

VISION IAS

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CURRENT AFFAIRS

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1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1. ARTICLE 131 OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Why in news?

Recently **Kerala and Chhattisgarh** have filed a suit in the Supreme court challenging the constitutional validity of various central laws such as Citizenship Amendment Act (Kerala) and the National Investigation Agency Act (Chhattisgarh), **under Article 131** of the Indian Constitution.

Why the states have challenged the Centre under article 131?

- **Kerala:**
 - Kerala has filed a suit **to challenge the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019**, stating that it is violative of Articles 14 (equality before the law), 21 (protection of life and personal liberty) and 25 (freedom of religion) as well as against the secular fabric of the nation.
 - It also challenges the Passport (Entry to India) Amendment Rules 2015, and Foreigners (Amendment) Order 2015, which had regularised the stay of non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, who had entered India before December 31, 2014, on the condition that they had fled religious persecution from their home countries.
- **Chhattisgarh**
 - It has sought a declaration that **the NIA Act, 2008**, is unconstitutional on the ground that it is “beyond the legislative competence of Parliament”.
 - As **‘Police’ is a subject reserved for the States**, having a central police agency, which has overriding powers over the State police, with **no provision for consent from the State government** for its operations, is against the division of legislative powers between the Centre and the States.
 - And thus NIA, is against the **federal spirit** of the Constitution.

About Article 131

- Article 131 of the Constitution talks about the original jurisdiction of the **Supreme Court**, where the apex court deals with any dispute **between the Centre and a state; the Centre and a state on the one side and another state on the other side; and two or more states**.
- This means **no other court** can entertain such a dispute.
- A dispute to qualify under Article 131, it has to necessarily be between states and the Centre, and must involve a **question of law or fact** on which the existence of a legal right of the state or the Centre depends.
 - In the **State of Karnataka v Union of India, Case, 1978** Justice P N Bhagwati had said that for the Supreme Court to accept a suit under Article 131, the state need not show that its legal right is violated, but **only that the dispute involves a legal question**.
 - It cannot be used to settle political differences between state and central governments headed by different parties.
- However, **Centre has other powers to ensure that its laws are implemented**.
 - The Centre can issue directions to a state to implement the laws made by Parliament.
 - If states do not comply with the directions, the Centre can move the court seeking a permanent injunction against the states to force them to comply with the law.
- **The original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court does not extend to:**
 - A dispute arising out of any treaty, agreement, covenant, engagement or other similar instrument executed before the commencement of the constitution and continues to be in operation or which provides that the **jurisdiction of the Supreme Court shall not extend to such a dispute;**

Other Jurisdictions of the Supreme Court

- **Advisory:** Under its advisory jurisdiction, the President has the power to seek an opinion from the apex court under Article 143 of the Constitution.
- **Appellate:** Under its appellate jurisdiction, the Supreme Court hears appeals from lower courts.
- **Extraordinary original jurisdiction:** The Supreme Court has exclusive power to adjudicate upon disputes involving elections of the President and the Vice President, those that involve states and the Centre, and cases involving the violation of fundamental rights.

- disputes relating to the use, distribution, or control of the water of any inter-state river;
- Suits brought by private individuals against the government of India.

Significance of Article 131

- **India's quasi-federal constitutional structure:** Inter-governmental disputes are not uncommon, therefore, the framers of the Constitution expected such differences, and added the **exclusive original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court** for their resolution.
- **Resolve disputes between states: Unlike individuals,** State governments cannot complain of fundamental rights being violated or cannot move to the courts under article 32 (Remedies for enforcement of rights).

Therefore, the Constitution provides that whenever a State feels that its legal rights are under threat or have been violated, it can take the **"dispute" to the Supreme Court.**

- States have filed such cases under Article 131 against neighbouring States in respect of **river water sharing and boundary disputes.**

Way forward suggested

Supreme Court, should constitute a **larger bench** to decide the question whether the suits challenging central laws are maintainable under article 131 or not. In that case, if the suits are declared maintainable, the same bench may also adjudicate the disputes.

Additional debate vis-à-vis Article 131

Power to declare a legislation unconstitutional under Article 131:

- In 2011, in *State of MP v Union of India*, the Supreme Court held that validity of central laws can be challenged under Article 32 of the Constitution and not under Article 131.
- However, a 2012 dispute between **Bihar and Jharkhand** is currently pending for consideration by a larger Bench of the Supreme court whose decision would have a bearing on Court's power to decide the **validity of a law under article 131.**

1.2. OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER AND THE ISSUE OF DEFECTION

Why in news?

Recently, the Supreme Court asked Parliament to amend the Constitution to strip Legislative Assembly Speakers of their exclusive power to decide on the matter of disqualification under the anti-defection law.

More on news

- The court asked Parliament to substitute the speaker of the Lok-Sabha and Legislative Assemblies as arbiter of disputes concerning disqualification under the Tenth Schedule with a **permanent tribunal** comprising either a retired Supreme Court Judge or a retired Chief Justice of a High Court.
- The court asked the State Assembly Speaker to decide the **disqualification petition in four weeks.**

Background

- For over three decades the office of the Speaker has been under controversies for its decisions on the disqualification of MLAs who switch sides for profit or political power thus, undermining democracy. Demand to address this chronic problem has been gaining ground for long.

About Anti-defection Law

- The anti-defection law sought to prevent political defections which may be due to reward of office or other similar considerations.
- For this, the **Tenth Schedule** was inserted in the Constitution in 1985, by the 52nd Amendment Act.
- It lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature based on a petition by any other member of the House.
- A legislator is deemed to have defected if
 - he either **voluntarily gives up** the membership of his party or
 - **disobeys the directives** of the party leadership on a vote. This implies that a legislator defying (abstaining or voting against) the party whip on any issue can lose his membership of the House)
- The law **applies to both** Parliament and state assemblies.
- **Exceptions under the law:** Legislators may change their party without the risk of disqualification in certain circumstances.
 - The law allows a party to merge with or into another party provided that at least two-thirds of its legislators are in favour of the merger.
 - If a person is elected as the speaker of Lok Sabha or the Chairman of Rajya Sabha then he could resign from his party, and rejoin the party once he demits that post.

- **Recent Instances:**

- Latest case is **from Manipur** which involves disqualification of a Congress legislator who joined the Ruling Bhartiya Janata Party right after the 2017 Assembly elections. The Congress had asked the Manipur Speaker to disqualify him and the Speaker failed to act and kept the petition pending.
- Similarly, the Supreme Court had to intervene the **Karnataka MLAs' disqualification case** where it had held that a Speaker who cannot stay aloof from the pressures and wishes of his political party does not deserve to occupy his chair.
- **In Andhra Pradesh**, 23 opposition party's MLAs had defected over a period of time to ruling Party in the last three years, putting a question mark on the role of the speaker.
- **Again, in Telangana** in 2016, its legislative assembly, speaker had to deal with the defection of 12 of the 15 TDP MLAs in the 119-member assembly.

Why is there a need to reform the office of Speaker?

- **Nature of the office of Speaker:** With **no security in the continuity of office**, the Speaker is dependent on his or her political party for re-election. This makes the Speaker susceptible to pulls and pressures from her/his political party in the **conduct of the proceedings of the Lok Sabha**, rather than their own conscience.
- **Intrinsic paradox of the office:** Disqualification petitions entrusted to a **Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority** is not a rational and logical act when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto.
- **To curb the delay in the speaker's decision on disqualification under anti-defection law:** Due to the inordinate delay in deciding the disqualification matter pending before the Speaker, often instances have been observed where legislators who have defected from their parties, continue to be members of the House.

Way Ahead

- **Administrative Reforms Commission's Report titled 'Ethics in Governance'** and various other expert committees have recommended that the issue of disqualification of members on grounds of defection should be **decided by the President/Governor** on the advice of the **Election Commission**.
- As said by the Supreme Court, unless there were "exceptional circumstances", **disqualification petitions** under the Tenth Schedule should be decided by Speakers within three months.
- The issue of **securing the neutrality of the Speaker** should be resolved through following other **models/examples of parliamentary democracy**. For instance, in Britain, by convention, political parties do not field a candidate against the Speaker at the time of general elections. And the Speaker can continue in office, until deciding otherwise. By convention, the Speaker also gives up the membership of his/her political party.
 - In 1951 and 1953, the **Conference of Presiding Officers of legislatures** in India passed a resolution for the adoption of the British Convention.

Conclusion

Though, discussion is already underway among presiding officers of legislatures on how to secure the Speaker's "dignity" particularly in matters related to the defection of lawmakers, there is an **urgent need to take appropriate measures** like the one suggested by the apex court to uphold democratic traditions and rule of law.

A **watchful Parliament** forms the foundation of a well-functioning democracy and the presiding officers therefore, are the key to securing the effectiveness of this institution.

Related Information: Interpretation of various aspects of the Anti-defection law by the Supreme Courts

Interpretation of the phrase 'Voluntarily gives up his membership'	The phrase has a wider connotation than resignation. The Supreme Court has interpreted that in the absence of a formal resignation by the member, the giving up of membership can be inferred by his conduct. Members who have publicly expressed opposition to their party or support for another party should be deemed to have resigned.
Decision of the Presiding Officer is subject to judicial review	The law initially stated that the decision of the Presiding Officer is not subject to judicial review. This condition was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1992 , thereby allowing appeals against the Presiding Officer's decision in the High Court and Supreme Court. However, it held that there may not be any judicial intervention until the Presiding Officer gives his order .

Time limit within which the Presiding Officer has to decide on anti-defection cases	The law does not specify a time-period for the Presiding Officer to decide on a disqualification plea. Court has expressed concerns and had ruled that the High Court can direct Speakers to rule on disqualification petitions if they do not do this within reasonable time.
Anti-defection law affecting the ability of legislators to make decisions	Often the law has restricted a legislator from voting in line with his conscience, judgement and interests of his electorate. Political parties issue a direction to MPs on how to vote on most issues, irrespective of the nature of the issue. Several experts have suggested that the law should be valid only for those votes that determine the stability of the government (passage of the annual budget or no-confidence motions).

1.3. SC'S VERDICTS ON CURBING RESTRICTIONS

Why in news?

Recently, Supreme Court has delivered verdict on a bunch of petitions challenging the restrictions imposed on internet services and movement of people in Jammu and Kashmir.

Background

- Since the revocation of Article 370 on 5th August 2019, many parts of **Jammu and Kashmir have been under lockdown with no internet** and restrictions on movement.
- The **Central government justified the restrictions** based on the ground of state's volatile history, threat of an uprising, law and order, national security and possible misuse of internet for propagation of terror activities and incitement of general public.
- However, the petitioners have argued that **such blanket restrictions violate the fundamental right** and is unconstitutional.
- Also, restrictions of such a wide scale for a period spanning over three months can be invoked only by declaring an emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution. Such restrictions cannot be imposed through orders of District Magistrates under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.
 - A declaration of emergency under Article 352 will be subjected to periodic review of the Parliament, and that way possibilities of abuse could be checked.

Section 144 CrPC

- **Powers under the law:**
 - It is a **colonial era law that empowers a district magistrate, a sub-divisional magistrate or any other executive magistrate** empowered by the state government to issue orders to prevent and address urgent cases of apprehended danger or nuisance.
 - This **usually includes restrictions on movement, carrying arms and from assembling unlawfully**. It is generally believed that assembly of three or more people is prohibited under Section 144. However, it **can be used to restrict even a single individual**.
 - It has often been used to clamp down on telecommunication services and order Internet shutdowns. For instance, in UP and West Bengal Internet services were suspended by the District Magistrate In the wake of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act.
- **Duration of the order:** Order passed under Section 144 **cannot remain in force for more than two months from the date of the order**, unless the state government considers it necessary. Even then, the total period cannot extend to more than six months.

Supreme Court's observation

On Internet shutdown

- **Freedom of speech and expression through the medium of internet** is a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
- The restrictions on internet have to follow the **principles of proportionality under Article 19(2)**.
 - Doctrine of proportionality is a principle that is prominently used as a ground for judicial review in cases of administrative action.
 - The doctrine essentially signifies that the **punishment should not be disproportionate to the offence committed** or the nature and extent of the **State's interference with the exercise of a right** must be proportionate to the goal it seeks to achieve.
- **Freedom of trade and commerce through internet** is also a constitutionally protected right under Article 19(1)(g).
- **Suspension of internet for indefinite period not permissible**. It can only be for a reasonable duration and periodic review should be done. Government should publish all orders of prohibition to enable affected persons to challenge the same.

On Section 144 of CrPC:

- The power under Section 144, **cannot be used to suppress legitimate expression of opinion or grievance or exercise of any democratic rights**
- When Sec 144 is imposed for reasons of apprehended danger, that **danger must be an “emergency”**.
- The imposition of Sec 144 **must strike a balance between the rights of the individual and the concerns of the state.**
- **Powers under Sec 144 should be exercised in a reasonable and bona fide manner**, and the order must state material facts in order to enable judicial review.

Understanding the issues in depth

Internet shutdowns

- India **tops the list** of Internet shutdowns globally. According to Software Freedom Law Center’s tracker, there have been 381 shutdowns since 2012, 106 of which were in 2019.
- The ongoing **shutdown in Kashmir is the longest ever** in any democratic country.

- **Legislative provisions:**

- Suspension of Internet services are dealt with under the **Information Technology Act, 2000, the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973 and the Telegraph Act, 1885.**
- **Before 2017**, Internet suspension orders were issued under **Section 144 of the CrPC**. But, in 2017, the central government notified the **Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Service) Rules** under the Telegraph Act to govern suspension of Internet.
 - ✓ Despite the 2017 rules, the government has often used the broad powers under Section 144 CrPC.

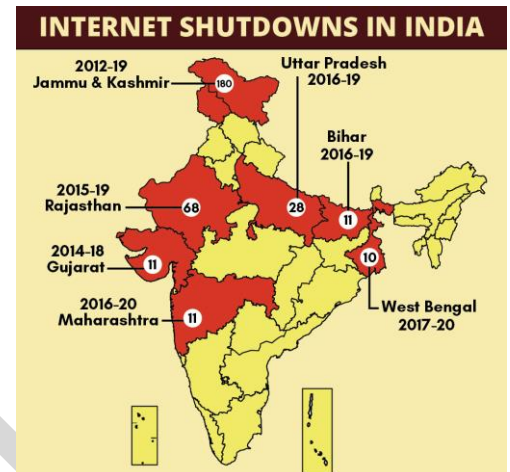
- **Economic cost:** India **lost over \$1.3 billion in internet shutdowns** across the country in 2019 — making it the **third-most economically affected country** after Iraq and Sudan.

- **Justifications for shutdowns:**

- The shutdown is **based on analysis of intelligence inputs**. This is a preventive measure used by the law & order administration as a **last resort to address mass protests, civil unrest, so as to ensure peace.**
- **In certain extreme situations** where rumours through WhatsApp and other social media start playing a disruptive role, it may become necessary to have internet shutdowns.

- **Arguments against:**

- Internet activists, law experts, and human rights agencies suggest that there is **no real evidence of Internet shutdown actually helping in preventing mass protests or civil unrest.**
- Internet shutdowns **make human rights a hostage to the whims of the executive:** the fundamental rights to speech, conduct business, access healthcare, express dissent, and movement of the people in a state, are compromised.
- Shutting the internet results in an information blackout that **can also create hysteria, panic and can result in even more discord.**



Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Service) Rules, 2017 (Suspension Rules)

- These Rules were **framed by ministry of communications and derive their powers from Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act**, which talks about interception of messages in the “interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India”.
- It **empowers the government to block transmission of messages** in case of a public emergency or for public safety in any part of the country.
- Any order suspending internet under the Rules, **can be only for a temporary duration and not for an indefinite period.**
- Directions to suspend the telecom services shall not be issued except by **Home Secretary of the country and a secretary of a state’s home department** and that order should be taken up by a review committee within five days.

UN Resolution on Internet shutdown

- In 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Council released a **non-binding resolution** condemning intentional disruption of internet access by governments.
- The resolution reaffirmed that “the same rights people have offline must also be protected online”.

Conclusion

- Expression through the Internet has gained contemporary relevance and is one of the major means of information diffusion. **Before completing blocking the Internet, it is essential to conduct a proportionality and necessity test.** It is crucial to consider whether the same objective can be achieved by a less intrusive and more effective solution such as deployment of the police force and running advisories on media.
- At the same time, **in the interest of transparency, government should document the reasons, time, alternatives considered, decision-making authorities and the rules** under which the shutdowns were imposed and release the documents for public scrutiny.

1.4. AADHAR REPORT

Why in news?

With Aadhaar entering its tenth year of existence a recent study covering **1,67,000 Indians by development consulting firm Dalberg**, - ‘**State of Aadhaar- A People’s Perspective’ report**, provide valuable lessons for countries on improving public services for the vulnerable.

Background

- Aadhaar is a verifiable **12-digit identification number** issued by the **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)** to the resident of India.
 - UIDAI, is a statutory authority established under the provisions of **Aadhaar Act 2016**, under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology.
- Aadhaar collects **only four pieces of personal information** – name, age, gender and address – along with biometric data.
- In addition, Aadhaar has created **new features such as virtual IDs** that help protect an individual’s privacy.
- An important objective of Aadhaar has been to improve the ability of the state to **provide efficient, transparent and targeted delivery of welfare services** to a large number of residents who depend on it.

About the report

- The State of Aadhaar initiative was started in 2016, to contribute to a data-driven discourse on Aadhaar.
- In the 2019 edition the initiative surveyed over 167,000 households spanning 28 states and union territories across India.
- The objective of the study is to help identify which aspects of Aadhaar are working and are not working, to what extent and for whom.

Key findings of the report

- **Getting Aadhaar- Enrolment and Updates:**
 - **Positives:** Aadhaar is India’s most ubiquitous form of ID today, which provided the **first identity document** for an estimated 65-70 million individuals. Some states have achieved enrolment levels higher than 99%. Assam and Meghalaya are exceptions with enrolment levels under 50%.
 - **Concerns:** A sizable minority of adults and children still do not have Aadhaar. Some of those enrolled in Aadhaar have errors in their ID, fingerprint authentication fails for a significant share of transactions.
- **Using Aadhaar:**
 - **Positives:** Aadhaar is becoming India’s default ID. Those who have Aadhaar use it regularly and across multiple services. 80% of respondents felt that Aadhaar had improved the **reliability of government-funded welfare services**.
 - **Concerns:** Still, marginalised groups, face Aadhaar-related exclusion from services. Moreover, nearly 34% of Indians worry about linking Aadhaar to too many services and fear losing access to a service because of it. **For example:** Around 0.8% of people experienced exclusion due to Aadhaar-related reasons from a key welfare service (PDS, MGNREGS, social pensions) which they had earlier received.
 - ✓ Similarly, not only a family member’s Aadhaar is required for most school enrolments, in some cases, Aadhaar affected children’s access to welfare. **For example:** An estimated 15 million children missed out on one or more mid-day meals because of difficulties with Aadhaar.
- **Perceptions, Satisfaction, and Trust:**
 - **Positives:** 90% of people trust that their data are safe in the Aadhaar system and 61% of welfare beneficiaries trust that Aadhaar prevents others from accessing their benefits.

Fact Findings

- 95% of adults have Aadhaar and 75% of children have Aadhaar.
- 8% of people do not have Aadhaar– or an estimated 102 million people.
- 80% of beneficiaries feel Aadhaar has made PDS rations, MGNREGS and social pensions more reliable.

- **Concerns:** However, a minority worries about the potential misuse of their Aadhaar. For example: 2% of people have experienced fraud that they see as being related to Aadhaar, diminishing their trust.
- **Variation of User Experience Across States:** Aadhaar usage varied across states by both frequency of use and number of services for which it is used. Aadhaar's performance is bound to be influenced by factors that relate to both implementation (e.g., number of enrolment centres) and local infrastructure (e.g., mobile data connectivity).

Way ahead

- Every decision to make Aadhaar **mandatory** for **service provision should be carefully considered** as making Aadhaar mandatory can lead to exclusion from welfare and other services.
- **Improvements in on-the-ground processes related to Aadhaar** should be done by designing efficient systems keeping the most vulnerable sections of society in mind. As more services are linked to Aadhaar, easy access as well as seamless updating and authentication will become only more critical.
- Different states implement Aadhaar in very distinct ways, which represents an **opportunity to innovate and learn from each other's successful practices**.

Therefore, Aadhaar needs to keep evolving as the people it serves and their needs keep changing, with the help of combined effort from governments, civil society and residents.

1.5. ENEMY PROPERTIES

Why in news?

The Centre announced the formation of committees and a group of ministers to sell enemy properties.

More on news

- A **Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by Union Home Minister** will monitor the disposal of over 9,400 enemy properties, which are likely to fetch about ₹1 lakh crore to the exchequer.
- Two other **high-level committees** will also be set up for disposal of immovable enemy properties.
 - **Inter-Ministerial Group** will be constituted for the disposal of enemy properties and it will be **co-chaired by the Union Home Secretary** and the **Secretary of the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM)**.
 - A **Core Group of Secretaries on Asset Monetisation (CGAM)** will be constituted under **chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary**.

Enemy Property

- When **nations go to war**, they often seize the properties in their countries of the citizens and corporations of the enemy country. Properties that are seized under these circumstances are referred to as '**alien properties**' or '**enemy properties**'.
 - The **idea behind seizing** these properties is that an enemy country should not be allowed to take advantage of its assets in the other country during war.
- During India-China war in 1962, and India – Pakistan war in 1965 and 1971, Central government took over properties of citizens of China and Pakistan in India **under the Defence of India Acts**.
 - The responsibility of the administration of enemy properties was handed over to the **Custodian of Enemy Property for India (CEPI)**, an office under the Central government.

