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PIB

JULY - 2019

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1. INDIAN SOCIETY & POLITY

CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

Why in News?

▸▸ A proposal for granting Classical status to Marathi Language was received from Marathi Language Department, Government of Maharashtra. The said proposal was placed before the Committee of Linguistic Experts for its consideration.

Current Classical Languages in India:

▸▸ Tamil (in 2004)

▸▸ Sanskrit (in 2005)

▸▸ Kannada (in 2008)

▸▸ Telugu (in 2008)

▸▸ Malayalam (in 2013)

▸▸ Odia (in 2014)

Criteria for Classical Languages in India:

▸▸ High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years

▸▸ A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers;

▸▸ The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community;

▸▸ The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

▸▸ Benefits of Classical Language Status:

▸▸ Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in the concerned language.

▸▸ A 'Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Languages' can be set up.

▸▸ The University Grants Commission can be requested to create, to start with at least in Central Universities, a certain number of professional chairs for classical languages, for scholars of eminence in the concerned language.

PARLIAMENT PASSES THE CENTRAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (RESERVATION IN TEACHERS' CADRE) BILL, 2019

Why in News?

▸▸ The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Bill, 2019 has been passed by both the houses of Parliament.

▸▸ The Bill will now be sent for President's assent.

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Highlights:

- The Bill replaces the "The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Ordinance, 2019".
- The new bill considers the University/College as one unit restoring earlier reservation system based on 200-point roster.
- No longer will 'Department/Subject' be treated as one unit.
- This decision will:

1. Allow up of more than 7000 existing vacancies in Central Educational Institutions and pave the way for filling up 3 lakh vacancies in the Government (Central and State) Educational institutions by direct recruitment in Teacher's Cadre.
2. Ensure compliance of the Constitutional Provisions of Articles 14, 16 and 21.
3. Ensure full representation of the Scheduled Castes/ the Scheduled Tribes, the socially and Educationally Backward Classes and Economically Weaker Sections in direct recruitment in teachers' cadres.

- This decision is also expected to improve the teaching standards in the higher educational institutions by attracting all eligible talented candidates belonging SCs/STs/SEBCs/EWS.
- It will also ensure providing of 10% reservation to EWS.

SURROGACY (REGULATION) BILL, 2019

Why in News?

- The Cabinet has approved the introduction of Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019 that aims to prohibit commercial surrogacy in India.

Highlights:

- The Bill proposes to regulate surrogacy in India by establishing a National Surrogacy Board at the central level and state surrogacy boards and appropriate authorities in the state and Union Territories.
- The purpose of the Bill is to ensure effective regulation of surrogacy, prohibit commercial surrogacy, and allow ethical surrogacy.
- While commercial surrogacy will be prohibited, including sale and purchase of human embryos and gametes, ethical surrogacy for needy couples will be allowed on fulfilment of stipulated conditions.
- It will also prevent exploitation of surrogate mothers and children born through surrogacy.
- There will not be any financial implications, except for the meetings of the National and State Surrogacy Boards and appropriate authorities, which will be met out of the administrative budgets of respective departments.

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Concerns with Commercial Surrogacy:

- Procreation is not just about furthering the family lineage, but also about succession, tradition and legality.
- Having a child is about putting a biological system in place, not just caring for societal mores.
- There is therefore a need to define the legality and ethicality of the practice.
- Commercial surrogacy can lead to complaints of exploitation of women, especially those from the economically weaker section, because it would involve financial compensation, the adequacy of which can always be challenged.
- Pregnancy remains a biological phenomenon, with its attendant complications, necessitating proper medical care, the grossness of which could be open to challenge in case something goes wrong.
- Children born out of surrogacy can also face the problems of citizenship, abandonment and abuse, another aspect that needs to be taken care of.
- There is also the problem of jurisdiction because not all countries permit it. Couples wanting a surrogacy arrangement may travel to a country that permits it.

JAIPUR CITY DECLARED AS A WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Why in News?

- Jaipur City, Rajasthan got inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO during the 43rd Session of the World Heritage Committee held at Baku, Azerbaijan.

Highlights:

- India's nomination of the Jaipur City, Rajasthan got inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO during the 43rd Session of the World Heritage Committee held at Baku, Azerbaijan.
- The nomination of Jaipur City has successfully been done by complying with the various UNESCO guidelines of 2017. With Successful inscription of Jaipur City, India has 38 world heritage sites, that include 30 Cultural properties, 7 Natural properties and 1 mixed site.
- India's nomination was initially recommended by the ICOMOS (advisory body of World Heritage (WH) Centre for cultural sites) as Deferral, but the 21 nation World Heritage Committee debated it and after discussion decided to inscribe it on the World Heritage list.

Why Jaipur?

- The City of Jaipur is an exceptional urban example in indigenous city planning and construction in South Asia.
- Unlike other medieval cities of the region, Jaipur was deliberately planned as a new city on the plains open for trade as opposed to hilly terrain and military cities of past, though its planning still ensured a response to the surrounding hill tops in all directions.

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- The site selected within the valley that lay to the south of Amber hills was comparatively flat and unmarred by any previous construction.
- Besides an exemplary planning, its iconic monuments such as the Govind Dev temple, City Palace, Jantar Mantar and Hawa Mahal excel in artistic and architectural craftsmanship of the period.
- Jaipur is an expression of the astronomical skills, living traditions, unique urban form and exemplary foresighted city planning of an 18th century city from India.
- Jaipur is an exemplary development in town planning and architecture that demonstrates amalgamation and important interchange of several ideas over the late medieval period.

World Heritage Committee:

- The World Heritage Committee is composed of representatives of 21 States Parties to the World Heritage Convention who meet annually.
- The Committee is in charge of implementing the Convention.
- To date, 1,092 sites in 167 countries have been inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Significance:

- It brings international attention to the need for the preservation and conservation of the site.
- It brings tourism to the site, with its accompanying economic benefits to the host country and local area.
- It can provide funds for restoration, preservation, and training. For example, in 2001, the Taliban destroyed two 6th century, 150-ft. statues of Buddha carved into the mountainside in the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan. The site has received more than $4 million from UNESCO to help with reconstruction and to hire a sculptor to re-carve some of the damaged stone
- It promotes national and local pride in the natural and man-made wonders of the country.
- It promotes close ties with the United Nations system and the prestige and support it provides.
- It provides access to global project management resources.
- It facilitates creating partnerships between government, the private sector, and NGOs to achieve conservation goals.
- The site is protected under the Geneva Convention against destruction or misuse during wartime.

Selection Criteria:

- To represent a masterpiece of human creative genius
- to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design; to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared

- to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
- to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
- to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);
- to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
- to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Types of World Heritage Sites:

- **Cultural heritage** sites include hundreds of historic buildings and town sites, important archaeological sites, and works of monumental sculpture or painting.
- **Natural heritage** sites are restricted to those natural areas that (1) furnish outstanding examples of Earth's record of life or its geologic processes, (2) provide excellent examples of ongoing ecological and biological evolutionary processes, (3) contain natural phenomena that are rare, unique, superlative, or of outstanding beauty, or (4) furnish habitats for rare or endangered animals or plants or are sites of exceptional biodiversity.
- **Mixed heritage** sites contain elements of both natural and cultural significance.

Process of getting into the list:

- The first step involves creating a detailed dossier showing the outstanding universal value of the site, besides meeting a few other criteria.
- Once the documentation is complete, it requires a push by the State party or the country where the site is located.
- The property is then evaluated by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

- The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) then provides advice on conservation of the site, and training.
- After all these steps, the World Heritage Committee evaluates the site and decides to inscribe it or send back the nomination.

INTER-STATE RIVER WATER DISPUTES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in news?

- Cabinet approves Inter-State River Water disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019. The Bill seeks to amend the Inter State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 with a view to streamline the adjudication of inter-state river water disputes and make the present institutional architecture robust.

Features of the bill:

- The Bill requires the central government to set up a Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC), for resolving any inter-state water dispute amicably. The DRC will get a period of one year, extendable by six months, to submit its report to the central government.
- Members of the DRC will be from relevant fields, as deemed fit by the central government.
- The Bill proposes to set up an Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal for adjudication of water disputes, if a dispute is not resolved through the DRC. This tribunal can have multiple benches. All existing tribunals will be dissolved and the water disputes pending adjudication before such existing tribunals will be transferred to this newly formed tribunal.
- The tribunal shall consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and not more than six nominated members (judges of the Supreme Court or of a High Court), nominated by the Chief Justice of India.

NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in news?

- National Investigation Agency (Amendment) Bill, 2019 passed by Lok Sabha.

Amendments:

- The Bill amends the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act, 2008. The Act provides for a national-level agency to investigate and prosecute offences listed in a schedule (scheduled offences). Further, the Act allows for creation of Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences.
- Scheduled offences: The schedule to the Act specifies a list of offences which are to be investigated and prosecuted by the NIA. These include offences under Acts such as the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967. The Bill seeks to allow the NIA to investigate the following offences, in addition:

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1. Human trafficking,
2. Offences related to counterfeit currency or bank notes
3. Manufacture or sale of prohibited arms
4. Cyber-terrorism
5. Offences under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.

⏵ **Jurisdiction of the NIA: The Act provides for the creation of the NIA to investigate and prosecute offences specified in the schedule. The** officers of the NIA have the same powers as other police officers in relation to investigation of such offences, across India.

⏵ The Bill states that in addition, officers of the NIA will have the power to investigate scheduled offences committed outside India, subject to international treaties and domestic laws of other countries. **The central government may direct the NIA to investigate such cases, as if the offence has been committed in India. The Special Court in New Delhi will have jurisdiction over these cases.**

⏵ **Special Courts: The Act allows the central government to constitute Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences.**

⏵ The Bill amends this to state that the central government may designate Sessions Courts as Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences.

⏵ The central government is required to consult the Chief Justice of the High Court under which the Sessions Court is functioning, before designating it as a Special Court.

⏵ **When more than one Special Court has been designated for any area, the senior-most judge will distribute cases among the courts. Further, state governments may also designate Sessions Courts as Special Courts for the trial of scheduled offences.**

MOTOR VEHICLES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in News?

⏵ Minister for Road Transport and Highways has been in the news as he pushes the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2019 in Parliament.

⏵ The amendments proposed by the government to the existing Motor Vehicles Act of 1988 essentially focus on improving road safety.

Key elements of the proposed amendment:

Minimum Compensation:

⏵ The Bill proposes to increase the minimum compensation for hit and run cases.

⏵ In particular, in case of death, such compensation would vary from Rs 25,000 to Rs 2 Lakh.

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- In the case of grievous injury, it would vary from Rs 12,500 to Rs 50,000.
- Beyond road safety, the Bill also increases penalties for several offences such as driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

Cashless treatment of victims:

- The Bill also enables the Central government to develop a scheme for cashless treatment of road accident victims during the "golden hour" (first 60 minutes following the injury during which doctors have the best chance of saving a life).

Accident Fund:

- The government's insurance scheme is likely to be funded through a Motor Vehicle Accident Fund that the central government is expected to constitute to provide compulsory insurance cover to all road users in India.
- This fund will be available for the treatment of the injured.

Defining Good Samaritan:

- The Bill also defines a good samaritan as a person who renders emergency medical or non-medical assistance to a victim at the scene of an accident.
- However, to be seen as one, such assistance must have been given in good faith, voluntarily, and without the expectation of any reward.
- If these conditions are met, such a person will not be liable for any civil or criminal action for any injury to or death of an accident victim, caused due to their negligence in assisting the victim.

National Road Safety Board:

- The Bill also proposes a National Road Safety Board which will advise the central and state governments on all aspects of road safety and traffic management.
- The Bill also enables the central government to order a recall of motor vehicles if it is found that they are defective and can cause harm to other road users or the environment.
- In case of such a recall, the manufacturers would either have to replace the faulty vehicle or pay full compensation to the customer.

Regulating digital intermediaries:

- The Bill also attempts to plug a policy gap that has been introduced by the emergence of shared economy concepts and technology.
- As such, it defines taxi aggregators as digital intermediaries or market places which can be used by passengers to connect with a driver for transportation purposes.
- These aggregators will be issued licenses by state, but they must also comply with the Information Technology Act, 2000.

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PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in News?

▸ Lok Sabha has passed The Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

Why such Amendment?

▸ The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 was enacted to provide for the constitution of a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the State HRC and the Human Rights Courts for protection of human rights. Certain State Governments have proposed for amendment as they have been facing difficulties in finding suitable candidates to the post of Chairperson of the respective SHRCs owing to the existing eligibility criteria. The proposed amendments will enable both the NHRC and SHRCs to be more compliant with the Paris Principles.

Highlights:

▸ A person who has been a Judge of the Supreme Court is also made eligible to be appointed as Chairperson of the Commission in addition to the person who has been the CJI;

▸ To increase the Members of the NHRC from two to three of which, one shall be a woman;

▸ To include Chairperson of the National Commission for Backward Classes, Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities as deemed Members of the Commission; To reduce the term of the Chairperson and Members of the NHRC and the SHRCs from five to three years and shall be eligible for re-appointment; To provide that a person who has been a Judge of a High Court is also made eligible to be appointed as Chairperson of the SHRC in addition to the person who has been the Chief Justice of the High Court; and, To confer upon State Commissions, the functions relating to human rights being discharged by the UTs, other than the UT of Delhi which will be dealt with by the Commission.

CODE ON WAGES BILL, 2019

Why in news?

▸ Minister of State (I/C) for Labour and Employment Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar introduced The Code on Wages Bill, 2019 in Lok Sabha to amend and consolidate the laws relating to wages and bonus and matters connected therewith.

Code on Wages Bill 2019:

▸ The Code on Wages Bill, 2019 subsumes relevant provisions of The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, The Payment of Wages Act, 1936, The Payment of Bonus Act, 1965 and The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. After the enactment of the Code on Wages, all these four Acts will get repealed.

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The Salient features of the Code:

- The Code on Wage universalizes the provisions of minimum wages and timely payment of wages to all employees irrespective of the sector and wage ceiling. At present, the provisions of both Minimum Wages Act and Payment of Wages Act apply on workers below a particular wage ceiling working in Scheduled Employments only. This would ensure "Right to Sustenance" for every worker and intends to increase the legislative protection of minimum wage from existing about 40% to 100% workforce. This would ensure that every worker gets minimum wage which will also be accompanied by increase in the purchasing power of the worker thereby giving fillip to growth in the economy. Introduction of statutory Floor Wage to be computed based on minimum living conditions, will extend qualitative living conditions across the country to about 50 crore workers. It is envisaged that the states to notify payment of wages to the workers through digital mode.

- There are 12 definitions of wages in the different Labour Laws leading to litigation besides difficulty in its implementation. The definition has been simplified and is expected to reduce litigation and will entail at lesser cost of compliance for an employer. An establishment will also be benefited as the number of registers, returns, forms etc., not only can be electronically filed and maintained, but it is envisaged that through rules, not more than one template will be prescribed.

- At present, many of the states have multiple minimum wages. Through Code on Wages, the methodology to fix the minimum wages has been simplified and rationalised by doing away with type of employment as one of the criteria for fixation of minimum wage. The minimum wage fixation would primarily based on geography and skills. It will substantially reduce the number of minimum wages in the country from existing more than 2000 rates of minimum wages.

- Many changes have been introduced in the inspection regimes including web based randomised computerised inspection scheme, jurisdiction-free inspections, calling of information electronically for inspection, composition of fines etc. All these changes will be conducive for enforcement of labour laws with transparency and accountability.

- There were instances that due to smaller limitation period, the claims of the workers could not be raised. To protect the interest of the workers, the limitation period has been raised to 3 years and made uniform for filing claims for minimum wages, bonus, equal remuneration etc., as against existing varying period between 6 months to 2 years.

- It can be said that a historical step for ensuring statutory protection for minimum wage and timely payment of wage to 50 crore workers in the country has been taken through the Code on Wages besides promoting ease of living and ease of doing business.

UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES PREVENTION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in News?

- The Lok Sabha has passed the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill 2019, in a move that gives a big push to India's internal security machinery.
- The move comes after amendment to the NIA Bill.

UAPA:

- The UAPA is an upgrade on the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act TADA, which was allowed to lapse in 1995 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was repealed in 2004 .
- It was originally passed in 1967 under the then Congress government led by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- Till 2004, "unlawful" activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory. Following the 2004 amendment, "terrorist act" was added to the list of offences.
- Why amendment?
- The Bill amends the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, providing special procedures to deal with terrorist activities, and individuals and groups that foster terrorism in India.

Highlights:

- The proposed amendments to the existing Act redefines "Who may commit terrorism", establishing that under the Act, the Centre may designate an organisation as a terrorist organisation if it commits or participates in acts of terrorism, prepares for terrorism, promotes terrorism, or is otherwise involved in terrorism.
- The Bill also additionally empowers the government to designate individuals as terrorists on the same grounds.
- The Bill also paves the way for the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to seize property as part of investigations into terror cases.
- At the same time, while the existing Act provides for investigation of cases to be conducted by officers of the rank of Deputy Superintendent or Assistant Commissioner of Police or above.
- The proposed amendment additionally empowers the officers of the NIA to investigate cases — of the rank of Inspector or above.
- Further, the International Convention for Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005) has also been added in the Second Schedule through this Amendment.

Need for Amendments:

- It is often accused that UAPA Act assigns absolute power to the central government to declare someone as terrorist.

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- Terrorism is not just fostered by the gun. Terrorism is also the spread of hate and radicalism.
- If the bill is passed, a person can be declared a terrorist when they take part in terror activities, or provide funds, or harbour a terror theory and then spread it among youth.

MONUMENTS OF VALOUR & VICTORY HOMAGE TO KARGIL WARRIORS

Why in News?

- The Union Culture Minister Shri Prahlad Singh Patel inaugurated an exhibition of 'Monuments of Valour & Victory Homage to Kargil Warriors' on the 20th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Divas.
- The exhibition was organized by National Monuments Authority of Ministry of Culture.

National Monuments Authority (NMA):

- The NMA has been established under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains AMASR (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010.
- It is chiefly engaged in the protection and preservation of monuments and sites through management of the prohibited and regulated area around the centrally protected monuments.
- Another function is to consider grant of permissions to applicants for construction related activity in the prohibited and regulated area.
- The NMA is particularly relevant with increasing urbanisation and development.
- The NMA is also involved in grading and classifying the monuments.

THE COMPANIES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Why in News?

- Lok Sabha has passed The Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

Highlights of the Amendment bill:

Issue of dematerialized shares:

- Under the 2013 Act, certain classes of public companies can issue shares only in demat form.
- The Bill states this may be prescribed for other classes of unlisted companies as well.

Re-categorization of Offences:

- Under the 2013 Act, there are 81 compoundable offences that carry punishments of a fine and/or prison terms. These offences are heard by courts.
- The Bill makes 16 of these offences' civil defaults, where government-appointed adjudicating officers may levy penalties.
- Some of these offences are the issuance of shares at a discount, and the failure to file annual returns. The Bill also amends penalties for some other offences.

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Corporate Social Responsibility:

 » As of now, companies that are required to budget for CSR must disclose in their annual reports the reasons why they were unable to fully spend these funds.

 » Now, any unspent annual CSR funds must be transferred to one of the funds under Schedule 7 of the Act (for example, the Prime Minister's Relief Fund) within six months of the financial year.

Debarring Auditors:

 » Under the Act, the National Financial Reporting Authority can debar a member or firm from practicing as a Chartered Accountant for six months to 10 years in case of proven misconduct.

 » The Bill amends this punishment to provide for debarment from appointment as an auditor or internal auditor of a company, or performing a company's valuation, for the same period.

Registration of Charges:

 » Under the Act, companies must register charges (mortgages, etc.) on their property within 30 days of creation of the charge, extendable up to 300 days with permission from the Registrar of Companies.

 » The Bill changes the deadline to 60 days (extendable by 60 days).

Change in approving authority:

 » Under the Act, change in period of financial year for a company associated with a foreign company, has to be approved by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

 » Any alteration in the incorporation document of a public company which has the effect of converting it to a private company, too, has to be approved by the NCLT.

 » Under the Bill, these powers have been transferred to the central government.

 » Under the 2013 Act, a regional director can compound (settle) offences with a penalty of up to Rs 5 lakh.

 » This ceiling has been raised to Rs 25 lakh in the amendment.

Bar on holding office:

 » Under the existing Act, the central government or certain shareholders can apply to the NCLT for relief against mismanagement of the affairs of the company.

 » The Bill states that in such a complaint, the government may also make a case against an officer of the company on the ground that he is not fit to hold office in the company, for reasons such as fraud or negligence.

 » If the NCLT passes an order against the officer, he will not be eligible to hold office in any company for five years.

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ICONIC TOURIST SITES INITIATIVE

Why in News?

⏩ During recent Budget speech earlier this month, Finance Minister said that 17 "Iconic Tourist Sites" in the country would be developed by the government into world class tourist destinations.

Roadmap:

⏩ The government is looking at overall development from the tourism point of view in and around these sites — which includes roads and infrastructure, hotels and lodges, connectivity and access. As such, several ministries, from Railways to Civil Aviation, will be involved, while the Tourism Ministry will be the nodal agency.

⏩ In keeping with international standards, interventions in and around the monuments will have elements of universal accessibility, green technology, and enhanced security for tourists.

⏩ The initiative was aimed at enhancing India's soft power. The Sites included:

1. Taj Mahal & Fatehpur Sikri (Uttar Pradesh)
2. Ajanta and Ellora (Maharashtra)
3. Humayun Tomb, Qutub Minar and Red Fort (Delhi)
4. Colva Beach (Goa)
5. Amer Fort (Rajasthan)
6. Somnath and Dholavira (Gujarat)
7. Khajuraho (Madhya Pradesh)
8. Hampi (Karnataka)
9. Mahablipuram (Tamil Nadu)
10. Kaziranga (Assam)
11. Kumarakom (Kerala)
12. Mahabodhi Temple (Bihar)

LOK SABHA PASSES CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL, 2019

Why in News?

⏩ The Lok Sabha passed the Consumer Protection Bill 2019 after due consideration and discussion.

Objective of the bill:

⏩ The bill aims at protecting the interests of consumers by establishing authorities for timely and effective administration and settlement of consumers' dispute. The Bill aims to simplify a number of rules.

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Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA):

» Under the Bill, there is provision for central government to set up a Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers and will be empowered to investigate, recall, refund and impose penalties.

» It will regulate matters related to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and misleading advertisements.

» The authority will have power to impose a penalty on a manufacturer or an endorser of up to 10 lakh rupees and imprisonment for up to two years for a false or misleading advertisement.

Benefit to Consumers:

» Presently Consumer only have a single point of access to justice, which is time consuming. Additional swift executive remedies are proposed in the bill through Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)

» Deterrent punishment to check misleading advertisements and adulteration of products

» Product liability provision to deter manufacturers and service providers from delivering defective products or deficient services

» Ease of approaching Consumer Commission and Simplification of Adjudication process

» Scope for early disposal of cases through mediation

» Provision for rules for new age consumer issues: e-commerce & direct selling.

2. GOVERNANCE
DIGITISATION: AYUSH MINISTRY INKS MoU with MeitY

Why in News?

» The Ministries of AYUSH and Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) inked an MoU to collaborate on the digitisation of the AYUSH sector.

Highlights:

» MeitY has agreed to give technical support to the AYUSH Ministry for planning and development of AYUSH GRID Project.

» The vision and utility of the project will be beneficial for all stakeholders of AYUSH, including citizens of the country and in turn will help to achieve various national and international goals in healthcare.

» In pursuance to the National Health Policy 2017 and e-governance initiative, the ministry aims to digitize the entire AYUSH, leading to transformation in field of healthcare delivery at all levels, in addition to greater research, education, delivery of various healthcare programmes and better drug regulations.

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- various health initiatives such as e-Hospital, e-Aushadhi, e-Rakt Kosh, Online Registration System and e-Shushrut for digitising the internal workflows and processes of hospitals enabling the efficient and online delivery of healthcare services across the country.

- MeitY has also sponsored a number of research and development projects for development of Medical Electronics Devices and Systems such as Medical and Imaging equipment, establishing centre of excellence in medical electronics.

- MeitY has also launched an online information guide called Vikaspedia, a portal for the various social sectors including Health and it offers information in 23 languages.

SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME

Why in News?

- Swadesh Darshan Scheme – Integrated Development of theme-based tourist circuits is the flagship scheme of Ministry of Tourism for development of tourism infrastructure in the country.

- Under Swadesh Darshan Scheme Ministry of Tourism is developing critical tourism infrastructure in the country in a sustainable and inclusive manner to make India into a world class tourist destination.

- The focus under the scheme is to develop public facilities like last mile connectivity, Tourist reception Centers, Way side Amenities, Solid Waste Management, Illumination, Landscaping, parking etc. where Private Sector is not willing to invest.

Objectives:

- Position tourism as a major engine of economic growth and job creation;

- Develop circuits having tourist potential in a planned and prioritized manner;

- Promote cultural and heritage value of the country to generate livelihoods in the identified regions; Enhance the tourist attractiveness in a sustainable manner by developing world class infrastructure in the circuit/destinations; Follow community based development and pro-poor tourism approach; Create awareness among the local communities about the importance of tourism for them in terms of increased sources of income, improved living standards and overall development of the area.

- Create employment through active involvement of local communities;

- Harness tourism potential for its effects in employment generation and economic development.

- Make full use of the potential and advantages in terms of available infrastructure, national culture and characteristic strong points of each and every region throughout the country by development of theme-based circuits.

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NATIONAL COMMON MOBILITY CARD

Why in News?

 ‣ National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) – One Nation, One Card for transport mobility is an initiative of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to enable seamless travel by different metros and other transport systems across the country besides retail shopping and purchases.

Highlights:

 ‣ The Indigenous Automatic Fare Collection System based on One Nation One Card Model is the first of its kind in India.

 ‣ These are bank issued cards on Debit/Credit/Prepaid card product platform.

 ‣ The customer may use this single card for payments across all segments including metro, bus, suburban railways, toll, parking, smart city and retail.

 ‣ The stored value on card supports offline transaction across all travel needs with minimal financial risk to involved stakeholders. The service area feature of this card supports operator specific applications e.g. monthly passes, season tickets etc.

Benefits of NCMC:

 ‣ NCMC Ecosystem offers the value proposition for customers as they need not to carry multiple cards for different usage. Further, the super quick contactless transactions will improve the seamless experience.

 ‣ For operators, NCMC ecosystem brings common standards for implementation without vendor lock-in.

 ‣ This will also help in higher digital payments penetration, savings on closed loop card lifecycle management cost and reduced operating cost. The rich data insights may be used by operators for business intelligence leading to efficient operation.

 ‣ With NCMC Ecosystem, Banks will get an access to segments which are highly driven by cash but stickiness in nature.

 ‣ NCMC Ecosystem will further help government in digitization of low value payments and reduced cost for the entire ecosystem.

RASHTRIYA AVISHKAR ABHIYAN

Why in News?

 ‣ Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan is running successfully to motivate children to learn Science, Maths and Technology through observation and experimentation confirmed HRD Minister.

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Rashtriya Aavishkar Abhiyan (RAA):

 ‣ Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan is a unique concept developed by the Ministry of HRD that aims to inculcate a spirit of inquiry, creativity and love for Science and Mathematics in school children.

 ‣ It was launched on 9th July, 2015 by Late Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Former President of India.

 ‣ It is a convergent framework across School Education and Higher Education to motivate children of the age group from 6-18 years in learning Science, Mathematics and Technology.

 ‣ It focuses on learning through observation, experimentation, inference drawing, model building, etc. both through inside and outside classroom activities and processes.

 ‣ It seeks to create curiosity, excitement and spirit of innovation and exploration amongst school children.

 ‣ It encourages higher education institutions to become Mentoring Institutions and assist secondary and elementary schools in the study of Science and Mathematics.

NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT

Why in News?

 ‣ The National Food Security Act was notified in 2013 with the objective to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity.

 ‣ The Act provides for coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population for receiving subsidized foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), thus covering about two-thirds of the population.

