

1. Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support (ARLS)

Why in News?

- ▶▶ India and Russia are finalising a defence agreement named “Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support (ARLS)” that will simplify interoperability and enable military platforms to receive support and supplies across bases in both nations.

About Agreement on Reciprocal Logistics Support (ARLS):

- ▶▶ It is an arrangement that will allow each other to access military facilities for supplies and fuel, that helps to expand the logistics support and operational turnaround of the Indian military.

Benefits to India through the Agreement:

- ▶▶ This will be beneficial for the Indian Navy, which has a large number of Russian origin ships, that will get access to Russian ports for supplies and refuelling. It would be crucial for joint exercises.
- ▶▶ This access will also be for ports in the Russian part of the Arctic, allowing access to energy resources there. The air force too will benefit by finding it easier to deploy aircraft for the same purpose.

2. Vigilance Awareness Week 2019

Why in News?

- ▶▶ Indian Railways has celebrated Vigilance Awareness Week 2019.

Vigilance Awareness Week 2019:

- ▶▶ The awareness week was observed in Oct-Nov 2019 for a week.
- ▶▶ The theme of the event was “Integrity – A Way of Life”.
- ▶▶ The Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) administered an ‘Integrity Pledge’ to railway officials and released a vigilance magazine called ‘Chetna Aahwan’ incorporating articles, stories, poems and messages on relevant issues concerning vigilance.
- ▶▶ To spread the message of honesty and integrity amongst employees, passengers and other stakeholders, a unique method was adopted of circulating Integrity Pledge on a mass scale to railway employees, rail users and public at large through text messages and railway portal.
- ▶▶ More than 2 crore railway users received messages of the Integrity Pledge through the railway app.

- ▶▶ A special effort was made to organise internal and outreach activities in a number of schools and colleges in an effort to sensitize the youth.
- ▶▶ Apart from distributing pamphlets, newsletters and journals on the topic, many seminars/workshops/skits/ street plays, employees/family competitions (debate, quiz, etc.), human chain formation & Customer Grievance Redressal Camps were also conducted. Debates/essay competitions contests, etc. were organized in many educational institutions (schools and colleges).
- ▶▶ The Vigilance Awareness Week is being observed annually since 2000 around the first week of November.

3. Brown Blotched Bengal Tree Frog

Why in News?

- ▶▶ Recently, a new frog species, Polypedates bengalensis was discovered in a residential area in West Bengal. The discovery points to the vulnerability of little-known species in non-protected areas.

Brown Blotched Bengal Tree Frog:

- ▶▶ Brown Blotched Bengal Tree Frog or Polypedates bengalensis frog was found in two places in West Bengal – Badu, North 24 Parganas District and Khordanahala, South 24 Parganas District. Polypedates are found throughout South and Southeast Asia
- ▶▶ It belongs to the genus Polypedates. There are 25 other Polypedates species round the world. Polypedates bengalensis is the 26th.
- ▶▶ The frog's body colour is yellowish-brown to greenish-brown.

4. Danakil Depression

Why in News?

- ▶▶ Microbes are known to survive almost anywhere. Scientists now believe that Danakil depression in Ethiopia is an exception.
- ▶▶ New research has pointed out that bubbling pools of water and mounds of salt covering its landscape – that is too daunting even for these microorganisms.

Danakil Depression:

- ▶▶ The Danakil Depression in northeastern Ethiopia is one of the world's hottest places, as well as one of its lowest, at 100 metres below sea level.

- ▶▶ At the northern end of the Great Rift Valley, and separated by live volcanoes from the Red Sea, the plain was formed by the evaporation of an inland water body.
- ▶▶ All the water entering Danakil evaporates, and no streams flow out from its extreme environment. It is covered with more than 10 lakh tonnes of salt.
- ▶▶ Now, a new study says that active and naturally occurring life cannot be sustained at Danakil. It identifies two barriers: magnesium-dominated brines that cause cells to break down; and an environment having simultaneously very low pH and high salt, a combination that makes adaptation highly difficult.

5. Bill and Keep (BAK)

Why in News?

- ▶▶ SC's recent judgment on upholding the definition of AGR has placed the telecom sectors in further financial crisis.

Interconnect Usage Charges (IUC):

- ▶▶ It is the charge payable by network provider A, whose subscriber originates the call, to network provider B where the Call Terminates.

Bill and Keep (BAK) Mode:

- ▶▶ According to the OECD, Bill and Keep is defined as "A pricing scheme for the two-way interconnection of two networks under which the reciprocal call termination charge is zero - that is, each network agrees to terminate calls from the other network at no charge".
- ▶▶ Bill and keep represents a modern approach to interconnection charging in which the networks recover their costs only from their own customers rather than from the sending network.

6. Elephant Bonds

Why in News?