Custodian of Enemy Property for India (CEPI)

- The Office of the CEPI was set up in the year 1939 to deal with enemy properties confiscated during World War II.
- The legal status to the office was given under Enemy Property Act, 1968.
- It works **under the aegis of Ministry of Home affairs, Freedom Fighters Division**, with its Head Office at New Delhi and three branch offices at Mumbai, Kolkata and Lucknow.
- The Custodian is a **quasi-judicial Authority** under the Enemy Property Act and a **Civil court** under the Civil Procedure Court, 1908.

Enemy Property Act, 1968

- The Defence of India Acts were temporary laws that ceased to operate after the wars ended. To administer the enemy property seized during the wars, the government enacted the **Enemy Property Act in 1968**.

- It **defined enemy property** as the property for the time being belonging to or held or managed on behalf of an enemy, an enemy subject or enemy firm.
- The Act **defined an ‘enemy’** as a country (and its citizens) that committed external aggression against India (i.e., Pakistan and China).
- It provided for the **continuous vesting of enemy property in the CEPI**.
- It laid down the powers of CEPI for management and preservation of enemy properties.
- The Enemy Property Act **gave enemy citizens certain rights** with respect to their properties vested in the Custodian. But the **ambiguity in their rights** and the powers of the Custodian to administer these properties **resulted in disputes**, some of which related to **inheritance rights** of the enemy property.

Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2017

- To further strengthen the control over enemy properties, Parliament passed the **Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2017. Its salient features are as follow-**
 - It makes the **CEPI the owner of enemy property** retrospectively from 1968. The Custodian, with prior approval of the central government, may dispose of, **whether by sale or otherwise**, enemy properties vested in him in accordance with the provisions of the Act.
 - ✓ However, Central Government may direct that disposal of enemy property shall be made by any other authority or Ministry or Department instead of Custodian.
 - It **voids the legal sales of enemy properties** undertaken by enemies since 1968. This means that a person who may have bought an enemy property in good faith when such sale and purchase was legal, now stands to lose the property.
 - It **prohibits Indian citizens** who are legal heirs of enemies from inheriting enemy property and brings them within the definition of ‘enemy’.
 - ✓ **The expanded definition** of the term “**enemy subject**”, and “**enemy firm**” include the **legal heir and successor** of an enemy, whether a citizen of India or a citizen of a country which is not an enemy; and the succeeding firm of an enemy firm, irrespective of the nationality of its members or partners.
 - It **prohibits civil courts** and other authorities from hearing certain disputes relating to enemy property.

Major issues regarding the 2017 amendments:

- The 1968 Act allowed transfer of enemy property from the enemy to other persons. The amendment Act declares all such transfers as void. This may be arbitrary and **in violation of Article 14** of the Constitution.
- Prohibiting civil courts from entertaining any disputes with regard to enemy property **limits judicial recourse** or access to courts available to aggrieved persons.
- It does not provide any alternative judicial remedy (e.g. tribunals).

Status of Enemy Properties

- **9406 immovable enemy properties** valued about Rs. 1 lakh crore, enemy shares worth about Rs.2927 crores and Gold/Ornaments valued about Rs. 0.37 crore have been vested in the CEPI.
- There are 9,280 such properties left behind by Pakistani nationals and 126 by Chinese nationals.
 - Of the total enemy properties left behind by Pakistani nationals, highest are in Uttar Pradesh (4,991).
 - The highest number of properties left by Chinese nationals is in Meghalaya (57).
- During 2018-19, approximately Rs. 780 crores worth of enemy shares were sold.

Significance of current step

- The decision will lead to **monetization of enemy shares** that had been lying dormant for decades since coming into force and the Enemy Property Act in 1968.
- Sale proceeds from this may be used for development and social welfare programmes.

1.6. REGULATING MINORITY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Why in news?

Recently, the Supreme Court has held that **state can regulate minority institutions in national interest**.

More on news

- The judgment came while hearing a petition challenging the validity of **West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act, 2008** which constituted a commission to appoint teachers in madrasas, recognised as minority institutions.

- While upholding the validity of the Act, SC reiterated that **regulation of minority institutions**, including in matter of appointment of teachers, is **permissible** if it is intended to **ensure excellence** in minority institution, without interfering with its minority status.
- The court referred to the **TMA Pai vs State of Karnataka 2002 case**, while deciding this case.

Constitutional Provisions regulating Minority Institutions

Article 30 of the Constitution deals with the Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

- Under **Article 30 (1)**, all minorities, whether based on religion or language, have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- **Article 30 (2)** prohibits the state in discriminating against such institutions in granting aid on the ground that it is under the management of minority.

Minority Educational Institutions (MEIs)

- The **National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) Act** defines MEI as a college or an educational institution established and administered by a minority or minorities.
- The Constitution of India does not define the term **minority**. The **NCMEI Act defines minority** means a community notified as such by the Central Government.
 - As per notification of the Government of India, there are **6 notified religious minority communities** - Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Parsis and Jain.
 - **No linguistic minority** has been notified by the Central Government till date. Thus, **linguistic minorities are outside the purview of the NCMEI**.
- **Eligibility criteria-**
 - Educational institution is **established and being administered** by the minority community.
 - If it is run by a trust/ registered society, **majority of members** must be from the minority community.
 - It has been established **for the benefit** of the minority community.
- Some states have their own guidelines for recognition and certification.
- Once conferred a status of minority educational institution, there is **no need for its renewal periodically**.

TMA Pai vs State of Karnataka 2002 case

- In this case, the Supreme Court held that the fundamental right under Article 30 (1) was neither absolute nor above the law.
- It laid down the following principles in its application-
 - A **regulation framed in the national interest** must necessarily apply to all institutions regardless of whether they are run by majority or minority as the essence of Article 30(1) is to ensure equal treatment between the majority and minority institutions.
 - ✓ However, Government **regulations cannot destroy** the minority character of the institution.
 - If an unfavourable treatment is given out to an educational institution established and administered by a minority, an objection can be raised.
 - But if **ensuring of excellence** in educational institutions is the underlying principle behind a regulatory regime and the mechanism of selection of teachers is so designed to achieve excellence in institutions, the matter may stand on a completely different footing.

NCMEI, a **quasi-judicial body**, regulates the certification of minority educational institutions all over India.

- Its Chairman should be who has been a Judge of the High Court and three members are to be nominated by Central Government.
- It has the **powers of a Civil Court**. It has both **original and appellate jurisdiction** in such matters, as laid down by the SC in **Joseph of Cluny v/s The State of West Bengal** case.
- Commission has **adjudicatory** functions and **recommendatory** powers.
- It **decides on disputes** regarding affiliation of a minority educational institution to a university.
- It has power to enquire, **suo motu**, into complaints regarding deprivation or violation of rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- It specifies **measures to promote and preserve the minority status** and character of institutions of their choice established by minorities.
- It can also **cancel the minority status** granted to institutions if they are found to have violated the conditions of the grant.

Issues of Linguistic minority institutions (LMIs)

- The **National Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities (NCLM)**, established under Article 350B of the Constitution has less power than the NCMEI.
- It can only **review safeguards** for the protection of linguistic minority rights and **make recommendations** to the parliament based on its findings.

Rights obtained by Minority Educational Institutions (MEIs)

- In respect of control over representatives, minority educational institutions have **substantially more prominent power** than other institutions. For example, in the selection of teacher and principals, the minority educational institution can have a choice advisory group which does exclude the university representatives.
- MEIs are **out of purview of reservation policy under Article 15**. The Bombay High Court came to the aid of MEIs and held that they need not reserve seats for backward class students.
- In case of admission of the student, minority educational institutions can have a **reservation of up to 50 percent for the student of their own community**.
- **Article 30** provides that in case of compulsory takeover of property by state, due compensation must be provided to institution.
- **Section 12 of Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009**, which mandates **25% reservation** for children belonging to economically weaker section (EWS), is also **not applicable** on MEI. However, the SC has held that all schools run by minority institutions will have to grant free admissions to poor children on 25% on their seats, under the Right to Education (RTE) act.
- They can also have **separate fee structure** but not allowed to charge capitation fee.

Significance of the Judgement

- **Curb maladministration**- Many private unaided minority institutions are in a mess and suffering from mismanagement, corruption etc. For e.g. selling minority seats to non-minority candidates.
- **Balance twin objectives**- i.e. one of excellence in education and other being the preservation of the minorities' right to run their educational institutions.
 - For this, SC has distinguished education divided into two categories- **secular education** and **education directly aimed at preservation of characteristics of a religious or linguistic minority**.
 - ✓ The former can be regulated by the state to promote excellence and the latter upholds the fundamental right.

1.7. EWS QUOTA IN STATES

Why in news?

The **central government** recently told the **Supreme Court** that **state governments** were free to decide whether to implement the **10% reservation** for the **economically backward** in jobs and admissions.

More about News

- While responding to a PIL for the implementation of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quota in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, **Centre submitted an affidavit in the Supreme Court stating that:**
 - **Centre has no role in deciding the reservation** policy of a state government.
 - **State governments were free to decide whether to implement the 10% quota for EWS** in state government jobs and admissions to state government educational institutions.
- The **103rd Constitution Amendment Act 2019** inserted Article 15 (6) and Article 16 (6) in the Constitution to allow reservation for the EWS among the general category.
 - It was enacted to **promote the welfare of the poor not covered by the 50% reservation policy** for the SC/ST and the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes.
 - Article 15 has been amended to enable the government to take **special measures** for the advancement of **“economically weaker sections”** (EWS).
 - Up to 10% of seats may be reserved for such sections for admission in educational institutions. Such reservation **will not apply to minority educational institutions**.
 - The newly added **Article 16(6)** permits the government to reserve up to **10% of all posts** for the **“economically weaker sections”** of citizens.
 - This reservation of up to 10% for the EWS will be in addition to the existing reservation cap of 50% reservation for SC, ST and OBCs.
 - The central government will notify the **“economically weaker sections”** of citizens on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage.

1.8. ALL INDIA JUDICIAL SERVICES

Why in news?

Recently, the **proposal of the All India Judicial Services (AIJS)**, has been revisited by the legal think tank Vidhi.

Background

- The idea of creating an All India Judicial Services (AIJS) was first introduced by the **14th Report of the Law Commission in 1958**.
- The **First National Judicial Pay Commission (Justice Jagannath Shetty Commission)** in **1996**, also recommended it at the district judge-level.
- **After the Swaran Singh Committee's recommendations in 1976, Article 312** of the Constitution (provides for creation all-India services), was amended by the Constitution **42nd Amendment Act, 1976**, to include an all-India judicial service.
- Currently, the appointments of District Judges and Subordinate Judiciary are done **by the respective State governments**.

About AIJS

- It aims at **creating a centralized cadre of District Judges** who will be recruited centrally through an all-India examination and allocated to each State along the lines of the All India Services (AIS).
- It has been pitched **as a solution to judicial vacancies**, lack of representation for the marginalised and the failure to attract the best talent.

Why is the need for All India Judicial Services?

- **To fill up vacancies:** It would help fill the approximately 5,000 vacancies across the District and Subordinate Judiciary in India, as **recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice** in 2013.
- **To enrich the quality of justice:** As the judicial academies give proper training and High Courts provide the freedom within identified parameters to innovate at work, district judges' efficiency will increase considerably and this **would reduce appeals** arising from their decisions.
- **Address Lacunas of state mechanism:** The existing system under which High Courts or State Public Service Commissions are recruiting judges to the district judiciary is full of loopholes, delays and inefficiency.
 - Moreover, in some cases, even those limited selections are challenged in unending litigation, denying judiciary the services of meritorious candidates.
- **To attract best talent:** This would help incentivize better talent to join the District and Subordinate Judiciary through transparent and efficient method of recruitment. For motivated young men and women, job satisfaction and personal reputation are more important and they are less likely to become corrupt.
- **Cooperative federalism:** A unified judiciary, with uniform laws and an all-India judiciary, helps to institutionalise the idea of co-operative federalism.
- **Better Bar-Bench relation:** Due to better quality of judges, cordial relationship between Lawyers and Judges are likely to change for the better, which is a desirable reform in the present circumstances.

Issues

- **Fear of centralization and federalism debate:** Creation of an AIJS will necessarily mean **transferring the recruitment and appointment powers of district judges**, from the State Governments (**Article 233**), to a centralized system, as exists for other AIS.
 - According to Article 233, the appointments of persons to the post of District Judges shall be made by the Governor of the State in consultation with the High Court exercising jurisdiction over such State.
- **Problem of language:** Up to the court of District and Sessions Judge, the proceedings are conducted and the judgments are written in the local language.
 - The judges recruited through AIJS process, being not familiar with the language/customs of the state, and deciding cases may **affect the legitimacy of the judicial system** in the eyes of local population and reduce its efficiency.

Related Information

- As per, **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908** and **Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973** the proceedings of civil and criminal courts are to be conducted in a language prescribed by the State Government.
- **Only High Courts** are required to conduct their proceedings in English, although some High Court have a special exemption and conduct their proceedings in Hindi.

- **Independence of judiciary:** Currently, the independence of District Judges, is guaranteed by the fact that the **High Court play a significant role in the appointment, transfer and removal of District Judges**. With the setting up of the AIJS, this control would be impaired or weakened and thereby independence of the judiciary would suffer further erosion.
 - There are also apprehensions that Indian Judicial Service will substantially reduce or impair the promotional avenues of the members of the subordinate State Judicial Service.
- **Fear over reservation & examination:** Many of the communities who currently benefit from the State quotas, may oppose the creation of AIJS. This is because the communities recognised as Other Backward Classes (OBC) by State governments may or may not be classified as OBCs by the Central government.
 - While AIJS has been pitched as a solution to lack of representation for the marginalised on the Bench, many States are already reserving posts **for marginalised communities and women**.
 - A “national exam” risks shutting out those from less privileged backgrounds from being able to enter the judicial services.
- **Local laws:** It may end up not taking into account local laws, practices and customs which vary widely across States, vastly increasing the costs of training for judges selected through the mechanism.

Way Forward

- There is need to ensure that service is **insulated from the influence of both the Central Government and State Government**, right from the process of appointment to the process of removal.
 - 116th report of the Law Commission recommends that appointments, postings and promotions to the AIJS be made by a **proposed National Judicial Service Commission consisting of retired and sitting judges of the Supreme Courts**, members of the bar and legal academics.
- Any change in the judicial set up of the country **must be concurred in by the States** and the High Courts as also members of the legal fraternity.
- It may be more prudent to investigate **the reasons and causes for the large number of vacancies in the poorly performing States**.
- **Intensive training can imparted** to the recruits for picking up one more language would certainly provide adequate and effective knowledge of the local language of the State to which he or she is allocated.

1.9. FAST TRACK SPECIAL COURTS

Why in news?

Ministry of Law and Justice has recently started a scheme for setting up **1023 Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)** for **rape and POSCO act cases**, as a part of **National Mission for Safety of Women (NMSW)**.

More about Scheme

- There are **389 districts** in the country where the number of pending cases under **POCSO Act** exceeds 100. Under the recent scheme, each of these districts will have one exclusive POCSO court (FTSC) which will **be set up for one year**.
- **Financing of the Scheme** will be on the pattern of Centrally Sponsored Schemes: 60% of the share is contributed by Central Government and 40% by State & UT governments.
- To bring out more stringent provisions and expeditious trial and disposal of Rape and POSCO Act cases, India enacted the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018.
 - Hence, to assist the implementation of the 2018 act, a key intervention is setting up **specific courts for time bound disposal of Rape and POCSO Act cases**.
- These 1023 FTSCs will dispose off 1,66,882 cases of Rape and POCSO Act, that are pending trial in various courts.

Evolution of Fast track special courts

- In 2000, **11th Finance Commission** recommended a scheme for creation of 1734 Fast Track Courts (FTCs) for disposal of **long pending cases in lower courts**, particularly cases of **under trials**.
- An average of 5 FTCs were to be established for five years (2000-05), in each district by the state governments in consultation with the respective High Courts.

- The **judges** for these FTCs were **appointed** on an **ad hoc basis**. The High Courts selected them from amongst retired HC judges, eligible judicial officers and members of the Bar.
- By 2005, only 1562 were functional by 2005. The scheme was continued till 2010-11 under Supreme Court's direction. But by the end of 2011, only 1192 FTCs were functional.
- Later, the Central government **discontinued** the scheme, but the **state governments** could establish FTCs from their own funds.
- However, if they decide to continue then the FTCs have to be made a **permanent feature**. States such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala chose to do so.
- After the Delhi gang rape case of 2012, the Verma Committee Report and public sentiment favoured speedy justice, and states were requested to set up **fast track special courts** for trying cases of sexual assault.

Pendency of cases in India

- As of August 2019, there are over 3.5 crore cases pending across the Supreme Court, the High Courts, and the subordinate courts.
- Of these, subordinate courts account for over 87.3% pendency of cases, followed by 12.5% pendency before the 24 High Courts.
- As of 2017, High Courts have 403 vacancies against a sanctioned strength of 1,079 judges, and subordinate courts have 5,676 vacancies against a sanctioned strength of 22,704 judges.
- Between 2006 and 2017, the number of vacancies in the High Courts has increased from 16% to 37%, and in the subordinate courts from 19% to 25%.

Issues with FTSCs

- **Systemic issues: Inadequate staff and IT infrastructure**, delay in getting reports from the **understaffed forensic science laboratories**, **lack of victim support services** and **victim/witness protection measures**, frivolous adjournments are some of the issues.
 - Judges, prosecutors and other court personnel are not trained for dealing with sexual offences.
 - This also leads to very high incidence of **complainants** and **witnesses** turning **hostile**.
- **Inadequate number of Judges**: Mostly, fresh appointments are not done. When states hire from the current pool of judges, it only increases the workload of the remaining judges.
 - Moreover, data from the Supreme Court's 'Court News' shows that even when the number of working judges increased in Karnataka, pendency did not reduce. Similar trends were found in Maharashtra, Kerala, Delhi and West Bengal.
- **No legislative clarity**: There is no legislative foundation which sets out the purpose of these courts, or specific fast track mode of functioning and any special time bound procedures to be followed.
 - They are technically special courts rather than fast track courts.
- **Lack of feedback and updation**: There has been no evolution in the conception of fast track courts since they were first established more than a decade ago.

Way Forward

- **Apart from increasing number of judges, equal attention** must be paid to both the metropolitan and far-flung non-metropolitan areas.
- **Critical systemic issues** such as inadequate court staff and improper infrastructure, which affect the day-to-day functioning of the FTCs, must be **comprehensively addressed**.
- Once established, special courts should be subject to **periodic monitoring and evaluation**, to assess their performance and effectiveness.
- **Judicial officers and prosecutors** should be selected based on their attitude, knowledge and skills and given special sensitization **training**.
- Mechanisms for collaboration with other court agencies and non-government organisations should be developed.
- **Comprehensive legislation** should provide for **victim support services**, including interpreters, social workers and other services to protect victims, enable them to testify in safety and reduce the trauma they might experience.

2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1. NEW AND EMERGING STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGIES DIVISION

Why in News?

Recently, Ministry of External Affairs has announced the setting up of a new division on **New and Emerging Strategic Technologies (NEST)**.

About NEST

- It will act as the **nodal division** within the ministry for issues pertaining to new and emerging technologies.
- **Objective:**
 - **Assessing foreign policy and international legal implications** of emerging technology and technology-based resources.
 - **Facilitating negotiations** to safeguard Indian interests at multilateral forum like the United Nations or the G20.
 - **Creation of HR capacity** within the ministry for technological diplomacy work.
 - **Collaboration** with foreign partners in the field of 5G and artificial intelligence.

Emerging Technologies

- It commonly refers to technologies that are currently developing, or that are expected to be available within the next five to ten years, and is usually reserved for technologies that are creating, or are expected to create, significant social or economic effects.
- It includes technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, natural language processing, 3D printing, blockchain, robotic process automation and Internet of Things.

Facets of Emerging Technology in Foreign Relations

- **Digital diplomacy:** It refers to the broader use of technology, particularly **the internet and other ICT-based innovations, in the conduct of diplomacy**. Digital measures have roles in negotiations, policy processes, and crisis managements that are all attached to diplomatic activities.
 - For example, despite experiencing an outbreak of Zika virus in 2015 and 2016, the government of Brazil was able to convince the international society by using social media on their preparedness for the 2016 Olympics and World Cup.
- **Technology and the Balance of Power:** Emerging technologies primarily **shape the balance of power through military and economic means**. Technologies can directly influence countries' abilities to fight and win wars. They can also indirectly affect the balance of power by impacting a country's economic power.
- **Security Threats:** Use of emerging technologies by **non-state actors** like terrorist organizations for recruitment purposes, financial mobilization, illegal surveillance etc is a cause for concern.
- **Science diplomacy:** Diplomacy for science means making use of diplomacy to gain benefits in science and technology - bilaterally as well as multilaterally and globally.
 - Increasingly, global challenges such as weapons of mass destruction, climate change, cyber security, outer space, etc. all require scientific inputs in order to understand and deal with them. These challenges are trans-border and require application of Science and Technology in order to resolve them in addition to normal diplomatic efforts.
- **Access to Technology:** The **gap between "haves" and "have-nots"** can prove to be a cause of conflict in the future. Poor access to these technologies may create new economic and military asymmetry.
- **Soft Power:** Sharing technologies for increasing the living choices of the people as well as enhancing social and public good offers an enormous advantage in foreign policy.
- **Foreign Interference in Internal matters: Opinion manipulations** using Big Data and Artificial Intelligence pose a big threat to democracies across the world.
 - Alleged role of Cambridge Analytica in the Indian election and alleged Russian infiltration in the 2016 US are the evidence of it.

Challenges for India

- **Lack of technical delegates:** India lacks an effective recruitment and training mechanism for hiring experts or training existing diplomats in the field of technological diplomacy.
- **Low bargaining power:** India's share in high technology products in the global market is relatively low, and its import of high technology products is increasing. This could affect its capability to develop soft power in the field.