Features of the bill:

 ‣ The eligible persons will be entitled to receive 5 Kgs of foodgrains per person per month at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse grains. The existing Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households, which constitute the poorest of the poor

 ‣ All Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) or the poorest of the poor group, a priority group to receive 7 kg of subsidised foodgrains per person per month ie. 35 kg of foodgrain/family/month.

 ‣ Upto 75 percent of the rural and up to 50 percent of the urban population will be covered by the bill. Of these, at least 46 percent of the rural and 28 percent of the urban population will be designated as priority households. The rest will be designated as general households.

 ‣ The Act also has a special focus on the nutritional support to women and children. Besides meal to pregnant women and lactating mothers during pregnancy and six months after the child birth, such women will also be entitled to receive maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000. It is however restricted to two children only.

- Children upto 14 years of age will be entitled to nutritious meals as per the prescribed nutritional standards.

- In case of non-supply of entitled foodgrains or meals, the beneficiaries will receive food security allowance.

- The Act also contains provisions for setting up of grievance redressal mechanism at the District and State levels. Separate provisions have also been made in the Act for ensuring transparency and accountability.

- The eldest women of the household of age 18 years or above will be the head of the household for the purpose of issuing ration cards.

- Prices can be revised after the first three years, up to the level of the minimum support price

JAL SHAKTI ABHIYAN

Why in News?

- Jal Shakti Abhiyan for Water Conservation Launched.

Highlights:

- It is a time-bound, mission-mode campaign that would focus on 1,592 "water-stressed" blocks in 257 districts.

- The campaign will run through citizen participation during the monsoon season, from 1st July, 2019 to 15th September, 2019.

- The 1,592 blocks, identified as "water-stressed" as per the Central Ground Water Board's 2017 data, include 313 critical blocks, 1,000-odd over-exploited blocks and 94 blocks with least water availability (for states without water-stressed blocks).

- Jal Shakti Abhiyan is a collaborative effort of various Ministries of the Government of India and State Governments, being coordinated by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

- The focus of the campaign is on water stressed districts and blocks. The teams of officers from the central government will visit and work with district administration in 1592 water stressed blocks in 256 districts, to ensure five important water conservation interventions.

- The five important water conservation interventions are :

  1. Water conservation and rainwater harvesting,

  2. Renovation of traditional and other water bodies/tanks,

  3. Reuse of water and recharging of structures,

  4. Watershed development and

  5. Intensive afforestation.

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- The water conservation interventions will also be supplemented with special interventions including the development of block and district water conservation plans, promotion of efficient water use for irrigation and better choice of crops through Krishi Vigyan Kendras.

- A large-scale communications campaign has also been planned alongside the JSA involving mass mobilisation of different groups including school students, college students, swachhagrahis, Self Help Groups, Panchayati Raj Institution members, youth groups (NSS/NYKS/NCC), defence personnel, ex-servicemen and pensioners, among various others.

SCHEMES FOR PROMOTION OF INNOVATION

Schemes for Promotion of innovation

- Department of Science & Technology has launched a NIDHI program (National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations) under which programmes for setting up of incubators, seed fund, accelerators and 'Proof of concept' grant for innovators and entrepreneurs have been launched.

- NIDHI, PRAYAS (Promoting and Accelerating Young and Aspiring innovators & Startups) programme has been initiated in which established Technology Business Incubators (TBI) are supported with PRAYAS grant to support innovators and entrepreneurs with grants for 'Proof of Concept' and developing prototypes.

- To boost entrepreneurial spirit in India, the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), a flagship initiative of NITI Aayog, is supporting two programs for setting up and scaling up of incubation centres.

- The Atal Incubation Centres (AICs) scheme supports setting up of green field incubation centres that nurture innovative start-up businesses in their pursuit to become scalable and sustainable enterprises.

- The Established Incubation Centres scheme provides scale-up support to well performing existing incubation centres, referred to as Established Incubation Centers (EICs), where AIM intends to further augment their performance by providing them scale-up support. In both of these schemes, AIM is providing grants of upto INR 10 Crores over a period of 3-5 years.

- Technology Incubation and Development of Entrepreneurs (TIDE) Scheme was put in place by MeitY in 2008 to promote innovation by nurturing startups in Information Technology, Communications & Electronics (ICTE) domain.

- Under the TIDE Scheme, financial assistance is provided to Institutions of Higher Learning to strengthen their Technology Incubation Centres for enabling young entrepreneurs to create technology startup companies for commercial exploitation of technologies developed by them.

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- ⇻ Enhanced version Technology Incubation and Development of Entrepreneurs (TIDE 2.0) Scheme is to promote tech entrepreneurship through financial and technical support to incubators engaged in supporting ICT startups using emerging technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Block-chain, Robotics etc.

- ⇻ BIRAC BioNEST (BIRAC Bio-incubation: Nurturing Entrepreneurs for Scaling up Technology): BIRAC's Flagship programme which creates / supports world-class bio-incubators for startups/ entrepreneurs to provide incubation space, mentor networks, instrumentation facilities, IP and technology management support.

- ⇻ SEED (Sustaining Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Development) Fund: Equity based funding support of up to Rs. 30 Lakh to startups and enterprises through bio-incubators for scaling up.

- ⇻ LEAP (Launching Entrepreneurial Driven Affordable Products Fund for Start-ups) Fund: Equity based funding support of up to Rs 1 Cr to startups and enterprises implemented through Incubators for scaling enterprises.

KISAN CREDIT CARD SCHEME

Why in News?

- ⇻ The Government of India has extended the facility of Kisan Credit Card (KCC) to fisheries and animal husbandry farmers to help them meet their working capital needs.

Kisan Credit Card Scheme:

- ⇻ The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme was announced in the Budget speech of 1998-99 to fulfil the financial requirements of the farmers at various stages of farming through institutional credit.

- ⇻ The model scheme was prepared by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) on the recommendation of V Gupta committee.

- ⇻ The KCC scheme is being implemented by the all Co-operative banks, Regional Rural Banks and Public Sector Banks throughout the country.

- ⇻ Scheme covers risk of KCC holders against death or permanent disability resulting from accidents.

Objectives:

- ⇻ To provide adequate and timely credit support from the banking system to the farmers at the cheap rate of interest.

- ⇻ To provide credit at the time of requirement.

- ⇻ To support post-harvest expenses.

- ⇻ To provide Working capital for maintenance of farm assets and activities allied to agriculture.

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- Investment credit requirement for agriculture and allied activities (land development, pump sets, plantation, drip irrigation etc.)
- Consumption requirements of farmers.

Salient features of the Scheme:

- Revolving cash credit facility involving any number of withdrawals and repayments within the limit.
- Limit to be fixed on the basis of operational land holding, cropping pattern and scale of finance.
- Card valid for 5 years subject to annual review. As an incentive for good performance, credit limits could be enhanced to take care of increase in costs, change in cropping pattern, etc.
- Conversion/reschedulement of loans also permissible in case of damage to crops due to natural calamities.
- Crop loans disbursed under KCC Scheme for notified crops are covered under Crop Insurance Scheme, to protect the interest of the farmers against loss of crop yield caused by natural calamities, pest attacks etc.

SFURTI, ASPIRE & PRADHAN MANTRI MATSYA SAMPADA YOJANA

Why in News?

- The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman said that the Government aims to set up more Common Facility Centres (CFCs) under the 'Scheme of Fund for Upgradation and Regeneration of Traditional Industries' (SFURTI).
- It will facilitate cluster-based development to make the traditional industries more productive, profitable and capable for generating sustained employment opportunities.
- The focused sectors are Bamboo, Honey and Khadi clusters.
- SFURTI envisions setting up of 100 new clusters during 2019-20 to enable 50,000 artisans to join the economic value chain.

SFURTI:

- SFURTI is Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries.
- Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Govt. of India has launched this scheme in the year 2005 with the view to promote Cluster development.
- As per the revised guidelines, the following schemes are being merged into SFURTI:
- The Scheme for Enhancing Productivity and Competitiveness of Khadi Industry and Artisans
- The Scheme for Product Development, Design Intervention and Packaging (PRODIP)
- The Scheme for Rural Industries Service Center (RISC) and
- Other small interventions like Ready Warp Units, Ready to Wear Mission, etc.

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Objectives of Scheme:

- To organize the traditional industries and artisans into clusters to make them competitive and provide support for their long term sustainability and economy of scale;

- To provide sustained employment for traditional industry artisans and rural entrepreneurs;

- To enhance marketability of products of such clusters by providing support for new products, design intervention and improved packaging and also the improvement of marketing infrastructure;

- To equip traditional artisans of the associated clusters with the improved skills and capabilities through training and exposure visits;

- To strengthen the cluster governance systems with the active participation of the stakeholders, so that they are able to gauge the emerging challenges and opportunities and respond to them in a coherent manner;

- To build up innovated and traditional skills, improved technologies, advanced processes, market intelligence and new models of public – private partnerships, so as to gradually replicate similar models of cluster – based regenerated traditional industries

- To make a paradigm shift from a supply driven selling model to a market driven model with the right branding, focus product mix and correct positioning and right pricing to make the offering holistic and optimal for each of the focus categories.

- To tap the E-Commerce as a major marketing channel given the outreach and the growing market penetration of E-Commerce, there is a need to devise a quick strategy to make its presence felt in the E – Retail space.

ASPIRE:

- The Scheme for Promotion of Innovation, Rural Industry and Entrepreneurship' (ASPIRE) has been consolidated for setting up of Livelihood Business Incubators (LBIs) and Technology Business Incubators (TBIs).

- The Scheme contemplates setting up 80 Livelihood Business Incubators (LBIs) and 20 Technology Business Incubators (TBIs) in 2019-20 to develop 75,000 skilled entrepreneurs in agro-rural industry sectors.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) – Through the Scheme the Department of Fisheries will establish a robust fisheries management framework.

- This will address critical gaps in strengthening the value chain, including infrastructure, modernization, traceability, production, productivity, post-harvest management, and quality control.

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FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY ANALYSIS, INDIA, 2019

Why in News?

 The Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019, a report by the MoSPI and The World Food Programme lists Maharashtra as one of the six States with high levels of stunting and underweight. The State also has a prevalence of stunting and wasting.

 Here's a look at the highlights of the report and overall malnutrition in Maharashtra.

Malnutrition:

 Malnutrition, in all its forms, includes undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight) inadequate vitamins or minerals, overweight, obesity, and resulting diet-related non-communicable diseases.

Types of malnutrition:

 Moderate Acute malnutrition (MAM): Children aged between six months and 59 months who are between the -2 and -3 standard deviation for weight for height (wasting) score.

 Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM): Children aged between six months and 59 months and have a weight for height (wasting) score 3 standard deviations below the median, have a mid-upper-arm circumference less than 115 mm, or the presence of bilateral edema.

 Severe Chronic Malnutrition (SCM): Calculated with the Z-score defined as a height-for-age index less than –3 standard deviations from the mean weight of a reference population of children of the same height and/or having edema.

 Stunting: Calculation is based on height-for-age. It is is associated with an underdeveloped brain, poor learning capacity, and increased nutrition-related diseases.

 Wasting: Calculated by weight-for-height. It is associated with decreased fat mass. Also known as wasting syndrome, it causes muscle and fat tissue to waste away.

 Underweight: Calculated by the weight-for-age formula. It is a body weight considered to be too low to be healthy. It can reflect both stunting and wasting.

Food and malnutrition in the country:

 Over the last 20 years, total food grain production in India increased from 198 million tonnes to 269 million tonnes. Despite increase in food production, the rate of malnutrition in India remains very high. In the food basket, it turns out that in both urban and rural areas, the share of expenditure on cereal and cereal substitutes has declined between 1972-73 and 2011-12, from 57% to 25% in rural areas and from 36% to 19% in urban areas. The energy and protein intake from cereals has decreased in both rural and urban India, largely because of increased consumption of other food items such as milk and dairy products, oils and fat and relatively unhealthy food such as fast food, processed food, and sugary beverages.

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➤ The consumption of unhealthy energy and protein sources is much higher in urban areas.

Double burden of malnutrition:

➤ For several decades India was dealing with only one form of malnutrition– undernutrition.

➤ In the last decade, the double burden which includes both over- and undernutrition, is becoming more prominent and poses a new challenge for India.

➤ From 2005 to 2016, prevalence of low (< 18.5 kg/m2) body mass index (BMI) in Indian women decreased from 36% to 23% and from 34% to 20% among Indian men.

➤ During the same period, the prevalence of overweight/obesity (BMI > 30 kg/m2) increased from 13% to 21% among women and from 9% to 19% in men.

➤ Children born to women with low BMI are more likely to be stunted, wasted, and underweight compared to children born to women with normal or high BMI.

States Performance:

➤ The highest levels of stunting and underweight are found in Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and

➤ At the national level, among social groups, the prevalence of stunting is highest amongst children from the STs (43.6 percent), followed by SCs (42.5 percent) and OBCs (38.6 percent).

➤ The prevalence of stunting in children from ST in Rajasthan, Odisha and Meghalaya is high while stunting in children from both ST and SC is high in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka. Prevalence of wasting is highest in Jharkhand (29.0%) and above the national average in eight more States (Haryana, Goa, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, MP, Karnataka and Gujarat) and three UTs (Puducherry, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli). Prevalence of underweight is also highest in Jharkhand (47.8%) and is above the National average in seven more States (Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, UP, MP and Bihar) and one UT (Dadra and Nagar Haveli).

COFFEE TABLE BOOK FOR PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDIA AND THE UN WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

Why in News?

➤ Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has launched a Coffee Table Book today to commemorate five decades of partnership between the Ministry and the UN World Food Programme towards addressing food and nutritional security in India.

Coffee Table Book:

➤ The Book showcases key milestones achieved by the Government of India in its efforts to make the nation free from hunger and malnutrition and WFP's role in this endeavour.

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- Some of the major turning points in India's journey towards food and nutrition security captured in the book include the Green Revolution, the White revolution, improvements in livestock and dairy development and digitization of food safety nets.

World Food Programme:

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is the food-assistance branch of the United Nations.
- It is the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.
- According to the WFP, it provides food assistance to an average of 91.4 million people in 83 countries each year. From its headquarters in Rome and from more than 80 country offices around the world, the WFP works to help people who cannot produce or obtain enough food for themselves and their families. It is a member of the United Nations Development Group and part of its executive committee.

INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Different initiatives undertaken by Govt to improve quality of Education:

- The Central Government has launched an Integrated Scheme for School Education – Samagra Shiksha, from 2018-19 which subsumes the erstwhile centrally sponsored schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).
- Under Samagra Shiksha, funds are given to all States and UTs for various interventions to improve the quality of education such as training of in-service teachers, headmasters and principals, remedial teaching for academically weaker students, provision of library grants to schools, ICT and digital initiatives, strengthening of teacher education institutions, Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan, Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat, etc.
- In order to focus on quality education, the Central rules to the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act have been amended to include reference on class-wise, subject-wise Learning Outcomes for all elementary classes.
- The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) conducted a National Achievement Survey, under which learning outcomes of students were evaluated, through a District level sampling and gaps were identified.
- Government of India has decided to participate in the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) to be conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2021.

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- Approval has been given for conducting a Census based audit called Shagunotsav of all government and government aided schools in all States and UTs. Further, in 2019-20 approval has been given for conducting a School Based Assessment (SBA) of all elementary stage students, to evaluate learning outcomes.

- MHRD has designed a 70 indicators-based matrix Performance Grading Index (PGI) to grade the States and UTs.

- To collect timely and accurate data, an Educational Management Information System called UDISE+ (UDISE plus) has been launched in 2018-19.

- In 2019-20, approval has been given for setting up Youth and Eco Club in all Government Schools across the country. In order to experience and celebrate the rich cultural diversity of India and to encourage experimental learning, Rangotsav was organized in schools in 2018-19.

NATIONAL TRANSLATION MISSION

National Translation Mission:

- The National Translation Mission (NTM) is a scheme launched in 2008 which is being implemented through the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore to establish translation as an industry in general and to facilitate higher education by making knowledge texts accessible to students and academics in Indian languages.

- Under the scheme, the books of knowledge texts mostly text books of various subjects prescribed in Universities and Colleges are being translated in all Languages of the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India.

- National Translation Mission has so far published 40 Knowledge Text translations in 16 languages (Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Hindi, Kannada, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu).

- NTM has published 6 bilingual dictionaries (English to Indian languages) in collaboration with Pearson Education, India.

- The Mission has trained about 1400 budding translators through 3-week intensive courses (21 days) on 'Introduction to translation' and 'Research Methodology in Translation'

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

Why in News?

- Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution has launched a new Central Sector scheme namely "Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS)" for implementation during 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Objectives:

▸ To integrate the existing PDS systems/portals of States/UTs with the Central Systems/portals,

▸ Introduction of National Portability of ration card holders to lift foodgrains from any fair price shop (FPS) across the country, and

▸ National level de-duplication of ration cards/beneficiary.

Significance:

▸ The new scheme will bring more transparency and efficiency in distribution of food grains as it will improve the mechanism to identify fake/duplicate ration cards.

▸ It will provide the option to PDS beneficiaries to lift their entitled foodgrains from the Fair Price Shops of their choice at the national level.

▸ Presently, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi has started portability at the State level, whereas, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Telangana have also started portability in the few FPS areas within the State.

IM-PDS Portability:

▸ IM-PDS scheme describes a mechanism for the transparent and efficient distribution of food grains. All the people having fake / duplicate ration cards will not be able to purchase ration at subsidized rates.

▸ Moreover, all the PDS beneficiaries will get benefit of purchasing entitled food grains from Fair Price Shops of their own choice across the country.

▸ In the current scenario, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi govt. has already started portability at the State level. Moreover Karnataka, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Telangana govt. has also started portability in the few FPS areas within their own territory.

▸ Govt. of India is not facing the problem of scarcity of food production but the main problem is management of agricultural produce.

STRINGENT PUNISHMENT FOR SEXUAL CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN

Why in News?

▸ Cabinet approves Amendment in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012

Amendments:

▸ It will make punishment more stringent for committing sexual crimes against children including death penalty.

▸ The amendments also provide for levy of fines and imprisonment to curb child pornography.

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➥ The amendment is expected to discourage the trend of child sexual abuse by acting as a deterrent due to strong penal provisions incorporated in the Act.

➥ It intends to protect the interest of vulnerable children in times of distress and ensures their safety and dignity.

➥ The amendment is aimed to establish clarity regarding the aspects of child abuse and punishment thereof.

POCSO Act:

➥ The POCSO Act, 2012 was enacted to Protect the Children from Offences of Sexual Assault, Sexual harassment and pornography with due regard for safeguarding the interest and well-being of children.

➥ The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age, and regards the best interests and welfare of the child as matter of paramount importance at every stage, to ensure the healthy physical, emotional, intellectual and social development of the child.

➥ The act is gender neutral.

WITNESS PROTECTION SCHEME

Why in News?

➥ Minister of State for Home Affairs informed about the scheme in a written reply to question in the Rajya Sabha.

Witness Protection Scheme:

➥ Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 provides for protection of witnesses based on the threat assessment and protection measures.

➥ It includes protection/change of identity of witnesses, their relocation, installation of security devices at the residence of witnesses, usage of specially designed Court rooms, etc.

➥ As per Article 141/142 of the Constitution, the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 endorsed in the said Judgment of the Supreme Court is binding on all Courts within the territory of India and enforceable in all States and Union Territories.

Other Provisions of the scheme:

➥ Witness Protection Fund means the fund created for bearing the expenses incurred during the implementation of Witness Protection Order passed by the Competent Authority under this scheme;

➥ Witness Protection Order means an order passed by the Competent Authority detailing the steps to be taken for ensuring the safety of witness from threats to his or his family member's life, reputation or property. *It also includes interim order, if any passed, during the pendency of Witness Protection Application;

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- Witness Protection Cell means a dedicated Cell of State/UT Police or Central Police Agencies assigned the duty to implement the witness protection order. It shall be responsible for the security as per witness protection order.

- Proposed Rights to be entitled to the Witness:

    1. Right to give evidence anonymously
    2. Right to protection from intimidation and harm
    3. Right to be treated with dignity and compassion and respect of privacy
    4. Right to information of the status of the investigation and prosecution of the crime
    5. Right to secure waiting place while at Court proceedings
    6. Right to transportation and lodging arrangements

Witness Protection Fund:

- The Scheme provides for a State Witness Protection Fund for meeting the expenses of the scheme.

- This fund shall be operated by the Department/Ministry of Home under State/UT Government and shall comprise of the following:

- Budgetary allocation made in the Annual Budget by the State Government;

- Receipt of amount of costs imposed/ ordered to be deposited by the courts/tribunals in the Witness Protection Fund;

- Donations/ contributions from Philanthropist/ Charitable Institutions/ Organizations and individuals permitted by the Government.

- Funds contributed under Corporate Social Responsibility.

PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA-LLL (PMGSY-III)

Why in News?

- In a major boost to rural road connectivity across the country, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for the launch of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-LLL (PMGSY-III).

    It involves consolidation of Through Routes and Major Rural Links connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) Scheme:

- The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), was launched by the Govt. of India to provide connectivity to unconnected Habitations as part of a poverty reduction strategy.

- PMGSY was launched in December, 2000 with an objective to provide single all-weather road connectivity to eligible unconnected habitation of designated population size (500+ in plain

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areas and 250+ in North-East, hill, tribal and desert areas as per Census, 2001) for overall socio-economic development of the areas. 97% of the eligible and feasible habitations have already been connected by all-weather road.

⏩ PMGSY–II envisages consolidation of the existing Rural Road Network to improve its overall efficiency as a provider of transportation services for people, goods and services. It aims to cover upgradation of existing selected rural roads based on their economic potential and their role in facilitating the growth of rural market centres and rural hubs .

⏩ Under the PMGSY-III Scheme, it is proposed to consolidate 1,25,000 Km road length in the States.The Scheme will also include Through Routes and Major Rural Links that connect habitations to Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals.

Impact:

⏩ This would facilitate easy and faster movement to and from Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs), Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals.

⏩ Roads constructed under PMGSY would also be maintained properly.

Financial Implications:

⏩ It will entail an estimated cost of Rs 80,250 crore (Central Share-Rs. 53,800 crore, State Share- Rs 26,450 crore).

⏩ The funds would be shared in the ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and State for all States except for 8 North Eastern and 3 Himalayan States (Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand) for which it is 90:10.

Implementation:

⏩ Project period: 2019-20 to 2024-25.

⏩ Selection of candidate roads based on the sum total of the marks obtained by particular road on the basis of parameters of population served, market, educational and medical facilities, etc. Construction of bridges upto 150 m in plain areas and 200 m in Himalayan and NE States proposed, as against the existing provisions of 75 m and 100 m in plain areas and Himalayan and NE States respectively.

⏩ The States shall be asked to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) before launching of PMGSY-III in the concerned State for providing adequate funds for maintenance of roads constructed under PMGSY post 5-year construction maintenance period.

Progress under PMGSY:

⏩ A total of 5,99,090 Km road length has been constructed under the scheme since inception till April, 2019 (inclusive of PMGSY-I, PMGSY-II and RCPLWEA Scheme

⏩ Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism Area (RCPLWEA):

- Government launched Road Connectivity Project for Left Wing Extremism affected Areas in the year 2016 as a separate vertical under PMGSY to provide all-weather road connectivity with necessary culverts and cross-drainage structures in 44 districts (35 are worst LWE affected districts and 09 are adjoining districts), which are critical from security and communication point of view. Under the Scheme, 5,066 Km road length has been sanctioned.

NATIONAL DAIRY PLAN

Why in News?

- Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying is implementing World Bank assisted National Dairy Plan – I in 18 States to support milk cooperatives and milk producer companies along with breeding improvement initiative.

Highlights:

- Rashtriya Gokul Mission with the aim to develop and conserve indigenous breeds and enhancing their production and productivity-Central assistance.
- Dairy Entrepreneurship Development Scheme is being implemented with the objective of generation of self-employment opportunities in the dairy sector, covering activities such as enhancement of milk production, procurement, preservation, transportation, processing and marketing of milk-Central assistance.
- National Programme for Dairy Development is being implemented with the objective to create infrastructure for milk procurement, processing and marketing-Central assistance.

Features of the scheme:

- National Dairy Plan Phase I (NDP I) is a Central Sector Scheme.
- Funding will be through a line of credit from the International Development Association (IDA), which along with the share of the Government of India will flow from DADF to NDDB and in turn to eligible End Implementing Agencies (EIAs).
- NDP I will focus on 18 major milk producing states namely Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh which together account for over 90% of the country's milk production.

Objectives:

- To help increase productivity of milch animals and thereby increase milk production to meet the rapidly growing demand for milk.
- To help provide rural milk producers with greater access to the organised milk-processing sector.

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MODEL TENANCY ACT

Why in News?

⯈ The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has drafted a 'Model Tenancy Act', 2019 which envisages to balance the interest and rights of both the owner and tenant and to create an accountable and transparent ecosystem for renting the premises in disciplined and efficient manner.

Model Tenancy Act:

⯈ Act will enable creation of adequate rental housing stock for various income segments of society including migrants, formal and informal sector workers, professionals, students etc. and increase access to quality rented accommodation, enable gradual formalization of rental housing market.

⯈ It will help overhaul the legal framework vis-à-vis rental housing across the country. It is also expected to give a fillip to private participation in rental housing for addressing the huge housing shortage across the country.

⯈ The Draft MTA will also promote growth of rental housing and investment in the sector and promote entrepreneurial opportunities and innovative mechanism of sharing of space. This MTA will be applicable prospectively and will not affect the existing tenancies.

Features of Draft Model Tenancy Act:

⯈ MTA stipulates a robust grievance redressal mechanism comprising of Rent Authority, Rent Court and Rent Tribunal.

⯈ It has been proposed to cap the security deposit equal to a maximum of two month's rent in case of residential properties and, minimum of one month's rent in case of non-residential property. After coming into force of this Act, no person shall let or take on rent any premises except by an agreement in writing.

⯈ The Model Act provides for its applicability for the whole of the State i.e. urban as well as rural areas in the State. Within two months of executing rental agreement both landowner and tenant are required to intimate to the Rent Authority about the agreement and within seven days a unique identification number will be issued by the Rent Authority to the both the parties. A digital platform will be set up in the local vernacular language of the State for submitting tenancy agreement and other documents.

⯈ A copy of the draft Act has also been shared with the States/UTs for seeking their views/comments.

⯈ Once finalized the Model Act will be shared with the States/Union Territory (UTs) for adoption.

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Significance:

- As per Census 2011, nearly 1.1 crore houses were lying vacant in the country and making these houses available on rent will complement the vision of 'Housing for All' by 2022.

- The existing rent control laws are restricting the growth of rental housing and discourage the owners from renting out their vacant houses due to fear of repossession.

- One of the potential measures to unlock the vacant house is to bringing transparency and accountability in the existing system of renting of premises and to balance the interests of both the property owner and tenant in a judicious manner.

STUDY IN INDIA' PROGRAMME

Why in News?

- To facilitate Internationalization of Higher Education in India, a Programme viz. 'Study in India' is under implementation.

Objectives:

- To make India a preferred education destination/hub for foreign students;

- Improve the soft power of India with focus on the neighbouring countries

- Use it as a tool in diplomacy;

- To rapidly increase the inflow of inbound International Students in India through systematic brand-building,

- Marketing, social media and digital marketing campaigns;

- To increase India's market share of global education exports;

- Improvement in overall quality of higher education;

- To reduce the export-import imbalance in the number of international students;

- Growth in India's global market share of International students;

- Increase in global ranking of India etc.

Special Focus:

- The programme focuses on attracting International students from select 30 plus countries across South-East Asia, Middle East and Africa.

- The programme envisages participation of select reputed Indian institutes/universities by way of offering seats for the International students at affordable rates, along with fee waivers to meritorious foreign students ranging from 100% to 25%. A centralised admission web-portal (https://studyinindia.gov.in) acts as a single window for the admission of foreign students.

- With the increase in number of foreign students, the global ranking of the Indian Higher Educational institutions will improve.