- ▶▶ A **High-Level Advisory Group on Trade Policy (HLAG)** headed by **Surjit S Bhalla** has recently suggested the government to issue 'Elephant Bonds' which would recover up to \$500 billion of black money that has been stashed overseas.

About:

- ▶▶ An Elephant Bond is a 25-year sovereign bond (a bond issued by a national government).
- ▶▶ This bond is issued to those people who declare their previously undisclosed income and are then bound to invest 50% of that amount in these securities.

- ▶▶ The fund gathered by the issuance of these bonds is utilized to **Finance Infrastructure Projects only** which was recommended by the HLAG.
- ▶▶ One of the key features of the proposed mechanism is that those disclosing their black money will receive immunity from all local laws including those under foreign exchange, black money laws, and taxation laws.
- ▶▶ This would enable people to bring their offshore undisclosed wealth into India without fear of prosecution.
- ▶▶ Countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, Argentina, and the Philippines have already launched their own tax amnesty schemes for persons who disclose undeclared income without the risk of prosecution.
- ▶▶ **Tax amnesty** is a limited-time opportunity for a specified group of taxpayers to pay a defined amount, in exchange for forgiveness of tax liability (including interests and penalties).
- ▶▶ The move is also expected to bring down the real interest rate. It will also strengthen the rupee.
- ▶▶ The HLAG was set up under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the year 2018.

7. NASA's Voyager 2

Why in News?

- ▶▶ NASA's Voyager 2 images have shown mysterious boundary where interstellar space begins.

About Voyager 2:

- ▶▶ Voyager 2 is the only probe ever to study Neptune and Uranus during planetary flybys.
- ▶▶ It is the second man-made object to leave our planet.
- ▶▶ It is now 11 billion miles from Earth, following behind its sister spacecraft, Voyager 1, which is 6 years ahead of it. The probe is estimated to be travelling at 34,000 mph.
- ▶▶ Voyager 2 is the only spacecraft to have visited all four gas giant planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — and discovered 16 moons, as well as phenomena like Neptune's mysteriously transient Great Dark Spot, the cracks in Europa's ice shell, and ring features at every planet.

Key Findings of Voyager 2:

- ▶▶ Few things that were confirmed by the two Voyager spacecraft was that the plasma inside the heliosphere is significantly less dense and less cold than the plasma in local interstellar space. Voyager 2 also sent out signals that hint that the plasma outside the heliosphere could be compressed as it is slightly warmer, though it is unclear what is causing the compression.
- ▶▶ The heliosphere is somewhat leaky, revealed Voyager's particle instruments.
- ▶▶ Another surprising revelation was the magnetic field in the region just beyond the heliopause is parallel to the magnetic field inside the heliosphere. This was more clearly confirmed by Voyager 2 spacecraft.
- ▶▶ The **Heliosphere** is a bubble around the sun created by the outward flow of the solar wind from the sun and the opposing inward flow of the interstellar wind.
- ▶▶ The **Heliopause** marks the end of the heliosphere and the beginning of interstellar space.
- ▶▶ Scientists use the heliopause to mark where **Interstellar Space** begins; although depending on how you define our solar system it can stretch all the way to the **Oort cloud**, which begins 1,000 times farther away from the sun than Earth's orbit.

8. Waste land Atlas

Why in News?

- ▶▶ Fifth edition of waste land atlas was released Recently.

About:

- ▶▶ The Union Minister for Rural Development, Agriculture and Farmers Welfare & Panchayati Raj released the Wastelands Atlas – 2019.
- ▶▶ The Department of Land Resources in collaboration with National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), Department of Space has published Wastelands Atlases of India - 2000, 2005, 2010 & 2011 editions. The new wastelands mapping exercise, carried out by NRSC using the Indian Remote Sensing Satellite.
- ▶▶ India with 2.4% of total land area of the World is supporting 18% of the World's population. This Wastelands Atlas-2019 provides district and state wise distribution of different categories of wastelands area including mapping of about 12.08 Mha hitherto unmapped area of Jammu & Kashmir.
- ▶▶ Majority of wastelands have been changed into categories of 'croplands', 'forest-dense' 'forest plantation' and 'industrial area.'

9. Pannai App

Why in News?

- ▶▶ Pannai, a new mobile app for pest-disease warning, developed by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF).

About:

- ▶▶ Pest-disease Advance Notification and Need-based Agriculture Information (PANNAI).
- ▶▶ It provides advisories, market information and farm-specific weather advisories.
- ▶▶ It also uses information from the Uzhavan app of the State government.
- ▶▶ Funded by Oracle CSR and developed by the MSSRF, the PANNAI is useful for the farmers involved in the Coastal Agriculture.
- ▶▶ The unique feature of this app is that all the Field Measure Boundary (FMB) level and records have been digitized and specific land-wise advisories will be given, based on automatic weather station installed by the MSSRF.