- **Lack of existing bilateral agreements** related to technology transfer, IT sector etc. to strengthen global position of India in the field of emerging technology.
- **Policy uncertainty and structural challenges:** India faces varied issues like multiple regulators, lack of coordination among departments, absence of coherent and comprehensive domestic policy etc which can adversely affect India's negotiating power on International platforms.
- **Aligning India's domestic interests with foreign policy:** While India is expected to benefit substantially with emergence of new technologies in the fields of governance, defense, research etc, issues like job loss via automation, technological monopoly of global companies etc need to be acknowledged.
- **Political sanctions and Intellectual Property regimes restricting the sharing of technology:** It would restrict the flow of information needed for collaborating on International science and technology projects.

Conclusion

Technology is seen as a driver for both power and legitimacy in the areas of foreign affairs and diplomacy. Therefore, it is important for developing countries to be adequately prepared to tackle these emerging technologies and protect their interests.

- India should **collaborate with foreign partners** for research and development of the future technologies.
- A **strong legal framework** should be developed to minimize the uncertainties of emerging technologies poses.
- It should **state its concerns at global platform** regarding the risk of these technologies.
- The **policy of non-proliferation** of harmful military technologies should be adhered.
- There is a need of **creating a pool of skillful diplomats** specializing in Digital Diplomacy.

2.2. SOUTH CHINA SEA

Why in news?

China has reportedly deployed an airship near South China Sea (SCS) to monitor and control military activity in the area by other countries, especially the United States.

Importance of South China Sea

- **Strategic Location:** It is a key commercial thoroughfare connecting Asia with Europe and Africa.
- One third of global shipping, or a total of US\$3.37 trillion of international trade, passes through the South China Sea.
 - It is estimated that around 80 percent of Beijing's imports of oil reach the country through the South China Sea after passing the Strait of Malacca.
 - Up to 97% of India's total International trade volume is sea borne, half of which passes through the strait of Malacca. In addition, ASEAN constitutes one of India's largest trade partners. Any instability in the SCS would adversely affect the shipping lanes and have a knock-on effect on India's economy.
- **Natural Resource:** The sea is believed to contain major reserves of natural resources, such as natural gas and oil.
- **Fisheries:** It accounts for 10% of the world's fisheries, making it a key source of food for hundreds of millions of people.



Issues with South China Sea

- **Territorial conflict:** Philippines, Vietnam, China, Brunei, Taiwan and Malaysia hold different, sometimes overlapping, territorial claims over the sea, based on various accounts of history and geography.

- China claims more than 80 per cent. China's "nine-dash line" is a geographical marker used to assert its claim. It stretches as far as 2,000km from the Chinese mainland, reaching waters close to Indonesia and Malaysia.
- China insists Chinese fishermen are free to conduct activities in their "traditional fishing ground," which partly overlaps with Indonesia's EEZ around the Natuna island group.
- Vietnam claims sovereignty over the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands.
- Philippines asserts ownership of the Spratly archipelago and the Scarborough Shoal
- Brunei and Malaysia have claimed sovereignty over southern parts of the sea and some of Spratly Islands.
- **Violation of International rules:** In 2016, China rejected UNCLOS Arbitral Tribunal ruling.
 - Tribunal said that China cannot claim historic rights to resources in the waters within a "nine-dash line" encompassing much of the South China Sea if these waters are within the exclusive economic zone, or EEZ, of other coastal states.
 - Arbitration was initiated by the Philippines and considered the legality of China's Nine-Dash Line, Chinese island construction within the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone, and resource exploitation in disputed waters, among other issues.
- **Balance of Power:** The SCS borders three U.S. treaty allies: Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines. In addition, SCS borders Southeast Asian nations that are current, emerging, or potential U.S. partner countries, such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia. China growing presence in SCS has **visibly challenged the international system** and US hegemony in the region.
- **Militarisation of South China Sea:** Both China and US have escalated their military presence in SCS. These developments have provoked apprehensions among both littorals as well as countries external to the region, as all of them have an interest in ensuring that commercial and military access across the Pacific remains unimpeded.

United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- It is an international treaty which was adopted and signed in 1982.
- It lays down a comprehensive regime of law and order in the world's oceans and seas establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources.
- The Convention has created three new institutions:
 - International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea,
 - International Seabed Authority,
 - Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.
- It has more than 160 member parties, including China and India.
 - US has still not sanctioned (ratified) the law.

Maritime Zone and their Entitlements

Maritime zone	Extension seaward from baselines	Entitlements
Internal Water (ie historical bays)	Located landward side of baseline	Full sovereign authority
Territorial Water	12 nm	Set laws, regulate use, exploit resources, police zone. Foreign vessels permitted 'innocent passage'
Contiguous Zone	24 nm (overlaps territorial sea)	Enforce laws on pollution, smuggling, taxation, customs and immigration.
Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)	200 nm	Rights over all natural resources in the water column and seabed (ie fishing). Other states have rights of navigation, overflight, and the submarine pipes and cables
Continental Shelf	Up to 350 nm	Exploit resources in the seabed and subsoil (ie oil)

Global Response

- Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been working with China on an official **code of conduct to avoid clashes in the disputed waters**. A binding agreement has been discussed for years to little avail but in August 2018 it was revealed all the parties had agreed on a single draft negotiating text.
 - Except for China, the other claimants in the South China Sea (Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam) are members of the ASEAN
- The United States has stepped up its military activity and naval presence in the region in recent years, including **freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs)**.
- India has favoured inclusivity and plurality. Institutions and orders need to be "consultative and non-prescriptive, respectful of the region's preference for consensus-based approaches.

Freedom of Navigation Operations

- Freedom of Navigation Operations are operations by U.S. naval and air forces that reinforce internationally-recognized rights and freedoms by challenging excessive maritime claims.
- The particulars of each operation are determined by the excessive maritime claim that is being protested.

Way forward

- The **real challenge** is in judging China's legitimate interests, how far they must be accommodated, and where the line must be drawn. This would prove an arduous task as Beijing will likely reject assessments of its interests.
- A more constructive approach to making China comply is to **put in place deterrence measures while providing sufficient encouragement** so that it eventually recognises the framework of international law and order.
- One way of achieving this is **through stronger and more dynamic institutional mechanisms**. More importantly, there should be efforts towards ascertaining areas of common interests which offer scope for China to contribute constructively in order to draw it into the global rules-based order and leverage it in a beneficial role.

2.3. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Why in news?

US President Donald Trump unveiled his Middle East peace plan, **Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People** aimed at solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

About Israel-Palestine conflict

- In 1917, during World War I, the British captured Palestine from the Ottoman Empire after the **Sykes-Picot Agreement** with France.
- Later in the **Balfour Declaration**, Britain pledged establishment of Palestine as national home for Jews.
- During World War II, over 3 lakh Jews migrated & resettled in Palestine and demanded a new country. This led to fight to fight between Arabs and Jews i.e. Israel Palestine conflict.
- **In 1947 the United Nations voted to split the Palestine between Arabs and Jews.**
 - The Jewish residents accepted the agreement and declared independence of Israel in 1948 while Arabs rejected the agreement.
 - Consequently, the Arab states of **Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria** declared war on Israel.
- **Israel** won the war and expanded its territory reducing Palestine to just Gaza strip and West bank & forcing lakhs of Palestinians to flee from Israel.
- It was the beginning of this Palestine refugee crisis which ultimately led to the creation of **PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)** in 1964.
- In June, 1967 **Six day war** was fought between Israel and neighboring Arab countries. During this, Israel captured Gaza strip, Sinai peninsula from Egypt, West bank from Jordan and Golan heights from Syria.
- **UN Security Council then adopted a resolution** for 'Land for peace' and it mandated that Israel should return the captured areas back to the defeated nations.
- In the light of Israel's reluctance to return the captured territories, another Arab-Israeli war erupted in 1973 (**Yom Kippur war**) in which Israel suffered some setbacks.

India's stance on Israel Palestine conflict

- India **believes in the 2-state solution** and has maintained a balanced approach. It supports the establishment of a sovereign independent and a viable state of Palestine along with maintaining India's growing relationship with Israel.

What makes Jerusalem so important?

- Jerusalem is situated on the border between Israel and the West Bank. It is **home to some of the holiest sites in both Judaism and Islam**, and so both Israel and Palestine want to make it their capital.
- It is an **Important pilgrimage for Christians** as well whose holiest **Church of Sepulcher** is located here.
 - The Church contains two important sites, one where Jesus was crucified and the other being Jesus' empty tomb where he said to have been buried and resurrected.
- It also **hosts the third holiest site of Islam, the dome of the rock**, which is one of the oldest extant works of Islamic architecture.
 - It is believed that Prophet Mohamad's night journey to the heaven started from the rock at the center of the structure.
- **The western wall or the Buraq wall** is the ancient limestone wall in this city. It is considered holy due to its connection to the temple mount.
 - **Israeli Jews weren't allowed to pray in the temple mount area while Jordan controlled it.** Because of the temple mount entry restrictions, the wall is the holiest place where the Jews are permitted to pray.

- This started the way for the subsequent peace process.
- In 1978, Israel and Egypt signed **Camp David Accord** to establish peace in the region and accordingly Israel returned Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in 1982. This however failed to bring about peace and stability in the region.
- In 1987, Hamas (Islamic Militant group) for the liberation of Palestine through Jihad came into existence. It refused to recognize Israel as a country
- In 1993, with the mediation of US and Russia, PLO signs **OSLO Accord** with Israel that provides for Palestinian interim self govt to rule over West bank and Gaza strip however Israel backtrack and refused to consider Palestine a free country .
- In 2011 Palestine launched a diplomatic campaign to gain membership in the UN for the state of Palestine. Same year, it was **admitted in UNESCO as a full member**, however the Palestinian struggle for independent nation is still going on.



Global response

- **Palestine:** Immediately rejected the plan.
- **Israel:** Praised the plan and called it a “realistic path to a durable peace”.
- **India:** Reaffirmed its call for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and asked both sides to resolve all issues through direct negotiations.

What the Trump’s Peace Plan suggested?

- **Status of Jerusalem:** Jerusalem will be the sovereign capital of Israel. Capital of Palestine should be in the section of East Jerusalem located in all areas east and north of the existing security barrier, could be named Al Quds or another name as determined by the State of Palestine.
- **Conceptual map:** Map delineates what the potential Israeli and Palestinian state borders would be. The plan gives the Israelis and Palestinians four years to accept these borders.
- **Economic package:** \$50 billion investment fund to boost the Palestinian and neighbouring Arab state economies. The United States will work with the Palestinian Authority to identify economic projects for Al Quds and incorporate such projects into Peace to Prosperity.
- **Security:** Upon signing the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Agreement, the State of Israel will maintain overriding security responsibility for the State of Palestine, with the aspiration that the Palestinians will be responsible for as much of their internal security as possible, subject to the provisions of this Vision. The United States will help support the State of Palestine to meet and maintain the Security Criteria
- **Port Facilities:** The State of Israel will allow the State of Palestine to use and manage earmarked facilities at both the Haifa and Ashdod ports
- **Dismantling of Hamas:** Hamas currently governs Gaza, so removing it would significantly change the coastal strip.

2.4. ROHINGYA ISSUE IN ICJ

Why in news?

Recently, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that **Myanmar must take effective measures to protect its Rohingya Muslims**, including protecting evidence relating to allegations of genocide.

About the ruling

- ICJ ruled that it has the **right and the preliminary jurisdiction to hear a case seeking emergency measures** to prevent Myanmar from committing genocide against its Rohingya minority.

About ICJ

- It is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN).
- It settles disputes between states and gives advisory opinions on international legal issues referred to it by the UN.
- The ICJ is the **successor of the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ)**, which was established by the League of Nations in 1920.
- The ICJ comprises a **panel of 15 judges** elected by the General Assembly and Security Council for **nine-year terms**.
- The court is seated in the **Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands**.

- It ordered Myanmar to take all measures in its power **to prevent genocide against the Rohingya**.
- Along with giving various provisional orders, the court also ordered that **Myanmar shall submit a report to the ICJ** on all measures taken to give effect to the order within four months, and thereafter every six months, until a final decision is passed.

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

- Unanimously adopted by the **United Nations General Assembly** in 1948, the Convention entered into force in 1951.
- 152 states have ratified or acceded to the treaty, most recently **Mauritius in 2019**.
- It **defines genocide** in legal terms as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
 - Killing members of the group;
 - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
 - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
 - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
 - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
- **India ratified the treaty in 1959.**

Background

- In November 2019, the **Republic of the Gambia** moved the ICJ against Myanmar over alleged violations of the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**.
 - Both **Gambia and Myanmar are parties to the Genocide Convention** that allows a party to move the ICJ for violations of the convention under article 9 of the Convention.
 - Gambia was backed by the **57-member Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**.
- Myanmar's leader **Aung San Suu Kyi** in response stated that the army may have used "disproportionate force" against some terrorist groups, however, there is no proof the army was trying to wipe out the community.

Implications of the ICJ Ruling

- The ICJ's ruling meant that a global legal body for the **first time officially recognized the real threat of abuse against the Rohingya**.
- Although a ruling against Myanmar dents its image internationally, the order of provisional measures **does not translate into a finding against Myanmar**. The court is **not** required to ascertain whether Myanmar violated the Genocide Convention.
- **Provisional measures** are essentially a restraining order against a state when a case is pending in the court. Though, the ruling of the court is binding on Myanmar, **and cannot be appealed, there are no means available to the court to enforce it.**

About the Rohingya crisis

- Described by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as "**one of the most discriminated people in the world**", the Rohingya are one of **Myanmar's many ethnic minorities**.
- Rohingya Muslims represent the **largest percentage of Muslims in Myanmar**, with the majority living in the coastal **Rakhine state**.
- **Myanmar Nationality Law 1982** denied citizenship to Rohingya population, making them the **largest stateless population** in the world.
- It does not recognise the community as its citizens and considers them "**illegal immigrants**" from **Bangladesh**.
- An estimated 7.3 lakh Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries, since 2017 when the Myanmar military acted against Rohingya villages.
- In August 2019, the UN said the army's action was carried out with "**genocidal intent**" and has described the violence against them as a "**textbook example of ethnic cleansing**."
- Myanmar has **stoutly denied all allegations of genocide**, mass rape, killings and arson against its army and declared that the soldiers carried out **legitimate counterterrorism operations**.

Conclusion

Proving genocide has been difficult because of the high bar set by its **'intent requirement' clause**— that is showing the genocidal acts were carried out with the specific intent to eliminate a people on the basis of their ethnicity.

So far, only three cases of genocide worldwide have been recognised since World War II: **Cambodia (the late 1970s), Rwanda (1994), and Srebrenica, Bosnia (1995)**. Thus, the present ruling of ICJ is a significant step in Rohingya issue.

2.5. IRAN-USA STANDOFF

Why in news?

Recently, there was a major escalation in tensions between the US and Iran after the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani by US military force.

More in News

- In an air raid at Iraq's airport in Baghdad, the US recently struck and killed Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force.
 - US alleged that General Soleimani was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region.
- Killing has been seen as direct attack against Iran. Iran vowed harsh retaliation and launched a series of missile attacks on two Iraqi bases housing US troops.
- Iran also recently abandoned nuclear deal limits prescribed under **Joint Comprehensive plan of Action (JCPOA)**.

- **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**, also called Pasdaran, is a branch of the Iranian armed forces, independent of Iran's regular army.
- It is tasked with preserving the Islamic Republic of Iran and the ideals of the 1979 revolution.
- The IRGC is Iran's primary instrument for exporting the ideology of the Islamic Revolution worldwide. It is rigidly loyal to Iran's clerical elite.
- **Quds Force is a wing of IRGC** which is responsible primarily for its foreign operations.

Background

- U.S.-Iran relations have been mostly adversarial since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. U.S. officials and official reports consistently identify Iran's support for militant armed factions in the West Asia region a significant threat to U.S. interests and allies.
- Attempting to constrain Iran's nuclear program took precedence in U.S. policy after 2002 as that program advanced.
- In 2015 an agreement, Joint Comprehensive plan of Action (JCPOA) or Iran nuclear deal, was reached between Iran and the P5+1 group — U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China and Germany — on Tehran's nuclear programme.
 - The JCPOA was designed to stop Iran from producing its own nuclear weapons, and set up a framework limiting the amount and degree to which Iran was allowed to enrich uranium.
- However, in 2018 USA unilaterally announced to decertify the nuclear deal on account of non-compliance by Iran and announced two rounds of economic sanction on it.
- In mid-2019, Iranian Forces shot down US military drone in response to increasing presence of American troops in the region.

Global Implications

- **Threat of emergence of new proxy wars** and escalation of ongoing conflicts which could further destabilize the already vulnerable region.
- **Wide-ranging implications on economy:** A lasting conflict could result in **broad economic and financial shocks** that could significantly worsen operating and financing conditions of the region.



- **Effect on global oil trade via Strait of Hormuz:** Roughly a third of the world's oil tanker traffic travels through the strait. Any blockade by Iran could quickly lead to a 30% drop in daily global oil exports resulting in a steep rise in Oil prices.
- **Disturbance in Rules based world order:** The US has set an alarming precedence of killing government officials on foreign soil.

Implications on India

- **Volatility in Oil prices and Its impact on India's economy:** Until May 2019, India was the **second largest buyer** of crude oil from Iran. Any disruption in supply or price hike could deplete our country's foreign reserves. The embargo by USA has also restricted India from buying oil from Iran.
- **Effect on India's Diaspora in Iran and the middle east:** In case of a fully-fledged war the safety and security of vast Diaspora in the Gulf can be at stake.
- **Remittance:** More than 50% of total remittance received by India last year came from the gulf region. Disturbance in the region would lead to decline in such remittances.
- **Trade:** India's trade is heavily reliant on the **Strait of Hormuz** and its blockade would adversely affect trade. Also, status of Chabahar Port may also come in question.
- **Security:** The US has ordered resumption of military training to Pakistan, which it had suspended in 2018 after accusing it of not doing enough to counter terrorist groups, as part of its wider West Asia strategy. This could impact overall security of the region as several terrorist outfits may become active in the region.

Conclusion

Tensions between the United States and Iran have been occurring for decades. Thus, a breakthrough from the vicious cycle of US-Iran hostility would require statesmanship in both the countries with the vision to break the stalemate.



फाउंडेशन कोर्स सामान्य अध्ययन प्रारंभिक एवं मुख्य परीक्षा 2021

इनोवेटिव क्लासरूम प्रोग्राम

- प्रारंभिक परीक्षा, मुख्य परीक्षा और निबंध के लिए महत्वपूर्ण सभी टॉपिक का विस्तृत कवरेज
- मौलिक अवधारणाओं की समझ के विकास एवं विश्लेषणात्मक क्षमता निर्माण पर विशेष ध्यान
- एनीमेशन, पॉवर प्वाइंट, वीडियो जैसी तकनीकी सुविधाओं का प्रयोग
- अंतर - विषयक समझ विकसित करने का प्रयास
- योजनाबद्ध तैयारी हेतु करंट ओरिएंटेड अप्रोच
- नियमित क्लास टेस्ट एवं व्यक्तिगत मूल्यांकन
- सीसैट कक्षाएं
- PT 365 कक्षाएं
- MAINS 365 कक्षाएं
- PT टेस्ट सीरीज
- मुख्य परीक्षा टेस्ट सीरीज
- निबंध टेस्ट सीरीज
- सीसैट टेस्ट सीरीज
- निबंध लेखन - शैली की कक्षाएं
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3. ECONOMY

3.1. REPORT OF THE 15TH FINANCE COMMISSION FOR FY 2020-21

Why in news?

Recently, the Fifteenth Finance Commission submitted its report with recommendations for the financial year 2020-21.

More on the news

- The commission was constituted by the President of India under Article 280 of the Constitution to make recommendations for a period of five years commencing 1st April 2020.
- The final report of the Commission with recommendations for the 2021-26 period will be submitted by October 30, 2020.

Key Recommendations of the Report

Developments in this period

- **Enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019-** leading to the creation of two new Union Territories.
- **Unpredictable global scenario-** which is experiencing an overall slowdown in the backdrop of US-China trade war, volatile geopolitical and oil politics situation.
 - **Economic slowdown in India-** owing to factors such as weak investments, exports and consumer confidence.
- **Elevated fiscal risks-** such as weak revenue collections under the good and services tax (GST) and large revenue forgone due to reduced corporate tax rates.
- **Short term transitional difficulties-** in the implementation of structural reforms taken by the government. E.g. slow input tax refunds on GST collections have depressed growth for many small and medium enterprises (SMEs).
- **High uncertainty in fiscal variables-** because of challenges such as large shortfall in collections as compared to original forecast, high volatility in collections, accumulation of large integrated GST credit, glitches in invoice and input tax matching, and delay in refunds etc.