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- The domestic students shall be exposed to a more diverse peer group and also get greater International exposure culminating in enhanced interest of Indian students to study in the country.

- This information was given by the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha today.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Initiatives by Government:

- Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme empowers rural women through community participation by involvement of Student Volunteers.

- The scheme is envisaged to work at the national and state level technical support to the respective government on issues related to women is provided.

- Swadhar Greh scheme targets the women victims of unfortunate circumstances who are in need of institutional support for rehabilitation so that they could lead their life with dignity.

- Ujjawala is a comprehensive scheme to combat trafficking with the objective to prevent trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation, to facilitate rescue victims and placing them in safe custody, to provide rehabilitation services by providing basic amenities/needs.

- Working Women Hostel aims at providing safe and affordable accommodation to working women.

- These hostels have Day care facility for the children of inmates too. The Ministry provides financial support for establishing such hostels by NGOs or State Governments.

- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme – The specific objectives of the scheme include preventing gender biased sex selective elimination; ensuring survival and protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child.

- One Stop Centre (OSC) facilitates access to an integrated range of services including police, medical, legal, psychological support and temporary shelter to women affected by violence. The Scheme is funded through Nirbhaya Fund.

- The Scheme is being implemented since 1st April, 2015 to provide 24 hours emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence through referral and information about women related government schemes/programmes across the country.

- Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs) Scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs. It envisages engagement of Mahila Police Volunteers in States/UTs

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NATIONAL SEMINAR CUM WORKSHOP ON STATISTICS AND SDGs

Why in News?

- A two days' National Seminar Cum Workshop on "Statistics and Sustainable Development Goals" was inaugurated by Chief Statistician of India and Secretary, Ministry of Statistics.
- He told that for the first time, in 7th Economic Census, an IT based digital platform for data capture, validation, report generation and dissemination is being used.

7th Economic Census:

- Economic Census is the complete count of all establishments located within the geographical boundary of India.
- It provides valuable insight into geographical spread of economic activities, ownership patterns, persons engaged etc. of all economic establishments in the country.
- The Seventh Economic Census will be held in 2019 after a gap of five years.
- The upcoming economic census will identify villages with no economic activity, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has said.

THE NATIONAL CRECHE SCHEME

Why in News?

- The National Crèche Scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Highlights:

- It is a centrally sponsored scheme being implemented with effect from 1st January, 2017.
- It aims at providing a safe place for mothers to leave their children while they are at work, and thus, is a measure for empowering women as it enables them to take up employment.
- It is also an intervention towards protection and development of children in the age group of 6 months to 6 years.
- The scheme provides for day care facilities to the children of working mothers.
- It also provides supplementary nutrition, health care inputs like immunization, polio drops, basic health monitoring, sleeping facilities, early stimulation (for children below 3 years), pre-school education for children aged between 3-6 yrs.

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LaQshya INITIATIVE

Why in News?

➤ The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare) informed about LaQshya Initiative in the Lok Sabha.

LaQshya Initiative:

➤ Government of India has launched "LaQshya" (Labour room Quality improvement Initiative) to improve quality of care in labour room and maternity operation theatres in public health facilities.

Aim:

➤ To reduce preventable maternal and newborn mortality, morbidity and stillbirths associated with the care around delivery in Labour room and Maternity Operation Theatre and ensure respectful maternity care.
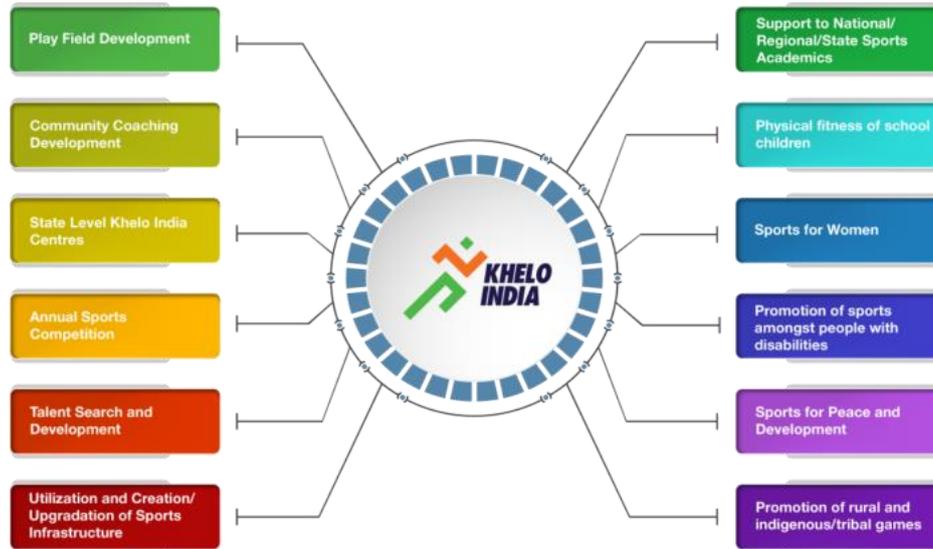
Objectives:

➤ To reduce maternal and newborn mortality & morbidity due to hemorrhage, retained placenta, preterm, preeclampsia and eclampsia, obstructed labour, puerperal sepsis, newborn asphyxia, and newborn sepsis, etc.

➤ To improve Quality of care during the delivery and immediate post-partum care, stabilization of complications and ensure timely referrals, and enable an effective two-way follow-up system.

➤ To enhance satisfaction of beneficiaries visiting the health facilities and provide Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) to all pregnant women attending the public health facilities.

➤ Following types of healthcare facilities have been identified for implementation of LaQshya program:

1. Government medical college hospitals.
2. District Hospitals & equivalent health facilities.
3. Designated FRUs and high case load CHCs with over 100 deliveries/month (60 in hills and desert areas)

KHELO INDIA PROGRAMME

Why in News?

➤ The Khelo India Scheme, with twelve verticals, is being implemented across the country from the year 2017-18 onwards.

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Highlights:

▸ The Talent Search and Development vertical of Khelo India scheme provides for grant of financial assistance of Rs.5.00 lakh per annum for a period of 8 years for selected sportspersons.

▸ State/Union Territory (UT)-wise allocation or release of funds is not made under this vertical, which is implemented centrally by Sports Authority of India (SAI).

▸ "Sports" being a State subject the responsibility of development Sports, including among girls in schools and colleges across the country rests with the State / Union Territory (UT) Governments. Sports Authority of India (SAI) also implements the Schemes of National Sports Talent Contest (NSTC) and Extension Centres of SAI Training Centres (STC)/Special Area Games (SAG) Centres with the aim of promoting sports.

▸ These schemes are applicable for all, including girls schools and colleges.

LIFESPAN OF SCHEDULED TRIBE PEOPLE

Why in News?

▸ According to data from the national Census 2011 to estimate, by indirect methods, the life expectancy for the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and non-ST population in India is 63.9 years, as against 67 years for general population.

▸ The reasons for shorter lifespan include gaps in various health and nutritional indicators, education level, poverty level, between ST and non-STs, traditional life styles, remoteness of habitations & dispersed population.

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Steps taken by Government:

- Under National Health Mission (NHM), support is being provided to States for strengthening their healthcare system including for upgradation of existing and setting up new public health infrastructure based on requirements posed by the States/UTs.
- All tribal districts whose composite health index is below the State average have been identified as High Priority Districts(HPDs) and receive more resources per capita under the NHM as compared to the rest of the districts in the State.
- As per the budget announcement 2017-18, 1.5 lakh Health Sub Centres and Primary Health Centres are being transformed into Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs)
- The Ayushman Bharat – Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) aim to provide an expanded range of services to include care for non – communicable diseases, palliative and rehabilitative care, Oral, Eye and ENT care, etc
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs supplements the efforts of Central line Ministries as well as State Governments for addressing needs of education, health and nutrition, skill development, livelihood etc. of tribals/ tribal areasby way of critical gaps filling.

GOOD SAMARITAN GUIDELINES

Why in News?

- Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued guidelines in pursuance of order of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India to protect the Good Samaritans in case of road accidents.

Good Samaritan:

- A Good Samaritan is a bystander, who voluntarily comes forward to administer immediate assistance or emergency care to a person injured in an accident, or crash, or emergency medical condition, or emergency situation.
- Significance of Good Samaritan law:
- In the last ten years, road crashes have killed over 13 lakh people in India. According to the Law Commission of India, 50% of these victims died of preventable injuries and could have been saved if they had received care on time.

How law came into Force:

- On March 30, 2016, the Supreme Court of India gave "force of law" to the guidelines for the protection of Good Samaritans issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- The purpose of a Good Samaritan law is to provide legal protection to bystanders who come to the aid and rescue of victims of road crashes.

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How Good Samaritan is protected:

- A Good Samaritan will not be liable for any civil or criminal action for any injury or death of the victim

- Good Samaritan who informs police or emergency service regarding an injured person not to be compelled to reveal his personal details

- Disciplinary action against public officials who coerce Good Samaritan to reveal his personal details. Good Samaritans not to be forced to bear the initial cost of treatment: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) to issue guidelines that no public or private hospital can demand payment for registration and admissions costs from the Good Samaritans

- Hospitals cannot refuse treatment to a victim: Lack of response by a doctor in an emergency situation to be considered as a "Professional Misconduct" and disciplinary action shall be taken against such a doctor

- The Good Samaritan can choose to be an eyewitness and cannot be compelled

- Eye witness to be examined in a single occasion

- Video conferencing may be used for examination of a Good Samaritan.

CENTRAL DRUGS STANDARD CONTROL ORGANISATION

CDSCO:

- Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) is the Central Drug Authority for discharging functions assigned to the Central Government under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act

Major functions of CDSCO:

- Regulatory control over the import of drugs, approval of new drugs and clinical trials, meetings of Drugs Consultative Committee (DCC) and Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), approval of certain licenses as Central License Approving Authority is exercised by the CDSCO headquarters.

Strategies:

- Initiate in framing of rules, regulations and guidance documents to match the contemporary issues in compliance with the requirements of Drugs & Cosmetics Act 1940 and Rules 1945.

- Facilitate in Uniform implementation of the provisions of the Drugs & Cosmetics Act 1940 and Rules 1945. Function as Central license Approving Authority under the provisions of Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940 and Rules 1945.

- Collaboration with other similar International agencies.

- Providing training to the Indian regulatory personnel.

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NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS

Why in News?

⤷ Govt has enacted the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act (CPCR), 2005, extending pan-India except to the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

NCPCR:

⤷ Under Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005 (CPCR), National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCRs) have been created as Statutory bodies for protection of child rights.

⤷ The Commission's Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.

⤷ The Commission may inquire into complaints and take suomotu notice of matters relating to:

1. Deprivation and violation of child rights
2. Non-implementation of laws providing for protection and development of children
3. Non-compliance of policy decisions, guidelines or instructions aimed at mitigating hardships to and ensuring welfare of the children and to provide relief to such children
4. Or take up the issues arising out of such matters with appropriate authorities.

SEVA BHOJ YOJANA

Why in News?

⤷ Seva Bhoj Yojna' is a Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

⤷ It envisages to reimburse the Central Government share of Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) and Integrated Goods and Service Tax (IGST) so as to lessen the financial burden of such Charitable Religious Institutions who provide Food/Prasad/Langar (Community Kitchen)/Bhandara free of cost without any discrimination to Public/Devotees.

⤷ The scheme is being implemented from 01.08.2018 with a total outlay of Rs. 325.00 Crores for Financial Years 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Objective:

⤷ Under the Scheme of 'Seva Bhoj Yojna' Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) and Central Government's share of Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) paid on purchase of specific raw food items by Charitable Religious Institutions for distributing free food to public shall be reimbursed as Financial Assistance by the Government of India.

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Type of activities supported under the scheme:

▶ Free 'prasad' or free food or free 'langar' / 'bhandara' (community kitchen) offered by charitable religious institutions like Gurudwara, Temples, Dharmik Ashram, Mosques, Dargah, Church, Mutt, Monasteries etc. Financial Assistance will be provided on First-cum-First Serve basis of registration linked to fund available for the purpose in a Financial Year.

Criteria for Financial Assistance:

▶ A Public Trust or society or body corporate, or organisation or institution covered under the provisions of section 10 (23BBA) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 (as amended from time to time) or registered under the provisions of section 12AA of the Income Tax Act, 1961, for charitable/religious purposes, or a company formed and registered under the provisions of

▶ section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013 or section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956, as the case may be, for charitable/ religious purposes, or a Public Trust registered as such for charitable/religious purposes under any Law for the time being in force, or a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, for charitable/religious purposes can apply under Seva Bhoj Yojna.

▶ The applicant Public Trust or society or body corporate, or organisation or institution, as the case may be, must be involved in charitable/religious activities by way of free and philanthropic distribution of food/prasad/langar(Community Kitchen)/ bhandara free of cost and without discrimination through the modus of public, charitable/religious trusts or endowments including maths, temples, gurdwaras, wakfs, churches, synagogues, agiaries or other places of public religious worship.

▶ The institutions/organizations should have been distributing free food, langar and prasad to atleast 5000 persons in a calendar month can apply under the scheme.

▶ Financial Assistance under the scheme shall be given only to those institutions which are not in receipt of any Financial Assistance from the Central/State Government for the purpose of distributing free food.

▶ The Institution/Organization blacklisted under the provisions of Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) or under the provisions of any Act/Rules of the Central/State shall not be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme.

NATIONAL DIGITAL HEALTH MISSION (NDHM)

Why in News?

▶ The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has recommended the setting up of a National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) to manage "enormous amounts of health data" generated by Ayushman Bharat, the Centre's flagship health programme.

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National Digital Health Mission (NDHM):

- The NDHM would provide technology to manage and analyse data, and create a system of personal health records and health applications. Central to the "ecosystem" would be a Personal Health Identifier (PHI) to maintain a Personal Health Record (PHR).

- The PHI would contain the names of patients and those of their immediate family, date of birth, gender, mobile number, email address, location, family ID and photograph.

- While Aadhaar assures uniqueness of identity and provides an online mechanism for authentication, it cannot be used in every health context as per the applicable regulations.

- The design of PHI, therefore, must allow multiple identifiers (chosen from the specified types of identifiers) for designing the structure and processes relating to PHI.

Blueprint of the Mission:

- The Health Ministry has decided to consult Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), which issues Aadhaar, and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in the design of the PHI.

- These recommendations come from a National Digital Health Blueprint (NDHB) created by a committee.The 14-member committee included officials from the Health Ministry, state governments, NITI Aayog, MeitY, National eGovernance Division (NeGD), NIC, CDAC and AIIMS. The panel envisions the new Mission to be autonomous like UIDAI and GSTN (Goods and Services Tax Network).

- It would be partly funded by the government but will also "raise a part of its funding through a transaction fee" with private players. The committee has also suggested a Command, Control, and Communication Center (CCCC) as a single point of contact in public health emergencies.

- It estimates that all the components of the Mission would take about 18 months to develop.

CYBER CRIME COORDINATION CENTRE

Why in News?

- The Central Government has rolled out a scheme for establishment of Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre to handle issues related to cybercrime in the country in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

- Central Government has taken steps to spread awareness about cybercrimes to prevent such crimes and to speed up investigation.

Initiatives:

- Establishment of National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) for protection of critical information infrastructure in the country.

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- All organizations providing digital services have been mandated to report cyber security incidents to CERT-In expeditiously.

- Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre) has been launched for providing detection of malicious programmes and free tools to remove such programmes.

- Issue of alerts and advisories regarding cyber threats and counter-measures by CERT-In.

- Issue of guidelines for Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) regarding their key roles and responsibilities for securing applications / infrastructure and compliance.

- Provision for audit of the government websites and applications prior to their hosting, and thereafter at regular intervals.

- Formulation of Crisis Management Plan for countering cyber-attacks and cyber terrorism

- Empanelment of security auditing organisations to support and audit implementation of Information Security Best Practices.

- Conducting cyber security mock drills and exercises regularly to enable assessment of cyber security posture and preparedness of organizations in Government and critical sectors.

- Conducting regular training programmes for network / system administrators and Chief Information Security Officers (CISOs) of Government and critical sector organisations regarding securing the IT infrastructure and mitigating cyber-attacks.

ATAL BIMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJANA

Why in News?

- The ESI Corporation has launched a scheme named 'Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana' (ABVKY)

Highlights:

- In the scheme in case the Insured Person (IP) is rendered unemployed, provides relief to the extent of 25% of the average per day earning during the previous four contribution periods, to be paid up to maximum 90 days of unemployment once in lifetime.

- Conditions and other features:

- The Insured Person should have been rendered unemployed during the period the relief is claimed.

- The Insured Person should have been in insurable employment for a minimum period of two years. The Insured Person should have contributed not less than 78 days during each of the preceding four contribution periods.

- The contribution in respect of him should have been paid or payable by the employer.

- The contingency of the unemployment should not have been as a result of any punishment for misconduct or superannuation or voluntary retirement.

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- Aadhar and Bank Account of the Insured Person should be linked with insured person data base. In case the IP is working for more than one employer and is covered under the ESI scheme he will be considered unemployed only in case he is rendered unemployed with all employers.

- As specified in Section 65 of the ESI Act, an IP shall not be entitled to any other cash compensation and the Relief under ABVKY simultaneously for the same period. However, periodical payments of Permanent Disability Benefit (PDB) under ESI Act and Regulations shall continue.

- As specified under Section 61 of the ESI Act, an IP who is in receipt of Relief under ABVKY shall not be entitled to receive any similar benefit admissible under the provisions of any other enactment.

- The IP will be eligible for Medical benefit as provided under the Act for the period he is availing this relief. The claim for Relief under ABVKY may be submitted by the claimant any time after rendering unemployed, but not later than one year from the date of unemployment to the appropriate Branch Office in form of affidavit in prescribed Form. No prospective claim i.e. claim for relief under ABVKY for any future period will be allowed.

- The IP will submit his claim online through the ESIC Portal.

EXPORT PROMOTION SCHEME

Why in News?

- The Government of India has launched a scheme namely, Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES) with the objective to assist Central and State Government Agencies for creation of appropriate infrastructure for growth of exports from the States.

Highlights:

- The Scheme provides financial assistance in the form of grant-in-aid to Central/State Government-owned agencies for setting up or for up-gradation of export infrastructure as per the guidelines of the Scheme.

- The scheme can be availed by the States through their Implementing Agencies, for infrastructure projects with overwhelming export linkages like the Border Haats, Land customs stations, quality testing and certification labs, etc.

- The Government of India strives to ensure a continuous dialogue with the State Governments and Union Territories on measures for promoting exports.

- Also, for providing an international trade enabling environment in the States, and to create a framework for making the States active partners in boosting exports from India.

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⯈ Under the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP), DGFT operates various Export promotion schemes such as Advance Authorization, Duty Free Import Authorization, Export Promotion of Capital Goods, Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) and Services Exports from India Scheme (SEIS). To give effect to these schemes, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has issued various exemption notifications.

Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS):

⯈ MEIS was introduced in the FTP from 01.04.2015, providing rewards for exporters of specified goods. The objective of the MEIS is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in exporting goods/products which are produced/manufactured in India.

⯈ The scheme incentivizes exporters in terms of Duty Credit Scrips at the rate of 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 % of FOB Value of exports realized.

⯈ These scrips are transferable and can be used to pay certain Central Duties/taxes including Customs Duties.

Agriculture Export Policy:

⯈ The Agriculture Export Policy was launched in 2018 to harness export potential of Indian agriculture, through suitable policy instruments, to make India global power in agriculture and raise farmers' income. This comprehensive "Agriculture Export Policy" aims to increase agricultural exports by integrating Indian farmers and agricultural products with the global value chains.

MoUs FOR ENHANCED COOPERATION TO END TB BY 2025

Why in News?

⯈ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare today exchanged MoUs with the Ministry of AYUSH, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Railways to strengthen inter-ministerial coordination and efforts towards Tuberculosis-free India by 2025.

Highlights:

⯈ Although entirely preventable and curable, Tuberculosis is a major obstacle to India's human and economic development.

⯈ India,in near future, is predicted to have world's largest working population and a disease like TB which mostly affects adults in their most productive years, poses a great risk to the country's economic growth potential. Apart from being a public health problem, TB is also associated with poor socio-economic development, marginalization and exploitation.

⯈ The actions required to tackle the socio-economic and structural determinants of TB lie beyond the purview of the health sector alone, calling for a harmonized multisectoral response.

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LOOK EAST AGENDA

Act East Policy:

⤞ India's Act East Policy focusses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region. The policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative, has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation

Objective:

⤞ The Objective of "Act East Policy" is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region including Arunanchal Pradesh with other countries in our neighbourhood.

⤞ The North East of India has been a priority in our Act East Policy (AEP).

⤞ The focus has been on the development and prosperity of the North Eastern states by improving connectivity, access and facilities to the region through various initiatives including improving connectivity of North East Region with Bangladesh, improving access to North East from Myanmar to facilitate tourism and cross border connectivity, promotion of Land Border Crossing Agreement and Integrated Check Post at Moreh and infrastructure projects like India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project in Myanmar.

Initiatives undertaken by the Govt:

⤞ ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2016-20) adopted at the 13th ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur in 2015 and endorsed by Leaders at the 13th ASEAN-India Summit held in Kuala Lumpur in 2015, provides for a road map for cooperation between ASEAN and India across three pillars

   1. Political security
   2. Economic and
   3. Socio-cultural.

⤞ A number of activities are held under the Plan of Action (2016-20) in all three spheres to promote ASEAN-India relations. Various projects are undertaken from Indo-Pacific Division's budget, and ASEAN-India Fund (AIF), ASEAN-India Green Fund (AIGF) and ASEAN-India Science & Technology Development Fund (AISTDF) which have been set up by Government of India for undertaking joint projects with ASEAN Member States. These Funds are rolling funds and are replenished on need basis.

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⪢ Under the 3 Lines of Credit worth about USD 8 billion extended by India to Bangladesh, GoI has undertaken several projects to enhance connectivity with our North East Region through Bangladesh.

⪢ India has disbursed around US $ 1.04 billion in grant projects, and has extended concessional loans of US $ 478.9 million from India's LOC amount of around US $750 million to Myanmar.

⪢ Projects on grant funding include connectivity infrastructure projects like Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project, upgradation of 69 bridges and building the Kalewa Yargi road segment on the Trilateral Highway.

⪢ On the Civilizational front, Buddhist and Hindu links could be energized to develop new contacts and connectivity between people.

SCHEMES FOR INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT IN NER

NEHHDC:

⪢ The North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation Limited (NEHHDC), a Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSE) of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER),

⪢ Provides marketing linkage to the artisans and weavers of the North Eastern Region (NER) by conducting exhibitions and craft bazaars in various parts of the country which in turn generates indirect employment for the artisans and weavers.

NERCORMP:

⪢ The North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP), a livelihood project under the Ministry of DoNER, has facilitated in establishing community-based micro-credit organizations and non-farm enterprises in its project areas.

⪢ It provides employment to Self Help Groups (SHGs) in 10 districts of 4 States of NER namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya for enterprise development.

North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP):

⪢ A World Bank aided project, being implemented by Ministry of DoNER, provides skill development training, vocational training to unemployed youths & Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in 11 districts of four North East States namely Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

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UGC SCHEME OF 'PARAMARSH'

Why in News?

» The Union Minister for Human Resource Development launched 'Paramarsh' – a University Grants Commission (UGC) scheme for Mentoring NAAC Accreditation Aspirant Institutions to promote Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

'Paramarsh':

» This "Paramarsh" scheme will target 1000 Higher Education Institutions for mentoring with a specific focus on quality as enumerated in the UGC "Quality Mandate".

» Mentor-Mentee relationship will not only benefit both the institutions but also provide quality education to the 3.6 crore students who are enrolling to Indian Higher Education system at present.

Significance of the scheme:

» The scheme will be a paradigm shift in the concept of mentoring of institution by another well performing institution to upgrade their academic performance and enable them to get accredited by focusing in the area of curricular aspects, teaching-learning & evaluation, etc.

» The scheme is expected to have a major impact in addressing a national challenge of improving the quality of Higher Education in India.

» The scheme will lead to enhancement of overall quality of the Mentee Institutions and enhance its profile as a result of improved quality of research, teaching and learning methodologies.

» Mentee Institution will also have increased exposure and speedier adaptation to best practices.

» "Paramarsh" scheme will also facilitate sharing of knowledge, information and opportunities for research collaboration and faculty development in Mentee Institutions.

DefExpo INDIA- 2020

Why in News?

» The 11th edition of the DefExpo India- 2020 is going to be held in Lucknow from 5th to 8th February 2020.

Highlights:

» The expo offers an excellent opportunity for the Indian defence industry to showcase its capabilities and promote its export potential.

» The theme of the 2020 edition is "India: The Emerging Defence Manufacturing Hub". The focus would be on 'Digital Transformation of Defence'.

» The expo is intended to facilitate B2B and G2G interactions and meetings. Many MoUs are also generally signed.

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▸ The DefExpo is a biennial event (held every 2 years).

▸ The expo is intended to give a boost to the 'Make in India' programme of the GOI.

▸ Two Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs) are planned in India, one in Uttar Pradesh and the other in Tamil Nadu.

INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON VIRTUAL CURRENCIES SUBMITS ITS REPORT

Why in News?

▸ The Inter-Ministerial Committee which was constituted to study the issues related to virtual currencies has submitted its report.

Highlights:

▸ The Committee was chaired by the Secretary, Office of the Economic Adviser, and had as its members Secretary, MeiTY; Chairman (SEBI) and Deputy Governor, RBI.

▸ The report has highlighted the positive aspect of distributed-ledger technology (DLT) and suggested various applications, especially in financial services, for use of DLT in India.

▸ The DLT-based systems can be used by banks and other financial firms for processes such as loan-issuance tracking, collateral management, fraud detection and claims management in insurance, and reconciliation systems in the securities market.

▸ The report has recommended banning of the cryptocurrencies in India and imposing fines and penalties for carrying on of any activities connected with cryptocurrencies in India.

▸ The report has also suggested Government to keep an open mind on official digital currency.

▸ Along with the report, the Draft Bill 'Banning of Cryptocurrency & Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2019' was also submitted.

TUBERCULOSIS FREE INDIA INITIATIVE

Why in News?

▸ Ministry of AYUSH and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare have signed MoU today to forge inter-sectoral convergence at the level of policy, planning and programme implementation for accelerated response towards "Tuberculosis Free India" initiative.

Highlights:

▸ Although entirely preventable and curable, Tuberculosis is a major obstacle to India's human and economic development.

▸ India, in near future, is predicted to have world's largest working population and a disease like TB which mostly affects adults in their most productive years, poses a great risk to the country's economic growth potential.

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- Apart from being a public health problem, TB is also associated with poor socio-economic development, marginalization and exploitation
- The actions required to tackle the socio-economic and structural determinants of TB lie beyond the purview of the health sector alone, calling for a harmonized multisectoral response.

MoUs Signed:

- The intended collaboration between the two Ministries aims at development of linkages and integration of TB care services within the infrastructure and institutional network of AYUSH.
- AYUSH systems have potential knowledge base, qualified & trained human resources and holistic healthcare practices to help achieving the objective of TB- free India.
- The MoU with the Central TB Division of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare outlines the scope and extent of AYUSH involvement in sensitization, awareness generation, capacity building of AYUSH institutions and health service providers in the areas of TB diagnosis, control and management.
- Focused activities envisaged under the MoU will cover joint planning to work with AYUSH organisations & professional bodies and promote adjuvant use of evidence- based AYUSH interventions for, TB control and management.
- It is also intended to facilitate research collaboration and best practices of AYUSH healthcare and build up capacities for TB-free work places and communities.
- Both Ministries will appoint Nodal Officers for development of implementation plan, modalities of operationalization and steering the collaboration activities outlined in the MoU.
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare today exchanged Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with the Ministry of AYUSH, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Railways to strengthen inter-ministerial coordination and efforts towards Tuberculosis-free India by 2025.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA

Why in News?

- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a Maternity Benefit Programme that is implemented in all the districts of the country in accordance with the provision of the National Food Security Act, 2013.

Objectives:

- Providing partial compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentive's so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first living child.
- The cash incentive provided would lead to improved health seeking behaviour amongst the Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW& LM).

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Benefits under PMMVY:

➤ Cash incentive of Rs 5000 in three instalments i.e. first instalment of Rs 1000/ – on early registration of pregnancy at the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) / approved Health facility as may be identified by the respective administering State / UT, second instalment of Rs 2000/ – after six months of pregnancy on receiving at least one ante-natal check-up (ANC) and third

instalment of Rs 2000/ – after child birth is registered and the child has received the first cycle of BCG, OPV, DPT and Hepatitis – B, or its equivalent/ substitute.

➤ The eligible beneficiaries would receive the incentive given under the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) for Institutional delivery and the incentive received under JSY would be accounted towards maternity benefits so that on an average a woman gets Rs 6000 / –.

Target Beneficiaries:

➤ All Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers, excluding PW&LM who are in regular employment with the Central Government or the State Governments or PSUs or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force.

➤ All eligible Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers who have their pregnancy on or after 01.01.2017 for first child in family.

➤ The date and stage of pregnancy for a beneficiary would be counted with respect to her LMP date as mentioned in the MCP card.

Case of Miscarriage/Still Birth:

➤ A beneficiary is eligible to receive benefits under the scheme only once.

➤ In case of miscarriage/still birth, the beneficiary would be eligible to claim the remaining instalment(s) in event of any future pregnancy.

➤ Thus, after receiving the 1st instalment, if the beneficiary has a miscarriage, she would only be eligible for receiving 2nd and 3rd instalment in event of future pregnancy subject to fulfilment of eligibility criterion and conditionalities of the scheme. Similarly, if the beneficiary has a miscarriage or still birth after receiving 1 st and 2nd instalments, she would only be eligible for receiving 3rd instalment in event of future pregnancy subject to fulfilment of eligibility criterion and conditionalities of the scheme.

Case of Infant Mortality:

➤ A beneficiary is eligible to receive benefits under the scheme only once. That is, in case of infant mortality, she will not be eligible for claiming benefits under the scheme, if she has already received all the instalments of the maternity benefit under PMMVY earlier.

➤ Pregnant and Lactating AWWs/ AWHs/ ASHA may also avail the benefits under the PMMVY subject to fulfilment of scheme conditionalities.

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TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OF RURAL YOUTH

Why in news?

⚬ Ministry of Rural Development is undertaking two initiatives in skill development under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) which are as follows:

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY):

⚬ It is a placement linked skill development program which allows skilling in a PPP mode and assured placements in regular jobs in an organization not owned by the skilled person.

⚬ DDU-GKY is being undertaken as PPP Project all over the country through Project Implementing Agencies (PIAs) registered with the Ministry of Rural Development.

⚬ Further, Guidelines of the scheme mandate State Governments to take up skill training projects with Corporate Social Responsibility funding.

⚬ DDU-GKY Guidelines provide for setting apart 15% of the funds of the funds at for national level beneficiaries from among minority groups.

Rural Self Employment and Training Institutes (RSETI):

⚬ Skill development through RSETI, thereby enabling the trainee to take Bank credit and start his/her own Micro-enterprise. Some of such trainees may also seek regular salaried jobs.

⚬ DDU-GKY and RSETI schemes covers rural parts of all the States of the country.

MERGER OF NIMH WITH ICMR-NIOH

Why in News?

⚬ The Union Cabinet approved to dissolve National Institute of Miners' Health (NIMH), an autonomous Institute under Ministry of Mines (MoM) and merge/amalgamate with ICMR-National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH).

Significance:

⚬ The merger/amalgamation of NIMH with NIOH will prove beneficial to both the Institutes in term of enhanced expertise in the field of occupational health besides the efficient management of public money.

Highlights:

⚬ NIMH was set up by Government of India in 1990

⚬ The Institute conducts applied research in occupational health and hygiene and specializes in providing technical support services to mining and mineral-based industry and endeavors for safe mines and healthy miners through R&D.

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- The focus areas of NIOH include a vast array of areas related to occupational health which also includes, occupational medicine and occupational hygiene.

- Expenditure Management Commission recommended, inter-alia, that- "Organisations with similar objectives can be considered for merger to encourage synergy in operations and reduction in cost".

FAIR AND REMUNERATIVE PRICE' OF SUGARCANE

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the proposal in respect of Determination of 'Fair and Remunerative Price' of sugarcane payable by sugar mills to the cane growers.

- Price of sugarcane is fixed by the centre/State, while the price of sugar is market determined.

FRP:

- Fair and remunerative price (FRP) is the minimum price at which rate sugarcane is to be purchased by sugar mills from farmers.

- The FRP is based on the recommendation of the Commission of Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP). The approval will ensure a guaranteed price to cane growers. The 'FRP' of sugarcane is determined under Sugarcane (Control) Order.

- This will be uniformly applicable all over the country. Determination of FRP will be in the interest of sugarcane growers keeping in view their entitlement to a fair and remunerative price for their produce. Fair and remunerative price (FRP) is the minimum price at which rate sugarcane is to be purchased by sugar mills from farmers.

Sugar buffer stock:

- The Cabinet has also approved the creation of buffer stock of 40 lakh Metric Tonnes of sugar for one year from the 1st of next month.

- The decision will lead to an improvement in the liquidity in sugar inventories and stabilization in sugar prices.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION TO GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Why in News?

- It is mentioned that as per Rule 8 of Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964, no Government servant shall, except with the previous sanction of the Government, own or conduct or participate in the editing or management of, any public media.

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Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules provides:

▶ Which has the effect of an adverse criticism of any current or recent policy or action of the Central Government or a State Government.

▶ which is capable of embarrassing the relations between the Central Government and the Government of any State.

▶ which is capable of embarrassing the relations between the Central Government and the Government of any foreign State.

Exceptions:

▶ Bonafide expression of views by office-bearers of a trade union or association of Government servants for the purpose of safeguarding the conditions of service of such Government servants or for securing an improvement thereof.

▶ Views expressed by a Government servant in his official capacity or in the due performance of the duties assigned to him.

NORTH EASTERN REGION VISION 2020

Why in News?

▶ North Eastern Region Vision 2020 document provides an overarching framework for the development of the North Eastern Region

▶ The main objective is to bring the north eastern region at par with other developed regions under which different Ministries, including the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region have undertaken various initiatives.

Reasons for Resource Flow:

▶ Mandatory earmarking of at least 10% of GBS of Central Ministries/Departments for North Eastern Region (NER)

▶ Creation of Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR)

▶ There has been a sharp rise in provisional expenditure (subject to final vetting by Ministry of Finance) by Central Ministries in NER by 83%.

Major initiatives:

▶ Strengthening infrastructure and connectivity is a major thrust area identified by the Vision document. Several connectivity initiatives have been undertaken in the recent past.

▶ In the last five years under the schemes of Ministry of DoNER funds were released for road projects, bridges, ISBT, airports, railway in North Eastern Region.

▶ Moreover, Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS-UDAN) has been launched to provide connectivity to unserved and underserved Airports within the country.

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- Also to promote regional connectivity, airfare has been made affordable through Viability Gap Funding (VGF). The North East has been kept as a priority area under RCS-UDAN.
- In respect of Rail Connectivity, during the last four years the entire North East Region has been converted to the Broad Gauge (BG) network.

Other major initiatives taken:

- Promotion of MSMEs in North Eastern Region and Sikkim
- Comprehensive Telecom Development Project (CTDP) for the North-Eastern Region

- Comprehensive Scheme for strengthening of Transmission and Distribution Systems (CSST&DS)
- North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project (NERPSIP)
- Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region scheme
- North East Region Textile Promotion Scheme (NERTPS)
- National Sports University at Imphal, Agartala-Akhaura Rail-Link to connect the existing Agartala station in Tripura to Akhaura Station of Bangladesh Railways
- Development of Brahmaputra and 19 new waterways including Barak.

IMPLEMENTATION OF POSHAN ABHIYAAN

Why in News?

- POSHAN Abhiyaan has been set up by Government of India in 2017 for a three-year time frame.

Objectives:

- Reduce the level of stunting in children (0-6 years) under-nutrition (Underweight Prevalence) in children (0-6 years) and Low Birth Weight at 2% per annum
- Reduce anaemia among young children (6-59 months), women and adolescent girls at 3% per annum across the country.

Abhiyaan:

- The Abhiyaan ensures convergence with various programmes, organising Community Based Events; incentivizing States/UTs for achieving goals.
- Community Mobilization and Awareness Advocacy leading to Jan Andolan – to educate the people on nutritional aspects. Incremental Learning Approach (ILA); strengthening Field Functionaries.
- Under the Abhiyan, all districts of the 36 States/UTs, including Tamil Nadu, have been covered for implementation in a phased manner.

CODE ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, HEALTH AND WORKING CONDITIONS BILL, 2019

Why in News?

⚬ The Minister of State (I/C) for Labour and Employment Shri Santosh Kumar Gang war introduced The Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Bill, 2019 in Lok Sabha today to amend the laws regulating the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions of the persons employed in an establishment.

Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Bill, 2019:

⚬ With the ultimate aim of extending the safety and healthy working conditions to all workforce of the country, the Code enhances the ambit of provisions of safety, health, welfare and working conditions from existing about 9 major sectors to all establishments having 10 or more employees.

⚬ The proposed Code enhances the coverage of workers manifold as it would be applicable to all establishments employing 10 or more workers, where any industry, trade, business, manufacture or occupation is carried on, including, IT establishments or establishments of service sector.

⚬ Further the varying threshold of applicability has been made uniform at 10 workers for all establishments except mines and dock where the Code would be applicable even with 1 worker. In order to ensure wider coverage, the definitions of Working Journalists and Cine worker have also been modified to include workers employed in electronic media and all forms of audio-visual production.

⚬ Similarly, the definition of inter-state migrant worker has also been proposed to be modified to include those migrant workers who are being employed directly by the employer from other States without contractor or agent. This proposal would enhance the coverage of the safety, health and working conditions provisions manifold as compared to the present scenario.

Other Features:

⚬ The Code provides basic broad legislative framework with enabling provisions for framing rules, regulations, standards, and bye-laws as per the requirements of different sectors which has Resulted in reduction of 622 sections to 134 sections in the Code. This would result in simple legislation with flexibility in changing the provisions in tune with emerging technologies and makes the legislation dynamic.

⚬ The Bill proposes one registration for an establishment instead of multiple registrations. Presently 6 labour acts out of 13 provide for separate registration of the establishment. This

⚬

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will create a centralized data base and promote ease of doing business. At present, separate registration is required to be obtained under 6 Acts.

- Employer to provide free of cost annual health checks-up for employees above prescribed age for prescribed tests and for prescribed establishments. Increases productivity as it would be possible to detect diseases. Coverage of employees above a certain age for health check-up would promote inclusion.

- First time statutory provision to issue appointment letter to every employee of the establishment with the minimum information prescribed by the appropriate government.

- The provision of appointment letter will result in formalization of employment and prevent exploitation of the worker.

- The multiple committees under five labour Acts have been substituted by one National Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board. The National Board is of tripartite nature and has representation from trade unions, employer associations, and State governments. This will result in reduction in multiplicity of bodies/committees in various Acts and simplified and coordinated policy-making.

- Enabling provision for constituting a bi-partite Safety Committee in any class of establishment by appropriate government. It will promote safe and healthy working conditions in an establishment. The participatory nature of the committee will encourage implementation of decisions taken by the management.

- A part of the penalty for contravention of provisions relating to duties of employer leading to death or serious bodily injury to any person may be given to the victim or the legal heirs of the victim by the Court. The part of penalty would help in rehabilitation of injured worker or would provide financial support to the family of deceased.

- Presently, different applicability thresholds exist for welfare provisions like crèche, canteen, first aid, welfare officer etc in different Acts. The proposed Code has envisaged uniform threshold for welfare provisions for all establishment as far as practicably feasible.

- Women permitted to work beyond 7 PM and before 6 AM subject to the safety, holidays, working hours or any other condition as prescribed by appropriate government in respect of prescribed establishments. However, only after taking their consent for night work. This will promote gender equality and is in tune with demands from the various forums including international organizations as it leads to protective discrimination. Further, the condition of taking consent/ willingness of the women employee for night work would avoid any kind of misuse of the provision.

- The provision of one license and one return in place of multiple licenses and returns in existing 13 labour laws subsumed in this Code to save time, resources and efforts of establishments.

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ACCESSIBLE ELECTIONS

Why in News?

- The motto of 'Accessible Elections' was one among the many initiatives of Election Commission to make the world's largest democratic exercise inclusive and participative for all.
- During this election special focus was given to ensure the participation of Persons with Disabilities.

Facilitation for Persons with Disabilities:

- The electors with disabilities and senior citizens were mapped polling station wise to provide them targeted and need-based assistance on the day of poll.
- During the election, all the polling stations were equipped with enough supply of wheelchairs and it was ensured that all polling stations had sturdy ramps for the convenience of PwD electors.
- All the polling stations in Lok Sabha Election 2019 had a sign language expert, signage and transport facility.
- To facilitate PwDs during the enrollment process door to door registration drives were carried out, a special mobile application was also developed by the Commission for easy registration.
- This election was witness to many firsts in the domain of accessibility of all; EVMs used in the elections were embossed with Braille signage for the visually impaired voters' assistance
- Other documents like voters' slip, voter guide had braille signage too. Accessibility Observers were introduced, who ensured all the polling stations are accessible to the PwDs.

ATAL INNOVATION MISSION

Why in News?

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) including Self-Employment and Talent Utilization (SETU) is Government of India's endeavour to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Its objective is to serve as a platform for promotion of world-class Innovation Hubs, Grand Challenges, Start-up businesses and other self-employment activities, particularly in technology driven areas.
- The Mission has been set up under NITI Aayog.

Functions of AIM:

- Entrepreneurship promotion through Self-Employment and Talent Utilization, wherein innovators would be supported and mentored to become successful entrepreneurs
- Innovation promotion: to provide a platform where innovative ideas are generated :
- Atal Tinkering Labs

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- Atal Incubation Centers
- Scale-up support to Established Incubators

Atal Tinkering Labs:

- The objective of establishing AIM is to create scientific temper and cultivate the spirit of curiosity and innovation among young minds.
- In Schools, AIM facilitates to set up network of Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATL).
- The vision of Atal Tinkering Lab initiative is to 'Cultivate 1 Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators'. The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds and inculcate skills such as design mind-set, computational thinking, adaptive learning, physical computing, rapid calculations, measurements etc.

CIVIL LIST OF IAS OFFICERS

Why in News?

- The Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh launched the e-Civil List-2019 of the IAS Officers.

IAS Civil List:

- The IAS Civil list contains vital information in respect of officers in respect of their batch, cadre, present posting, pay scale, qualification and superannuation with their overall cadre strength with search features. The Civil list has been linked with the ER sheets. The List has been designed through DoPT, which gives multiple search options to the users.
- The Department of Personnel and Training is the cadre controlling authority of IAS officers and the Civil List is prepared with the help of inputs received from the States Cadres.
- The e-IAS Civil list is available on the website of the Ministry

Significance:

- The civil list is in line with citizen-centricity in working as it provides the information related to IAS officers in public domain which is accessible to the users from anywhere.
- It will facilitate the Information Commissions as the information demanded by RTI activists about the officers is already in public domain that too with multiple search options.
- DoPT being the HR wing of the government, it will also facilitate in research and comparative data analysis based on many parameters such as age, sex. educational qualifications etc
- It will also assist in the human resource management of the Government to ensure that the services of these officers are utilized to the best of their abilities.

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22nd NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON E-GOVERNANCE

Why in news?

- The Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG), in association with Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India and the State Government of Meghalaya will organize the 22nd National Conference on e-Governance 2019.
- It will be conducted at Shillong, Meghalaya.

Highlights:

- Objective of the e-Gov conference is to provide platform to improve the standard of service rendered to common man i.e. to provide end to end Citizen Centric Service Delivery.
- The conference is normally attended by senior officers of Government of India and State Governments including union Territories, academician, Executives from Industry, etc.
- This is the first time the event is being organized in North-Eastern region of the country.
- This Conference provides a platform to disseminate knowledge on effective methods of designing and implementing sustainable e-Governance initiatives to provide end-to-end Digital Services, exchange experiences in solving problems, mitigating risks, resolving issues, etc. The theme of this Conference is "Digital India: Success to Excellence". Discussions will be held on 5 sub-themes in Plenary session during the Conference:
    1. India Enterprise Architecture (INDEA),
    2. Digital Infrastructure,
    3. One Nation – One Platform,
    4. Emerging Technology for Practitioners, Secretariat Reforms,
    5. National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA).

3. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
NASA'S PUNCH MISSION

Why in News?

- NASA has selected an US based Indian researcher to lead its PUNCH mission which will image the Sun.

PUNCH Mission:

- PUNCH stands for "Polarimeter to Unify the Corona and Heliosphere," is focused on understanding the transition of particles from the Sun's outer corona to the solar wind that fills interplanetary space.
- It will consist of a constellation of four microsatellites that through continuous 3D deep-field imaging, will observe the corona and heliosphere as elements of a single, connected system.

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- This is a landmark mission will image regions beyond the Sun's outer corona. The Sun and the solar wind are one interconnected system, but these have until recently been studied using entirely different technologies and scientific approaches.

Significance:

- Other missions such as NASA's Parker Solar Probe and the ESA-NASA joint project, Solar Orbiter, which is due to be launched in 2020, can study the structures of the Sun's atmosphere.
- The PUNCH mission enhances these by tracking these structures in real time.
- Since the Sun's corona is much fainter than its surface layers, it cannot be viewed by the instruments directly.
- So, PUNCH will block out the light from the Sun to view its corona and the structures in it.

Constellation of satellites:

- PUNCH will consist of a 'constellation' of four suitcase-sized microsats that will orbit the Earth in formation and study how the corona, which is the atmosphere of the Sun, connects with the interplanetary medium. The mission is expected to be launched in 2022.
- The mission will image and track the solar wind and also the coronal mass ejections – which are huge masses of plasma that get thrown out of the Sun's atmosphere.
- The coronal mass ejections can affect and drive space weather events near the Earth.

BLACK GOLD

Why in News?

- Using gold nanoparticles Indian scientists have developed a new material called "black gold", which can potentially be used for applications ranging from solar energy harvesting to desalinating seawater, according to a study.

Black Gold:

- To develop the material, the team from Mumbai-based Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) rearranged size and gaps between gold nanoparticles.
- It has unique properties such as capacity to absorb light and carbon dioxide (CO_2).
- Gold does not have these properties therefore 'black gold' is being called a new material.
- In appearance it is black, hence the name 'black gold', according to the findings published in Chemical Science. The researchers varied inter-particle distance between gold nanoparticles using a cycle-by-cycle growth approach by optimizing the nucleation-growth step. They used dendritic fibrous nanosilica, whose fibers were used as the deposition site for Gold Nanoparticles.

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Features of Black Gold:

‣ One of the most fascinating properties of the new material is its ability to absorb the entire visible and near-infrared region of solar light.

‣ It does so because of inter-particle plasmonic coupling as well as heterogeneity in nanoparticles size.

‣ Black gold could also act as a catalyst and could convert CO_2 into methane at atmospheric pressure and temperature using solar energy.

‣ If we develop an artificial tree with leaves made out of back gold, it can perform artificial photosynthesis, capturing carbon dioxide and converting it into fuel and other useful chemicals.

‣ The efficiency of conversion of CO_2 into fuel, at present, is low but researchers believe it could be improved in future.

‣ The material can be used as a nano-heater to covert seawater into potable water with good efficiency, the researchers said.

NEUTRINO OBSERVATORY

Why in News?

‣ The Government of India has approved a project to build the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) at Pottipuram in the Theni District of Tamil Nadu.

‣ The project aims to set up a 51000-ton Iron Calorimeter (ICAL) detector to observe naturally occurring atmospheric neutrinos in a cavern at the end of an approximately 2 km long tunnel in a mountain.

‣ This will help to reduce the noise from cosmic rays that is ever present over-ground and which would outnumber the rare neutrino interactions even in a detector as large as ICAL.

India based Neutrino Observatory Project:

‣ The India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) Project is a multi-institutional effort aimed at building a world-class underground laboratory with a rock cover of approx.1200 m for non-accelerator based high energy and nuclear physics research in India.

‣ The project includes:

1) Construction of an underground laboratory and associated surface facilities at Pottipuram in Bodi West hills of Theni District of Tamil Nadu,

2) Construction of a Iron Calorimeter (ICAL) detector for studying neutrinos, consisting of 50000 tons of magnetized iron plates arranged in stacks with gaps in between where Resistive Plate Chambers (RPCs) would be inserted as active detectors.

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3) Setting up of National Centre for High Energy Physics at Madurai, for the operation and maintenance of the underground laboratory, human resource development and detector R&D along with its applications. The underground laboratory, consisting of a large cavern and several smaller caverns, will be accessed by a 2100 m long and 7.5 m wide tunnel.

Objectives:

▸ The initial goal of INO is to study neutrinos.

▸ Neutrinos are fundamental particles belonging to the lepton family. They come in three flavours, one associated with electrons and the others with their heavier cousins the muon and the Tau.

▸ According to standard model of particle physics, they are mass less.

▸ However recent experiments indicate that these charge-neutral fundamental particles, have finite but small mass which is unknown.

▸ They oscillate between flavours as they propagate. Determination of neutrino masses and mixing parameters is one of the most important open problems in physics today.

▸ The ICAL detector is designed to address some of these key open problems in a unique way.

▸ Over the years this underground facility is expected to develop into a full-fledged underground science laboratory for other studies in physics, biology, geology, hydrology etc.

GAGANYAAN NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Why in News?

▸ A Gaganyaan National Advisory Council has been created with members from different institutions and industries

Members:

▸ Secretaries of Department of Space, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Defence Research and Development, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Principal Scientific Advisor to PM, Senior Officials from Armed Forces, Indian Coast Guard, Former Chairman of ISRO, Member of Space Commission, Former Director of Aeronautical Development Agency, Former Indian Astronaut, Directors of Premier Academic and Research Institutions and Heads of various Indian Industries

Gaganyaan:

▸ Gaganyaan is an Indian crewed orbital spacecraft intended to be the basis of the Indian Human Spaceflight Programme.

▸ The spacecraft is being designed to carry three people, and a planned upgraded version will be equipped with rendezvous and docking capability.

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- In its maiden crewed mission, Indian Space Research Organisation's largely autonomous 3.7-tonne capsule will orbit the Earth at 400 km altitude for up to seven days with a three-person crew on board.
- The crewed vehicle is planned to be launched on ISRO's GSLV Mk III in December 2021.

BROADBAND READINESS INDEX

Why in News?

- Department of Telecom (DoT) and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop a Broadband Readiness Index (BRI) for Indian States and Union Territories (UT).

Highlights:

- The National Digital Communication Policy (NDCP) 2018 acknowledged the need for building a robust digital communications infrastructure leveraging existing assets of the broadcasting and power sectors including collaborative models involving state, local bodies and the private sector. Accordingly, the policy recommended that a BRI for States and UTs be developed to attract investments and address Right of Way (RoW) challenges across India.

Broadband Readiness Index:

- The BRI consists of two parts. Part I will focus on infrastructure development based on the measurement of nine parameters.
- Part II consists of demand side parameters which will be captured through primary surveys.
  1) It will include indicators such as percentage of households using computers/ laptops with internet connection, percentage of households with fixed broadband connection, internet users as a percentage of the population, smart phones density, percentage of households with at least one digitally literate member, etc.
  2) The primary survey will be conducted annually until 2022.

Details of the Index:

- Index will appraise the condition of the underlying digital infrastructure and related factors at the State/UT level.
- Such an exercise will provide useful insights into strategic choices made by States for investment allocations in ICT programmes. In the spirit of competitive federalism, the index will encourage states to cross learn and jointly participate in achieving the overall objective of digital inclusion and development in India. The framework will not only evaluate a state's relative development but will also allow for better understanding of a state's strengths and weaknesses that can feed into evidence-based policy making.

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- The methodology developed as a part of this research will be adapted and used on an annual basis for systematic evaluation of state-performance on metrics set out as the goals for 2022 under the new policy. As a result, ranking and understanding State/UT performance over time will be an important part of the exercise.

- The development of BRI will be a collaborative exercise with stakeholders including State governments and industry associations like the Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association (TAIPA), theInternet Service Providers Association of India (ISPAI) and the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI). This will be a first of its kind exercise that will comprehensively measure the development of telecom infrastructure at the sub national level.
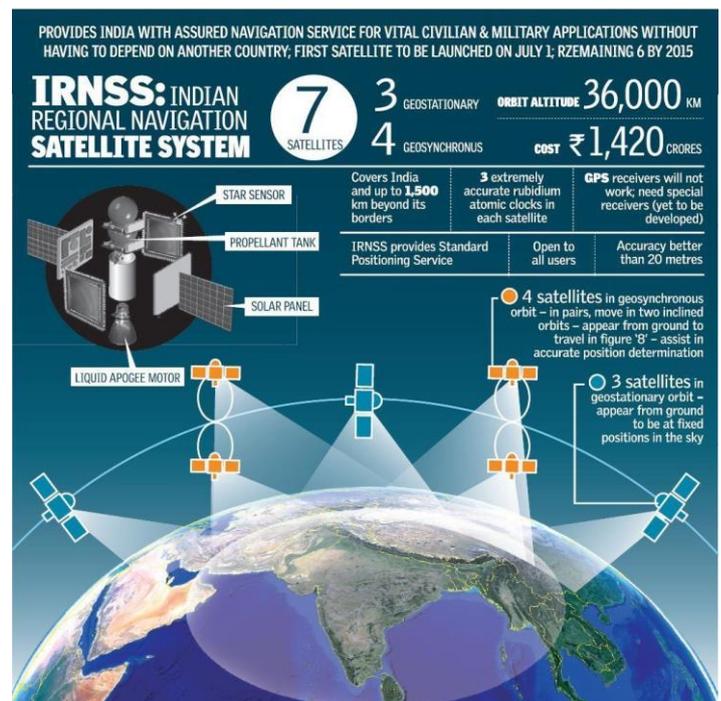
NAVIGATION WITH INDIAN CONSTELLATION (NavIC)

Why in News?

- The navigation system that Indians use on their mobile phones and cars could be set for a reboot.

- It has been reported that ISRO is in talks with processing chip manufacturers such as Qualcomm to substitute the existing Global Positioning System (GPS) with the Indian version of satellite navigation.

NavIC:

- NavIC is an independent Indian satellite-based positioning system for critical national applications.

- India got its system with the launch of the IRNSS 1-G satellite, is the seventh member of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), in November 2017.

- It consists of a constellation of seven satellites, three of which are in a geostationary orbit and four in a geosynchronous orbit.

- The IRNSS can provide Standard Positioning Service (SPS) to all users, and an encrypted Restricted Service (RS) to authorised users.

- It has position accuracy better than 20 metres in the primary service area.

- Its purpose is to provide reliable position, navigation and timing services over India and neighbourhood.

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Service coverage:

- The regional navigation satellite system can provide accurate position information service to users in India and the region, extending up to 1,500 km from its boundary, which is its Primary Service Area.

- Beyond that lies an Extended Service Area, that can extend up to the edges of the area enclosed by the rectangle imagined by latitudes 30 degrees South and 50 degrees North, and longitudes 30 degrees East and 130 degrees East.

- The GPS is a satellite-based radio navigation system that is owned by the United States government and operated by the United States Air Force.

- Apart from GPS, there is GLONASS of Russia, Galileo of the European Union and BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (or BDS) of China.

ELECTRONICALLY TRANSMITTED POSTAL BALLOT SYSTEM (ETPBS)

Why in News?

- In the recently concluded 2019 general elections, the Election Commission of India used Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) for service voters.

Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS):

- Persons working in Central Forces under Arms Act and Government officials deployed in Embassies outside the country are classified as Service Voters.

- Such service voters are provisioned for online enrolment.

- On the introduction of the ETPBS, there has been a record turnout of service voters. 18,02,646 were enrolled as Service Electors in 2019. This is a high of 60.14% as recorded by the E-postal ballot.