Criteria of Devolution

Criteria of Devolution											
Vertical Devolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An aggregate share of 41 percent of the net proceeds of Union taxes (divisible pool) should be devolved to States in the year 2020-21. • The 1% decrease is to provide additional resources for the newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>FC-XI (2000-05)</th> <th>FC-XII (2005-10)</th> <th>FC-XIII (2010-15)</th> <th>FC-XIV (2015-20)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>States' share in divisible pool</td> <td>29.5</td> <td>30.5</td> <td>32.0</td> <td>42.0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		FC-XI (2000-05)	FC-XII (2005-10)	FC-XIII (2010-15)	FC-XIV (2015-20)	States' share in divisible pool	29.5	30.5	32.0	42.0
	FC-XI (2000-05)	FC-XII (2005-10)	FC-XIII (2010-15)	FC-XIV (2015-20)							
States' share in divisible pool	29.5	30.5	32.0	42.0							
Horizontal Devolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need-based Criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Population- As mentioned in the terms of reference (TOR) of the Commission, it has used the 2011 population data while making recommendations. It has been assigned a weight of 15%. ○ Area- The previous weight of 15% has been continued. ○ Forest and Ecology- This criterion has been arrived at by calculating the share of dense forest of each state in the aggregate dense forest of all the states. The weight has been increased to 10%. • Equity-based Criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Income Distance- Income distance is the distance of the state's income from the state with the highest income. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A three-year average (2015-16 to 2017-18) per capita comparable GSDP has been taken for all the States. ✓ States with lower per capita income would be given a higher share to maintain equity among states. ✓ Its weight has been reduced to 45%. • Performance-based Criteria- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Demographic Performance- During the previous commission, many states, particularly the southern states had complained of being penalized with lower devolution for having good performance in population control. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ It has been introduced to reward efforts made by states in controlling their population. ✓ It will be computed by using the reciprocal of the total fertility rate (TFR) of each state, scaled by 1971 population data. States with a lower fertility ratio will be scored higher on this criterion. ✓ It has been assigned a total weight of 12.5%. ○ Tax Effort- Many States had suggested inclusion of tax performance criteria to incentivize States with higher efficiency of tax collection. The commission has assigned a total weight of 2.5% to reward the states with higher tax collection efficiency. 										

<i>The trends of previous Finance Commissions criteria are as follows-</i>				
Criteria	FC-XI (2000-05)	FC-XII (2005-10)	FC-XIII (2010-15)	FC-XIV (2015-20)
Population (1971)	10.0	25.0	25.0	17.5
Population (2011)				10.0
Area	7.5	10.0	10.0	15.0
Forest cover				7.5
Index of infrastructure	7.5			
Income distance	62.5	50.0		50.0
Fiscal capacity distance			47.5	
Tax effort	5.0	7.5		
Fiscal discipline	7.5	7.5	17.5	
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Grants-in-aid

In 2020-21, the following grants will be provided to states: (i) revenue deficit grants, (ii) grants to local bodies, and (iii) disaster management grants. The Commission has also proposed a framework for sector-specific and performance-based grants. State-specific grants will be provided in the final report.

Revenue deficit grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2020-21, 14 states are estimated to have an aggregate revenue deficit of Rs 74,340 crore post-devolution. The Commission recommended revenue deficit grants for these states.
Special Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In case of three states (Karnataka, Mizoram, and Telangana), the sum of devolution and revenue deficit grants is estimated to decline in 2020-21 as compared to 2019-20. The Commission has recommended special grants to these states aggregating to Rs 6,764 crore.
Sectoral Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commission has recommended a grant of Rs 7,375 crore for nutrition in 2020-21. Sector-specific grants for the following sectors will be provided in the final report: health, pre-primary education, judiciary, rural connectivity, railways, statistics, police training and housing.
Performance Based Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The following domains have been identified- implementation of agricultural reforms, development of aspirational districts and blocks, power sector reforms, enhancing trade including exports, incentives for education, and promotion of domestic and international tourism.

Empowering Local Bodies

Changes brought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants should be given to all tiers of the panchayati raj so as to enable pooling of resources across villages and blocks to create durable community assets and improve their functional viability. Grants to the Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas and Cantonment Boards. Tied grants in the critical sectors of sanitation and drinking water. Share of urban local bodies in the grants to local bodies should be gradually increased to 40 per cent over the medium term. The fifty Million-Plus cities in the country need differentiated treatment, with special emphasis on meeting the challenges of bad ambient air quality, ground water depletion and sanitation.
Grants in aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The total grants to local bodies for 2020-21 has been fixed at Rs 90,000 crore which is equivalent to 4.31% of the divisible pool for 2020-21, up from the 3.54% (2019-20), of the divisible pool. The proportion of grants between rural and urban local bodies will be in the ratio of 67.5: 32.5. The grants will be divided between states based on population and area in the ratio 90:10.

Disaster Risk Management

Mitigation Funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up Mitigation funds at both national and state levels in the form of a National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF) and State Disaster Mitigation Funds (SDMF), in accordance with the Disaster Management Act. Along with existing disaster response funds (NDRF & SDRF), they will now together be called as National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF) and State Disaster Risk Management Funds (SDRMF). They shall be used for those local level and community-based interventions which reduce the risks and promote environment-friendly settlements and livelihood practices. However, large-scale mitigation interventions such as construction of coastal walls, flood embankments, support for drought resilience etc. should be pursued through regular development schemes and not from the mitigation fund. The cost-sharing pattern between centre and states is (i) 75:25 for all states, and (ii) 90:10 for north-eastern and Himalayan states.
Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding and Modernisation of Fire Services

Allocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalytic Assistance to Twelve Most Drought-prone States for Preparing District-level Drought Mitigation Plans • Managing Seismic and Landslide Risks in Ten Hill States • Reducing the Risk of Urban Flooding in Seven Most Populous Cities- Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Pune • Mitigation Measures to Prevent Coastal and River Erosion • Resettlement of Displaced People Affected by Coastal and River Erosion
Fiscal Roadmap	
Fiscal deficit and debt levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A credible fiscal and debt trajectory roadmap remains problematic due to uncertainty around the economy. • Both central and state governments should focus on debt consolidation and comply with the fiscal deficit and debt levels as per their respective Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Acts.
Off-budget borrowings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the central and state governments should make full disclosure of extra-budgetary borrowings. • The outstanding extra-budgetary liabilities should be clearly identified and eliminated in a time-bound manner.
Statutory framework for public financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commission recommended forming an expert group to draft legislation to provide for a statutory framework for sound public financial management system. • An overarching legal fiscal framework is required which will provide for budgeting, accounting, and audit standards to be followed at all levels of government.
Tax capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus should be on broadening the tax base, streamlining tax rates, and increasing capacity and expertise of tax administration in all tiers of the government.
GST Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission highlighted some challenges with the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). These include: large shortfall in collections as compared to original forecast, high volatility in collections, accumulation of large integrated GST credit, glitches in invoice and input tax matching, and delay in refunds. • Commission observed that the continuing dependence of states on compensation from the central government (21 states out of 29 states in 2018-19) for making up for the shortfall in revenue is a concern. • It suggested that the structural implications of GST for low consumption states need to be considered.
Financing of security-related expenditure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ToR of the Commission required it to examine whether a separate funding mechanism for defense and internal security should be set up. • In this regard, the Commission intends to constitute an expert group comprising representatives of the Ministries of Defense, Home Affairs, and Finance, which will study proposed measures submitted by the Ministry of Defense in this regard. 	

3.2. NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Why in news?

Recently, Reserve Bank of India released National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI) for the period 2019-2024.

Financial inclusion in Indian context

- Financial inclusion has been defined as “the process of ensuring access to financial services, timely and adequate credit for vulnerable groups such as weaker sections and low-income groups at an affordable cost”.

National Strategy for Financial Inclusion 2019-2024

- It sets forth the vision and key objectives of the financial inclusion policies in India to help **expand and sustain the financial inclusion process at the national level through a broad convergence of action** involving all the stakeholders in the financial sector.



- The strategy aims to provide access to formal financial services in an affordable manner, broadening & deepening financial inclusion and promoting financial literacy & consumer protection.

Strategic Pillars of National Strategy for Financial Inclusion

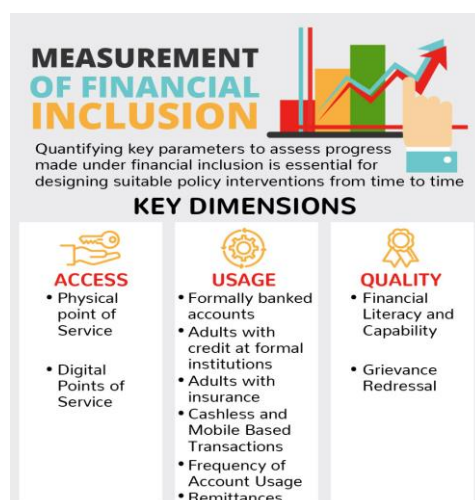
Pillars	Objective	Recommendations
Universal Access to Financial Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every village to have access to a formal financial service provider within a reasonable distance of 5 KM radius. • The customers may be on boarded through an easy and hassle-free digital process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extending the digital financial infrastructure to co-operative banks and other specialized banks as well as other non-bank entities such as- fair price shops, common service centres etc. to promote efficiency and transparency in the services offered to customers.
Providing Basic Bouquet of Financial Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every adult who is willing and eligible needs to be provided with a basic bouquet of financial services that include a Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account, credit, a micro life and non-life insurance product, a pension product and a suitable investment product. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be achieved through designing and developing customized financial products by banks and ensuring efficient delivery of the same through leveraging of Fin-tech and Banking Correspondents networks.
Access to Livelihood and Skill Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new entrant to the financial system be given the relevant information about the ongoing Government livelihood programmes thus helping them to augment their skills and engage in meaningful economic activity and improve income generation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convergence of objectives of various employment generation and skill development programmes like National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and other state level programmes through an integrated approach.
Financial Literacy and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to understand financial literacy modules with specific target audience orientation in the forms of Audio-Video/ booklets shall be made available for understanding the product and processes involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated efforts should be made by RBI, Panchayats, Self Help Groups, Farmers' Clubs etc. to promote financial literacy at grassroots levels
Customer Protection and Grievance Redressal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers shall be made aware of the recourses available for resolution of their grievances. • About storing and sharing of customer's biometric and demographic data, adequate safeguards need to be ensured to protect the customer's Right to Privacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal audits should be done to assess the qualitative efficacy of the customer grievance redressal mechanism already in place in the banking system viz., Internal Ombudsman Scheme.
Effective Co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There needs to be a focused and continuous coordination between the key stakeholders viz. Government, the Regulators, financial service providers, Telecom Service Regulators, Skills Training institutes etc. to make sure that the customers are able to use the services in a sustained manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordination should be promoted through emerging technology. • Adopting a decentralized approach to planning and development should be done by creating separate smaller forums to help accelerate local level financial inclusion.

The NSFI also recommends periodic evaluation of financial inclusion policies through monitoring **Measurement of Progress of Financial Inclusion**

- The NSFI also recommends periodic evaluation of financial inclusion policies through monitoring of financial inclusion parameters- **Access, Usage and Quality.**
- It would provide policy makers and stakeholders with necessary insights to understand the achievements made in the country and to address issues and challenges through a coordinated approach.

Way Forward

- Adequate measures are needed to create a safe environment by incorporating the principles of consent and privacy.



- Digital financial inclusion and the role of fin-tech should be meaningfully integrated in the policy discourse.
- Surveys and feedback from the customers, leveraging on Big Data sets and importantly collecting and analyzing granular data to gather a holistic perspective on the coverage and also the usage of financial services is essential.

3.3. STRESSED URBAN CO-OPERATIVE BANKS TO FACE PCA-LIKE CURBS

Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to **revise Supervisory Action Framework (SAF) on urban co-operative banks (UCBs) for deterioration of financial position**, in line with the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework that is imposed on commercial banks.

Revised SAF

- Under this, UCBs will face restrictions on **worsening of 3 parameters**:
 - Net non-performing assets exceed 6% of net advances.
 - Losses for two consecutive financial years or have accumulated losses on their balance sheets
 - Capital adequacy ratio (CAR) falls below 9%.
- Action can be also taken if there are **serious governance issues**.
- **Possible restrictions/Actions that can be taken by the RBI**
 - It may seek a **board-approved proposal for merging the UCB with another bank** or converting itself into a credit society if CAR falls below 9%.
 - It can **impose restrictions on declaration or payment of dividend or donation** without prior approval if any one of the risk thresholds is breached.
 - Some of the other curbs include **restricting fresh loans and advances carrying risk-weights more than 100%** on incurring capital expenditure beyond a specified limit and on expansion of the balance sheet.
 - Actions such as **issue of show-cause notice for cancellation of banking licence** may also be considered.

About PCA

- It is a framework under which banks with weak financial metrics are **put under watch by the RBI**.
- The RBI introduced the PCA framework in 2002 as a **structured early-intervention mechanism** for banks that become undercapitalised due to poor asset quality, or vulnerable due to loss of profitability.
- It aims to **check the problem of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs)** in the Indian banking sector.
- The PCA framework deems banks as risky if they slip some trigger points - **capital to risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR), net NPA, Return on Assets (RoA) and Tier 1 Leverage ratio**.

For more details refer to Urban Cooperative Banks (UCB) article in October 2019 Monthly Current Affairs.

3.4. E-COMMERCE IN INDIA

Why in news?

Recently, The Competition Commission of India (CCI) released a Report titled **'Market Study on E-commerce in India: Key Findings and Observations'**.

Key features of E-commerce ecosystem in India

- **Fastest growing market in the world:** Revenue from the India's e-commerce sector is expected to increase from USD 39 billion in 2017 to USD 120 billion in 2020, **growing at an annual rate of 51 percent, the highest in the world**.
- **Funding:** Since 2009, the e-commerce sector has received around USD 13,338 million in investments from across the world.
- **MSME Participation:** As per a Working Paper of **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)**, nearly half of the

E-commerce sector and related terminologies

- **E-commerce** means buying and selling of goods and services including digital products over digital & electronic network.
- **Types of e-commerce business models:**
 - **Inventory based model**- an e-commerce activity where inventory of goods and services is owned by e-commerce entity and is sold to the consumers directly. E.g.- Grofers
 - **Marketplace based model** - means providing of an information technology platform by an e-commerce entity on a digital & electronic network to act as a facilitator between buyer and seller. E.g.- Amazon, Flipkart etc.
- **FDI Provisions:**
 - 100% FDI under automatic route is permitted in marketplace model of e-commerce.
 - FDI is not permitted in inventory based model of e-commerce.

manufacturing output in India comes from the Micro Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and 43% of the MSMEs participate in online sales in India.

- **Dynamic pricing:** Online trade has led to increased price transparency and the consequent ease of **price-comparison for the customers**. It also enables **sellers to monitor competitors' prices** and use the same as an input in setting their own prices.
- **Strategic response to e-commerce:** Some smaller retailers are primarily using third party marketplace platforms to access the online consumers. Some have launched their own websites to complement the physical sales. Also, there are sellers who sell exclusively online, with no brick and mortar presence.
- **Role of online marketplace platforms:** The study reveals that third-party online marketplaces play a central role in e-commerce in India. An estimated 64% of digital retail trade in India is through online platforms.
- **Growth enablers:** Besides the growth in **smartphone penetration and access to internet**, the growth of e-commerce has been enabled through **introduction of cash on delivery, discounts and deals offered by the marketplaces, faster deliveries including one-day delivery and access to a large product range**, especially in tier II and tier III cities where choices were limited.

Challenges faced the sector

- **Low customer base:** India's total internet user base is set to grow from 665 million in 2019 to 829 million by 2021, yet e-commerce remains highly underpenetrated with **only 50 million online shoppers**.
- **Low share in retail sales:** As per World Bank report, online sales as a percentage of total retail sales were **only 1.6% in India**, versus over 15% for China and around 14% globally.
- **Catering to the demands of new consumer base:** Future consumers are set to emerge from India's tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Diverse array of languages, unfamiliarity with digital systems, and preferences for an eclectic array of products across micro markets remain key challenges.
- **Logistic challenge:** In addition to the infrastructural inefficiencies, cost of deliveries is driven up by factors like high return rate, high share of Cash on Delivery (COD) orders.
- **Draft e-commerce policy** puts an additional obligation on online retail giants such as Walmart-Flipkart and Amazon to set up a local data centre for collection and storage of such data.
- **Issues related to online platforms:**
 - **Platform neutrality:** marketplaces use some critical data such as prices of competing products, consumer preferences, etc. to influence the competition in favour of the Preferred Sellers or Private Labels.
 - **Platform-to-business Contract Terms:** There is **no standard contract** that is made available to all business users by a platform. The contracts are customised, to address individual needs of the sellers/service providers who are not all similarly placed.
 - **Practice of deep discounting** leads to concerns such as unfair conditions and/or discrimination due to differential discounting structures, demotion in rankings, profitability erosion and loss of brand equity, etc.
 - **Exclusive arrangements** such as exclusive launch of a product on a particular platform or to list only one brand in a product category generally result in increased prices and reduced choices to consumers.
 - **Platform Price Parity Clause** restricts sellers/service providers from offering their goods or services at lower prices on other platforms.
 - **Lack of transparency and credibility** issues around the user review and rating policy of some of these platforms.

Way forward

- **Government's role:** Efforts are needed via the expansion of formal banking and easy credit facilities for the citizenry, increased government support for 'Make in India' initiatives, particularly through the establishment of industrial corridors, logistics parks and special economic zones.
- **Promotion of robust data protection frameworks:** Levelling the playing field between offline and online players in terms of indirect taxation and easing restrictions on cross-border e-commerce transactions.
- **New-age logistics partners, and the advent of technologies** such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), offers a solution to the existing issues, allowing ecommerce companies to reduce Return to origin (RTO) and COD rates.
 - RTO is when orders cannot be delivered and have to be shipped back to the warehouse.

- **Self-regulation:** Platforms may devise ways to govern, the following aspects to protect the interests of all contracting parties –i) negotiating framework for basic contract terms ii) discount policy iii) penalties and iv) conflict resolution.
- **Case-by-case analysis:** Issues related to **Platform Price Parity Clause**, Exclusive arrangements and deep discounting practices must be subjected to case specific analysis by the CCI to reconcile and balance out conflicting interests of stakeholders.

Note: For more details on Draft E-commerce Policy, please refer to Vision IAS Current Affairs-February 2019 edition.

3.5. THE MINERAL LAWS (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE 2020

Why in news?

Recently, The Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 was promulgated.

More in News

- It amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) and the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 (CMSP Act).
- In 2014, Supreme Court cancelled the allocation of the coal mines following the CAG report on Coal scam.
- The CMSP Act in 2015, provides for the auction and allocation of mines whose allocation was cancelled by the Supreme Court.
 - Schedule I of the Act provides a list of all such mines;
 - Schedule II and III are sub-classes of the mines listed in the Schedule I.
 - Schedule II mines are those where production had already started then, and Schedule III mines are ones that had been earmarked for a specified end-use.
- However, out of 204 coal blocks, only 29 of these blocks could be auctioned as some of these mines had end-use restrictions.

Key amendments

- **Composite license for prospecting and mining:**
 - Currently, separate licenses are provided for prospecting and mining of coal and lignite, called prospecting license, and mining lease, respectively.
 - ✓ Prospecting includes exploring, locating, or finding mineral deposit.
 - The Ordinance adds a new type of license, called prospecting license-cum-mining lease. This will be a composite license providing for both prospecting and mining activities.
- **Removal of restriction on end-use of coal:**
 - Currently companies acquiring Schedule II and Schedule III coal mines through auctions can use the coal produced only for specified end-uses such as power generation and steel production. This is known as **captive mining**.
 - The Ordinance removes this restriction and thus companies will be **free to use extracted mineral both for captive use** of end use plants (power, steel, cement etc.) **and commercial sale in the open market**.
- **Eligibility for auction of coal and lignite blocks:**
 - The Ordinance clarifies that the companies which do not possess any prior coal mining experience in India but are financially strong and or have mining experience in other minerals or in other countries can now participate in auction of coal/lignite blocks.

Current situation of mining industry

- **Key to ensuring the country's energy and raw material security:** The mining industry serves as the base for the power sector, with around 72% of India's current power being generated through coal. Further, minerals are the basic building blocks of manufactured products and many agri-inputs.
- **Huge imports:** Despite having the world's fourth largest coal reserves, India imported 235 million tonnes (mt) of coal last year, of which 135mt valued at ₹171,000 crore could have been met from domestic reserves.
- **Declining contribution to GDP, foreign investment:**
 - The industry's share in India's GDP (in real terms) was a low 2.6% in 2018-19, down from 3.0% in 2011-12.
 - FDI inflow in the sector declined from 2.1% of India's total FDI inflow in 2014-15 to 0.5% in 2018-19.
- **Underdeveloped relative to its enormous potential:** Reduced demand for power from conventional sources, decreased growth in cement, iron and steel sectors; and approval processes resulted in a scenario, where, even if mines were allotted, the extraction of minerals would be limited thereby resulting in stagnation of development of mines.

- ✓ This would help in **attracting investments and allow the implementation of the 100% FDI** through automatic route for sale of coal.

- **Reallocation after termination of the allocations:**
 - The CMSP Act provides for termination of allotment orders of coal mines in certain cases.
 - The Ordinance adds that such mines may be reallocated through auction or allotment and provides for compensation to the allottee whose allocation has been terminated.
- **Prior approval from the central government:**
 - Under the MMDR Act, state governments require prior approval of the central government for granting reconnaissance permit, prospecting license, or mining lease for coal and lignite.
 - The Ordinance provides that **prior approval of the central government will not be required** in granting these licenses for coal and lignite, **in certain cases**. These include cases where: (i) the allocation has been done by the central government, and (ii) the mining block has been reserved by the central or state governments to conserve a mineral.
- **Non-exclusive reconnaissance permit (NERP) holders may apply for licence:**
 - Currently, the holders of non-exclusive reconnaissance permit (i.e exploration of certain specified minerals through certain surveys) are not entitled to obtain a prospecting license or mining lease.
 - The Ordinance provides that the holders of such permits may apply for a prospecting license-cum-mining lease or mining lease. This provision will apply to certain licensees as prescribed in the Ordinance.
- **Advance action for auction:**
 - Under the MMDR Act, mining leases for specified minerals (minerals other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) are auctioned on the expiry of the lease period.
 - The Ordinance provides that state governments can take advance action for auction of a mining lease before its expiry.
- **Transfer of statutory clearances to new bidders:**
 - Currently, the new lessee is required to obtain statutory clearances before starting mining operations. This leads to delay and would adversely affect the mineral production in the country, which in turn would impact the important downstream industries like steel, cement etc.
 - The Ordinance provides that the various approvals, licenses, and clearances given to the previous lessee will be extended to the successful bidder for a period of two years.