- The number of service voters included those from the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs (Central Armed Police Forces), Ministry of External Affairs and the State Police.

- ETPBS is developed by Election Commission of India with the help of Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).

- This system enables the entitled service voters to cast their vote using an electronically received postal ballot from anywhere outside their constituency.

- The voters who make such a choice will be entitled for Postal Ballot delivered through Electronic Media for a particular election.

- It enables the voters to cast their vote on an electronically received postal ballot from their preferred location, which is outside their originally assigned voting constituency.

- This system addresses the issue of time constraint for dispatch of postal ballot.

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Who are eligible to avail of ETPBS?

- Service Voters, other than those who opt for proxy voting (Classified Service Voters)
- The wife of a Service Voter who ordinarily resides with him
- Overseas Voters

Advantages of ETPBS:

- It can be availed by service voters from anywhere outside their constituency.
- It is easy and efficient.

- It facilitates the creation of service voter electoral roll data.
- It has two-layered security and is a secure system.
- OTP is required to download encrypted Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot file.
- Secrecy is maintained and no duplicate of casted ETPB is possible due to QR code.
- PIN is required to decrypt, print and deliver ETPB.

NEW SPACE INDIA LIMITED

Why in News?

- The Union Government has set up New Space India Limited (NSIL), a wholly-owned Government of India undertaking/ Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE), under the administrative control of Department of Space (DOS)

Significance:

- To commercially exploit the research and development work of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Centres and constituent units of DOS.
- The emergence of NSIL would spur the growth of Indian industries in the space sector and enable Indian industries to scale up manufacturing and production base.

Roles and functions:

- Small Satellite technology transfer to industry, wherein NSIL will obtain license from DOS/ISRO and sub-license it to Industries. Manufacture of Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) in collaboration with Private Sector. Productionisation of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) through Indian Industry. Productionisation and marketing of Space-based products and services, including launch and application. Transfer of technology developed by ISRO Centres and constituent units of DOS. Marketing spin-off technologies and products/services, both in India and abroad any other subject which Government of India deems fit.

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RADIATION TECHNOLOGY FOR SEWAGE TREATMENT

Why in News?

⯈ Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in collaboration with Amdavad Municipal Corporation (AMC), Ahmedabad has set up a Technology Demonstration Pilot Project "Sewage Sludge Hygienisation Plant" at Shahwadi, Ahmedabad.

Highlights:

⯈ Large amount of sewage sludge is produced in India every day. The sludge is infectious and can spread diseases. It also has essential micro and macro nutrients, especially carbon, useful for soil and crop production.

⯈ Radiation Technology can be used to hygienise the sludge reliably and affordably and protect health and environment. Addition of useful microorganisms to the hygienised sludge can convert it to a value-added manure

Radiation Technology:

⯈ Ionizing radiation emitted by radiation source such as Cobalt-60 interacts with the critical molecules like DNA, proteins and water present in the cell and result in the inactivation of microorganisms.

⯈ As a result of Irradiation, besides pathogens, other unwanted constituents like weeds, chemicals, etc. are also degraded, making the sludge safer for use

⯈ Based on microbiological inactivation, Radiation Technology is already established world over for sterilizing medical products, food safety and food preservation. Sludge hygienisation can be carried out in the similar manner

Advantages of Radiation Technology:

⯈ Process is simple, economic, effective, reproducible and scalable.

⯈ Easy to integrate with conventional sewage treatment facilities.

⯈ Process is fully automatic to avoid manual handling of contaminated sludge.

⯈ Based on the process of radiation sterilization which is well established world over and in India. Degrades chemical contaminants and makes sludge safer for use.

Benefits to the farmers/people:

⯈ Increased crop yield – direct benefit to the farmers.

⯈ Improved soil conditions – soil conservation & restoration.

⯈ Reduced health risks associated with sludge, reduces costs of health care system.

⯈ Reduced demand of water due to higher water holding capacity of the sludge.

⯈

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- Radiation technology has sound scientific basis and is a practical technology to economically hygienise sewage sludge for agriculture application.

- The technology and radiation source both are available in our country. Irradiation facility can be utilised to treat whole city sludge at one place in a fully automatic process.

- The hygienised sludge can benefit farmers and protect environment and human health. The technology has high potential in contributing towards meeting the objectives of Clean India Mission (the Swachh Bharat mission).

DEEP OCEAN MISSION

Why in news?

- Union Ministry of Earth Sciences has unveiled blueprint of Deep Ocean Mission (DOM).

Objectives:

- A major thrust of the mission will be looking for metals and minerals.

- It has been estimated that 380 million metric tonnes of Polymetallic nodules are available at the bottom of the seas in the Central Indian Ocean.

- These are rocks scattered on the seabed containing iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt.

Deep Ocean Mission (DOM):

- Nodal Agency: Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)

- The mission proposes to explore deep-ocean by emulating success of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in designing and launching satellites.

- For this mission, Centre has drawn up a five-year, Rs. 8,000 crore plan to explore deep recesses of the ocean. The focus of DOM is on deep-sea mining, ocean climate change advisory services, underwater vehicles and underwater robotics related technologies.

- Two key projects planned under it include desalination plant powered by tidal energy and submersible vehicle that can explore depths of at least 6,000 metres. For this mission, Centre has drawn up a five-year, Rs. 8,000 crore plan to explore deep recesses of the ocean. Underwater robotics and 'manned' submersibles are key components of the Mission which will help India harness various living and non-living (water, mineral and energy) resources from the seabed and deep water. The tasks that will be undertaken over this period include deep-sea mining, survey, energy exploration and the offshore-based desalination.

- These technological developments are funded under an umbrella scheme of the government – called Ocean Services, Technology, Observations, Resources Modelling and Science (O-SMART).

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Significance:

‣ India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) spreads over 2.2 million sq. km and in the deep sea, lies unexplored and unutilised.

‣ Besides, India has been allotted site of 1,50,000 sq. km in Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) by United Nations International Sea Bed Authority (UN-ISBA) for exploitation of polymetallic nodules (PMN). These are rocks scattered on seabed containing iron, nickel, manganese and cobalt. It is envisaged that 10% of recovery of that large reserve can meet energy requirement of India for next 100 years.

‣ It has been estimated that 380 million metric tonnes of polymetallic nodules are available at the bottom of the seas in CIOB.

MICRODOT

Why in News?

‣ The government has come out with draft rules to make microdots mandatory in vehicles.

‣ This move will also ensure that consumers have a way of identifying original parts from fake ones and that contributes to overall safety as well.

Microdots Technology:

‣ The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways issued a draft notification on amending the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, and allowing motor vehicles and their parts, components, assemblies, sub-assemblies to be affixed with permanent and nearly invisible microdots.

‣ These microdots can be read physically with a microscope and identified with ultraviolet light.

‣ Microdots are a globally proven technology to ensure originality in spare parts of machines and components, including in the automobile sector.

‣ The government has envisaged that with microdots becoming a permanent feature in vehicles, identifying them would become easier in case they are stolen.

How it works?

‣ The microdots and adhesive are to become a permanent fixture/affixation which cannot be removed without damaging the asset itself.

‣ The microdots are to comply with AIS 155 requirements, if affixed.

‣ The technology involves spraying thousands of microscopic dots onto vehicles or other assets to form a unique identification. Each microdot carries this identification which is registered to the owner, but is not visible to the naked eye.

GOODS & SERVICE TAX

Why in News?

➤ 2nd anniversary of Goods & Services Tax to be celebrated on 1st July 2019

GST:

➤ GST is one indirect tax for the whole nation, which will make India one unified common market.

➤ GST is a single tax on the supply of goods and services, right from the manufacturer to the consumer.

➤ Credits of input taxes paid at each stage will be available in the subsequent stage of value addition, which makes GST essentially a tax only on value addition at each stage.

➤ The final consumer will thus bear only the GST charged by the last dealer in the supply chain, with set-off benefits at all the previous stages.

Taxes at the Centre and State level are subsumed into GST:

➤ At the Central level, the following taxes are being subsumed:

1) Central Excise Duty
2) Additional Excise Duty
3) Service Tax
4) Additional Customs Duty commonly known as Countervailing Duty, and
5) Special Additional Duty of Customs.

➤ At the State level, the following taxes are being subsumed:

1) Subsuming of State Value Added Tax/Sales Tax,
2) Entertainment Tax (other than the tax levied by the local bodies), Central Sales Tax (levied by the Centre and collected by the States)
3) Octroi and Entry tax
4) Purchase Tax, Luxury tax, and Taxes on lottery, betting and gambling.

Benefits of GST:

For business and industry:

➤ **Easy compliance:** A robust and comprehensive IT system would be the foundation of the GST regime in India.

➤ Therefore, all tax payer services such as registrations, returns, payments, etc. would be available to the taxpayers online, which would make compliance easy and transparent.

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- **Uniformity of tax rates and structures:** GST will ensure that indirect tax rates and structures are common across the country, thereby increasing certainty and ease of doing business. In other words, GST would make doing business in the country tax neutral, irrespective of the choice of place of doing business.

- **Removal of cascading:** A system of seamless tax-credits throughout the value-chain, and across boundaries of States, would ensure that there is minimal cascading of taxes. This would reduce hidden costs of doing business.

- **Improved competitiveness:** Reduction in transaction costs of doing business would eventually lead to an improved competitiveness for the trade and industry.

- **Gain to manufacturers and Exporters:** The subsuming of major Central and State taxes in GST, complete and comprehensive set-off of input goods and services and phasing out of Central Sales Tax (CST) would reduce the cost of locally manufactured goods and services.

- This will increase the competitiveness of Indian goods and services in the international market and give boost to Indian exports.

- The uniformity in tax rates and procedures across the country will also go a long way in reducing the compliance cost.

For Central and State Governments:

- **Simple and easy to administer:** Multiple indirect taxes at the Central and State levels are being replaced by GST. Backed with a robust end-to-end IT system, GST would be simpler and easier to administer than all other indirect taxes of the Centre and State levied so far.

- **Better controls on leakage:** GST will result in better tax compliance due to a robust IT infrastructure. Due to the seamless transfer of input tax credit from one stage to another in the chain of value addition, there is an in-built mechanism in the design of GST that would incentivize tax compliance by traders.

- **Higher Revenue Efficiency:** GST is expected to decrease the cost of collection of tax revenues of the Government, and will therefore, lead to higher revenue efficiency.

For the consumer:

- **Single and transparent tax proportionate to the value of goods and services:** Due to multiple indirect taxes being levied by the Centre and State, with incomplete or no input tax credits available at progressive stages of value addition, the cost of most goods and services in the country today are laden with many hidden taxes. Under GST, there would be only one tax from the manufacturer to the consumer, leading to transparency of taxes paid to the final consumer.

- **Relief in overall tax Burden:** Because of efficiency gains and prevention of leakages, the overall tax burden on most commodities will come down, which will benefit consumers.

GST Council:

- As per Article 279A (4), the Council will make recommendations to the Union and the States on important issues related to GST, like the goods and services that may be subjected or exempted from GST, model GST Laws, principles that govern Place of Supply, threshold limits, GST rates including the floor rates with bands, special rates for raising additional resources during natural calamities/disasters, special provisions for certain States, etc.
- As per Article 279A of the amended Constitution, the GST Council will be a joint forum of the Centre and the States. This Council shall consist of the following members namely: –
- Union Finance Minister... Chairperson
- The Union Minister of State, in-charge of Revenue of finance... Member
- The Minister In-charge of finance or taxation or any other Minister nominated by each State Government.

NATIONAL WAREHOUSING GRID

Why in News?

- The government is likely to introduce warehousing schemes at village and National level to build an efficient storage infrastructure.
- A National Warehousing Grid along the National Highways may also be introduced in the Budget.

National Warehousing Grid:

- The Centre's scheme aims at broad integration of the warehousing capacities in India.
- Approximately 90% of the warehousing space is controlled by unorganised players, with small warehouses of less than 10,000 sq ft area.
- An action plan has already been approved by the Centre on sectoral basis for the construction of steel silos with a capacity of 100 lakh metric tonnes in PPP mode for modernizing storage infrastructure and improving shelf life of stored food grains.

Significance of scheme:

- Practically, much of the country's warehousing capacity outside of the agri sector is in the unorganised sector, with small warehouses of less than 10,000 sq ft area.
- Currently, of the total warehousing space of about 180 million sq ft in the country, the industrial segment accounts for about 86% and the agricultural sector the rest 14%, according to NITI statistics.
- Two-thirds of the warehousing capacity in the food storage segment is owned by the public sector.

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➽ Apart from conventional storing services, India's warehousing capacity is increasingly being used to offer value-added services such as the consolidation and breaking up of cargo, packaging, labelling, bar coding and reverse logistics.

Plugging deficiencies:

➽ The project is aimed at plugging deficiencies given that India's current cold storage capacity at 25 MT is barely sufficient for 10% of the fruits and vegetables produced in the country.

➽ The lack of adequate storage infrastructure is an important reason for the high cost of food products and wastage.

➽ Nearly 60% of the modern warehousing capacity in India is concentrated in top six cities, namely Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi-NCR and Pune, with Hyderabad and Kolkata being the other major markets, according to Care Ratings.

➽ This trend is driven by the concentration of industrial activity and presence of sizeable urban population around these clusters.

Beneficiaries:

➽ The prime beneficiaries of the new wave of growth in warehousing include peripheral locations of Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities.

➽ Much of the fresh investments would go into creating storage facilities for retail and consumer goods.

Forthcoming challenges:

➽ The primary challenge that India's warehousing market currently faces is acquisition of a feasible land parcel, given that land cost constitutes the largest component of a warehousing project. While rental values that a warehouse owner can charge are primarily driven by demand and supply factors, land prices are inherently dependent on multiple factors like development control regulations, infrastructure development and the best alternative usage of land.

SCHEME FOR TRANS-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FOR INDIA'S DEVELOPING ECONOMY (STRIDE)

Why in News?

➽ The University Grants Commission (UGC) has approved a new scheme – 'Scheme for Trans-disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy' (STRIDE)

STRIDE:

➽ STRIDE will provide support to research projects that are socially relevant, locally need-based, nationally important and globally significant.

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- STRIDE shall support research capacity building as well as basic, applied and transformational action research that can contribute to national priorities with focus on inclusive human development.

- STRIDE shall support creation, development and integration of new ideas, concepts and practices for public good and strengthening civil society.

- STRIDE scheme will strengthen research culture and innovation in colleges and Universities and help students and faculty to contribute towards India's developing economy with help of collaborative research.

STRIDE Objectives:

- To identify young talent, strengthen research culture, build capacity, promote innovation and support trans-disciplinary research for India's developing economy and national development.

- To fund multi institutional network high-impact research projects in humanities and human sciences.

STRIDE components:

- Component-1 will endeavour to identify the motivated young talents with research and innovation aptitude in universities and colleges.

- The Scheme will provide research capacity building in diverse disciplines by mentoring, nurturing and supporting young talents to innovate pragmatic solutions for local, regional, national and global problems.

- This component is open to all disciplines for grant upto 1 crore.

- Component-2 will be mainly to enhance problem solving skills with help of social innovation and action research to improve wellbeing of people and contribute for India's developing economy. Collaborations between universities, government, voluntary organizations and industries is encouraged under this scheme. This component is open to all disciplines for grant upto 50 lakh – 1 crore.

- Component-3 will fund high impact research projects in the identified thrust areas in humanities and human sciences through national network of eminent scientists from leading institutions. Grant available for this component is upto 1 crore for one HEI and upto 5 crores for multi institutional network.

NATIONAL MANUFACTURING COMPETITIVENESS PROGRAMME

Why in News?

- National Manufacturing Competitiveness Programme (NMCP) aima to support the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in their endeavor to become competitive.

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Objectives:

- The objective of NMCP is to develop global competitiveness among Indian MSMEs.
- This programme targets at enhancing the entire value chain of the MSME sector through the following components: Lean Manufacturing Competitiveness Scheme for MSMEs;
- Promotion of Information & Communication Tools (ICT) in MSME sector;
- Technology and Quality Up gradation Support to MSMEs;
- Design Clinics scheme for MSMEs; Enabling Manufacturing Sector to be Competitive through Quality Management Standards (QMS) and Quality Technology Tools (QTT);
- Marketing Assistance and Technology Up gradation Scheme for MSMEs;
- National campaign for building awareness on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR);
- Support for Entrepreneurial and Managerial Development of SMEs through Incubators.
- Bar Code under Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme.

NATIONAL ELECTRIC MOBILITY MISSION PLAN

Why in News?

- The National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) 2020 is a National Mission document providing the vision and the roadmap for the faster adoption of electric vehicles and their manufacturing in the country.

Highlights:

- The plan has been designed to enhance national fuel security
- To provide affordable and environmentally friendly transportation
- To enable the Indian automotive industry to achieve global manufacturing leadership.
- As part of the NEMMP 2020, Department of Heavy Industry formulated a Scheme viz. Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME India) Scheme in the year 2015 to promote manufacturing of electric and hybrid vehicle technology and to ensure sustainable growth of the same. FAME-India Scheme Phase – II for promotion of Electric Mobility in the country. The scheme proposes to give a push to electric vehicles (EVs) in public transport. It seeks to encourage adoption of EVs by way of market creation and demand aggregation.

Targets:

- Target of deploying 5 to 7 million electric vehicles in the country by 2020
- Emphasizes importance of government incentives and coordination between industry and academia. Target of 400,000 passenger battery electric cars (BEVs) by 2020 ~ avoiding 120 million barrels of oil and 4 million tons of CO_2

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▸ Lowering of vehicular emissions by 1.3 percent by 2020

▸ Total investment required – INR 20,000 – 23,000 cr (approx 3 billion USD)

FAME India:

▸ FAME India is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan. Main thrust of FAME is to encourage electric vehicles by providing subsidies. Vehicles in most segments – two wheelers, three wheelers, electric and hybrid cars and electric buses obtained the subsidy benefit of the scheme. FAME focuses on 4 areas i.e. Technology development, Demand Creation, Pilot Projects and Charging Infrastructure.

INDIA RATIFIES CONVENTION TO PREVENT BEPS

Why in News?

▸ Recently India has ratified the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures (MLI) to prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS).

Highlights:

▸ The MLI is aimed to prevent firms from moving profit out of country.

▸ Out of 93 tax treaties notified by India, 22 countries have already ratified the MLI so far and the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with these countries will be modified by MLI.

▸ For the remaining countries with tax treaties with India, the MLI will come into force when they ratify it.

▸ The MLI will come into force for India from October 1, 2019.

▸ The Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures (MLI):

▸ The multilateral convention is an outcome of the OECD/G20 project to tackle base erosion and profit shifting.

▸ This project was designed to work on anti-evasion measures that could curb tax planning strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations. The MLI will be applied alongside existing tax treaties, modifying their application in order to implement the BEPS measures.

▸ It will lead to amendments to double taxation avoidance agreements (DTAA) with the countries signatories to the convention to plug revenue leakages.

Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS):

▸ BEPS is a term used to describe tax planning strategies that exploit mismatches and gaps that exist between the tax rules of different jurisdictions.

▸ It is done to minimize the corporation tax that is payable overall, by either making tax profits 'disappear' or shift profits to low tax jurisdictions where it is little or no genuine activity.

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- In general BEPS strategies are not illegal; rather they take advantage of different tax rules operating in different jurisdictions.
- BEPS is of major significance for developing countries due to their heavy reliance on corporate income tax, particularly from multinational enterprises (MNEs).
- The BEPS initiative is an OECD initiative, approved by the G20, to identify ways of providing more standardised tax rules globally.

TRADE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EXPORT SCHEME (TIES)

Why in News?

- The Department of Commerce, under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has approved financial assistance for three trade promotion centres under the TIES.

Highlights:

- Establishment of Main Exhibition Building (Phase-II) at Trade cum Permanent Exhibition Centre at Imphal, Manipur by Manipur Industrial Development Corporation (MANIDCO).
- Expansion of Chennai Trade Centre by Tamil Nadu Trade Promotion Organisation
- Establishment of Trade Promotion Centre at Minto Hall, Bhopal by M.P. State Tourism Development Corporation.

Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES):

- Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched the Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES) in March, 2017.
- After delinking of the Assistance to States for Development of Export Infrastructure and Allied Activities (ASIDE) Scheme in 2015, the State Governments had been consistently requesting the support of the Centre in creation of export infrastructure.
- The scheme would provide assistance for setting up and up-gradation of infrastructure projects with overwhelming export linkages like the Border Haats, Land customs stations, quality testing and certification labs, cold chains, trade promotion centres, dry ports, export warehousing and packaging, SEZs and ports/airports cargo terminuses.
- The proposals of the implementing agencies for funding will be considered by an inter-ministerial Empowered Committee.

AGRICULTURAL EXPORT POLICY

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet approved the Agriculture Export Policy, 2018.

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⬧ The Cabinet has also approved the proposal for establishment of Monitoring Framework at Centre with Commerce as the nodal Department with representation from various line Ministries/Departments and Agencies and representatives of concerned State Governments, to oversee the implementation of Agriculture Export Policy.

Highlights:

⬧ The Government has come out with a policy to double farmers' income by 2022. Exports of agricultural products would play a pivotal role in achieving this goal. In order to provide an impetus to agricultural exports, the Government has come out with a comprehensive "Agriculture Export Policy" aimed at doubling the agricultural exports and integrating Indian farmers and agricultural products with the global value chains.

⬧ The Agriculture Export Policy has the following vision: "Harness export potential of Indian agriculture, through suitable policy instruments, to make India global power in agriculture and raise farmers' income."

Objective of the Agriculture Export Policy:

⬧ To double agricultural exports from present ~US$ 30+ Billion to ~US$ 60+ Billion by 2022 and reach US$ 100 Billion in the next few years thereafter, with a stable trade policy regime.

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

⬧ To promote novel, indigenous, organic, ethnic, traditional and non-traditional Agri products exports.

⬧ To provide an institutional mechanism for pursuing market access, tackling barriers and deal with sanitary and phyto-sanitary issues.

⬧ To strive to double India's share in world agri exports by integrating with global value chain at the earliest.

⬧ Enable farmers to get benefit of export opportunities in overseas market.

Elements of Agricultural Export Policy:

Strategic Policy Measure:

1. Infrastructure and logistics support
2. Holistic approach to boost exports
3. Greater involvement of State Governments in agri exports

Operational Policy Measure:

4. Focus on Clusters
5. Promoting value-added exports
6. Marketing and promotion of "Brand India

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7. Attract private investments into production and processing

8. Establishment of strong quality regimen

9. Research & Development

10. Miscellaneous

WORKING GROUP ON CORE INVESTMENT COMPANIES

Why in News?

▸ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted a working group to review the regulatory guidelines and supervisory framework applicable for Core Investment Companies (CIC).

Terms of Reference:

▸ To examine the current regulatory framework for CICs in terms of adequacy, efficacy and effectiveness of every component thereof and suggest changes therein.

▸ To assess the appropriateness of and suggest changes to the current approach of the Reserve Bank of India towards registration of CICs including the practice of multiple CICs being allowed within a group.

▸ To suggest measures to strengthen corporate governance and disclosure requirements for CICs. To assess the adequacy of supervisory returns submitted by CICs and suggest changes therein. To suggest appropriate measures to enhance RBI's off-site surveillance and on-site supervision over CICs. The working group, headed by Tapan Ray, shall submit its report by October 31, 2019.

Core Investment Company:

▸ Core Investment Companies (CICs) are a specialized Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs). They have asset size of Rs 100 crore and above.

▸ Their main business is acquisition of shares and securities with certain conditions.

▸ It holds not less than 90% of its net assets in the form of investment in equity shares, preference shares, bonds, debentures, debt or loans in group companies.

▸ Its investments in the equity shares (including instruments compulsorily convertible into equity shares within a period not exceeding 10 years from the date of issue) in group companies constitutes not less than 60% of its net assets .

▸ It does not trade in its investments in shares, bonds, debentures, debt or loans in group companies except through block sale for the purpose of dilution or disinvestment.

▸ It does not carry on any other financial activity referred to in RBI Act, 1934 except investment in bank deposits, money market instruments, government securities, loans to and investments in debt issuances of group companies or guarantees issued on behalf of group companies.

▸ It accepts public funds.

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EXPLAINED: ECONOMIC SURVEY 2019

Why in News?

- Each year, a day before the presentation of the full-fledged annual Union Budget, the country Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) releases the Economic Survey.

- However, notwithstanding the close proximity of its release with the Union Budget, the Economic Survey is not exactly a predictor of the Budget proposals.

- Still, it is a very important document because it provides an authoritative, detailed and official annual summary of the current state of play in the Indian economy.

What it consists of?

- Beyond the summary, the ES paints a variety of future scenarios, highlighting likely challenges and pointing to possible solutions.

- In the past few years, the ES has been presented in two volumes.

- Volume 1 focussed on research and analysis about the challenges — both contemporary and long-term — facing the Indian economy.

- Volume 2 provided the more descriptive review of the fiscal year, encompassing all the major sectors of the economy.

Significance of Economic Surveys:

- Apart from providing a comprehensive snapshot of the various sectors of the economy, the ES is also used as a sounding board for introducing new policy ideas and triggering fresh debates.

- As the years have rolled by, successive CEAs have used every aspect of the Economic Survey to convey some key idea.

- For instance, the colour of the 2018 Survey's cover — pink — was chosen "as a symbol of support for the growing movement to end violence against women, which spans continents".

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Key Highlights of Economic Survey 2018-19:

Macroeconomic Indicators:

- The survey has flagged the challenges on the fiscal front following an economic slowdown impacting tax collections amid an expected surge in agri-spending.
- It has underlined the need for India to shift gears to accelerate and sustain a real GDP growth rate of 8% in order to achieve the target of becoming a $5 trillion economy by 2025.
- It flags the need for a "virtuous cycle" of savings, investment and exports to be catalyzed and supported by a favorable demographic phase required for sustainable growth.
- Private investment has been highlighted as a key driver for demand, capacity, labor productivity, new technology, creative destruction and job creation.

Slowest projection of growth:

- The ES has projected that economic growth in the current fiscal year could rise to 7% from the 6.8% in 2018-19 — the slowest rate of growth in five years.

Policy prescriptions:

- The Survey flags the case for intervention in the case of "dwarfs" (firms with less than 100 workers) despite being more than 10 years old, account for more than 50% of all organized firms in manufacturing by number.
- In this context, it calls for a sunset clause of less than 10 years, with necessary grand-fathering, for all size-based incentives and deregulating labor law restrictions to create significantly more jobs.
- It calls for a need to ramp up capacity in the lower judiciary, including a focus on delays in dispute resolution.
- Contract enforcement biggest constraint to improve EODB ranking; much of the problem is concentrated in the lower courts.
- It also calls for policy changes to lower overall lifetime ownership costs and make electric vehicles an attractive alternative to conventional vehicles.

Private Investment as the Key Driver of Growth, Jobs, Exports and Demand:

- Survey states that pathways for trickle-down opened up during the last five years; and benefits of growth and macroeconomic stability reached the bottom of the pyramid.
- Sustained real GDP growth rate of 8% needed for a $5 trillion economy by 2024-25.
- "Virtuous Cycle" of savings, investment and exports catalyzed and supported by a favorable demographic phase required for sustainable growth.
- Private investment– key driver for demand, capacity, labor productivity, new technology, creative destruction and job creation.

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- Survey departs from traditional Anglo-Saxon thinking by viewing the economy as being either in a virtuous or a vicious cycle, and thus never in equilibrium.
- **Key ingredients for a self-sustaining virtuous cycle:**
  1. Presenting data as a public good.
  2. Emphasizing legal reforms.
  3. Ensuring policy consistency.
  4. Encouraging behavior change using principles of behavioral economics.
  5. Nourishing MSMEs to create more jobs and become more productive.
  6. Reducing the cost of capital.
  7. Rationalizing the risk-return trade-off for investments.

Reorienting policies for MSME Growth:

- Survey focuses on enabling MSMEs to grow for achieving greater profits, job creation and enhanced productivity.
- Dwarfs (firms with less than 100 workers) despite being more than 10 years old, account for more than 50% of all organized firms in manufacturing by number.
- Contribution of dwarfs to employment is only 14% and to productivity is a mere 8%.
- Large firms (more than 100 employees) account for 75% employment and close to 90% of productivity despite accounting for about 15% by number.

- Unshackling MSMEs and enabling them to grow by way of:
1) Asunset clause of less than 10 years, with necessary grand-fathering, for all size-based incentives.
2) Deregulating labor law restrictions to create significantly more jobs, as evident from Rajasthan.
3) Re-calibrating Priority Sector Lending (PSL) guidelines for direct credit flow to young firms in high employment elastic sectors.
4) Survey also focuses on service sectors such as tourism, with high spillover effects on other sectors such as hotel & catering, transport, real estate, entertainment etc., for job creation.

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How to Ramp up Capacity in the Lower Judiciary:

- Delays in contract enforcement and disposal resolution are arguably now the single biggest hurdle to the ease of doing business and higher GDP growth in India.
- Around 87.5 per cent of pending cases are in the District and Subordinate courts.
- 100 per cent clearance rate can be achieved by filling out merely 2279 vacancies in the lower courts and 93 in High Courts.
- States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal need special attention.
- Productivity improvements of 25 percent in lower courts, 4 percent in High Courts and 18 percent in Supreme Court can clear backlog.

Planning Public Good Provision for the 21st Century:

- Sharp slowdown in population growth expected in next 2 decades. Most of India to enjoy demographic dividend while some states will transition to ageing societies by 2030s.
- National Total Fertility Rate expected to be below replacement rate by 2021.
- Working age population to grow by roughly 9.7mn per year during 2021-31 and 4.2mn per year during 2031-41.
- Significant decline to be witnessed in elementary school-going children (5-14 age group) over next two decades.
- States need to consolidate/merge schools to make them viable rather than build new ones.
- Policy makers need to prepare for ageing by investing in health care and by increasing the retirement age in a phased manner.

Swachh Bharat to Sundar Bharat via Swasth Bharat: An Analysis of the Swachh Bharat Mission:

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- Traceable health benefits brought about by Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM).
- 93.1% of the households have access to toilets.
- 96.5% of those with access to toilets are using them in rural India.
- 100% Individual Households Latrine (IHHL) Coverage in 30 states and UTs.
- Financial savings from a household toilet exceed the financial costs to the household by 1.7 times on average and 2.4 times for poorest households.
- Environmental and water management issues need to be incorporated in SBM for sustainable improvements in the long-term.
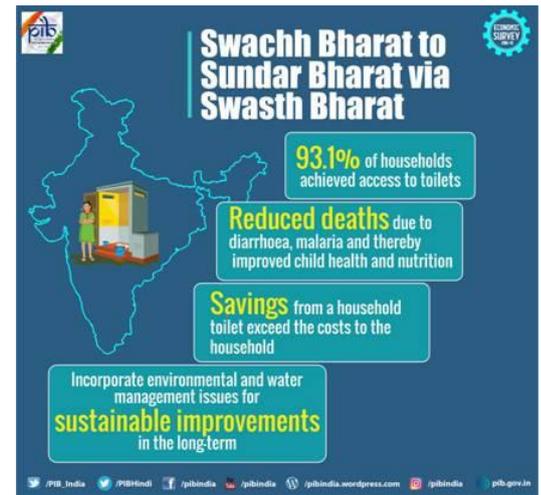
Enabling Inclusive Growth through Affordable, Reliable and Sustainable Energy:

- 2.5 times increase in per capita energy consumption needed for India to increase its real per capita GDP by $5000 at 2010 prices, and enter the upper-middle income group.
- 4 times increase in per capita energy consumption needed for India to achieve 0.8 Human Development Index score.
- India now stands at 4th in wind power, 5th in solar power and 5th in renewable power installed capacity.
- Rs 50,000 crore saved and 108.28 million tonnes of CO2 emissions reduced by energy efficiency programmes in India.
- Share of renewable (excluding hydro above 25 MW) in total electricity generation increased from 6% in 2014-15 to 10% in 2018-19.
- Thermal power still plays a dominant role at 60% share.
- Market share of electric cars only 0.06% in India while it is 2% in China and 39% in Norway.
- Access to fast battery charging facilities needed to increase the market share of electric vehicles.
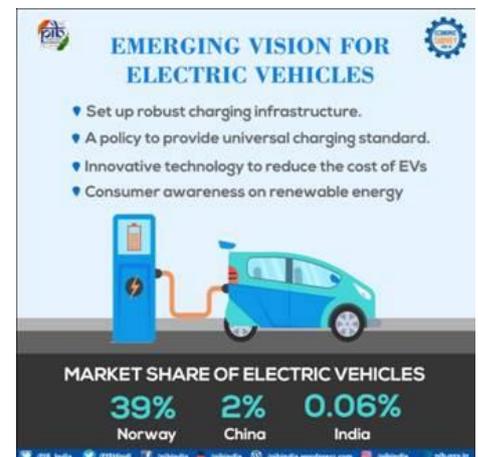
Redesigning a Minimum Wage System in India for Inclusive Growth:

- Survey proposes a well-designed minimum wage system as a potent tool for protecting workers and alleviating poverty.
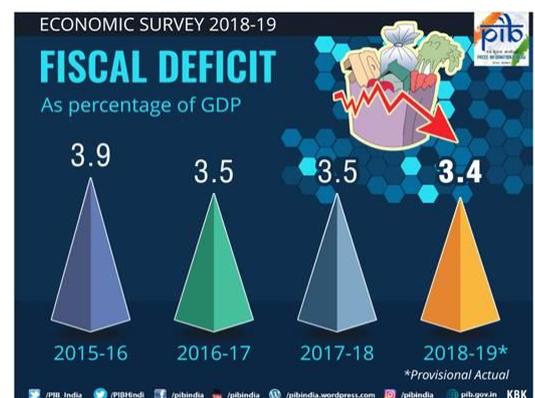- Present minimum wage system in India has 1,915 minimum wages for various scheduled job categories across states.

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- 1 in every 3 wage workers in India not protected by the minimum wage law.
- Survey supports rationalization of minimum wages as proposed under the Code on Wages Bill.
- Minimum wages to all employments/workers proposed by the Survey.
- 'National Floor Minimum Wage' should be notified by the Central Government, varying across five geographical regions.
- Minimum wages by states should be fixed at levels not lower than the 'floor wage'.
- Minimum wages can be notified based either on the skills or on geographical region or on both grounds.
- Survey proposes a simple and enforceable Minimum Wage System using technology.
- 'National level dashboard' under the Ministry of Labour & Employment for regular notifications on minimum wages, proposed by the Survey.
- Toll-free number to register grievance on non-payment of the statutory minimum wages.
- Effective minimum wage policy as an inclusive mechanism for more resilient and sustainable economic development.

State of the Economy in 2018-19: A Macro View:

- India still the fastest growing major economy in 2018-19.
- Growth of GDP moderated to 6.8 per cent in 2018-19 from 7.2 per cent in 2017-18.
- Inflation contained at 3.4 per cent in 2018-19.
- Non-Performing Assets as percentage of Gross Advances reduced to 10.1 per cent at end December 2018 from 11.5 per cent at end March 2018.
- Investment growth recovering since 2017-18:
- Growth in fixed investment picked up from 8.3 per cent in 2016-17 to 9.3 per cent next year and further to 10.0 per cent in 2018-19.
- Current account deficit manageable at 2.1 percent of GDP.
- Fiscal deficit of Central Government declined from 3.5 percent of GDP in 2017-18 to 3.4 percent in 2018-19.
- Prospects of pickup in growth in 2019-20 on the back of further increase in private investment and acceleration in consumption.

Fiscal Developments:

- FY 2018-19 ended with fiscal deficit at 3.4 per cent of GDP and debt to GDP ratio of 44.5 per cent (Provisional).
- As per cent of GDP, total Central Government expenditure fell by 0.3 percentage points in 2018-19 PA over 2017-18:

ECONOMIC SURVEY 2018-19
FISCAL DEFICIT
As percentage of GDP

3.9 3.5 3.5 **3.4**

2015-16 2016-17 2017-18 2018-19*
*Provisional Actual

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- ⇥ 0.4 percentage point reduction in revenue expenditure and 0.1 percentage point increase in capital expenditure.

- ⇥ States' own tax and non-tax revenue displays robust growth in 2017-18 RE and envisaged to be maintained in 2018-19 BE.

- ⇥ General Government (Centre plus states) on the path of fiscal consolidation and fiscal discipline. The revised fiscal glide path envisages achieving fiscal deficit of 3 per cent of GDP by FY 2020-21 and Central Government debt to 40 per cent of GDP by 2024-25.

Monetary Management and Financial Intermediation:

- ⇥ Banking system improved as NPA ratios declined and credit growth accelerated.

- ⇥ Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code led to recovery and resolution of significant amount of distressed assets and improved business culture.

- ⇥ Till March 31, 2019, the CIRP yielded a resolution of 94 cases involving claims worthINR1, 73,359 crore.

- ⇥ As on 28 Feb 2019, 6079 cases involving INR2.84 lakh crores have been withdrawn.

- ⇥ As per RBI reports, INR50,000 crore received by banks from previously non-performing accounts.

- ⇥ Additional INR50,000 crore "upgraded" from non-standard to standard assets.

- ⇥ Benchmark policy rate first hiked by 50 bps and later reduced by 75 bps last year.

- ⇥ Liquidity conditions remained systematically tight since September 2018 thus impacting the yields on government papers.

- ⇥ Financial flows remained constrained because of decline in the equity finance raised from capital markets and stress in the NBFC sector.

- ⇥ Capital mobilized through public equity issuance declined by 81 per cent in 2018-19.

- ⇥ Credit growth rate y-o-y of the NBFCs declined from 30 per cent in March 2018 to 9 per cent in March 2019.

Prices and Inflation:

- ⇥ Headline inflation based on CPI-C continuing on its declining trend for fifth straight financial year remained below 4.0 per cent in the last two years. Food inflation based on Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) also continuing on its declining trend for fifth financial year has remained below 2.0 per cent for the last two consecutive years.
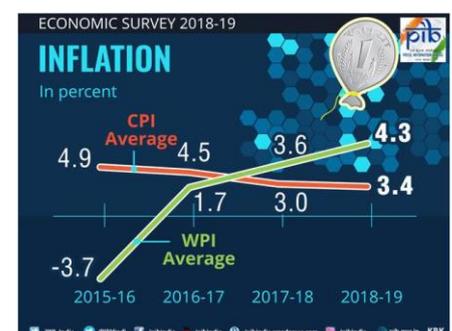
- CPI-C based core inflation (CPI excluding the food and fuel group) has now started declining since March 2019 after increment during FY 2018-19 as compared to FY 2017-18.
- Miscellaneous, housing and fuel and light groups are the main contributors of headline inflation based on CPI-C during FY 2018-19 and the importance of services in shaping up headline inflation has increased. CPI rural inflation declined during FY 2018-19 over FY 2017-18. However, CPI urban inflation increased marginally during FY 2018-19. Many States witnessed fall in CPI inflation during FY 2018-19.

Sustainable Development and Climate Change:

- India's SDG Index Score ranges between 42 and 69 for States and between 57 and 68 for UTs:

1) Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are the front runners with a score of 69 amongst states.

2) Chandigarh and Puducherry are the front runners with a score of 68 and 65 respectively among the UTs.

- Namami Gange Mission launched as a key policy priority towards achieving the SDG 6, with a budget outlay of INR. 20,000 crore for the period 2015-2020.
- For mainstreaming Resource Efficiency approach in the development pathway for achieving SDGs, a national policy on Resource Efficiency should be devised.

- A comprehensive NCAP launched in 2019 as a pan India time bound strategy for:
    1. Prevention, control and abatement of air pollution
    2. Augmenting the air quality monitoring network across the country.
- Achievements in CoP 24 in Katowice, Poland in 2018:
    1. Recognition of different starting points for developed and developing countries.
    2. Flexibilities for developing countries.
    3. Consideration of principles including equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities.
- Paris Agreement also emphasizes the role of climate finance without which the proposed NDCs would not fructify. Though the international community witnessed various claims by developed countries about climate finance flows, the actual amount of flows is far from these claims.
- Scale and size of investments required to implement India's NDC requires mobilizing international public finance and private sector resources along with domestic public budgets.

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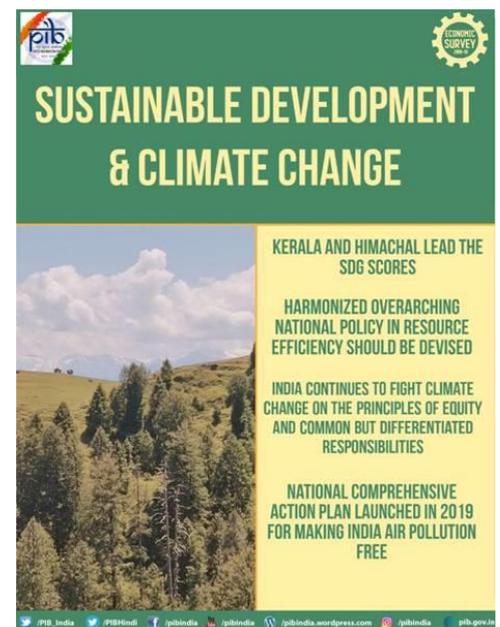
External Sector:

⇶ As per WTO, World trade growth slowed down to 3 per cent in 2018 from 4.6 per cent in 2017. Reasons:

1. Introduction of new and retaliatory tariff measures.
2. Heightened US-China trade tensions.
3. Weaker global economic growth.
4. Volatility in financial markets (WTO).

⇶ In Indian rupee terms growth rate of exports increased owing to depreciation of the rupee while that of imports declined in 2018-19.

⇶ Net capital inflows moderated in April-December of 2018-19 despite robust foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, outweighed by withdrawals under portfolio investment.

⇶ India's External Debt was US$ 521.1 billion at end-December 2018, 1.6 per cent lower than its level at end-March 2018.

⇶ The key external debt indicators reflect that India's external debt is not unsustainable.

⇶ The total liabilities-to-GDP ratio, inclusive of both debt and non-debt components, has declined from 43 per cent in 2015 to about 38 per cent at end of 2018.

⇶ The share of foreign direct investment has risen and that of net portfolio investment fallen in total liabilities, reflecting a transition to more stable sources of funding the current account deficit.

⇶ The Indian Rupee traded in the range of 65-68 per US$ in 2017-18 but depreciated to a range of 70-74 in 2018-19.

⇶ The income terms of trade, a metric that measures the purchasing power to import, has been on a rising trend, possibly because the growth of crude prices has still not exceeded the growth of India's export prices.

⇶ The exchange rate in 2018-19 has been more volatile than in the previous year, mainly due to volatility in crude prices, but not much due to net portfolio flows.

⇶ Composition of India's exports and import basket in 2018-19(P):

1. Exports (including re-exports): **INR23, 07,663 Cr.**
2. Imports: **INR35, 94,373 Cr.**

⇶ Top export items continue to be Petroleum products, precious stones, drug formulations, gold and other precious metals.

⇶ Top import items continue to be Crude petroleum, pearl, precious, semi-precious stones and gold.

⇶ India's main trading partners continue to be the US, China, Hong Kong, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

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Agriculture and Food Management:

⇨ Agriculture sector in India typically goes through cyclical movement in terms of its growth.

1. Gross Value Added (GVA) in agriculture improved from a negative 0.2 per cent in 2014-15 to 6.3 per cent in 2016-17 but decelerated to 2.9 per cent in 2018-19.

2. Gross Capital Formation (GCF) in agriculture as percentage of GVA marginally declined to 15.2 per cent in 2017-18 as compared to 15.6 per cent in 2016-17.

⇨ The public sector GCF in agriculture as a percentage of GVA increased to 2.7 per cent in 2016-17 from 2.1 per cent in 2013-14.

⇨ Women's participation in agriculture increased to 13.9 per cent in 2015-16 from 11.7 per cent in 2005-06 and their concentration is highest (28 per cent) among small and marginal farmers.

⇨ A shift is seen in the number of operational land holdings and area operated by operational land holdings towards small and marginal farmers.

⇨ 89% of groundwater extracted is used for irrigation. Hence, focus should shift from land productivity to 'irrigation water productivity'. Thrust should be on micro-irrigation to improve water use efficiency. Fertilizer response ratio has been declining over time. Organic and natural farming techniques including Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) can improve both water use efficiency and soil fertility. Adopting appropriate technologies through Custom Hiring Centers and implementation of ICT are critical to improve resource-use efficiency among small and marginal farmers.

⇨ Diversification of livelihoods is critical for inclusive and sustainable development in agriculture and allied sectors. Policies should focus on

⇨ Dairying as India is the largest producer of milk.

⇨ Livestock rearing particularly of small ruminants.

⇨ Fisheries sector, as India is the second largest producer.

Industry and Infrastructure:

⇨ Overall Index of Eight Core Industries registered a growth rate of 4.3 percent in 2018-19.

⇨ India's ranking improved by 23 to 77th position in 2018 among 190 countries assessed by the World Bank Doing Business (DB) Report, 2019.

⇨ Road construction grew @ 30 km per day in 2018-19 compared to 12 km per day in 2014-15.

⇨ Rail freight and passenger traffic grew by 5.33 per cent and 0.64 per cent respectively in 2018-19 as compared to 2017-18.

ECONOMIC SURVEY 2018-19

INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

Growth Rate of GVA at Basic Prices in percent

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19*
7.7	5.9	6.9

*Provisional Estimates

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- Total telephone connections in India touched 118.34 crore in 2018-19

- The installed capacity of electricity has increased to 3, 56,100 MW in 2019 from 3, 44,002 MW in 2018.

- Public Private Partnerships are quintessential for addressing infrastructure gaps

- Building sustainable and resilient infrastructure has been given due importance with sector specific flagship programmes such as SAUBHAGYA scheme, PMAY etc

- Institutional mechanism is needed to deal with time-bound resolution of disputes in infrastructure sector

Social Infrastructure, Employment and Human Development:

- The public investments in social infrastructure like education, health, housing and connectivity is critical for inclusive development.

- Government expenditure (Centre plus States) as a percentage of GDP on
    1. **Health:** Increased to 1.5 per cent in 2018-19 from 1.2 per cent in 2014-15.
    2. **Education:** Increased from 2.8 per cent to 3 per cent during this period.

- Substantial progress in both quantitative and qualitative indicators of education is reflected in the improvements in Gross Enrolment Ratios, Gender Parity Indices and learning outcomes at primary school levels.

- Encouraging Skill Development by:
    1. Introduction of the skill vouchers as a financing instrument to enable youth obtain training from any accredited training institutes.
    2. Involving industry in setting up of training institutes in PPP mode; in curriculum development; provision of equipment; training of trainers etc.

- Personnel of Railways and para-military could be roped in for imparting training in difficult terrains. Create a database of Instructors, skill mapping of rural youth by involving local bodies to assess the demand-supply gaps are some of the other initiatives proposed.

- Net employment generation in the formal sector was higher at 8.15 lakh in March, 2019 as against 4.87 lakh in February, 2018 as per EPFO.

- Around 1, 90, 000 km of rural roads constructed under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) since 2014. About 1.54 crore houses completed under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) as against a target of 1 crore pucca houses with basic amenities by 31st March, 2019.

- Accessible, affordable and quality healthcare being provided through National Health Mission and Ayushman Bharat scheme for a healthy India.

- Alternative healthcare, National AYUSH Mission launched to provide cost effective and equitable AYUSH healthcare throughout the country to address the issue of affordability, by improving access to these services.

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- Employment generation scheme, MGNREGA is prioritized by increasing actual expenditure over the budgetary allocation and an upward trend in budget allocation in the last four years.

NEW CODE ON WAGES

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has cleared the new version of Code on Wages Bill, which seeks to define the norms for fixing minimum wages that will be applicable to workers of organised and unorganised sectors, except government employees and MGNREGA workers.

Highlights:

- The Code on Wages will amalgamate the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.

- The code on wages is one of the four codes that would subsume 44 labour laws with certain certain amendments to improve the ease of doing business and attract investment for spurring growth. The four codes will deal with wages, social security, industrial safety and welfare, and industrial relations.

- As per the Bill, minimum wages will be linked only to factors such as skills and geographical regions. A National Floor Level Minimum Wage will be set by the Centre to be revised every five years, while states will fix minimum wages for their regions, which cannot be lower than the floor wage.

CAPITAL TO RISK-WEIGHTED ASSETS (CRAR)

CRAR:

- Capital to Risk (Weighted) Assets Ratio (CRAR) is also known as Capital adequacy Ratio, the ratio of a bank's capital to its risk.

- The banking regulator tracks a bank's CAR to ensure that the bank can absorb a reasonable amount of loss and complies with statutory Capital requirements. Higher CRAR indicates a bank is better capitalized.

- The Capital to risk weighted assets ratio is arrived at by dividing the capital of the bank with aggregated risk weighted assets for credit risk, market risk and operational risk.

- The capital to risk-weighted assets ratio is calculated by adding a bank's tier 1 capital and tier 2 capitals and dividing the total by its total risk-weighted assets. As per RBI guidelines, banks are required to maintain a minimum Capital to Risk-weighted Assets (CRAR) of 9% on an ongoing basis.

- Out of the 9 per cent of CAR, 7 per cent has to be met by Tier 1 capital while the remaining 2 per cent by Tier 2 capital.

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INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY GOVT TO REDUCE BANK FRAUDS

Initiatives undertaken by Govt to reduce Bank Frauds:

- Government has issued **"Framework for timely detection, reporting, investigation etc.** relating to large value bank frauds" to Public Sector Banks (PSBs), for systemic and comprehensive checking of legacy stock of their non-performing assets (NPAs), which provides, inter-alia, that—

  1. All Accounts exceeding Rs. 50 crores, if classified as NPAs, be examined by banks from the angle of possible fraud, and a report placed before the bank's Committee for Review of NPAs on the findings of this investigation;

  2. Examination be initiated for wilful default immediately upon reporting fraud to RBI; and report on the borrower be sought from the Central Economic Intelligence Bureau in case an account turns NPA.

- Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 has been enacted to deter economic offenders from evading the process of Indian law by remaining outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts.

- The act provides for attachment of property of a fugitive economic offender, confiscation of such offender's property and disentitlement of the offender from defending any civil claim.

- PSBs have been advised to obtain certified copy of the passport of the promoters/directors and other authorised signatories of companies availing loan facilities of more than Rs. 50 crore and, decide on publishing photographs of wilful defaulters, in terms of Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s instructions and as per their Board-approved policy and to strictly ensure rotational transfer of officials/employees. The heads of PSBs have also been empowered to issue requests for issue of Look Out Circulars.

- For enforcement of auditing standards and ensuring the quality of audits, Government has established the National Financial Reporting Authority as an independent regulator.

- In order to bring transparency and accountability in the larger financial system, bank accounts of 3.38 lakh inoperative companies were frozen over the last two financial years.

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INDIAN NUCLEAR INSURANCE POOL

Why in News?

- The Government has created an Indian Nuclear Insurance Pool (INIP) in June 2015, a union minister informed in Lok Sabha.

Indian Nuclear Insurance Pool:

- M/s. General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC-Re), along with several other Indian Insurance Companies, have launched the Indian Nuclear Insurance Pool (INIP) with a capacity of ₹1500 crore. This aims to provide insurance to cover the liability against accidents as prescribed under Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act, 2010.

- This has addressed issues related to Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act and had facilitated commencement of work in setting up new nuclear power projects.

Nuclear Power in India:

- The present nuclear power capacity is 6780 MW comprising of 22 reactors.

- There are 9 reactors with a capacity of 6700 MW (including 500 MW PFBR being implemented by BHAVINI) under construction.

- The Government in 2017 has also accorded administrative approval and financial sanction of 12 nuclear power plants totaling to a capacity of 9000 MW.

- On their progressive completion, the installed nuclear capacity is expected to reach 8180 MW by 2020 and 22480 MW by 2031.

BANNING OF UNREGULATED DEPOSIT SCHEMES BILL, 2019

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019. It will replace the banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance, 2019.

Impact:

- The Bill will help tackle the menace of illicit deposit taking activities in the country, which at present are exploiting regulatory gaps and lack of strict administrative measures to dupe poor and gullible people of their hard-earned savings.

Salient Features of the Bill:

- The Bill contains a substantive banning clause which bans Deposit Takers from promoting, operating, issuing advertisements or accepting deposits in any Unregulated Deposit Scheme. The principle is that the Bill would ban unregulated deposit taking activities altogether, by making them an offence ex-ante rather than the existing legislative-cum-regulatory framework which only comes into effect ex-post with considerable time lags;

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- The Bill creates three different types of offences, namely, running of Unregulated Deposit Schemes, fraudulent default in Regulated Deposit Schemes, and wrongful inducement in relation to Unregulated Deposit Schemes.

- The Bill provides for severe punishment and heavy pecuniary fines to act as deterrent.

- The Bill has adequate provisions for disgorgement or repayment of deposits in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally.

- The Bill provides for attachment of properties / assets by the Competent Authority, and subsequent realization of assets for repayment to depositors;

- Clear-cut time lines have been provided for attachment of property and restitution to depositors;

- The Bill enables creation of an online central database, for collection and sharing of information on deposit-taking activities in the country;

- The Bill defines "Deposit Taker" and "Deposit" comprehensively;

- "Deposit Takers" include all possible entities (including individuals) receiving or soliciting deposits, except specific entities such as those incorporated by legislation;

- "Deposit" is defined in such a manner that deposit-takers are restricted from camouflaging public deposits as receipts, and at the same time, not to curb or hinder acceptance of money by an establishment in the ordinary course of its business; and

- Being a comprehensive Union Law, the Bill adopts best practices from State laws, while entrusting the primary responsibility of implementing the provisions of the legislation to the State Governments.

GLOBAL MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX – 2019

Why in News?

- Global Multidimensional Poverty Index – 2019 (MPI), released by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) has revealed that there are vast inequalities across countries, and among the poorer segments of societies.

Highlights:

- As per Index 1.3 billion people in the world are still multidimensionally poor.

- Level of Inequality and poverty is very high in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

- Bangladesh, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru and Vietnam (10 selected countries have a combined population of around 2 billion people) have shown significant progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 i.e ending poverty in all its forms, everywhere.

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- One in every three children (under the age of 10) and every second child below the age of 18 years is multidimensionally poor in the world.

- About 34% of the world's children and 17.5% adults covered under MPI survey are multidimensionally poor.

- One adult in six is multidimensionally poor compared with one child in three, hence children are more prone to multidimensional poverty than adults.

- Multidimensionally poor children are concentrated more in the Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In African countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Niger and South Sudan 90% or more children (under the age of 10) are multidimensionally poor.

- Trends in poverty reduction is uneven in all 10 countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru and Vietnam) as rural areas are poorer than urban areas.

India's findings:

- India lifted 271 million people out of poverty between 2006 and 2016, (reduced from 0.283 in 2005-06 to 0.123 in 2015-16) recording the fastest reductions in the multidimensional poverty index values during the period with strong improvements in areas such as assets, cooking fuel, sanitation and nutrition. Among 10 selected countries India (and Cambodia) reduced their MPI values the fastest and they did not leave the poorest groups behind.

- Jharkhand has reduced the incidence of poverty at a faster pace than other regions (reduced the incidence of multidimensional poverty from 74.9% in 2005-06 to 46.5% in 2015-16).

- India (along with Ethiopia and Peru) significantly reduced deprivations in all 10 indicators, namely nutrition, sanitation, child mortality, drinking water, years of schooling, electricity, school attendance, housing, cooking fuel and assets.

- MPI reduced from 640 million people (55.1%) in 2005-2006 to 369 million people (27.9%) in 2015-16.

MPI:

- The MPI captures both the incidence and intensity of poverty and tracks 101 countries on deprivations across ten indicators in health, education, and standard of living.