Conclusion

- While, the ordinance is a **positive step to provide operational efficiency**, the corresponding rules and bidding guidelines must be assessed in detail to ensure that progressive steps pursuant to the Ordinance are preserved and given full effect.
- The liberalised policy will allow global players to look for investment opportunities which in turn **will allow the country to leverage their technical capabilities for effective utilisation of natural resources for the benefit of people at large**.

3.6. ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Why in news?

National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) recently unveiled the **Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvITs) roadmap**.

More on news

- Union Cabinet in December 2019 authorised **NHAI to set up InvIT**.
 - The trust **enabled the NHAI to monetise completed national highways** with toll collection record of at least one year and meet its funding requirements.
- Now, NHAI will **initially raise ₹15,000-20,000 crore in its maiden InvIT offer** and then go for a larger round.
- It is part of the **government's plans to tap alternative sources of financing to boost public spending in the roads and infrastructure sector** amid declining private sector interest in the build, operate and transfer model, where the entire initial cost is borne by them.

National Highways Authority of India

- It is an **autonomous agency** of Government of India set up by **NHAI Act, 1988**.
- It is responsible for **the development, maintenance and management of national highways** and for matters connected to it.
- NHAI is mandated to implement **National Highways Development Project (NHDP)** which is India's largest ever Highways Project in a phased manner.

- ₹1 trillion **National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)** was also unveiled for the next five years. 19 per cent of the investments was earmarked to be channelised to road sector.
- NHAI currently addresses its funding requirement through **ToT (toll-operate-transfer), partnering NIIF (National Investment and Infrastructure Fund), issuance of bonds to LIC and central budgetary allocations.**

Issues in Road infrastructure funding

- **Lack of financial support from government:** The budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Road transport and Highways has **failed to keep pace with the government's ambitions**, forcing the former to look elsewhere for funds.
- **Decline in Private investment in infrastructure:** Growing stressed assets in the sector and market volatility have caused confidence deficit and even aversion among international and domestic investors.
 - Declining interest of private sector in **present models of financing**, such as the Build, Operate and Transfer model.
- **Lack of commercial bank funding:** Due to a growing concentration of risks/ stressed assets in banks in terms of sector exposure and asset-liability maturity mismatch.
 - Small banks lack the capacity to perform independent credit appraisal of such large projects and also to withstand credit risk from these loans.

Way Forward

- Government could resort to '**Asset reusing**' (otherwise called capital recycling) to reinvest capital or assets in projects which have potential.
- Government could establish a '**Road Infrastructural Project Fund**' to smoothen funding.
 - It ought to have a solid administration, autonomous reporting, and well-defined characterized key performance indicators approved by an independent audit to guarantee great execution.
- It could explore the option of issuing **securities** with a 30-to-50-year tenor. Bank and bond financing can supplement each other; it lessens financial delicacy and upgrades the effectiveness of capital allotment.
- A **well-developed bond market** broadens the subsidizing base, provides risk management apparatuses, reinforces corporate administration and upgrades discipline by restricting the impact of borrowers on banks.

Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvITs) for NHAI

- These are **investment scheme similar to mutual funds** that allow investment from individuals and institutional investors in infrastructure projects to earn a portion of the income as return.
- NHAI's InvIT will be a **trust established under the Indian Trust Act, 1882** and Securities and Exchange Board of India (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014.
- InvIT Trust will be formed **with an objective of investing primarily in infrastructure projects** and InvIT may hold assets either directly or through an SPV or a holding.
- This will enable **NHAI to monetise completed national highways** that have a toll collection track record of at least one year.

Significance of InvIT

- Through the InvIT route, NHAI will now have an **another funding route by mobilizing additional resources through capital markets** to monetize its completed and operational National Highways projects.
 - NHAI is expected to monetise projects that have a toll collection track record of atleast one year or were NHAI reserves the right to levy toll on the identified highway.
- It can **channelise new investments to greenfields projects like Bharatmala Pariyojana.**
- InvIT is expected to help **NHAI attract patient capital (for say 20-30 years) to the Indian highway market** given that investors are averse to construction risk and are interested in investment in assets which provide long-term stable returns.
- InvIT is highly likely to **attract the interest of foreign investors** especially pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and insurance companies.
- Regulatory framework build around InvITs **offers corporate governance, stable long-term returns** because of mandatory distribution rules, lower risks, high quality assets and tax benefits on income distributions.

3.7. DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR PRIVATE TRAINS

Why in news?

Recently, Ministry of Railways and NITI Aayog released **Draft Documents for discussion on Private Participation in Passenger Trains** to seek stakeholder comments on them.

Key Recommendations

- **Role of Private Entity:** The private entity shall be responsible for financing, procuring, operation and maintenance of the trains. The Private Entity shall pay to Indian Railways pre-determined charges for haulage and any other payments as specified in the Agreement.
- **Routes:** It has identified 100 routes, including Mumbai Central-New Delhi, New Delhi- Patna, Allahabad-Pune and Dadar-Vadodara, which will be split into 10-12 clusters.
- **Determination of Fare:** The Private Entity shall have the freedom to decide on the fare to be charged from its passengers.
- **Operation and Maintenance:** The maintenance of the trains shall be the responsibility of private entity. Operation and maintenance of the passenger trains would be governed by standards to be laid down by Research Designs & Standards Organisation (RDSO).
- **Design of the Rolling Stock:** Private Entity shall be free to procure trains and locomotives from a source of its choice, provided such trains and locomotives are compatible with specification and standards specified in the Concession Agreement. The trains could be either loco hauled or distributed power.
- **Penalties for non-performance:** Pre-specified penalties shall be recovered from the Concessionaire for failure to meet the prescribed performance standards and outcomes.
- **Bidding:** It proposes a **two-stage bidding Process** – Request for Qualification (RFQ) & Request for Proposal (RFP).
 - RFQ process will be for pre-qualification and shortlisting of bidders based on their technical and financial capacity who will be required to offer a fixed price bid at RFP stage for undertaking the project.
 - Selection of successful bidder **based on highest revenue share.**
 - The operators could be domestic or international entities.

Privatization of Railways

Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved efficiency: A private firm is interested in making a profit, and so it is more likely to cut costs and be efficient. • Lack of political interference: Governments often make poor economic managers as they are motivated by political pressures rather than sound economic and business sense. • Long term Planning: A government might think only in terms of the next election and thus be unwilling to invest in infrastructure improvements which will benefit the firm in the long term. This could be facilitated by private enterprises. • Shareholders: Private players face pressure from shareholders to perform efficiently. • Increased competition: It would ensure improved quality of service with competitive fares. • Prevent Government's loss: The revenue generated by the Indian Railways is low and keeps the system always in losses. • Improved quality of service: The quality of service in Indian Railways faces massive criticism especially in the fields of catering and punctuality. • Latest technology: The privatization will also help in accommodating the latest technology in railway coaches, station facilities, online services etc. • Lesser accidents: Private ownership is considered synonymous with better maintenance, which will reduce the number of accidents, thus resulting in safe travel and higher monetary savings in the long run. • Reducing the supply demand deficit: Since waitlisted passengers comprise ~15% of the reserved passengers. • Facilitating capacity augmentation: as capacity constraints lead to loss of passenger business to other modes such as air travel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural monopoly: Privatization in railways might create a private monopoly which might seek to set higher prices which exploit consumers. • Public interest: Given that a private enterprise runs on profit, it might hike fares, thus rendering the service out of reach for lower income groups. • Coverage Limited to Lucrative Sectors: With privatization routes which are less popular could be eliminated, thus having a negative impact on connectivity, rendering some parts of the country virtually inaccessible. • Accountability: Private companies are unpredictable in their dealings and do not share their governance secrets with the world at large. In such a scenario it would be difficult to pin the accountability on a particular entity, in case of a discrepancy. • Fragmentation in railways industry: In the UK, rail privatization led to breaking up the rail network into infrastructure and train operating companies. This led to areas where it was unclear who had responsibility. • Regulatory Burden: High costs and lower returns, policy uncertainty, lack of a regulator to create a level playing field, lack of incentives for investors and procedural/operational issues such as delays in land acquisition etc. have significantly restricted private sector participation.

Way forward

- Railways is a strategically important asset for Government of India, its privatization and its impact must be deliberated upon holistically. Performance of privately operated Tejas Express can be analyzed to study implications.
- A robust regulatory mechanism for determination of tariffs in the railways sector and a convincing dispute redressal mechanism must be put in place.

3.8. DRAFT SCHEME FOR SUPPLY OF ROUND-THE-CLOCK (RTC) POWER

Why in news?

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has prepared a "Draft Scheme for Supply of Round-The-Clock (RTC) Power from Renewable Energy (RE) based (solar, wind or small hydro) Power Projects, **complemented with** Power from Thermal (coal) Power Projects."

Background

- In order to facilitate development and deployment of grid connected solar power, the first phase of **Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission** provided for a **scheme of "bundling"** wherein, then relatively expensive solar power was bundled with cheaper thermal power.
- Over period, advancement of technologies and economies of scale have resulted in bringing down the tariffs of solar and wind power to below Rs 3.00/unit levels, lower than the cost of power from the contemporary thermal power plants.
- However, the RE sector has its own share of issues in terms of **intermittent** and **unpredictable nature** of renewable energy and **low capacity utilization** of transmission system.
- The problem gets pronounced with the **addition of large- scale renewable capacity**. In order to manage the infirm nature of power, DISCOMs are procuring balancing power from other sources to provide grid stability and to meet its requirements in non-RE hours. This costs more to DISCOMs.
- To address the above issues, the **Draft Scheme makes case for "reverse bundling"**, wherein high cost thermal power is allowed to be bundled with cheaper renewable energy and is provided round-the-clock to the DISCOM.
- Such bundling of RE power with thermal power can help in:
 - bringing down the overall cost of power supplied to buying utilities;
 - further penetration of renewable energy;
 - overcome the intermittency issues of RE power;
 - Meet the round-the-clock requirement of DISCOMs.

Key Features of the Draft

- The Power Generator shall supply RE Power complemented with Thermal Power, in RTC manner, keeping at least 80% availability on annual basis.
 - At least 51% of the annual energy supplied must correspond to RE Power and the balance should be drawn from thermal sources.
- RE power may include solar, wind, small hydro, or a combination thereof, with or without any Energy Storage System (ESS).
- A **composite single tariff** for renewable energy, complemented with thermal energy shall be quoted by the bidders (e.g. DISCOMs).
- The RE component (including ESS component charged with RE sources) bought under this Scheme shall be **eligible for Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPO) compliance**.

Benefits of the scheme

- DISCOMs will be able to meet their RPO. It is the obligation of certain power consumers e.g. DISCOMs to procure a fix percentage of their total consumption from the RE sources.
 - The **National Tariff Policy (NTP) 2006** requires the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs) to fix a minimum percentage of RPO based on each state's varying renewable energy potentials.
 - The **Electricity Act 2003** provides for the RPO to be decided by the SERC.

- DISCOMs will be able to purchase firm power at **competitive rates** to meet their deficits or replace costly power.
- DISCOMs will **not have to undertake operations to integrate RE power into the grid** since the responsibility of giving firm power will be with the Generator.
- DISCOMs may further save due to **optimum scheduling of power among the sources**, wherein the generation and integration of power from renewable depends on the real time demand data.
- It is in line with the suggestions provided by expert group reviewing the **Indian Electricity Grid Code (IEGC)** which asserted that renewable energy power plants shall be treated as “must run”.
 - A ‘**must run**’ status means that the concerned power plant has to supply electricity to the grid under all conditions.

3.9. NORTH-EAST GAS GRID PROJECT

Why in news?

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved a Capital Grant as the **Viability Gap Funding** to Indradhanush Gas Grid Ltd for setting up the **North East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid**.

More on news

- A total of ₹5,559 crore has been earmarked as VGF.
- As per the plan, a 1,656-km gas pipeline grid would connect the eight states of the North-Eastern region, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.
- It is a part of “**Hydrocarbon Vision 2030 for North-East India**” which outlines steps to leverage the hydrocarbon sector for social and economic development of the north-east region.

National Gas Grid

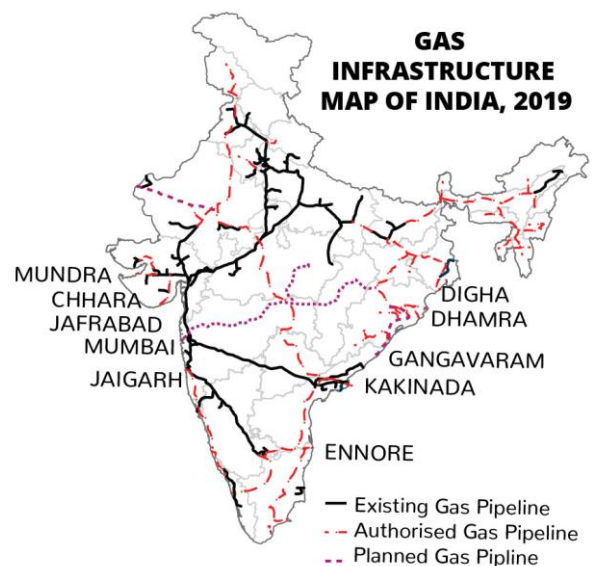
- Gas Pipeline infrastructure is an **economical and safe mode of transporting the natural gas** by connecting gas sources to gas consuming markets. Gas pipeline grid determines the structure of the gas market and its development. Therefore, an **interconnected National Gas Grid has been envisaged** to ensure the adequate availability and equitable distribution of natural gas in all parts of the country.
- At present, there are about **16800 km long Natural Gas pipeline network** which is operational in the country. In order to make available natural gas across the country, it has been envisaged to develop **additional about 14,300 km pipelines** to complete the National Gas Grid and same are at various stages of development.
- This would ensure easy availability of natural gas across all regions and also potentially help to achieve uniform economic and social progress.

Aims and objectives of National Gas Grid

- To remove regional imbalance within the country with regard to access of natural gas and provide clean and green fuel throughout the country.
- To connect gas sources to major demand centres and ensure availability of gas to consumers in various sectors.
- **Development of City Gas Distribution (CGD) Networks** in various cities for supply of CNG and PNG.

A brief of major gas pipeline projects which are being implemented by Central Government PSUs are as under

- **Jagdishpur – Haldia/Bokaro – Dhamra Pipeline Project (JHBDPL):** GAIL is executing a 2655 km. long pipeline project. The project is scheduled to be completed progressively by December, 2020. JHBDPL will cater to the energy requirements of five states, namely Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.
 - It is also known as the **Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga** of Eastern India.



- **Barauni- Guwahati Pipeline project (BGPL):** It is being implemented as an **integral part JHBDPL project** to connect North East Region (NER) with the National Gas Grid. The approximate length of the pipeline is 729 km. Completion of the project is scheduled by December 2021.
- **North East Region (NER) Gas Grid :** A joint venture of 5 oil and gas CPSEs i.e. GAIL, IOCL, OIL, ONGC and NRL named as “Indradhanush Gas Grid Ltd” (IGGL) has been entrusted to develop trunk pipeline connectivity in all North Eastern States i.e. Assam, Sikkim, Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya in a phased manner.
- **Kochi-Koottanad- Bangalore-Mangalore (Ph-II) Pipeline Project (KKBMPL):** 41 Km of Phase-I of pipeline has been commissioned and 887 Km of Phase-II is under progress in two sections. Construction work by GAIL of Kochi-Koottanad- Mangalore Section (444 Kms) is under progress and expected to be commissioned shortly.
- **Ennore-Thiruvallur-Bangalore- Puducherry-Nagapattinam– Madurai – Tuticorin Natural gas pipeline (ETBPNMTL):** IOCL is laying 1385 km long pipeline. This pipeline will connect new Ennore LNG Terminal with various demand centres in the region.

City Gas Distribution (CGD) Networks

- Under the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) Act 2006, PNGRB grants the authorization to the entities for developing a City Gas Distribution (CGD) network (including PNG network) in a specified Geographical Area (GA) of the country.
- **CGD sector has four distinct segments** – Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) predominantly used as **auto-fuel** and Piped Natural Gas (PNG) used in **domestic, commercial and Industrial segments**.
- Regulations pertaining to authorization/bidding of City Gas Distribution (CGD) networks were amended in 2018. PNGRB has authorized 229 GAS covering 407 districts for development of CGD network across the country.
 - It covers about 53% of the country’s area and 70% of country’s population. It will make available environment friendly fuel i.e. CNG/PNG to public at large.
- To promote the development of CGD network, the **Government has accorded the priority in domestic gas allocation to PNG (Domestic) and CNG (Transport) segments**. It has been decided to meet 100% gas requirement of CNG (Transport) and PNG(Domestic) segments through supply of domestic gas which is cheaper than imported gas.
- At present, CGD sector is consuming approx. 14.36 Million Metric Standard Cubic Meter per Day (MMSCMD) of domestic Gas for CNG (Transport) and PNG (Domestic) sector.

The **Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas** has released a draft policy on City Gas Distribution (CGD) Network.

Main provisions of the draft policy

- It suggests setting up of a **committee, under the chairmanship of the chief secretary**, which will help formulate policies and streamline the processes for **various permissions** to develop the CGD infrastructure.
 - It will cause setting up of a suitable **single-window clearance** mechanism for the same in the state for the promotion development of CGD infrastructure and ease of doing business.
 - Committee will also make a suitable mechanism for permissions from state divisions of the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation, NHAI, the railways, etc.
- State transport corporations will accord priority to CNG/LNG buses, while purchasing new buses and retrofitting in present alternate fuel fleet.
- The draft also calls for **VAT rates** of CNG/LNG may be reviewed and rationalized with a **ceiling of 5%**.
- It also calls the states to **rationalize road tax** for CNG vehicles at par with electric vehicles.

Conclusion

To usher in Gas based economy and to increase the share of natural gas in country's primary energy mix, Government is taking focused steps viz. enhancing domestic gas production, expeditious development of gas infrastructure including pipelines, City Gas Distribution (CGD) networks and Re-gasified Liquefied Natural Gas (R-LNG) Terminals as well as development of Gas market by providing open access to gas infrastructure.

3.10. NATIONAL DATA AND ANALYTICAL PLATFORM VISION DOCUMENT

Why in news?

Recently, the NITI Aayog released its vision for the National Data and Analytics Platform (**NDAP**).

Overview

- **India has rich publicly available data.** Government departments have digitised various processes and reporting requirements, which in turn are feeding into management information systems and interactive dashboards.
 - This data is being used to track and visualise progress and make iterative improvements on the ground.
- **However, the data landscape can improve** as it is currently facing the **following challenges**-
 - **Data is not published in a user-centric manner.** The current data formats are often not conducive for research and innovation.
 - **Data ecosystem is incoherent due to different standards.** Ministries and Departments do not use a shared standard for common indicators.
 - ✓ Attributes like region and time period defined differently. This makes it difficult for datasets to speak to each other and present a coherent picture.
 - ✓ Various datasets exist in silos, resulting in a loss of cross-sectoral insights.
 - Currently, there are **various pockets of excellence** in terms of data management and use. However, lessons and best practices are not uniformly applied.

National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP):

- It is a **flagship initiative of NITI Aayog** in the space of promoting larger access and better use of data.
- NDAP's Mission is to **standardize data** across multiple Government sources, provide **flexible analytics** and make it **easily accessible** in formats conducive for research, innovation, policy making and public consumption.

Salient features of the NDAP

- **Data Sources**-
 - Websites of over 50 Ministries and Departments of the Central Government and data.gov.in.
 - Websites of all Departments and Ministries of the State Government, not exceeding 250.
- **User-centric**- The platform will be powered by a **user - friendly search engine**, backed by seamless navigation, with a world-class user interface. Data will be provided in a **machine-readable format** with **customisable analytics**.
 - It will also provide **tools for analytics and visualization**.
- **Coherency**- Multiple data sets will be presented using a **standardized schema**, by using common geographical and temporal identifiers.
- **Regular Updation**- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will be created to ensure data is updated regularly. There will be **regular tracking of compliance** to these SOPs.
- **Governance Structure**-
 - **High Powered Steering Committee** under the **chairmanship of Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog** will be set up to **provide direction**, oversee progress, guide on data sources, and address various inter-ministerial issues on collating data.
 - **Technical Advisory Group** consisting of sector and technology experts will be established to **provide expert consultation**. It will provide guidance on the development of the platform, management of data, and aligning the platform for user-needs.
 - **Project Management Unit** established at NITI Aayog to **coordinate with different stakeholders** and manage various facets of NDAP.
 - **Technology vendor** will be engaged for development and operation of NDAP.
- **Timeline**- The first version of the platform is expected to be launched in 2021.

Significance

- It intends to draw **inspiration from the best platforms around the world** e.g., platforms such as 'datausa.io' and 'data.gov.sg'.
- It seeks to **build on the success of existing Indian data platforms**. For example, data.gov.in provides ready access to data from 165 departments. DISHA, by the Ministry of Rural Development, provides access to data from 42 schemes across 20 ministries.
 - Various states also have a 'Chief Minister's Dashboard'. Initiatives like these provide a rich source of data for NDAP.

- It will allow **quick and easy availability to the most recent data**, which is published periodically without any hassle to help the welfare of the country.
- It aims to **democratize access** to publicly available government data.
- It will aid India's progress by **promoting data-driven discourse** and decision-making.
 - It will deepen the understanding of India's dynamic economy and social conditions. This will in turn help improve the crores of lives by making the government's actions more scientific and data driven.
- It will spearhead the **standardization of formats** in which data is presented across sectors.

Conclusion

NDAP is a pan-India initiative by NITI Aayog. Its success requires extensive support and cooperation of various stakeholders such as Central Ministries, State Governments and guidance from experts to realise the vision and meet the timelines.