- Index is developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

- As per report a single measure is not a sufficient guide to both inequality and multidimensional poverty, and studies such as the MPI, Human Development Index, and the Gini coefficient (which measures countries wealth- income distribution), can contribute important and distinctive information for policy action to effectively reduce poverty.

Multidimensional poor:

➤ Multidimensionally poor means that poverty is defined not simply by income, but by a number of indicators, including poor health, poor quality of work and the threat of violence.

DIBANG MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT

Why in News?

➤ The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the expenditure on pre-investment activities and various clearances for Dibang Multipurpose Project (MPP) in Arunachal Pradesh for an amount of Rs. 1600 crore.

Dibang Multipurpose Project:

➤ Dibang Multipurpose Project (Dibang MPP) is envisaged as a storage-based hydro-electric project with flood moderation as the key objective.

➤ The construction of Dibang MPP shall prevent the sizeable downstream area from floods. After implementation of master plan of Brahmaputra Board for flood moderation of all rivers contributing to river Brahmaputra, of which Dibang MPP is one of the components, sizable area will be protected from flooding and help in mitigating the perennial damage due to floods in Assam.

➤ The project shall generate 2880MW (12x240MW) power to produce 11223MU of energy in a 90% dependable year.

➤ This is the largest ever Hydro Electric Projects to be constructed in India.

➤ The dam is 278 metres high and will be the highest dam in India once completed.

UJH AND BASANTAR BRIDGES IN J&K

Why in News?

➤ Raksha Mantri inaugurated the One-kilometre long Ujh bridge in Kathua district, 617.40 Metre long Basantarbridge in Samba district of Jammu & Kashmir today and dedicated these to the nation.

Highlights:

➤ One Km long Ujh bridge is the longest bridge constructed by BRO.

➤ These bridges will provide smooth connectivity and are vital for the Army for deployment on border areas.

➤ These bridges will be a big relief for the local people of border villages of Kathua and Samba sector as road connectivity used to get disrupted during Monsoon.

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Border Roads Organisation:

- The Border Roads Organisation develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighboring countries.
- Currently, the organisation maintains operations in twenty-one states, one UT (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), and neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. The Border Roads Organisation works under the Ministry of Defence.

8 MORE ROUTES START OPERATIONS UNDER UDAN

Why in news?

- Giving further fillip to Regional Connectivity, 8 more routes became functional Under Regional Connectivity Scheme – Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik- UDAN of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Highlights:

- With the addition of these 8 new routes, total UDAN routes Operational as on date have increased to 194 routes.
- The scheme seeks to boost regional air connectivity and provides various incentives to airlines.
- The routes are Mysore - Hyderabad, Mysore - Goa, Mysore - Cochin and Kolkata - Shillong.

UDAN Scheme:

- UDAN is a regional connectivity scheme. The full form of UDAN is 'Ude Desh ka Aam Nagarik'. The scheme aims to develop smaller regional airports to allow common citizens easier access to aviation services. The following are the stated objectives of the regional connectivity scheme:
    1. Operalisation and development of 425 underserved or unserved airports in the country
    2. Boost inclusive economic development by providing faster connectivity
    3. Development of air transport infrastructure in remote areas aiding job growth

PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT IN DEFENCE PRODUCTION

Why in news?

- The defence industry sector was opened up to 100% for private sector participation in May 2001 through licensing.

Highlights:

- Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) had been revised in 2016 wherein specific provisions have been introduced for stimulating growth of the domestic defence industry.

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- A new category of procurement 'Buy {Indian-IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)}' has been introduced in DPP-2016 to promote indigenous design and development of defence equipment.

- 'Buy (Indian)', 'Buy and Make (Indian)' & 'Make' categories of capital acquisition have been given preference over 'Buy (Global)'& 'Buy & Make (Global)'categories.

- The 'Strategic Partnership (SP)' model has been notified by the government to establish longstanding strategic partnerships with Indian entities through a transparent and competitive process, in order to tie up with Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to seek technology transfers to set up domestic manufacturing infrastructure and supply chains.

- The 'Make' Procedure has been simplified with provisions for funding of 90% of development cost by the Government to Indian industry and reserving projects not exceeding development cost of Rs.10 crore (Government funded) and Rs.3 crore (Industry funded) for MSMEs.

- Separate procedure for 'Make-II' subcategory has been notified wherein a number of industry friendly provisions such as relaxation of eligibility criterion, minimal documentation, provision for considering proposals suggested by industry/individual, etc. have been introduced.

- The Government will establish two defence industrial corridors to serve as an engine of economic development and growth of defence industrial base in India.

- An innovation ecosystem for Defence titled Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) has been launched in April, 2018. iDEX is aimed at creation of an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging Industries including MSMEs, Start-ups, Individual Innovators, R&D institutes and Academia and provide them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D.

- The Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti has been introduced to encourage IPR culture in indigenous defence industry.

- A Policy for indigenisation of components and spares used in Defence Platforms has been notified in April 2019.

- A Defence Investor Cell has been created in the Defence Ministry to provide all necessary information including addressing queries related to investment opportunities, procedures and regulatory requirements for investment in the sector.

- FDI is now allowed under automatic route up to 49% and beyond 49% through Government route.

- Export clearance process has been streamlined and a scheme for the promotion of defence exports has been notified.

- Technology Development Fund (TDF) has been set up by the GOI to encourage participation of public/private industries especially MSMEs, through provision of grants.

 ➤ Offset guidelines have been made flexible by allowing change of Indian Offset Partners (IOPs) and offset components, even in signed contracts. Foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) are now not required to indicate the details of IOPs and products at the time of signing of contracts. 'Services' as an avenue of offset have been reinstated.

GLOBAL INNOVATION INDEX (GII)

Why in News?

 ➤ Union Minister of Commerce & Industry and Railways, Piyush Goyal, will launch the Global Innovation Index (GII) in New Delhi.

GII:

 ➤ The Global Innovation Index (GII) is an annual ranking of countries by their capacity for, and success in, innovation. It is published by Cornell University, INSEAD, and the World Intellectual Property Organization, in partnership with other organisations and institutions

 ➤ The index is based on both subjective and objective data derived from several sources, including the International Telecommunication Union, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum.

Significance of GII:

 ➤ This is the first time that the GII is being launched in an emerging economy.

 ➤ During the last few years innovation has become central to the Government of India's economic policy. This is now paying off with India's rising performance in the GII. India jumped 24 places in four years. India was 81 in 2015, and in 2018 achieved the 57th position in the Global Innovation Index.

 ➤ India has been ranked the most innovative country in the Central and Southern Asia Region every year since 2011. India has consistently outperformed on innovation relative to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita.

BENGALURU GOES LIVE WITH FACIAL BIOMETRICS-BASED AIR TRAVEL

Why in News?

 ➤ The Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) rolled out a biometric-based self-boarding facility.

Highlights:

 ➤ The passengers had the option of boarding a flight without producing travel documents at each touch point.

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- To avail this facility, a passenger has to enrol their ID, biometric data and flight details before entering the terminal.
- The passenger will be authenticated and verified at every touch point by biometric technology.

Paperless Biometric System:

- The Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), the operator of the KIA, is expected to deploy the paperless biometric system at over 350 passenger touch points in Terminal 1 with the final phase of the project.
- In the final stage, this technology will be integrated with the Digi Yatra Central Platform that is currently being architectured by the central government's Digi Yatra Foundation.

User Data Privacy:

- The BIAL maintains that biometric data is used only for authentication and verification of passengers to assist the boarding process, and not for recognition.
- The process offers the highest degree of safety and security while ensuring stringent standards of safety.
- Passenger data will be deleted within a few hours of completion of air travel.
- Vision Box, the company that developed and installed One – ID biometric platform technology, is compliant with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which adopts privacy by design principles.

TIRTHANKAR CIRCUIT

Why in News?

- Ministry of Tourism under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme has identified Tirthankar Circuit as one of the fifteen thematic circuits for development in the country. All the sites associated with Jainism are covered under this circuit.

Tirthankar Circuit Project:

- Ministry has sanctioned the project "Development of Tirthankar Circuit: Vaishali-Arrah-Masad-Patna-Rajgir-Pawapuri-Champapuri in Bihar.

Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- Swadesh Darshan Scheme – Integrated Development of theme-based tourist circuits is the flagship scheme of Ministry of Tourism for development of tourism infrastructure in the country.
- Under Swadesh Darshan Scheme Ministry of Tourism is developing critical tourism infrastructure in the country in a sustainable and inclusive manner to make India into a world class tourist destination.

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❧ The focus under the scheme is to develop public facilities like last mile connectivity, Tourist reception Centers, Way side Amenities, Solid Waste Management, Illumination, Landscaping, parking etc. where Private Sector is not willing to invest.

Objectives of the scheme:

❧ Position tourism as a major engine of economic growth and job creation;

❧ Develop circuits having tourist potential in a planned and prioritized manner;

❧ Promote cultural and heritage value of the country to generate livelihoods in the identified regions;

❧ Enhance the tourist attractiveness in a sustainable manner by developing world class infrastructure in the circuit/destinations;

❧ Follow community-based development and pro-poor tourism approach;

❧ Create awareness among the local communities about the importance of tourism for them in terms of increased sources of income, improved living standards and overall development of the area.

❧ Create employment through active involvement of local communities;

❧ Harness tourism potential for its effects in employment generation and economic development.

❧ Make full use of the potential and advantages in terms of available infrastructure, national culture and characteristic strong points of each and every region throughout the country by development of theme-based circuits.

INDIA'S R&D EXPENDITURE ECO-SYSTEM REPORT

Why in News?

❧ A special session was held to discuss India's Research and Development (R&D) expenditure eco-system report during the Global launch of Global Innovation Index (GII) – 2019 in New Delhi. The report has been compiled by PMEAC.

Highlights:

❧ Investments in R&D are key inputs in economic growth. The impact of this is proven on productivity, exports, employment and capital formation.

❧ India's investment in R&D is a fraction of India's GDP. It has remained constant at around 0.6% to 0.7% of India's GDP. This is below the expenditure of countries like the US (2.8), China (2.1), Israel (4.3) and Korea (4.2).

❧ Government expenditure, almost entirely the Central Government, is the driving force of R&D in India which is in contrast to the advanced countries where private sector is the dominant and driving force of R&D spend.

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- The report is to address the data gaps in compiling R&D data so that up to date data on R&D is available in order to reflect India's true rank globally.
- To examine expenditure trends in various sector and their short coming.
- To lay down the road map for achieving the desire target of R&D spend by the year 2022.

Recommendations:

- There is a need for greater participation of State Governments and private sector in overall R&D spending in India especially in application-oriented research and technology development.
- The growth in R&D expenditure should be commensurate with the growth of GDP and should reach at least two percent of GDP by 2022.

INTEGRATED SCHEME FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SILK INDUSTRY (ISDSI)

Why in News?

- The ISDSI is launched under the central scheme Silk Samagra.

Components of the scheme in detail:

- **R&D:** development of improved host plant varieties and improved disease resistant Silkworm breeds via research through organisations like CSIR, IITs, etc.
- **Seed Organizations:** Seed production units will be strengthened to bring in quality standards in production network, besides increasing the production capacity to cater to the increased silk production target, promote adopted seed rearers to generate quality seed cocoons, Private Graineurs to produce quality seed and Chawki Rearing Centres (CRCs) with Incubation facilities to produce and supply chawki worms.
- Coordination and Market Development: Promote Indian silk through quality certification by Silk Mark not only in the domestic market but also in the Export market.

Features:

- The chief aim of the scheme is the overall development of silk industry in India.
- It has an objective to scale up production by improving the quality and productivity.
- Four components of the scheme:
1. Research & Development, Training, Transfer of Technology and Information Technology Initiatives
2. Seed Organizations
3. Coordination and Market Development
4. Quality Certification Systems (QCS) / Export Brand Promotion and Technology Up-gradation

INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY BOARD OF INDIA (IBBI)

Why in News?

⤻ The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) notified the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) (Amendment) Regulations, 2019 and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Liquidation Process) (Amendment) Regulations, 2019.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) (Amendment) Regulations, 2019:

⤻ The amendments specify the process for withdrawal of applications before constitution of committee of creditors (CoC), after constitution of CoC but before issue of invitation for expression of interest, and after issue of invitation for expression of interest.

⤻ While approving a resolution plan or deciding to liquidate the corporate debtor, the CoC may:

1. Approve a plan providing for contribution for meeting the liquidation costs

2. Recommend Sale of the corporate debtor or sale of business of the corporate debtor as a going concern, and Fix, in consultation with the RP, the fee payable to the liquidator, if an order for liquidation is passed by the Adjudicating Authority.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Liquidation Process) (Amendment) Regulations, 2019:

⤻ The amendments specify the process for (i) sale of corporate debtor as going concern, and (ii) sale of business of corporate debtor as going concern under liquidation.

⤻ These also provide that where a corporate debtor is sold as a going concern, the liquidation process shall be closed without dissolution of the corporate debtor.

⤻ The amendments require completion of liquidation process within one year of its commencement, notwithstanding pendency of applications for avoidance transactions.

⤻ To ensure that the liquidation process completes at the earliest, it:

1. Provides a model timeline for each task in the liquidation process

2. Specifies a maximum time of 90 days from the order of liquidation for completion of compromise or arrangement, if any, proposed by the stakeholders under section 230 of the Companies Act, 2013.

3. The amendments require the financial creditors, who are financial institutions, to contribute towards the liquidation cost, where the corporate debtor does not have adequate liquid resources to complete liquidation, in proportion to the financial debts owed to them by the corporate debtor, in case the CoC did not approve a plan for such contribution during corporate insolvency resolution process.

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4. However, such contribution along with interest at bank rate thereon shall form part of liquidation cost, which is paid in priority.

▶ The amendments provide for constitution of a Stakeholders' Consultation Committee, whose advice is not binding on the liquidator.

▶ The amendments require that a stakeholder may submit its claim or update its claim submitted during the corporate insolvency resolution process, as on the liquidation commencement date.

▶ The amendments have introduced a comprehensive compliance certificate to be submitted along with the final report to the Adjudicating Authority

NATIONAL INDICATOR FRAMEWOR

Why in News?

▶ A national consultation workshop was organized with the Central Ministries / Departments and State Governments to discuss the proposed indicators. The Ministries / Departments were also requested to examine the suggested possible national indicators and add / delete / modify / suggest national indicators for the SDG targets concerned. Furthermore, a public consultation was also made.

▶ Based on the suggestions received in the national consultation process from concerned Ministries/Departments and other stakeholders, National Indicator Framework (NIF) consisting of 306 statistical indicators has been prepared by MoSPI.

▶ NIF will be the backbone of monitoring of SDGs at the national level and will give appropriate direction to the policy makers and the implementers of various schemes and programmes.

Features of National Indicator Framework:

▶ Largest ever Monitoring Framework in the country. National Indicator Framework consists of 306 statistical indicators. This is the largest monitoring framework in the country and will be dependent on a statistical system for flow of information.

▶ It has been developed after extensive consultations with NITI Aayog, Central Ministries, State Governments and other stakeholders.

▶ The framework consists of nationally defined indicators responding to national priorities and needs.

▶ National acceptability was an important criteria used in deciding the indicators.

▶ The indicators directly respond to the goals and targets.

▶ Attempt made to cover all components of the targets.

▶ Data sources and periodicity included.

▶ Data disaggregation to be decided by the respective Ministries.

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- Scope of improving the Framework by adding/deleting indicators with improvement in Statistical System.
- High Level Steering Committee (HLSC) to periodically review and refinement of National Indicator Framework for monitoring SDGs.

ODISHA'S RASAGOLA AND KODAIKANAL'S MALAI POONDU GARLIC GETS GI TAG

Why in News?

- The Rasagola, a popular dessert of Odisha and Kodaikanal's malai poondu Garlic has received the geographical indication tag from the Registrar of Geographical Indication.

Odisha Rasagola:

- The registration was conferred to 'Odisha Rasagola' under Section 16(I) or of authorized Section 17(3)(c) of Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act 1999.
- The GI number 612 has been registered in favour of the Odisha Small Industries Corporation Limited (OSIC Limited), a government of Odisha undertaking and Utkal Mistanna Byabasayee Samiti, a traders' organisation, in the foodstuff category.
- According to the application submitted to the Registrar of GI, 'Odisha Rasagola' is a sweet from the state of Odisha made of chhena (cottage cheese) cooked in sugar syrup.
- This culinary is offered to Lord Jagannath as part of bhog since centuries.
- Colour development of the 'Odisha Rasagola' is very specific, where without addition of external colour, various intensely-coloured rasagolas are prepared using the principle of caramelisation of sugar with specific methods of preparation.

Kodaikanal's malai poondu Garlic:

- Also known by its scientific name Allium Sativum, this particular garlic is known for its medicinal and preservative properties. It is grown in the Kodaikanal Hills, Dindugul district.
- It has anti-oxidant and anti-microbial potential, which is attributed to the presence of higher amount of organosulfur compounds, phenols and flavonoids compared to other garlic varieties.
- Its usually white or pale yellow and each bulb weighs 20-30g on an average.
- According to the GI application, Kodaikanal Hill Garlic cultivation is done twice in a year, once around May and for second time in November depending upon the suitability of the climate.
- The hill altitude, the misty condition and the soil prevailing in the Kodaikanal region are responsible for its medicinal property and the long storage shelf life of the garlic.

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Geographical Indications in India:

▸ A Geographical Indication is used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.

▸ Such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to its origin in that defined geographical locality.

▸ This tag is valid for a period of 10 years following which it can be renewed.

▸ Recently the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry has launched the logo and tagline for the Geographical Indications (GI) of India. The first product to get a GI tag in India was the Darjeeling tea in 2004. The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (GI Act) is a sui generis Act for protection of GI in India.

▸ India, as a member of the WTO enacted the Act to comply with the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

▸ Geographical Indications protection is granted through the TRIPS Agreement. See also the Paris Convention, the Madrid Agreement, the Lisbon Agreement, the Geneva Act.

5. GEOGRAPHY & ENVIRONMENT

HIGH POWERED COMMITTEE OF CHIEF MINISTERS FOR TRANSFORMATION OF INDIAN AGRICULTURE

Why in News?

▸ Governing Council meeting of NITI Aayog, the Prime Minister has set up a High-Powered Committee of Chief Ministers for 'Transformation of Indian Agriculture'.

Highlights:

▸ Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis will act as the convenor of the committee

▸ CMs of Karnataka, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh & Union Minister of Agriculture will act as members

▸ The committee will submit its report within two months of the date of notification of the Committee. The High-Powered Committee of Chief Ministers for 'Transformation of Indian Agriculture' will be serviced by NITI Aayog.

Terms of Reference of the Committee:

▸ To discuss measures for transformation of agriculture and raising farmers' income and suggest modalities for adoption and time bound implementation of following reforms by States/UTs:

▸ The State/Union Territory 'Agriculture Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2017' (APLM Act, 2017) circulated by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, GoI to States/UTs.

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- The States/Union Territory 'Agriculture Produce and Livestock, Contract Farming and Services (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2018' circulated by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, GoI to States/UTs.

- To examine various provisions of Essential Commodity Act (ECA), 1955 and situations that require ECA. To suggest changes in the ECA to attract private investments in agricultural marketing and infrastructure. To suggest mechanism for linking of market reforms with e-NAM, GRAM and other relevant Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

- To suggest policy measures to (a) boost agricultural export (b) raise growth in food processing (c) attract investments in modern market infrastructure, value chains and logistics.

- To suggest measures to upgrade agri-technology to global standards and improve access of farmers to quality seed, plant propagation material and farm machinery in agriculturally advance countries. To propose any other relevant reforms for transformation of agriculture sector and raising farmers' income.

FLY ASH

Why in News?

- The National Green Tribunal has sought a report from the authorities on the current status on disposal and management of fly ash.

Fly Ash:

- Fly ash is a major source of PM 2.5 (fine, respirable pollution particles) in summer. It becomes airborne, and gets transported to a radius of 10 to 20 kms.

- It can settle on water and other surfaces.

- Fly ash contains heavy metals from coal, a large amount of PM 2.5 and black carbon (BC).

- Fly ash, the end product of combustion during the process of power generation in the coal based thermal power plants, is a proven resource material for many applications of construction industries and currently is being utilized in manufacturing of Portland Cement, bricks/blocks/tiles manufacturing, road embankment construction and low-lying area development, etc.

CORAL REHAB PROGRAMME

Why in News?

- The National Centre for Coastal Research's (NCCR) proposal of dropping 'melted plastic rocks or slabs' on the seabed for growing coral reefs and address the problem of disposal of plastic waste has drawn criticism from the Gulf of Mannar (GoM) Marine National Park, which has been implementing coral rehabilitation programme since 2002.

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Coral Rehabilitation Programme:

➤ The GoM Marine National Park has been implementing the corral rehabilitation programme since 2002.

➤ It has so far covered eight sq km areas in GoM region, where coral reefs suffered bleaching and degradation due to climate change and high temperature.

➤ The program employs 'concrete frame slabs' method.

➤ Corals would start growing in 60 days using the concrete frames as sub-state. The acropora coral species grow by 10 to 12 cm per year on these slabs.

MOSAiC MISSION

Why in News?

➤ Scientists from 17 nations will take part in the year-long MOSAIC mission as they anchor the RV Polarstern ship to a large piece of Arctic sea ice to study climate change.

MOSAiC mission:

➤ The MOSAiC mission stands for Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate.

➤ It is a one-year-long expedition into the Central Arctic, planned to take place from 2019 to 2020.

➤ For the first time a modern research icebreaker will operate in the direct vicinity of the North Pole year round, including the nearly half year long polar night during winter.

➤ It comes about 125 years after Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen first managed to seal his wooden expedition ship, Fram, into the ice during a three-year expedition to the North Pole.

➤ MOSAiC will contribute to a quantum leap in our understanding of the coupled Arctic climate system and its representation in global climate models.

➤ The focus of MOSAiC lies on direct in-situ observations of the climate processes that couple the atmosphere, ocean, sea ice, bio-geochemistry and ecosystem.

Why study Arctic climate?

➤ The Arctic is a key area of global climate change, with warming rates exceedingly twice the global average.

➤ The observed rate of climate change in the Arctic is not well reproduced in climate models.

➤ Many processes in the Arctic climate system are poorly represented in climate models because they are not sufficiently understood.

➤ Understanding of Arctic climate processes is limited by a lack of year-round observations in the central Arctic.

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"MIYAWAKI" METHOD OF AFFORESTATION

Why in News?

 ⯈ Telangana government has introduced the Japanese "Miyawaki" method of afforestation to grow urban forests and expand the green cover as well as to meet the stipulated plantation target under the Telanganaku Haritha Haaram (TKHH).

"Miyawaki" Method:

 ⯈ Miyawaki is a technique pioneered by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, that helps build dense, native forests in a short time.

 ⯈ This method includes planting trees (only native species) as close as possible in the same area which not only saves space, but the planted saplings also support each other in growth and block sunlight reaching the ground, thereby preventing the growth of weed.

 ⯈ The saplings become maintenance-free (self-sustainable) after the first three years.

 ⯈ The approach is supposed to ensure that plant growth is 10 times faster and the resulting plantation is 30 times denser than usual.

 ⯈ Miyawaki method helps to create a forest in just 20 to 30 years, while through conventional methods it takes anywhere between 200 to 300 years.

Miyawaki Process:

 ⯈ The native trees of the region are identified and divided into four layers — shrub, sub-tree, tree, and canopy. The quality of soil is analysed and biomass which would help enhance the perforation capacity, water retention capacity, and nutrients in it, is mixed with it.

 ⯈ A mound is built with the soil and the seeds are planted at a very high density — three to five sapling per square meter.

 ⯈ The ground is covered with a thick layer of mulch.

HYDROGEN-ENRICHED COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS (HCNG)

Why in News?

 ⯈ Delhi will be the first city in the country to roll out hydrogen-enriched compressed natural gas (HCNG) buses for public transport from November 2020.

Highlights:

 ⯈ It will start as a pilot project with 50 CNG buses retrofitted with HCNG.

 ⯈ Also, the Delhi government along with Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) and Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL) began work to set up India's first semi-commercial HCNG station.

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HCNG:

- The blending of hydrogen with CNG provides a blended gas termed as HCNG.
- HCNG stands for hydrogen-enriched compressed natural gas and it combines the advantages of both hydrogen and methane.
- HCNG allows customers early hydrogen deployment with nearly commercial technology. It is being treated as a first step towards a future hydrogen economy.
- Hydrogen has been regarded as a future secondary fuel for power system due to carbon-free operation.
- The rapid increase in the emission of greenhouse gases and very strict environmental legislation are major motivating factors for the usage of hydrogen in fuel cells and internal combustion engines. Hydrogen is an excellent additive to improve the combustion of hydrocarbon fuel due to its low ignition energy, high reactivity, diffusivity and burning velocity.

ZERO BUDGET NATURAL FARMING

Why in News?

- The Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a proposal of Zero Budget Natural Farming in budget 2019 for doubling farmer's income in the country.

Zero Budget Natural Farming:

- "Zero budget" stands for no production cost in farming and "Natural Farming" stands for doing farming without any aided chemical fertilizer or external seed and only using natural resources
- Aim to pull farmers out of the debt trap, cutting production cost and make small scale farming a viable option
- ZBNF involves no use of chemical fertilizers and assures zero credit for agriculture
- This type of farming was successfully initiated in Karnataka and was replicated as a role model in other states
- It cut down the farming expenditure and ends farmer's reliance on loans

Highlights:

- Practice only natural growth of crops
- Bijamrita, Jiwamrita, Mulching and Waaphasa are the processes of ZBNF
- Intercropping of crops is one of the features of ZBNF
- The required materials are cow dung, cow urine, water, neem pulp, etc.
- The insects are removed by using neem pulp and chillies

KISAN SUVIDHA MOBILE APP

Why in News?

⇝ Kisan Suvidha is an omnibus mobile app developed by Department of Agriculture & Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare to help farmers by providing relevant information to them quickly.

⇝ The app is available in multiple Indian languages.

Facilities available on Kisan Suvida App:

⇝ Weather – provides weather report for that day and weather forecast for next five days of a selected district. Extreme weather alerts are also provided.

⇝ Dealers – Name, Mobile number and Address of the dealers of Seeds, Pesticides, Fertilizer and Farm Machinery are provided.

⇝ Market Prices – information about rates of various crops in different mandies are provided.

⇝ Plant Protection – Crop specific information related to pest management are provided. If the condition of crop is not normal, farmers can upload a picture/photo of the crop and send it through kisan suvidha app to agriculture experts for advice.

⇝ Agro Advisories – Information from agriculture experts of districts regarding the advisories about activities to be undertaken and precaution to be taken staring from sowing to harvesting.

⇝ Contact KCC – This option provides facility to speak to Kisan Call Centre (KCC).

⇝ Soil Heath Card – option gives information about Soil Health Card, so that farmers can use fertilizer and pesticides judiciously having regard to minerals available in a particular land/farm.

⇝ Cold Storage and gowdowns – information about warehouse and cold storage available in the district like warehouse / cold storage, name of manager, address, storage capacity and phone number etc are provided.

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD PROJECT

Why in News?

⇝ The Environment Ministry has initiated a project worth ₹33.85 crore for their conservation and protection of Great Indian bustard.

Highlights:

⇝ It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

⇝ Through 'Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats', government provides funds to states & Union Territories under the component 'Species Recovery Programme'.

⇝ The fund is for conservation and protection of 21 critically endangered species, including the Great Indian Bustard.

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- The ministry has also initiated 'Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard' – An Integrated Approach.
- The important objective of this is to build up a captive population of great Indian bustard and to release the chicks in the wild for increasing the population.
- Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra are the important range states involved in this programme.

Great Indian bustard:

- It is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Threats:

- Agriculture & aquaculture
- Energy production & mining
- Transportation & service corridors
- Human intrusions & disturbance
- Invasive and other problematic species and diseases.

MICRO IRRIGATION

Why in News?

- The net sown area in the country is 140130 thousand ha and net irrigated area is 68385 thousand ha. As per available information, the area covered under drip irrigation is 4374.53 thousand ha.