3.11. WORLD EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL OUTLOOK

Why in News?

International Labour Organisation (ILO) has released the **World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 (WESO)** report.

Highlights of the Report

The annual WESO Trends report **analyses key labour market issues** including unemployment, labour underutilisation, working poverty, income inequality, labour income share and factors that exclude people from decent work.

- **Slow Pace and skewed structure of economic growth in low-income countries:** It endangers efforts to reduce poverty and improve working conditions.
 - Over the past 18 years, average per capita growth has been only 1.8 per cent in low-income countries.
 - Between 2000 and 2018, the employment share of agricultural and elementary occupations declined by only 6 percentage points in low-income countries (to 69 per cent)
- **Labour Underutilisation:** Mismatch between labour supply and demand extends far beyond the 188 million unemployed across the world in 2019.
 - More than 470 million people worldwide lack adequate access to paid work as such or are being denied the opportunity to work the desired number of hours.
- **Shortage of job expected to continue:** Global unemployment is projected to increase by around 2.5 million in 2020.
 - The global unemployment rate stood at 5.4 per cent in 2019 and is projected to remain essentially the same over the next two years.
 - Given the high level of uncertainty over how trade and geopolitical tensions in the coming years will affect business and consumer confidence, and thereby job creation.
- **Issue of getting decent work:** Having a paid job was not a guarantee of decent working conditions or of an adequate income for many of the 3.3 billion employed worldwide in 2019.
 - Currently working poverty affects more than 630 million workers, or one in five of the global working population.
 - It is defined as earning less than USD 3.20 per day in purchasing power parity terms.
 - In addition, 165 million people do not have enough paid work, and 120 million have either given up actively searching for work or otherwise lack access to the labour market.
- **Rise in Inequalities:** Related to gender, age and geographical location continue to plague the job market, with these factors limiting both individual opportunity and economic growth.
 - Low-income countries have the highest employment-to-population ratio (68 per cent), as many vulnerable workers are forced to take up any job, regardless of its quality.
 - At the global level, the employment rate of the working-age population living in rural areas (59 per cent) is greater than that in urban areas (56 per cent).
- **Obstacle to women and young people:** In 2019, the female labour force participation rate was just 47 per cent, 27 percentage points below the male rate (at 74 per cent). There is strong regional variation in gender disparities in access to employment.

- Around 267 million young people aged 15 to 24 worldwide (or 22 per cent of that age group) are not in employment, education or training.
- **Future risks:** The rise in trade restrictions and protectionism, which could have a significant impact on employment, is seen as a potentially worrying trend, as is the significant drop in the share of national income in the form of wages, compared to other forms of production.
 - In terms of the type of growth, structural transformation, technological upgradation and diversification would be needed to shift employment from activities with low value added to those with higher value added.

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION 2019

Programme Features

- ★ DAF Analysis Session with senior faculty members of Vision IAS
- ★ Mock Interview Session with Ex-Bureaucrats/ Educationists
- ★ Interaction with Previous toppers and Serving bureaucrats
- ★ Performance Evaluation and Feedback
- ★ Recorded Mock interview sessions to be provided



4. SECURITY

4.1. BODO PEACE ACCORD

Why in news?

The **3rd Bodo Peace Accord** as tripartite agreement between the **Centre, Assam Government and the banned Assam-based insurgent group National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)** was signed on 27th January 2020, for bringing a lasting peace in Bodo-dominated areas in Assam.

Understanding Bodo Dispute

- Bodos are the **single largest tribal community** in Assam, making up over 5-6% of the state's population. The Bodos have had a long history of separatist demands, marked by armed struggle.
- The four districts in Assam — Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang — that constitute **the Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD)**, are home to Bodos along with several other ethnic groups.
- The **demand for a separate state for Bodos** is rooted in **reasons** like administrative and development apathy of the state of Assam, and a feeling that identity, culture and language of the Bodo people were subsumed by the Assamese and migrants.
- In 1966-67, the **demand for a separate state** called Bodoland was raised under the banner of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), a political outfit.
- In 1987, the **All Bodo Students Union (ABSU)** renewed the demand. "Divide Assam fifty-fifty", was a call given by the ABSU's then leader.
- This unrest was a **fallout of the Assam Accord, 1985** which addressed the demands of protection and safeguards for the "Assamese people", leading the Bodos to launch a movement to protect their own identity.
- However, following **an agreement in 1993**, Bodoland became **an autonomous administrative unit** under the **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution, administered by the **Bodoland Autonomous Council**.
- Following a **2nd peace agreement in 2003**, the **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)** was formed which has 46-members (40 elected and 6 nominated by the governor) and acts as a Legislative Council to look after the development works in the **Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD)**.
 - The 3rd Bodo accord (2020) renamed the BTC as the **Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)** with more administrative and fiscal powers.



Highlights of Agreement

- **Villages dominated by Bodos** presently outside BTAD would be included and those with non-Bodo population would be excluded.
- Bodos living in hills would be conferred **Scheduled Hill Tribe status**.
- Bodo with Devnagri script would be associate **official language for entire Assam**.
- BTAD would now be called **Bodoland Territorial Region** and it will have more executive, administrative, legislative and financial powers.
- **Over 1500 armed cadres** will abjure violence and join mainstream.
- **A Special Development Package of Rs. 1500 crores** over three years is provided.

Major Takeaways of the Bodo Peace accord

- **For ensuring peace and harmony in the BTAD:** It is the first peace agreement in the Northeast where **all the existing insurgent groups** in a particular area have put their signatures, with a **joint commitment to end violence**.
 - Over 1,615 cadres of different factions of the NDFB surrendered their arms and joined the mainstream within two days of the signing of the agreement.
- **Soothing the sentiments of the Bodos:** The Bodoland Territorial Area Districts, will now be known as **Bodoland Territorial Region**. The changed nuance from districts to region is significant as it acknowledges a **Bodo homeland within the state of Assam**, without separating from Assam and also satisfying the identity and aspirations of the Bodo people.

- **Balancing the aspirations of all:** The new Accord has decided to **demarcate the border** of the Bodoland Territorial Area (BTR). **This is expected to address the issues of both tribal currently outside** the Bodo Council as well as non-tribal currently living within the Council.
 - For this purpose, **a commission appointed by the state government** will examine and recommend if villages contiguous to BTAD and with a majority tribal population can be included into the BTR or vice-versa.
- **Strengthening the BTC:** Accord has provided more **legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers** to BTC and amendment to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- **Protection of Bodo culture and welfare measures:** **The accord has provided for** setting up of a **Bodo-Kachari Welfare Council** for 'development' of Bodo villages located **outside** the Bodo Council area, and declaring Bodo language in Devnagri script as an associate official language of Assam.
 - **Additionally,** setting up several institutions of higher and technical education have also been provided in the accord.

Concerns remain

- **Concerns of the non-Bodos:** Critics have alleged that accord has ignored the interests of the other ethnic communities in the area. Concerns of non-Bodo people, mainly Bengali-speaking Muslims, Adivasis, and migrants inhabiting these districts, who were attacked and killed in large numbers in all these years, must be addressed.
- **Implementational issues:** Biggest challenge before all the stakeholders, including the government, would be to make it sustainable by enforcing commitments given in the new peace-accord.
- **Possibility of a chain reaction:** The accord could trigger similar demands in other parts of Assam, such as Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao and Cachar, which also have homelands of non-Ahom ethnicities.
 - Moreover, it could also **affect the ongoing Naga peace process**, leading Naga rebels to demand territorial and administrative autonomy in **Naga homelands in Manipur**, which will further trigger political and ethnic tension between the Nagas and the Meitei (the largest ethnic group in Manipur).

Conclusion

The demand for a separate state for the Bodos has been going on in Assam for about five decades leading to agitations, protests, violence and many deaths. The third Bodo Peace Accord promises to usher a new era for the people of the state if development and peace take the charted course as intended by the accord.

4.2. PACT TO END BRU REFUGEE CRISIS

Why in news?

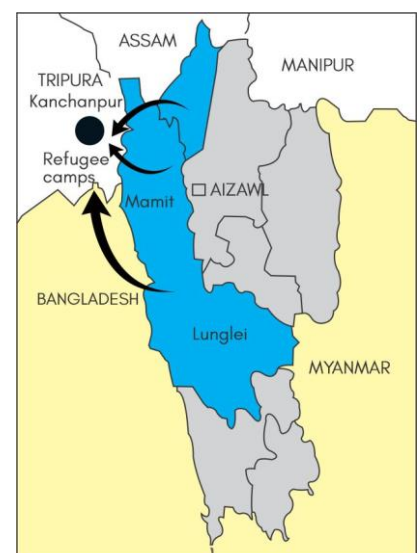
A four-party agreement among the Centre, Mizoram government, Tripura government, and leaders of Bru community was signed to end the 23-year old Bru-Reang refugee crisis.

Background

- The Bru community, also referred to as Reangs, resides in Mizoram, Tripura, and parts of southern Assam, and is ethnically distinct from the Mizos of Mizoram.
- There are over 40,000 Brus living in four districts of Mizoram. At present, over 30,000 Brus are living in the refugee camps in Tripura after they fled Mizoram following ethnic clashes with the Mizo tribes in 1997.
- **Reangs in Tripura** are categorised as **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)**.
- The **first signs of conflict** between the two communities emerged in 1995 when Mizo organisations - the Young Mizo Association and the Mizo Students' Association - **demand that Brus be left out of the Mizoram's electoral rolls** as they were not an indigenous tribe.
- The Brus retaliated by forming an armed organisation, Bru National Liberation Front, and a political body, Bru National Union. The two demanded more political autonomy for Mizoram's Brus and a **Bru Autonomous District Council (ADC) under the Sixth Schedule** of the

Mizos

- Mizo is a generic term used for the people living in Mizoram.
- The Mizo society is said to have consisted of the Lusei, Lai, Hmar and Mara who live in Mizoram and all the other Zo tribes who are presently residing in Manipur, Assam and Tripura.



Constitution in the western areas of Mizoram, where they were present in sizable numbers but where Mizos formed the majority.

- In 1997, following ethnic tension over an incident in Mizoram, around 5,000 families comprising over 30,000 Bru tribals were forced to flee the state and seek shelter in Tripura, where they were housed in temporary camps at Kanchanpur in North Tripura.

Earlier Peace attempts

- **Since 2010**, Government of India has been making sustained efforts to permanently rehabilitate these **Internally Displaced Bru people**. The Union government has been assisting the two State governments for taking care of the refugees. Till 2014, 1622 Bru-Reang families returned to Mizoram in different batches.
- On 3rd July 2018, an agreement was signed between the Union government, the two State governments and representatives of Bru-Reang refugees, as a result of which the aid given to these families was increased substantially.
 - Subsequently, 328 families comprising of 1369 individuals returned to Mizoram under the agreement.
- There had been a sustained demand of most Bru-Reang families that they may be allowed to settle down in Tripura, considering their apprehensions about their security.

Key features of present pact

- Around **34,000 Internally Displaced Brus will be settled in Tripura** and would be given aid from the Centre to help with their rehabilitation and all-round development, through a **package of around Rs 600 crores**.
- These people would **get all the rights** that normal residents of the States get, and they would now be able to enjoy the **benefits of social welfare schemes** of Centre and State governments.
 - The Bru refugees in Tripura will be given aid for their rehabilitation and would be given the **tribal status** and included in the **voter list of the state**.
- Rs. 4 lacs will be given to each displaced Bru family in a fixed deposit account. Each family will also be provided Rs 5,000 per month for two years, a residential plot in Tripura and **ration for two years**.
- The **Tripura government will provide the land** as per this agreement.

Challenges in implementation

- It is doubtful whether the land that is allocated to Brus in Tripura will be accepted by the domicile tribes in Tripura.
- Till the pact, the Tripura Government was eager to repatriate the Brus to Mizoram. As the new pact settles the Brus in Tripura, it needs a lot of political will from Tripura to implement welfare programmes for the Brus.
- The existing Bru families in Mizoram still are opposed by some ethnic organizations of Mizoram, which might trigger another exodus if there is no settlement at the place of the conflict.

Conclusion

The pact is hailed as a settlement for the over 2-decade old ethnic disturbances between the tribes of the North East and consistent approach towards a peaceful North-East India. This also provides a model on how to deal with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

4.3. KUKI- NAGA MILITANTS SIGN PACT

Why in news?

Recently, for the first time, the **Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO)** have signed a joint declaration to work together, as they used to separately negotiate political settlements with the Union of India.

About NNPGs and KNO

- NNPGs is an umbrella body of seven Naga militant outfits that have been holding talks with the Centre since 2017. The groups had announced in 2019 that it was ready to sign a deal with the Government of India.
 - NNPGs, comprises the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Unification), the NSCN (Reformation), the NSCN (Khango), the Naga National Council and two of its factions, and the Federal Government of Nagaland.
- The KNO is one of the two umbrella bodies of **17 Kuki militant outfits** that is also currently holding peace talks with the Government of India.
 - The demand of the group is a separate Territorial Council for Kukiland in Manipur.

Understanding Kuki-Naga Conflicts

- Manipur consists of diversity of various ethnic groups and thus have witnessed many conflicts, the most important being the Kuki-Naga conflict.
- Kuki–Naga conflict, which was mainly fought on **land and identity issues**
 - **Identity issue:** In the last few decades, the name Naga and Kuki have become the core subject of **ethnic re-alignment and re-grouping**.

Kuki Tribes

- They are **ethnic group that spread throughout** the North-eastern region of India, Northwest Burma and Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.
- In Northeast India they are present in all the states **except Arunachal Pradesh**.
- Important festivals: Chavang Kut, Chapchar Kut.

Naga Tribes

- They are various individuals or ethnic groups associated to the North Eastern part of India and northwestern Myanmar. (Nagaland and Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in India.)
- **Prominent Naga tribes** are Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Konyak.
- They are distinctly **famous for their ritual practice of headhunting**, once prevalent among tribal warriors in Nagaland.
- The Naga men's clothing is distinctive: conical red headgear is decorated with wild-boar canine teeth and white-black hornbill feathers.
- **Important festivals:** Sekrenyi' Moatsü or Moatsü Mong, Hornbill Festival.

- ✓ **For example:** Various tribes such as the Anal, Chiru etc who were once designated as Old Kuki, have now assimilated with the Naga tribes.
- ✓ Similarly, among the Kuki there have been movements **to distinguish the old from the new migrants** like Thadou, who are attempting to establish their cultural dominance in the region.
- ✓ **Land issue:** Though, hostility between the Nagas and the Kukis dates back to colonial times, in 1990s conflict between these two broke out in the border town of Moreh leading to retaliation and counter retaliation in the southern parts of Manipur.
- ✓ This conflict **was primarily over land**- large swathes land which the Kuki claim to be their **"homeland"** in the Manipur hills overlapped with **Greater Nagaland or Nagalim**, envisioned by the Naga outfits as a **sovereign Naga homeland**.
- ✓ The proposed map of **Nagalim consists** of Nagaland and "all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas" of Assam, **Manipur**, Arunachal Pradesh and, across the international border, Myanmar.



- **Kukis consequently felt the need to organise themselves** to protect their interests more forcefully on **two parallel fronts**-
 - From Nagas and
 - from the reciprocal distrust/dislike for the majority Meitei community of Manipur.
- **Similarly**, the conflict compelled the **Nagas to form the Naga Lim Guard (NLG)** for self-defence against the aggressive Kukis on the other hand.

4.4. INDIAN CYBER CRIME COORDINATION CENTRE

Why in news?

Recently, Union Ministry of Home affairs inaugurated Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) and launched National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.

About I4C

- The **scheme to set up Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) was approved in October 2018** for two years (2018-2020) to deal with all types of cybercrimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- It is in line with the **National Cyber Security Policy, 2013 which aims at** facilitating the creation of secure computing environment and enabling adequate trust and confidence in electronic transactions and also guiding stakeholders actions for the protection of cyberspace.
- This centre is **located in New Delhi**.

- **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP)** is one of the components of the scheme:
 - Other components are: National Cybercrime Threat Analytics Unit, Platform for Joint Cybercrime Investigation Team, National Cybercrime Forensic Laboratory Ecosystem, National Cybercrime Training Centre, Cybercrime Ecosystem Management Unit, National Cyber Research and Innovation Centre.
- NCRP is a citizen-centric initiative that **will enable citizens to report cybercrimes online** through the portal with specific focus on crimes against women, children, particularly child pornography, child sex abuse material, online content pertaining to rapes and gang rapes, financial crime etc.
- All the cybercrime related **complaints will be accessed by the concerned law enforcement agencies** in the states and UTs for taking action as per law.
- **Regional Cyber Crime Coordination Centres** will be set up at the state/UT level and currently 15 States and UTs have given their consent to set it up.

Cyber crime

- Cybercrime is a broad term that is used to define **criminal activity in which computers or computer networks are a tool, a target, or a place of criminal activity** and include everything from electronic cracking to denial of service attacks. It also covers the traditional crimes in which computers or networks are used to enable the illicit activity.
- **Cyberlaw in India is not a separate legal framework.** It's a combination of Contract, Intellectual property, Data protection, and privacy laws.
- **The Information Technology Act, 2000** addresses the gamut of new-age crimes. Computer technology, mobile devices, software, and the internet are both medium and target of such crimes.
- All Traditional criminal activities are such as theft, fraud, forgery, defamation, and mischief are part of cyberspace. These were addressed in the **Indian Penal Code** already.
- Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects as per the Constitution of India. Thus, **States/UTs are primarily responsible for prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of crimes through their law enforcement machinery.**

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UDAIPUR | VADODARA | VARANASI | VIJAYAWADA | VISAKHAPATNAM | WARANGAL

5. ENVIRONMENT

5.1. GREEN ECONOMY

Why in news?

Recently, renowned environmental economist **Pavan Sukhdev** was awarded the 2020 Tyler Prize for his work in the domain of **green economy**.

About Green Economy

- As per the United Nations Environment Programme (**UNEP**), Green Economy is the one that “improves **human well-being** and **builds social equity**, while significantly reducing **environmental risks** and **ecological scarcities**.”
- It has emerged as an alternative to today's dominant economic model, which exacerbates inequalities, encourages waste, triggers resource scarcities, and generates widespread threats to the environment and human health.
 - It aims to transition to an economy that is low-carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive.
 - It is based on the idea of qualitative growth, where low-carbon and environmentally friendly technologies, as well as international cooperation play a key role.
- Pavan Sukhdev's ground-breaking 2008 report on **The Economics of Environment and Biodiversity (TEEB)**, was hosted by UNEP and became the foundation for the Green Economy movement.
- In 2008, UNEP launched the **Green Economy Initiative (GEI)**, a programme of global research and country-level assistance designed to motivate policymakers to support environmental investments.
- Transition towards green economy has global importance, but it's more significant for developing countries like India with its associated benefits and costs.

About Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement

- Established in 1973, it is one of the oldest international environmental awards, recognizing individuals who have contributed in an outstanding manner to the scientific knowledge and public leadership to preserve and enhance the global environment.
- Its recipients encompass the **spectrum of environmental concerns**, including environmental policy, health, air and water pollution, ecosystem disruption and loss of biodiversity, and energy resources.
- It is awarded by the **international Tyler Prize Executive Committee** with the administrative support of the University of Southern California.

The Economics of Environment and Biodiversity (TEEB)

- In 2007, G8+5 countries proposed to initiate the process of analyzing the global economic benefit of biological diversity, the costs of the loss of biodiversity and the failure to take protective measures versus the costs of effective conservation.
- In response to this, a global study was conducted by Germany and the European Commission under Pavan Sukhdev which led to the establishment of **TEEB**.
- Based in Geneva, Switzerland, at the International Environment House, the **TEEB office is hosted by the UNEP**.
- TEEB is a global initiative focused on “**making nature's values visible**”. Its principal objective is to mainstream the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services into decision-making at all levels.
- In October 2010 it released its report “**Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature: A Synthesis of the Approach, Conclusions and Recommendations of TEEB**” and launched the **Bank of Natural Capital** to communicate its findings to the general public.
- It is guided by three core principles-
 - **Recognizing value in ecosystems** can sometimes ensure conservation and sustainable use. e.g. the existence of sacred groves in some cultures has helped to protect natural areas and the biodiversity they contain.
 - **Demonstrating value in economic terms** is often useful for policy makers and others such as business in reaching decisions that consider the full costs and benefits of an ecosystem. E.g. By including the costs and benefits of conserving the ecosystem services provided by wetlands in controlling floods compared to building flood defences.
 - **Capturing value** involves the introduction of mechanisms that incorporate the values of ecosystems into decision-making through incentives and price signals. This can include payments for ecosystem services, reforming environmentally harmful subsidies or introducing tax breaks for conservation.

Need of Green Economy

- **Existing economy is premised on some serious flawed assumptions** such as-
 - that humans have a **right to exploit nature** and extract what they need, writing off any losses to nature as ‘**externalities**’ that do not show up on the books.

- that **'wealth'** and **'growth'** can be measured as GDP alone, whereas most people seek many kinds of wealth, and balance one against another in the decisions they make.
- **Economic growth has come at the expense of environment-** The industrial revolution has helped in the rise of GDP and provided the livelihood for many people. However, **global warming** and **environmental degradation** has an impact on almost everyone.
 - The **poor people are more vulnerable** to the consequences of climate change in terms of violent weather and floods.
- **Green economy can bring resilience to climate change-** as it is basically an amalgamation of all the processes and services which helps towards minimizing environmental degradation.
- **Green economy will place a value on Nature-** through taxation and other means of regulation.
 - It will seek to maximize **natural capital**, social capital and intellectual capital, as well as financial capital.