Micro Irrigation:

- Micro irrigation is a modern method of irrigation; by this method water is irrigated through drippers, sprinklers, foggers and by other emitters on surface or subsurface of the land. Major components of a micro irrigation system is as follows.
- Water source, pumping devices (motor and pump), ball valves, fertigation equipments, filters, control valves, PVC joining accessories (Main and sub main) and emitters.
- In this system water is applied drop by drop nearer the root zone area of the crop.
- The drippers are fixed based on the spacing of crop.
- Drip irrigation is most suitable for wider spacing crops. Micro sprinkler irrigation system is mostly followed in sandy or loamy soils. This system is most suitable to horticultural crops and small grasses. In this method water is sprinkled in a lower height at various directions.
- Portable micro sprinklers are also available. They distribute slightly more water than drippers and micro sprinklers. They spray water in not more than one meter. It is used for preparing nursery and lawns in soils with low water holding capacity.

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Advantages of Micro Irrigation:

- An Impact evaluation study of Micro Irrigation scheme was carried out by Department of Agriculture Cooperation & Farmers Welfare in 2014 through M/s Global Agri System Ltd. The major findings of the study are as under:

- Irrigation cost is reduced by 20% to 50% with average of 32.3%.

- Electricity consumption is reduced by about 31%.

- Saving of fertilizers in the range of 7% to 42%.

- Average productivity of fruits and vegetables increased by about 42.3% and 52.8%.

- Overall income enhancement of farmers in the range of 20% to 68% with an average of 48.5%.

- Water use efficiency of Micro Irrigation including drip irrigation is as high as 80 to 95% in comparison to only 30-50% in conventional flood irrigation resulting in considerable amount of saving irrigation water under drip irrigation as also evident from the research studies conducted on different crops by centres of All India Coordinated Research Project on Irrigation Water Management in different agro-ecological regions of India.

Govt Schemes for promotion of Micro irrigation Technique:

- Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW) is implementing Per Drop More Crop component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY-PDMC) which focuses on enhancing water use efficiency at farm level through Micro Irrigation technologies viz. Drip and Sprinkler Irrigation systems.

- Besides, the Department creates awareness about Micro Irrigation by wide publicity through press & print media, publication of leaflets/booklets, organization of workshops, exhibitions, farmer fairs, information on State/Government of India web portals etc.

- In addition, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) imparts training and organizes field demonstrations through Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK) to educate farmers for promotion of Micro Irrigation.

RESTRUCTURED NATIONAL BAMBOO MISSION

Why in News?

- The restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM) has been launched in 2018-19 to focus on the development of complete value chain of bamboo sector and link growers with markets.

Objectives of the Mission:

- To increase the area under bamboo plantation in non forest Government and private lands to supplement farm income and contribute towards resilience to climate change as well as availability of quality raw material for industries.

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⪢ To improve post-harvest management through establishment of innovative primary processing units near the source of production, primary treatment and seasoning plants, preservation technologies and market infrastructure.

⪢ To promote product development keeping in view market demand, by assisting R&D, entrepreneurship & business models at micro, small and medium levels and feed bigger industry. To rejuvenate the under developed bamboo industry in India.

⪢ To promote skill development, capacity building, awareness generation for development of bamboo sector from production to market demand.

⪢ To re-align efforts so as to reduce dependency on import of bamboo and bamboo products by way of improved productivity and suitability of domestic raw material for industry, so as to enhance income of the primary producers.

SOLAR CHARKHA MISSION

Why in News?

⪢ Ministry of MSME has launched the Mission Solar Charkha for implementation of 50 Solar Charkha Clusters across the country with a budget of Rs. 550 crore. Solar Charkha units have been classified as Village Industries.

Highlights:

⪢ A pilot project on Solar Charkha was implemented at Khanwa village, Nawada District of Bihar in 2016. Based on the success of the pilot project, Government of India has accorded approval to set up 50 such clusters with a budget of Rs. 550 Crore for 2018-19 and 2019-20.

⪢ The scheme is envisaged to generate direct employment nearly to one lakh persons in the approved Fifty (50) clusters.

⪢ The scheme is being implemented by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), Mumbai.

Scheme Objectives:

⪢ To ensure inclusive growth by generation of employment, especially for women and youth, and sustainable development through solar charkha clusters in rural areas.

⪢ To boost rural economy and help in arresting migration from rural to urban areas.

⪢ To leverage low-cost, innovative technologies and processes for sustenance.

Project Coverage:

⪢ The target is to cover 50 solar clusters across the country, whereby approx. 1,00,000 artisans/beneficiaries are to be covered under the various scheme components. The scheme shall be implemented in all States of India.

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- The geographical distribution of the clusters throughout the country, with at least 10% located in the North Eastern Region (NER), J&K and hilly states, will also be kept in view. Special focus will be given to 117 aspirational districts for soliciting project proposals under the scheme.

Project Intervention:

- Capital subsidyis provided at various stages including for the purchase of Charkha
- Interest subvention for Working Capital
- Capacity Building

BHABHA KAVACH

Why in News?

- Bhabha Kavach, billed as "India's lightest bullet-proof jacket", was launched at the International Police Expo 2019 in New Delhi.

Bhabha Kavach:

- The bullet-proof jacket is developed jointly by the Ordnance Factories Board and the public sector metals and metal alloys manufacturer MIDHANI.
- It can withstand bullets from an AK-47 assault rifle (7.62 mm hard steel core bullets), and the 5.56 mm INSAS rifle.
- The Kavach weighs 9.2 kg, a half kilogram less than the weight for a bullet-proof jacket prescribed by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- The jacket is powered with nano technology from Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and has a five-year warranty.

Stands all Quality Standards:

- The trials have validated that the Bhabha Kavach meets US National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Level III standards, which guarantees protection against 7.62 mm NATO-standard bullets.
- Most army bulletproof jackets meet the lesser NIJ Level II standard, which protects soldiers from 9 mm bullets fired from a carbine or handgun.
- That is because the army places a premium on mobility as well as protection and does not want a heavy jacket.

Composition & Strength:

- Bhabha Kavach is built from layers of "high-density, high-tenacity polyethelene, which are thermo-sealed" by MIDHANI.
- This means the layers are fused together at high temperature.
- This forms a thick, hard armour plate, which is then sprayed with BARC's carbon nanomaterial.

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- Soaking into the layers of the plate, the nanomaterial instils the toughness and tenacity needed to slow down and trap a bullet as it passes through the plate.

- Bulletproof jacket armour is of two types. Soft armour provides lesser protection, suitable for threats from handgun and small arms bullets and is worn by bodyguards and VIPs against personal threats. Hard armour is stronger and heavier and is designed to stop high calibre rounds. NIJ Level IV jackets even provide protection against armour-piercing rounds.

- Each Bharat Kavach has four hard armour plates, which protect the wearer from the front, back, and either side.

ALL INDIA TIGER ESTIMATION

Why in news?

- On the occasion of Global Tiger Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the results of the fourth cycle of All India Tiger Estimation – 2018.

Survey Highlights:

- The count of tigers in India has risen to 2967, in 2018, according to this survey.

- Survey brings great hope and reassurance about tiger habitats in many areas

- India conducts the All India Tiger Estimation every four years. Three cycles of the estimation have already been completed in 2006, 2010 and 2014.

- Their number stood at 2,967 at last count in 2018, a 33 per cent jump from 2,226 in 2014, according to the tiger census. National Tiger Conservation Authority carries out the census.

Status of Tigers in India:

- The report 'Status of Tigers in India – 2018', compiled by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The report highlighted the importance of maintaining core habitats for breeding, expanding conservation interventions to include habitats beyond extant protected areas, maintaining connectivity and providing rigorous protection from poaching. The survey was led by the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Institute of India, in collaboration with State Forest Departments. The Government and National Tiger Conservation Authority have also carried out an economic valuation of tigers in mitigating the adverse impact of climate change

Regions wise growth:

- Central India and Eastern Ghats have the highest number of tigers. According to the census, Madhya Pradesh saw the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka at 524 and Uttarakhand at number 3 with 442 tigers. Chhattisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in their tiger numbers while tiger numbers in Odisha remained constant. All other states witnessed a positive trend.

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6. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

WHO LAUNCHES ITS FIRST GUIDELINES ON SELF-CARE INTERVENTIONS FOR HEALTH

Why in News?

» The WHO has launched its first guidelines on self-care interventions for health.

» This is in response to an estimate that by 2035 the world will face a shortage of nearly 13 million healthcare workers.

» Currently at least 400 million people worldwide lack access to the most essential health services.

Self-Care:

» Explaining what self-care means, the WHO says that it is the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health-care provider.

» Self-care interventions represent a significant push towards new and greater self-efficacy, autonomy and engagement in health for self-careers and caregivers.

» WHO noted that self-care is also a means for people who are negatively affected by gender, political, cultural and power dynamics, including those who are forcibly displaced, to have access to sexual and reproductive health services, as many people are unable to make decisions around sexuality and reproduction.

Guidelines:

» In its first volume, the guidelines focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

» Some of the interventions include self-sampling for human papillomavirus (HPV) and sexually transmitted infections, self-injectable contraceptives, home-based ovulation predictor kits, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) self-testing and self-management of medical abortion.

» These guidelines look at the scientific evidence for health benefits of certain interventions that can be done outside the conventional sector, although sometimes with the support of a health-care provider. They do not replace high-quality health services nor are they a shortcut to achieving universal health coverage.

Autonomy and engagement:

» It adds that self-care interventions represent a significant push towards new and greater self-efficacy, autonomy and engagement in health for self-careers and caregivers.

» People are increasingly active participants in their own health care and have a right to a greater choice of interventions that meets their needs across their lifetime, but also should be able to access, control, and have affordable options to manage their health and well-being.

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- The guidelines, meanwhile, will be expanded to include other self-care interventions, including for prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases.

- WHO is establishing a community of practice for self-care, and will be promoting research and dialogue in this area during the self-care month between June 24 and July 24.

INDIA-RUSSIA STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DIALOGUE (IRSED)

Why in News?

- The Second India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue (IRSED) shall be held on 10 July in New Delhi, under the chairmanship of Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog and Mr. Timur Maksimov, Deputy Minister of the Economic Development of the Russian Federation.

India – Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue:

- The IRSED was established following a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation during the 19th edition of the Annual India-Russia Bilateral Summit in 2018

- The First India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue was held in St. Petersburg between November 25-26, 2018, and was chaired by Mr. Maxim Oreshkin, Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, and Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog.

- The Second meeting of the IRSED shall be focussing on six core areas of cooperation, namely, Development of Transport Infrastructure and Technologies; Development of Agriculture and Agro-Processing sector; Small and Medium Business support; Digital Transformation and Frontier Technologies; Cooperation in Trade, Banking, Finance, and Industry; and Tourism & Connectivity.

INDIA BUILDS 250 HOMES IN MYANMAR TO ASSIST ROHINGYA

Why in News?

- Two years after more than 700,000 Rohingya fled to camps in Bangladesh alleging ethnic cleansing by Myanmar forces, the Indian government says it is stepping up efforts to help them return to their villages.

- Recently, India's Ambassador to Myanmar, Saurabh Kumar handed over 250 completed pre-fabricated homes to the Myanmar government for use by the refugees when they return.

Part of 2017 pact:

- The project is part of an agreement signed by the two governments in 2017, under which the government had committed to spending $25 million over five years.

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» The houses, measuring 40 square metres each, are designed to survive quakes and cyclonic storms.

» The 250 houses, built in three clusters, are in the Shwe Zar, Kyein Chaung Taung and Nan Thar Taung areas that saw some of the worst cases of violence, including mass murder, gang-rape of women and children and burning of thousands of homes.

» They have cost about ₹10 crore.

» However, there are no signs yet that the Rohingya will return at any specific date.

A Look at other developments:

» The Myanmar government has also handed over a list of 21 other projects that it wants India to fund as part of the agreement, including the construction of small villages, culverts and school buildings.

» It is important to note that hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, mostly Muslim, fled the violence that started after a local militant group ARSA attacked several Myanmar police posts in August 2017, killing about 12, and also Hindus in nearby Rakhine villages.

» In attacks on the Muslim Rohingya, termed 'retaliatory' by Myanmar's Junta and the majority Buddhist community, thousands were killed. Nearly a million Rohingya, including about 400 Hindu families, are now living in precarious conditions.

International concern:

» The government in NayPyiTaw still refuses to recognise the Rohingya as citizens and will not prosecute military personnel and civilians for the killings, which the United Nations officials said bore the hallmarks of genocide.

» In such a situation, several international refugee relief and human rights agencies have counselled against forcing the refugees to return to Myanmar.

» Making the situation worse are monsoon rains and flooding at the camps in Bangladesh that have already affected about 45,000 people since April 2019, even as international funding for the camps dwindles.

» Despite the desperate situation for them, there are no signs yet that the Rohingya refugees will return at any specific date, and officials could not confirm when they would actually occupy the houses being built by India and also by Japan, China and ASEAN countries for them.

HR 1044

Why in News?

» The US lawmakers passed a Bill titled Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act (HR 1044).

» It is aimed at lifting the current seven per cent country-cap on issuing Green Cards, a development which would benefit thousands of highly-skilled Indian IT professionals.

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HR 1044 to India:

- A change in the existing law can mean that immigrants from countries like India and China seeking permanent residency could expect shorter wait times.
- Indian IT professionals, who under the existing law would have to wait up to 70 years as some studies suggest, can now hope for a fairer system with lesser processing time.
- Apart from removing caps for employment-based Green Cards, caps for family-based categories have also been increased to 15%. A US based institute released a study in 2018 saying, that based on current law and backlog, Indian nationals holding advanced educational degrees may have to wait over 150 years in order to get a Green Card.

What is a Green card?

- A Permanent Resident Card, also known as a 'Green Card', allows a non-US citizen to live and work permanently in America. Green Card holders can qualify for US citizenship generally after three to five years. Over 10 lakh migrants from around the world are known to receive Green Cards yearly.

Popular Green Card categories:

- Categories of employment-based visas under which Indian professionals are known to apply are the:
    1. 'EB-1', or priority workers with extraordinary ability
    2. 'EB-2' or those holding advanced degrees, and
    3. 'EB-3' or skilled workers.
- The EB-2 category generally sees the most number of applicants.

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND USA

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has given approval to the Inter-Institutional Agreement between India and the USA in the areas of regenerative medicine and 3D bioprinting, new technologies, exchange of scientific ideas/information and technologies.

Benefits:

- The joint research projects, training programmes, conferences, seminars etc. under this Agreement will be open to all qualified scientists and technologists, and will be supported on the basis of scientific merit and excellence.
- Scientific research and technology development in the areas of regenerative medicine and 3D bio-printing will have potential for generation of new Intellectual Property, processes, prototypes or products.

- Both institutes anticipate the general academic exchange contemplated under the Agreement will lead to the development of specific projects, each of which may have academic, clinical and commercial implications.

Objectives:

- The objective of the Agreement is to contribute towards the development of research and education of both the Institutions through academic collaboration.
- The general areas of common interest where collaboration and exchange of knowledge are intended for both include:
  1. Exchange of faculty members and students for training, study and research especially in the areas on 3D Bioprinting;
  2. Execution of joint research projects; and
  3. Exchange of information and academic publications.

SAGARDHWANI EMBARKS ON SAGAR MAITRI MISSION-2

Why in News?

- Oceanographic research vessel of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), INS Sagardhwani, embarked on a two-month long SAGAR MAITRI.

SAGAR MAITRI:

- SAGAR MAITRI is a unique initiative of DRDO which promote closer co-operation in socio-economic aspects as well as greater scientific interaction especially in ocean research among Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) countries.
- INS Sagardhwani has been designed and developed by Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL), Kochi, a premier systems laboratory of DRDO.
- It conducts ocean research experiments in the Indian waters and spearheads NPOL's at-sea data collection activities. SAGAR MAITRI Mission-2 commemorates the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of India's lone research ship INS Kistna's missions as part of the historic International Indian Ocean Expeditions (IIOE), which took place during 1962-65.
- The prime objectives of the SAGAR MAITRI Mission are data collection from the entire North Indian Ocean, focussing on the Andaman Sea and adjoining seas and establishing long-term collaboration with eight IOR countries in the field of ocean research and development.
- The other IOR countries, include Oman, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Myanmar. The programme also aims at establishing long term scientific collaboration with these countries in the field of 'Ocean Research & Development' and data collection with a focus in the Andaman Sea.

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INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE PREVENTION OF POLLUTION FROM SHIPS (MARPOL)

Why in News?

⯈ International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) is the main international convention covering prevention of pollution of the marine environment by ships from operational or accidental causes.

⯈ The MARPOL Convention was adopted on 2 November 1973 at IMO. The Protocol of 1978 was adopted in response to a spate of tanker accidents in 1976-1977.

⯈ The Convention includes regulations aimed at preventing and minimizing pollution from ships – both accidental pollution and that from routine operations – and currently includes six technical Annexes.

⯈ India is a signatory to MARPOL

⯈ Special Areas with strict controls on operational discharges are included in most Annexes.

Annex I: Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution by Oil

⯈ Covers prevention of pollution by oil from operational measures as well as from accidental discharges; the 1992 amendments to Annex I made it mandatory for new oil tankers to have double hulls and brought in a phase-in schedule for existing tankers to fit double hulls, which was subsequently revised in 2001 and 2003.

Annex II:

⯈ Regulations for the Control of Pollution by Noxious Liquid Substances in Bulk

⯈ Details the discharge criteria and measures for the control of pollution by noxious liquid substances carried in bulk; some 250 substances were evaluated and included in the list appended to the Convention; the discharge of their residues is allowed only to reception facilities until certain concentrations and conditions (which vary with the category of substances) are complied with.In any case, no discharge of residues containing noxious substances is permitted within 12 miles of the nearest land.

Annex III:

⯈ Prevention of Pollution by Harmful Substances Carried by Sea in Packaged Form

⯈ Contains general requirements for the issuing of detailed standards on packing, marking, labelling, documentation, stowage, quantity limitations, exceptions and notifications.

⯈ For the purpose of this Annex, "harmful substances" are those substances which are identified as marine pollutants in the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code (IMDG Code) or which meet the criteria in the Appendix of Annex III.

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Annex IV:

⇢ Prevention of Pollution by Sewage from Ships

⇢ Contains requirements to control pollution of the sea by sewage; the discharge of sewage into the sea is prohibited, except when the ship has in operation an approved sewage treatment plant or when the ship is discharging comminuted and disinfected sewage using an approved system at a distance of more than three nautical miles from the nearest land; sewage which is not comminuted or disinfected has to be discharged at a distance of more than 12 nautical miles from the nearest land.

Annex V:

⇢ Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships

⇢ Deals with different types of garbage and specifies the distances from land and the manner in which they may be disposed of; the most important feature of the Annex is the complete ban imposed on the disposal into the sea of all forms of plastics.

Annex VI:

⇢ Prevention of Air Pollution from Ships

⇢ Sets limits on sulphur oxide and nitrogen oxide emissions from ship exhausts and prohibits deliberate emissions of ozone depleting substances; designated emission control areas set more stringent standards for SOx, NOx and particulate matter. A chapter adopted in 2011 covers mandatory technical and operational energy efficiency measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from ships.

MEETING OF BRICS MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Why in News?

⇢ The BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting took place on 26th July 2019 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Highlights:

⇢ India was represented by Gen (retd) VK Singh who at the meeting who is the Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways.

⇢ A common understanding was made to further deepen BRICS three-pillar-driven cooperation in the areas of security, peace, economy and people-to-people exchanges.

⇢ Reaffirmation to the commitment to upholding the international law was made along with advance sustainable development and protection of human rights and freedom.

⇢ They decided to make a dedicated effort to prevent the financing of terrorist networks and condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

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- BRICS is an informal grouping of five major emerging national economies Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa formed in 2006.

- Originally the first four countries were grouped as "BRIC" (or "the BRICs"), and after the induction of South Africa in 2010 it became BRICS.

- BRICS countries represent 41% of the global population and contribute about 23% of the gross world product.

INDIA AND BENIN RELATIONSHIP

Why in News?

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, reached Cotonou, Benin on the first leg of his state visits to three West African nations – Benin, Gambia and Guinea.

- This visit is the first-ever visit of Head of State/Head of Government of India to each of the three countries.

MOUs/agreements:

- MOUs exchanged between India and Benin:
1. Cultural Exchange Programme between the two countries for the years 2019-2023
2. MOU on Cooperation in the field of Export Credit and Investment Insurance
3. MOU between Benin & Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL) for participation in the e- VBAB Network Project (Technology upgradation of Pan Africa e-Network Project (PAeNP)- Phase-I) of Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India
4. Agreement on mutual exemption from the visa requirement for holders of Diplomatic, Official/Service Passports

India and Benin:

- India is keen to strengthen economic partnership with Benin. India has emerged as the largest trading partner of Benin with two-way trade crossing US$ 800 million.

- Around 100 Indian or Indian-owned companies are operating in Benin. More Indian companies are interested to enter the Benin market, especially in mining. India seeks Benin's support to help them grow their business.

- President announced fresh Line of Credit worth US$ 100 million for developmental projects in Benin. He also announced extension of e-visa facility to Benin.

- India also offered to extend free tele-education courses to 15,000 Beninese students and tele-medicine courses to 1000 doctors and paramedics in Africa.

- In addition, the two sides discussed defence and security cooperation and India offered further training assistance to Benin to expand its anti-piracy capacity.

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⌖ India thanked Benin for its support for India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Both countries reiterated their commitment to stand together in the global fight against terrorism and piracy.

7. INTERNAL SECURITY & DISASTER MANAGEMENT

NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY

Why in News?

⌖ A Bill seeking to further strengthen the National Investigation Agency (NIA) by giving it powers to probe terror attacks targeting Indians and Indian interests on foreign soil was introduced in Lok Sabha. Legislation will also allow the NIA probe cyber crimes and cases of human trafficking.

NIA:

⌖ The NIA was created by an Act of the Parliament of India on December 31, 2008 following Mumbai Terror Attack of November 2008.

⌖ According to the NIA Act, the Agency is an investigation agency at the national level to investigate and prosecute offences affecting the sovereignty, security and integrity of India, security of State, friendly relations with foreign States and offences under Acts enacted to implement international treaties, agreements, conventions and resolutions of the United Nations, its agencies and other international organisations and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto for investigation and prosecution of offences affecting sovereignty, security and integrity of India. NIA plays the role of the national counter terrorism law enforcement agency.

⌖ The NIA was established in a concurrent jurisdiction framework, with provisions for taking up specific cases under specific Acts for investigation and prosecution. Hence, it was "not an Agency to deal with offences under all the laws", but "with only eight laws":

1. The Atomic Energy Act, 1962 (33 of 1962);
2. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967);
3. The Anti-Hijacking Act, 1982 (65 of 1982);
4. The Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Civil Aviation Act, 1982 (66 of 1982);
5. The SAARC Convention (Suppression of Terrorism) Act, 1993 (36 of 1993);
6. The Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against Safety of Maritime Navigation and Fixed Platforms on Continental Shelf Act, 2002 (69 of 2002);
7. The Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Act, 2005 (21 of 2005);

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8. Offences under— Chapter VI of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860) [sections 121 to 130 (both inclusive)]; Sections 489-A to 489-E (both inclusive) of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860).

➤ Under two circumstances the NIA takes up a case "to investigate and prosecute offences".

➤ It could be on reference from the State where a Scheduled offence has taken place. On receipt of report from the State Government, the Central Government shall determine on the basis of information made available by the State Government or received from other sources, within 15 days from the date of receipt of the report, whether the offence is a fit case to be investigated by the NIA

➤ The Central Government may also, suo motu, direct the Agency to investigate a Scheduled offence if it is of the opinion that the offence is required to be investigated under the NIA Act

NO COMPROMISE WILL BE TOLERATED ON AIR SAFETY: MINISTER FOR CIVIL AVIATION

Why in News?

➤ Speaking at the International conference cum awards on civil aviation and cargo, the Minister of State(I/c) for Civil Aviation, Housing & Urban Development said that the Ministry would not tolerate any compromise on Air Safety and standards.

➤ The event organised by ASSOCHAM.

Highlights:

➤ The first National Air Cargo Policy's (NACP) outline was released at the Global Aviation Summit in January 2019.

➤ It aims to achieve fundamental re-engineering of the whole-of-the-value-chains for domestic and export-import air freight for reaching the target of handling 10 million tonnes by 2026-27.

National Civil Aviation Policy:

➤ A comprehensive National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) was announced in 2016, covering 22 areas of the Civil Aviation sector.

➤ It was framed to boost regional air connectivity, establish an integrated ecosystem to promote tourism and generate employment.

National Air Cargo Policy's (NACP):

➤ The National Air Cargo Policy unveiled at the Global Aviation Summit 2019, seeks to make India among the top five air freight markets by 2025, besides creating air transport shipment hubs at all major airports over the next six years.

➤ The policy aims at encouraging code sharing/inter-line agreements between foreign and Indian carriers.

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⁌ The policy seeks to establish agreements between national carriers/ freighters and integrators to improve domestic connectivity as well as encourage the establishment of agreements between national and international carriers/freighters and other airline operators to provide access to key global cargo hubs.

⁌ It also aims to promote the development of a last mile/first mile connectivity program at international/regional gateways.

⁌ As part of the security strategy under the policy, the strategy will address security related to the physical cargo, people handling the cargo, data and information related to shipments within and across all chains of custody transfers.

⁌ To increase process transparency while decreasing shipment delays, costs and dwell time, a fully automated paperless trade environment with minimum face-to-face interactions will be implemented

⁌ The policy assured that The GST and other economic legislation would be reviewed by the appropriate government agencies to ensure effective measures are in place to support the national air cargo development strategies.

DORNIER SQUADRON INAS 313 AT CHENNAI

Why in News?

⁌ The fifth Dornier squadron Indian Naval Air Squadron (INAS) 313, was commissioned into the Indian Navy by Admiral Karambir Singh.

Dornier Squadron INAS 313:

⁌ It will enhance maritime security and safeguard our nation's maritime interests

⁌ The strategic position of the squadron will give India, dominance over the North-Eastern part of the Indian Ocean that also consists of trade routes

⁌ The Squadron will be operating from Chennai International Airport

⁌ With the commissioning of INAS 313, Tamil Nadu will have 3 naval air bases, which is the highest among the Coastal States

⁌ Other two air bases in Tamil Nadu are INS Rajali at Arakkonam and INS Parundu at Ramnad

⁌ INAS 313 is named 'Sea Eagle' from the bird of prey family Accipitridae

⁌ Dornier aircraft is a multi-role Short Range Maritime Reconnaissance (SRMR) aircraft manufactured by HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited)

⁌ The aircraft performs maritime surveillance, Search and Rescue Operations, and targeting data to weapon platforms

⁌ Dornier aircraft from HAL will Contribute towards indigenous development and self-reliance through "Make in India"

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IN LCU L-56 COMMISSIONED INTO THE INDIAN NAVY

Why in News?

‣ IN LCU L-56 Commissioned into the Indian Navy

IN LCU L-56:

‣ IN LCU L56, the sixth ship of the Landing Craft Utility (LCU) MK IV class was commissioned into the Indian Navy

‣ LCU 56 is an amphibious ship with its primary role being transportation and deployment of Main Battle Tanks, Armoured Vehicles, Troops and Equipment from ship to shore.

‣ These ships are based at the Andaman and Nicobar Command, can be deployed for multirole activities like beaching operations, search and rescue, disaster relief operations, supply and replenishment and evacuation from distant islands.

‣ LCU is equipped with two Indigenous CRN 91 Guns to provide artillery fire support during landing operations. The ship is fitted with state-of-the-art equipment and advanced systems like Integrated Bridge System (IBS) and Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS).

‣ The LCU Mk-IV Class of ships are fitted with close to 90% indigenous content in line with the Government of India's 'Make in India' initiative towards achieving self-reliance and indigenisation.

‣ The Mk-IV LCU Vessels are a further improved version of the Mk-III LCU Vessels presently being used by the Indian Navy. The entire design of LCU Mark-IV ship has been developed in-house by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers as per requirements specified by Indian Navy.