Challenges to Green Economy

- Might **slow down economic development** during first few years and negatively impact poverty reduction programmes and industrial growth.
 - Such a shift requires necessary **infrastructure** and adequate **time** to be implemented.
- Changing market focus of country's main industries may lead to **job losses** in industries seen as not environmentally friendly such as coal mining.
- **Huge cost to government** in form of subsidies to promote production and use of energy efficient green products.
- **Lack of know-how** regarding green technology and availability of related skills.
- **Developed countries may exploit** green economy model using their technological advantage and environment to gain market access.
 - Developed countries have resources to provide their firms with subsidies for R&D on low carbon technologies. This results in an **uneven balance between developed and developing countries**.
 - Developing countries may be unable to meet required environmental standards on their product export, affecting their economic development.

Global Illustrations on Green Economy

- **Korea-** has adopted a national strategy and a five-year plan for green growth for the period 2009–2013, **allocating 2% of its GDP** to investment in several green sectors such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, clean technology and water.
- **Namibia-** Local communities across the country are granted the right to use and capitalize on the benefits of using wildlife and other natural resources within the boundaries of **"communal conservancies."**

Some steps taken by India on Green Economy

- India has put forward its **Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC)**.
- The National Action Plan on Climate Change (**NAPCC**) along with the State Action Plan on Climate Change seek to mainstream climate in development processes at the national and state levels.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change recognized **green growth in its vision**, wherein **'poverty eradication'** along with green growth is seen to be central.
- The **Fourteenth Finance Commission** has introduced a forward-looking incentive-based grant rewarding the states with quality forest cover measured by moderate and very dense forest cover.
 - The practice is continued by the Fifteenth Finance Commission and it further enhanced the weightage assigned to forest cover.
- The Government of India has a **renewable capacity target of 175 GW by 2022**.

Pathways to a green economy

To make the transition to a green economy, specific enabling conditions will be required. These enabling conditions consist of national regulations, policies, subsidies and incentives, as well as international market and legal infrastructure, trade and technical assistance.

- **Employing strong environmental policies** can drive inefficiencies out of the economy by removing those firms and industries that only exist because of implicit subsidies in under-priced resources.
- **Resource pricing** is important not just for the pricing of natural capital and services, but also for pricing of all the other inputs within an economy. An economy allocates its efforts and expenditures according to relative prices, and under-priced resources result in unbalanced economies.
- Employing resource pricing **drives investments into R&D and innovation**. It does so because avoiding costly resources can be accomplished by researching and finding new production methods. This will include investment in all of the factors (human capital and knowledge) and all of the activities (R&D and innovation).

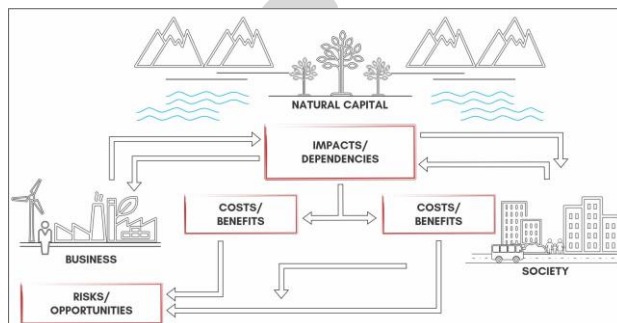
- These investments may then generate **innovation rents** as solution to a problem of resource scarcity identified locally may have applicability and hence more global marketability.
- **Aggressive environmental regulation** may **anticipate future widely experienced scarcities** and provide a template for other jurisdictions to follow. Such policy leadership can be the first step in the process of innovation, investment, regulation and resource pricing described above

Conclusion

Thus, moving towards a green development path is almost certainly a means for attaining welfare improvements across a society, but it is also often a means for attaining future growth improvement. This is because a shift away from basic production modes of development based on extraction and consumption and towards more complex modes of development can be a good long-term strategy for growth.

What is Natural Capital?

- It is the stock of **renewable and non-renewable resources** (e.g. plants, animals, air, water, soils, minerals) that combine to yield a flow of benefits to people.
 - It is a way of describing a resource, environment, habitat or ecosystem (sometimes called a 'stock') that underpins ecosystem service benefits (sometimes called a 'flow').
 - Example- a pollinator habitat can be thought of as natural capital, as are the pollinating insects themselves.
 - It is based on the understanding that **nature underpins** human health, wealth, culture, identity and happiness.
- A natural capital approach works to illuminate this value and helps decision makers to understand the complex ways in which natural, social and economic systems interact, impact, and depend upon one another.



5.2. CORAL RESTORATION

Why in news?

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), with help from Gujarat's forest department, is attempting for the first time a process to restore coral reefs using the bio rock technology. A bio rock structure was installed one nautical mile off the Mithapur coast in the Gulf of Kachchh.

Coral Reefs

- Coral reefs are one of the most biologically diverse marine eco-systems on the Earth.
- Ecologically, coral reefs are important because they are the **counterpart to the tropical rain forest** in terms of species diversity and biological productivity in the Ocean.
 - Coral reef enables the formation of associated eco-systems which allow the formation of essential habitats, fisheries and livelihoods.
- In addition, coral reefs are **climatologically** important because they provide an **accurate long-term record of the climate change** and help in extending our knowledge of seasonal climate variability in many remote tropical oceans.
- In India, Coral reefs are present in the areas of **Gulf of Kutch, Gulf of Mannar, Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep Islands and Malvan (Maharashtra)**.

About Bio rock technology

- Bio rock is the name given to the substance formed by **electro accumulation of minerals dissolved in seawater on steel structures** that are lowered onto the sea-bed and are connected to a power source.
- The technology works by passing a small amount of electrical current through electrodes in the water.
- When a positively charged anode and negatively charged cathode are placed on the sea floor, with an electric current flowing between them, calcium ions combine with carbonate ions and adhere to the structure (cathode).
- This results in calcium carbonate formation. Coral larvae adhere to the CaCO₃ and grow quickly.
- The fragments of broken corals are tied to the bio-rock structure, where they are able to grow at least four to six times faster than their actual growth as they need not spend their energy in building their own calcium carbonate skeletons.

Major threats for the corals

The vast diversity of animal and plant species that contributes to its system and genetic heritage that it represents are increasingly at risk, since the last few decades.

- **Natural:** Environmental-Temperature, Sediment Deposition, Salinity, pH, etc.
- **Anthropogenic:** Mining, Bottom Fishing, Tourism, pollution, etc.

Coral bleaching

- Coral bleaching occurs when coral polyps expel algae that live inside their tissues.
- Coral species live within a relatively narrow temperature margin hence low and high sea temperatures can induce coral bleaching.
- When corals are exposed to high concentrations of chemical contaminants or pathogens, coral bleaching happens.
- Some of the common factors behind coral bleaching are-
 - **Run off from agricultural land and chemical pollution** results in eutrophication and subsequent oxygen depletion.
 - **Destructive fishing and boating practices** lead to habitat destruction and disintegration of reef ecosystem.
 - **Marine Pollution:** Incidents such as increase in sea transport, oil spill etc. destroy coral reefs
 - **Uncontrolled tourism activities** lead to breakage of coral colonies and leads to tissue damage.
 - **Coastal construction and shoreline development** results in heavy sedimentation, which can lead to coral reef destruction.
 - **Introduction of invasive species** in ocean by humans too lead to change in the coral ecosystem.
 - **Coral mining:** Live coral is removed from reefs for use as bricks etc.
 - **Ocean acidification-** With increased pollution, Carbon Dioxide is absorbed by Ocean leading to rise in Carbonic acid in water. As Coral has Calcium carbonate as main component, it reacts with Carbonic acid and slowly dissolves down.
- According to a study, since 1982 three mass bleaching events occurred in 1998, 2010 and 2016 have occurred in India.

Consequences of Coral Bleaching

- It will impact **marine ecosystem**, as coral reefs are some of the most bio diverse and productive ecosystems.
- Reefs act as **natural barriers to shorelines**, protecting them from the effects of moving water. As coral reefs die, coastlines become more susceptible to damage and flooding from storms, hurricanes, and cyclones.
- Without coral reefs, **ocean will not be able to absorb as much CO₂**, leaving more CO₂ in atmosphere.
- Loss of the coral reefs will have a devastating impact on **tropical countries' economies**, food supplies, and safety of their coastal communities.

It is in this context that coral restoration activities are being taken up.

Measures taken for Coral Restoration

Global Measures

- **Chapter 17 of "Agenda 21"** specifically addresses the protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment within the context of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- **International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)-** is an **informal partnership** between Nations and organizations which strives to preserve coral reefs and related ecosystems around the world.
 - It had declared **2018 as the third International Year of the Reef (IYOR)** to strengthen awareness globally about the value of, and threats to, coral reefs and associated ecosystems. **1997 was declared the first IYOR**, in response to the increasing threats on coral reefs and associated ecosystems, such as mangroves and sea grasses around the world.
- **UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)-** It works with scientists and policy makers worldwide to place biodiversity at the heart of environment and development decision-making to enable enlightened choices for people and the planet.

Measures taken in India

- Government of India has taken steps to protect its coral reefs under Coastal Ocean Monitoring and Prediction system (**COMAPS**), Land Ocean Interactions in Coastal zones (**LOICZ**) and Integrated Coastal and Marine Area Management (**ICMAM**).
- Government of India has notified Coastal Regulation Zones (**CRZ**) and has setup National Coastal Zone Management Authority and State Coastal Zone Management Authority to protect coral reefs.
- **Coral Bleaching Alert System (CBAS)**- a service initiated from **INCOIS** uses the satellite derived Sea Surface Temperature (SST) in order to assess the thermal stress accumulated in the coral environs.
- **Coral Reef Recovery Project**- is a joint venture of Wildlife Trust of India and the Gujarat Forest Department, supported by Tata Chemicals Limited (TCL).
 - In Mithapur, the project envisions the creation of a model public-private-managed coral ecosystem of international standards using global benchmarks to restore degraded reefs through activities including coral transplantation and natural recruitment.
- **ReefWatch India**- An NGO, has taken up two projects — **Re(e)Build** and **Re(e)Grow** - to conserve the reefs.
 - **Re(e)build** involves the restoring and rehabilitation of coral reefs at the Andamans by rescuing naturally broken coral fragments that would otherwise get smothered in the sand and die, and re-attaching them to a robust substratum.

5.3. GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING WETLANDS (CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT) RULES, 2017

Why in news?

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has notified the Guidelines for implementing Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017.

Background

- The MoEF&CC has notified **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 (Wetlands Rules)** under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 as regulatory framework for conservation and management of wetlands in India.
- The **present guidelines** have been drafted to support the State Governments / Union Territory (UT) Administrations in the implementation of the Rules

Features of the Guidelines

- **Wetlands to be regulated**
 - Wetlands designated to the **List of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention**.
 - Wetlands notified under the rules by the Central Government, State Government and UT Administration.
 - **All wetlands**, irrespective of their location, size, ownership, biodiversity, or ecosystem services values, can be notified under the Wetlands Rules, **except** River channels; Paddy fields; and certain categories of Human-made waterbodies among others.
 - **Protected Areas** and **areas falling within the purview of Coastal Zone Regulation** have been **excluded** from notification under the Wetlands Rules.
- **Wetlands Authorities**
 - **State Wetland Authority**: The minister in charge of environment in the state will act as chairperson of the authority (Administrator or Chief Secretary of the UT – Chairperson in the case of UT). It has a diverse membership with experts also from Wetland ecology, Hydrology etc.
 - Each Wetlands Authority shall constitute-

Functions of State wetland Authority:

- **Prepare a list of all wetlands** of the State or UT
- Develop a **comprehensive list of activities, to be regulated** and permitted within the notified wetlands and their zone of influence;
- **Define strategies for conservation and wise use of wetlands** within their jurisdiction;
- Coordinate **implementation of Integrated Management Plans** based on wise use principle.
- Function as a **nodal authority for all wetland-specific authorities** within the State or UT Administration.

- ✓ **Technical Committee** to review Brief Documents, Management Plans and advise on any technical matter referred by the Wetlands Authority.
- ✓ **Grievance Committee**, consisting of four members, to provide a mechanism for hearing and forwarding the grievances raised by the public to the Authority.
- **Integrated Management Plan** - The plan refers to a document which describes **strategies and actions for achieving 'wise use'** of the wetland and includes objectives of site management; management actions required to achieve the objectives; factors that affect, or may affect, various site features; monitoring requirements for detecting changes in ecological character and for measuring the effectiveness of management; and resources for management implementation.
- **Preparing a list of wetlands** - The list is developed based on **wetlands definition of the Ramsar Convention**. The Convention, ratified by India, **defines wetlands as** 'areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which, at low tides, does not exceed six meters'.
- **Delineating wetlands** - For each wetland to be notified, a **zone of influence** is to be defined. The zone of influence of a wetland is an area, developmental activities wherein are likely to induce adverse changes in wetland ecosystem structure and (ecological) functioning.
- **Wetlands wise use and ecological character** - Management of notified wetlands is recommended to be based on 'wise use' approach. **Ramsar Convention defines the 'wise use' of wetlands** as "the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development".
 - **Ecosystem approach** requires consideration of the complex relationship between various ecosystem elements and promotion of integrated management of land, water and living resources.
 - **Ecological character** is "the combination of ecosystem components, processes and services that typify the wetland at a given point in time". Ecosystem components are living (biotic) and nonliving (abiotic) constituents of the wetland ecosystem.
- **Prohibited activities** - Conversion of Wetland including encroachment of any kind, setting up of any industry and expansion of existing industries; Solid waste dumping, Discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from industries, Poaching etc.
 - **Permission for carrying out any prohibited activity** within a notified wetland can only be given by **MoEF&CC** upon a specific request made by State Government based on recommendation of Wetlands Authority.
- **Regulated activities** - Subsistence level biomass harvesting (including traditional practices), Sustainable culture fisheries practices, Plying of non-motorized boats; Construction of temporary nature.
- **Account of pre-existing rights and privileges in a notified wetland** - Each wetland is likely to be associated with a range of pre-existing rights and privileges, and it must be ensured that such rights and privileges are **aligned with the 'wise use' approach**.
 - **'Privilege'** is defined here as a special entitlement granted to restricted group or persons, on a conditional basis and can be revoked. **'Rights'**, on the other hand, may be irrevocable and inherently held by a human being.
- **Violations and penal provisions** - The violations of the Wetlands Rules shall attract the **penal provisions as per the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- **Portal for information sharing** - The MoEF&CC has created a web-portal for sharing information regarding implementation of Wetlands Rules. The Central Government, State Government and UT Administration are required to upload all relevant information and documents pertaining to wetlands in their jurisdiction.
- **National Wetlands Committee:** Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA) will be replaced with the committee to monitor the implementation of the rules.

Activities under wise use

- Ecological rehabilitation and rewilding of nature
- Wetlands inventory, assessment and monitoring
- Research
- Communication, environmental education and participation activities
- Management planning
- Habitat management and conservation of wetland-dependent species
- Community-based ecotourism

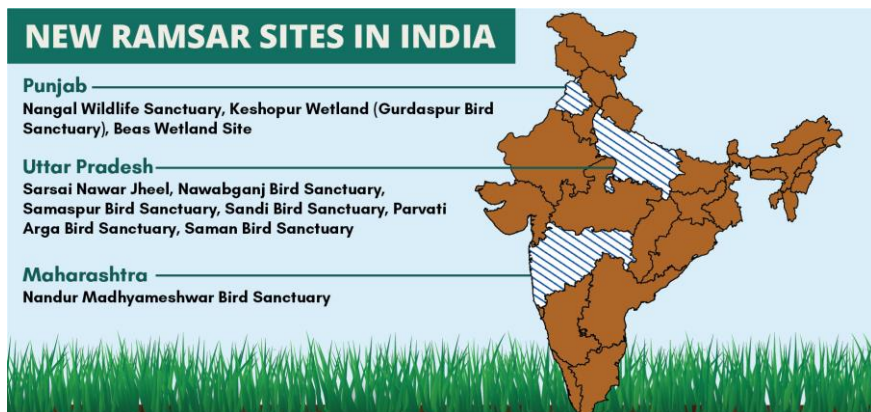
5.4. 10 NEW RAMSAR SITES IN INDIA

Why in news?

The Ramsar Convention has **declared 10 more wetlands in India** as sites of international importance.

Details of Wetlands

This brings the total **number of Ramsar sites in India to 37** from 27. The details of newly included wetlands are as follows-



- **Nandur Madhameshwar**
 - It is the first Ramsar site in Maharashtra.
 - It is a mosaic of lakes, marshes and riparian forest on the Deccan Plateau. Construction of the Nandur Madhameshwar Weir at the confluence of the **Godavari and Kadwa Rivers** helped create a thriving wetland.
 - Its diverse habitats contrast with the **surrounding semi-arid conditions** caused by the rain shadow of the Western Ghats mountain range.
 - It provides sanctuary to **critically endangered species** including **Deolali minnow** (a fish), Indian vulture and white-rumped vulture.
- **Saman Bird Sanctuary (Mainpuri, UP)**
 - It is a **seasonal oxbow lake** on the Ganges floodplain.
 - The Sanctuary is particularly important as a **wintering site for many migrants** including the **greylag goose**, with over 1% of the South Asian population present during winter.
- **Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary (Unnao, UP):**
 - It is a **shallow marshland**. Monsoon rains feed this diverse wetland while the Sarada Canal supplies additional water. The Sanctuary supports recreation and tourism activities as well as local biodiversity.
 - The highly invasive common water hyacinth poses a threat, as does the removal of timber from the forests.
 - It is known to host **Siberian cranes** among migratory bird species that rest here during the winter months.
- **Samaspur Bird Sanctuary (Raebareli, UP):**
 - It is a perennial **lowland marsh typical of the Indo-Gangetic Plains** in Uttar Pradesh.
 - Its **six connected lakes** are heavily dependent on monsoon rains.
 - The Sanctuary harbours threatened species such as the endangered **Egyptian vulture** and **Pallas's fish eagle** and more than 1% of the South Asian population of the **vulnerable common pochard**.
 - A **tall grass called "Sarpat"** is also found in bunches at every spot.
- **Sandi Bird Sanctuary (Hardoi, UP)**
 - It is a freshwater marsh, also designated as **Important Bird Area by Birdlife International**.
 - The Sandi Bird sanctuary is also known by its ancient name as "**Dahar Jheel**" (Jheel = Lake).
 - **River Garra, formerly known as Garun Ganga**, passes near the sanctuary.
 - It is home to over 1% of the South Asian populations of common teal, red-crested pochard and ferruginous duck while **vulnerable sarus crane** has a population of 200 individuals within the Sanctuary.
 - The Sanctuary dried out leading to a subsequent collapse in waterbird populations from 2014 to 2015.
- **Parvati Arga Bird Sanctuary (UP)**
 - It is a **permanent freshwater** environment consisting of two oxbow lakes.
 - They are **rain-fed lakes** in a deep natural depression in the **Gangetic plains of the terai region of Uttar Pradesh**.
 - The Sanctuary is a refuge for some of India's threatened vulture species: the critically endangered **white-rumped vulture and Indian vulture** and the endangered **Egyptian vulture** have all been recorded.

- Invasive species such as the **common water hyacinth** along with the development of roads and railways present significant threats.

- **Sarsai Nawar Jheel (Etawah, UP)**

- This typical wetland of the **Indo-Gangetic floodplain in Uttar Pradesh** is fed by precipitation run-off from the South West monsoon rains.
- It is an example of **co-habitation of humans and wildlife**: farming practices across most of the Site play important roles in sustaining the waterbird habitats.
- A particular beneficiary is the **vulnerable sarus crane**, with a population of 400 individuals making up the largest flock in the region. Other threatened species present include the critically endangered **white-rumped vulture** and endangered **woolly-necked stork**.

- It is recognized by Birdlife International as an **Important Bird Area**.

- **Beas Conservation Reserve (Punjab)**

- It is a 185-kilometre stretch of the **Beas River majorly in Punjab**. The River is dotted with islands, sand bars and braided channels creating a complex environment supporting substantial biodiversity.
- The Reserve **hosts the only known population in India of the endangered Indus river dolphin**. Further threatened species include the endangered masheer and hog deer as well as the vulnerable smooth-coated otter.
- A programme was initiated to **re-introduce the critically endangered gharial**.

- **Nangal Wildlife Sanctuary (Punjab)**

- It is Located in the **Shivalik foothills of Punjab** which is highly eco-sensitive.
- It occupies a human-made reservoir constructed as part of the Bhakra-Nangal Project on **Sutlej River** in 1961.
- The site is of **historic importance** as the Indian and Chinese Prime Ministers formalized the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” there in 1954.

- **Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve (Punjab)**

- It is a mosaic of natural marshes, aquaculture ponds and agricultural wetlands maintained by the annual rainfall runoff.
- It is heavily human influenced and includes a **series of managed fishponds and cultivated crops such as lotus and chestnut**.
- The Site is an **example of wise use of a community-managed wetland**, which provides food for people and supports local biodiversity.
- Threatened species present include the vulnerable common pochard and the endangered spotted pond turtle.

About Ramsar Convention

- It is an intergovernmental treaty that provides a framework for the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation.
- The Convention, **signed in 1971** in the Iranian city of Ramsar, is one of the oldest inter-governmental accord for preserving the ecological character of wetlands.
- Under the **“three pillars” of the Convention**, the Contracting Parties commit to:
 - work towards the wise use of all their wetlands;
 - designate suitable wetlands for the list of Wetlands of International Importance (the “Ramsar List”) and ensure their effective management;
 - cooperate internationally on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems and shared species.
- **Number of Contracting Parties: 171**
- **Montreux Record maintained as part of the Ramsar List** is a register of wetland sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.
- The Ramsar Convention has **6 International Organisation Partners**:
 - **Birdlife International**
 - **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**
 - **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)**
 - **Wetlands International**
 - **World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)**
 - **Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)**

5.5. URBAN LAKES

Why in news?

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently pulled up the Telangana government for failing to take steps to control the pollution in Hyderabad's Hussainsagar lake.

What is Urban Lake?

- According to the **National Lake Conservation Plan (NLCP)**, a water body having a minimum depth of three meters, spread over more than 10 hectares, and having no or very little aquatic vegetation, is considered as a lake.
 - Urban lakes are those lakes which are located entirely within city limits (census town) and directly surrounded by urban developments, with some recreational facilities limited to the shoreline area (parks, playgrounds).

Importance of Urban Lakes

Historically, cities were built along waterways or lakes which **influence the development of urban areas**. They play a major role in **providing environmental, social and economic services**.

- They can **ease the impact of floods and droughts by the means of storage**.
- They also help in **replenishing groundwater level as they are essential receptors for groundwater recharge**, positively influencing water quality of downstream watercourses and preserving the biodiversity and habitat of the surrounding area.
- Lakes are **cooling agents** and are essential to the urban microclimate.
- They provide **prime opportunities for recreation, tourism and domestic purposes**.
- They constitute a **primary source of water supply** in many places.

Threats to Urban lakes

- **Pollution:** Explosive increase in the urban population has resulted into disposing of untreated local sewage and solid waste in to urban lakes and in many cases these water bodies have been ultimately turned into landfills.
- **Eutrophication:** The entry of nutrients through raw sewage cause various destructive changes in the lakes such as prolific growth of aquatic weeds in lakes and ponds that ultimately disturb and kill the ecology of the waterbody.
- **Encroachment:** Due to rapid economic development even a small piece of land in urban areas has a high economic value. Hence, these urban water bodies are no more acknowledged for their ecosystem services but as real estate leading to high scale encroachment.
- **Illegal Mining Activities:** Illegal mining for building material such as sand and stones on the catchment and the bed of the lake also have extremely damaging impacts on the waterbody.
- **Unplanned Tourism Activities:** Lack of systematic planning and regulation and absence of garbage disposal facilities has contributed to the degradation of many water bodies especially at the high-altitude lakes, for example- Dal Lake in Srinagar.
- **Cultural Misuse:** The misuse of these water bodies by local communities for their cultural or religious festivals such as the immersion of idols are particularly a source of serious pollution in lakes.

Institutional Arrangements for the Protection of Lakes in India

- **Government Institutions:** In urban areas, water bodies are owned by land owning agencies. However, their survival and protection depend on the role of a number of other institutions /agencies such as Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Agriculture Ministry, Fisheries Ministry and other local authorities, i.e., Municipal Corporations, Development Authorities, Tourism Department, Water Supply Boards, etc.
 - Ministry of Environment and Forests implements the National Lake Conservation Plan (NLCP), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, aiming at restoration of water quality and ecology of the lakes in the country.
- **Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs):** for lake management and conservation have also been set up in many parts of the country, such as, Bhoj Wetland Authority for the restoration and management of Bhoj wetlands in Madhya Pradesh, Chilka Development Authority in Orissa for the Chilka Lake.

- **Non-Government Organizations:** A number of national and international non-government organizations such as WWF, UNDP, UNEP, ADB, World Bank and many other small local organizations/Citizen Groups such as Neela Hauz Citizen Group in Delhi and Save Urban Lakes in Bangalore, are also involved in lake conservation and restoration.
- **Judiciary and Legal Mechanisms:** In the last few decades a number of Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have been filled by various citizen groups that have successfully sought mandamus for many highly polluted and environmentally degraded lakes. Some of these significant battles of lake protection include Powai and Charkop lakes in Mumbai against encroachment.

Way Forward

- Focus should be on a Lake Management Plan which:
 - Encourages partnerships between concerned citizens, special interest groups, government body and water resources management practitioners
 - Identifies the concerns regarding the catchment/watershed of the lake
 - Sets realistic goals, objectives, and (short, medium and long-term) actions
 - Identifies needed funds and personnel.
- Planning process should focus on resource utilization while keeping future sustainability of the lake in account.
- Roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders along with Centre, state and urban local bodies should be specified.
- An integrated and multidisciplinary approach with a common regulatory framework may result into conservation of Lakes and wetlands.

5.6. COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION: GREEN CREDIT SCHEME

Why in news?

Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) has recently proposed to **overhaul the compensatory afforestation process by introducing the Green Credit Scheme.**

Proposed Green Credit Scheme

- It will allow agencies to **identify appropriate non-forest land and begin growing plantations.**
 - These agencies could be private companies, village forest communities or NGOs.
- After three years, the land would be **eligible to be considered as compensatory forest land** if it meets the criteria set by the Forest Department.
- An industry that is in a need of forest land could then approach the agency and pay it for parcels of such forested land and this would then be **transferred to the Forest Department** and be recorded as forest land.
- FAC believes that this will **encourage plantations outside the traditional forest area.** It will help in contributing towards meeting the international commitments of the country such as Sustainable Development Goals and Nationally Determined Contributions.
- However **various concerns** have been raised against this scheme:
 - It will allow the Forest Department to **outsource** one of its responsibilities of reforesting to non-government agencies.
 - This could allow for “forests” to be **traded** as a **commodity**. It could lead to the **privatisation** of multi-use forests into **monoculture** plantations, and even their destruction, along with **loss of biodiversity** and **violation of land rights**.
 - If the economic value of these plantations becomes lucrative, it can pose a serious **threat to agricultural land**, by diverting the latter for plantations.
 - If the company raising the plantation does not wish to trade, it can retain and **harvest** the plantation for **timber**, once ready. This goes **against the rehabilitative principle** of compensatory afforestation which seeks to restore the ecological imbalance.
 - The crisis of **fragmentation of forests** and the **spike in man-animal** conflict will augment.

Forest Advisory Committee (FAC)

- It is a body under the Union **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)** and is responsible for **regulating forest diversion.**
- It comprises of official members from the forestry division and independent experts, who are non-official members.

Compensatory Afforestation (CA) process in India

- The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 provide that whenever a forest land is to be diverted for non-forestry purposes like mining or infrastructure development, the equivalent non forest land has to be identified for compensatory afforestation and funds for raising compensatory afforestation are to be imposed.
- The government enacted **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act 2016** to provide a proper institutional mechanism for compensatory afforestation matters.
- The project proponent identifies land for CA and also pays the current economic value of the diverted forest land- '**Net Present Value**'. This money which is transferred to the forest department gets collected in the **Compensatory Afforestation Fund**.
- The forest department then undertakes appropriate plantation work on that land, which grows into forests over time.
- The act further requires that:
 - the non-forest land for CA are to be identified contiguous to or in the proximity of Reserved Forest or Protected Forest, as far as possible.
 - in case, non-forest land for CA is not available in the same district, non-forest land for CA is to be identified anywhere else in the State/Union Territory.
 - If non forest land is unavailable in the entire State/ UT, funds for raising CA in double the area in extent of the forest land diverted need to be provided by the user agency on the basis of the rates fixed by the State Forest Department.

5.7. AFRICAN CHEETAH

Why in news?

Supreme Court (SC) allowed the Centre to **introduce the African cheetah from Namibia in Africa to a suitable habitat in India.**

Background

- The plan, first floated in 2009, was to **bolster the nearly extinct Indian cheetah population.**
 - Iran has a sub-species of the Asiatic cheetah but has refused to share them with India, forcing the **government to look for African ones.**
- In 2010, **central government had set up an expert panel for reintroducing cheetah in India.** Panel recommended KunoPalpur (MP), Velavadar National Park (Gujarat) and Tal Chapar sanctuary (Rajasthan) for reintroducing Cheetah.
 - Kuno Palpur was the preferred location for introduction of cheetah. It was also the place prepared by MP to house Asiatic lions.
- However, in May 2012, **SC had stalled the plan to initiate African cheetahs into Kuno-Palpur sanctuary.** Various factors contributed to this:
 - Cheetah may come into **conflict with a parallel project to reintroduce lions** into the same sanctuary and priority has to be given for preservation of our own species.
 - Whether African cheetahs would find the sanctuary a favourable climate as far as abundance of prey is concerned.
 - Whether there would be man-animal conflict in Kuno-Palpur on the cheetahs' introduction.
- In 2013, SC quashed the plan for introducing African cheetahs to Kuno-Palpur.
- The **cheetah plan was revived in 2017** by central government.

About Cheetah

- Cheetah is a **keystone species** of dry forests, scrub forests, and savannahs.
 - Keystone species are those which have an **extremely high impact on a particular ecosystem** relative to its population.
 - It has a **disproportionately large effect on its natural environment** relative to its abundance
- It was officially declared extinct in India in 1952.
- It is one of the **oldest of the big cat species**, with ancestors that can be traced back more than five million years to the Miocene era.
- It is also the **world's fastest land mammal.**
- **Problems like human-wildlife conflict, loss of habitat and loss of prey**, and illegal trafficking, have decimated their numbers.
 - The advent of climate change and growing human populations have only made these problems worse.
- **IUCN status:** African Cheetah- **Vulnerable** and Asiatic Cheetah – **Critically endangered** (surviving only in Iran).

African Cheetah vs Asiatic Cheetah

- **Asiatic cheetah is much stronger** and faster than African cheetah, while on the other hand people believe the **African cheetah are the fastest.**
- **Asiatic Cheetah (around 50-70) is only found in Iran** while African Cheetah is found in wild in Africa.

- **SC now set up a three-member committee** to 'guide' National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). Decision for relocation of African cheetah will be taken after a proper survey and the action of introduction of the animal will be left to the NTCA's discretion.

Arguments against introduction

- **Threat to endangered species:** Recommendation of erstwhile great Indian bustard (GIB) habitats for the cheetah, in effect denying the bird any chance of habitat recovery. Near-extinct GIB is a potential prey for cheetah.
- **Competition with other keystone species:** Wolves, for example, are the keystone species in Nauradehi in MP and would have to compete with cheetahs.
- **Unsuitable habitat:** Proposed Indian wildlife habitats do not have an area of more than 1,000 sq km, and with much less prey base than the African homes of cheetahs.
 - Serengeti National Park in Tanzania has an area of 14,750 sq km brimming with prey base, while the Kruger National Park in South Africa is spread across 19,485 sq km.

5.8. STATE ENERGY EFFICIENCY PREPAREDNESS INDEX 2019

Why in News?

Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) recently released the 'State Energy Efficiency Index 2019'

About Index

- It tracks the **progress of Energy Efficiency initiatives in 36 states and union territories** based on 97 significant indicators.
 - Energy Efficiency (EE) is the cleanest, fastest and cheapest way **to achieve India's sustainable development goals:**
 - ✓ SDG 7- Affordable and Clean Energy
 - ✓ SDG 12- Responsible Consumption and Production
 - ✓ SDG 13- Climate Action
- **The first such Index** was launched in 2018.
- Index was **developed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)** in association with the **Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy (AEEE)**.
- It incorporates qualitative, quantitative and outcome-based indicators to assess energy efficiency initiatives, programs and outcomes in five distinct sectors – **buildings, industry, municipalities, transport, agriculture, and DISCOMs**.
- It categorises states as '**Front Runner**', '**Achiever**', '**Contender**' and '**Aspirant**' based upon their efforts and achievements towards energy efficiency implementation.
- New indicators for this year include adoption of **Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) 2017, energy efficiency in MSME clusters**, etc.
- **Index will help states contribute towards national goals on energy security and climate action** by
 - Helping drive EE policies and program implementation at the state and local level
 - Tracking progress in managing the states' and India's energy footprint
 - Institutionalising data capture and monitoring of EE activities by states

About Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)

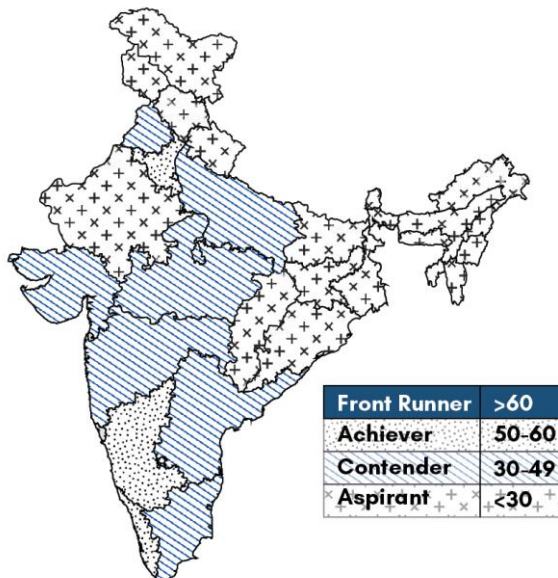
- It is a **statutory body under the Ministry of Power**, created under the provisions of the Energy Conservation Act 2001.
- It **assists in developing policies and strategies** with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy.
- It **co-ordinates with designated consumers and designated agencies** to identify and utilize the existing resources and infrastructure, in performing the functions assigned to it under the Energy Conservation Act.

Related Information

- **India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)** and BEE's draft strategy plan for accelerating energy efficiency in India – **UNNATEE (Unlocking NATIONAL Energy Efficiency potential)** was launched in 2019.
 - ICAP aims to reduce cooling demand across sectors by 20% to 25% by 2037-38 and cooling energy requirements by 25% to 40% within the same period.
 - UNNATEE provides a roadmap for meeting India's goals on climate change through energy efficiency.
- Both plans are a call to action **to accelerate the implementation of energy efficiency initiatives** to reduce energy demand and energy intensity in all sectors, while still powering growth in India.

Key takeaways

- There are **no 'Front Runner' states**, and the top performing states Haryana, Karnataka and Kerala are in the 'Achiever' category.
- For rational comparison, States/UTs are grouped into **four groups based on aggregated Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES)** required to meet the state's actual energy demand (electricity, coal, oil, gas, etc.) across sectors.
 - TPES grouping shall help states compare performance and share best practices within their peer group.
- **Building:** 6 states have amended **Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) 2017** to suit regional and local conditions and have notified the code in the state's official gazette.
 - Four states have incorporated ECBC 2017 in municipal building bye-laws.
- **Industrial sector:** 35 industrial units across 13 states reduced their energy intensity through the adoption of EE measures.
- **Municipal Energy Efficiency:** 11 states have installed centralised control and monitoring systems for street lighting in some municipalities within the state.
- **Transport Sector:** 6 states have released Electric Vehicle (EV) or e-mobility policies, and 4 have published draft EV policies.
- The index showed that a **majority of the initiatives taken by states are on the Policies and Regulations front.**



Suggestion for States

Based on the analysis of responses submitted by states this year, a **three-point agenda is suggested for consideration by state agencies:**

- **Proactive role by states in policy formulation and implementation** to shift the focus from “policies in place” to “policies successfully implemented”.
- **Strengthening the mechanism for data capture, management and public availability of data:** State Designated Agencies (SDAs) should further enhance their engagement with state departments and private sector to enable a robust mechanism for Energy Data Management System.
- **Enhancing the credibility of EE schemes:** Ensuring the integrity of programs that have direct or indirect linkages with common consumers is significant to energy efficiency market transformation.

5.9. ENFORCEMENT & MONITORING GUIDELINES FOR SAND MINING

Why in news?

The Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released the Enforcement & Monitoring Guidelines for Sand Mining (EMGSM-2020).

Need for the Guidelines

- Despite **Sustainable Sand Management Guidelines (SSMG) 2016** to curb the practice, illegal and unsustainable sand mining has continued to be common.
- Since 2016, the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)**, in many of the cases, stressed on **the need of regulating sand mining** and passed several orders.

- Sand is a **minor mineral** defined under Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act).
- **The present guidelines list following as major sources:** River (riverbed and flood plain, Lakes and reservoirs, Agricultural fields, Coastal/ marine sand, Palaeo-channels and Manufactured Sand (M-Sand).
- MMDR Act, 1957 **empowers state governments to frame rules** to prevent illegal mining, transportation and storage of minerals (both major minerals and minor minerals) and for purposes connected therewith.
 - **Control of illegal mining** is, therefore, **under the legislative and administrative jurisdiction of state governments.**

The court in some cases even expressed concern over the death of officials who tried to stop illegal mining.

- Also, a **high-power committee (HPC) constituted by NGT** submitted certain recommendations on enforcement requirements and monitoring essentials to prevent illegal sand mining.
- It is felt necessary to identify the minimum requirements across all geographical regions to have a **uniform protocol for monitoring and enforcement of regulatory provision** prescribed for sustainable sand and gravel mining.
- This document will serve as a **guideline for collection of critical information** for enforcement of the regulatory provisions. It also highlights the **essential infrastructural requirements** necessary for effective monitoring for Sustainable Sand Mining.
- Use of latest **remote surveillance and IT services** helps in effective monitoring of the sand mining activity. Thus, there is a need for an effective policy for monitoring of sand mining in the Country which can be enforced on the ground.

Objective of the Guidelines

- Identification and Quantification of Mineral Resource and its optimal utilization.
- To regulate the Sand & Gravel Mining in the Country since its identification to its final end-use by the consumers and the general public.
- Use of IT-enabled services & latest technologies for surveillance of the sand mining at each step.
- Reduction in demand & supply gaps.
- Setting up the procedure for replenishment study of Sand.
- Post Environmental Clearance Monitoring.
- Procedure for Environmental Audit.
- To control the instance of illegal mining.

The Guidelines

- **District Survey Report (DSR)** is to be prepared to identify and **define the mining and no mining zones** considering various environmental and social factors.
- All district to prepare a **comprehensive mining plan for the district** as per the provision of DSR.
- **Abandoned stream channels** on the floodplains should be **preferred** rather than active channels and their deltas and floodplains.
- **Replenishment study** should be conducted on regular basis to nullify the adverse impacts of sand extraction.
- **Mining depth** should be **restricted to 3 meters**.
- No riverbed mining operation allowed in monsoon period.
- It suggested the **use of technology such as drones, mobile application and/or bar code scanners** etc. for checking illegal mining, reserves estimation, quantity estimation, land use monitoring.
- **Annual audit of each mining lease** shall be carried out wherein three independent members of repute, nominated by District administration shall also participate.
- State Government should develop an **online portal for sale and purchase** of sand and river- bed material.
- State Government shall constitute a **District Level Task Force (DLTF)** under the Chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner/District Magistrate/Collector to keep regular watch.

Conclusion

- This Guideline is supplemental to the existing SSMG-2016, and these two guidelines viz. EMGSM-2020 and SSMG-2016 shall be read and implemented in sync with each other.
- These guidelines focus on the effective monitoring of the sand mining since from the identification of sand mineral sources to its dispatch and end-use by consumers and the general public. Further, the effective monitoring and enforcement require efforts from not only Government agencies but also by consumers and the general public.

5.10. HYDROCHLOROFLUOROCARBON (HCFC)-141 B

Why in News?

India achieved **complete phase out of HCFC-141 b**, one of the most potent ozone depleting chemical after Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

More about news

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) brought out a notification through which the issuance of import license for **HCFC-141b has been prohibited from January 1 this year**.
 - It was **issued under Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control) Amendment Rules, 2019** issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The complete phase out of HCFC-141 b is **among the first at this scale in Article 5 parties** (developing countries) **under the Montreal Protocol**.
 - **Montreal Protocol**, finalized in 1987, is a global agreement to protect the stratospheric ozone layer by phasing out the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances (ODS).

About HCFC-141 b use in India

- It is **used mainly as a blowing agent** in the production of rigid **polyurethane (PU) foams**. PU foam sector has links with cold storages and cold chain infrastructure, automobiles, commercial refrigeration, refrigerators, water geysers, etc.
- It is **not produced in the country** and all the domestic requirements are met through imports.
- **Nearly, 50 % of the consumption** of ozone depleting chemicals in the country was attributable to HCFC-141 b **in the foam sector**.
- **Foam manufacturing sector is mix of** large, medium and small enterprises having varying capacities.
 - MoEFCC engaged with foam manufacturing enterprises to provide technical and financial assistance in order to transition to non-ODS and low GWP technologies under HCFC Phase out Management Plan (HPMP).
- The phase out of HCFC-141b **has twin environmental benefits** viz.
 - assisting the healing of the stratospheric ozone layer,
 - towards the climate change mitigation due to transitioning to low global warming potential alternative technologies under HCFC Phase out Management Plan.

About HCFC

- HCFCs are compounds containing carbon, hydrogen, chlorine and fluorine.
- They are less stable than CFCs because HCFC molecules contain carbon-hydrogen bonds.
- They have shorter atmospheric lifetimes than CFCs and deliver less reactive chlorine to the stratosphere.
- HCFCs are also part of a group of chemicals known as **the volatile organic compounds (VOCs)**.
- HCFCs do not usually dissolve in water, but do dissolve in organic (carbon-containing) solvents.

5.11. NEW MONSOON DATES

Why in News?

- India Meteorological Department (IMD) had decided to **revise the normal onset and withdrawal dates for the monsoon** in some parts of the country from this year.
- The changed dates are **expected to be announced in April**, when the IMD makes its first forecast for the monsoon.

Why was revision in normal dates needed?

- **Changes in precipitation patterns:** Reference dates back to 1940s and it needed to be revised. For example: In the last 13 years, only once has

About Monsoon dates

- The four-month southwest monsoon season, which brings as much as 70 per cent of the country's annual rainfall, officially begins on June 1, with the onset over Kerala, and ends on September 30.
- India had been adhering to June 1 and September 1 as 'normal' reference dates for onset and withdrawal of monsoon ever since it was **last set in 1941**.
- It takes about a month and half after onset on the Kerala coast to cover the entire country.
- And about a month, beginning from the northwestern parts of the country on September 1, to withdraw completely.

the onset over the Kerala coast happened on June 1. While two or three days of earlier or later onset falls within the yearly variability, in several years the onset happened five to seven days late.

- Similarly, the commencement of withdrawal has happened in the first week of September only twice during this period.

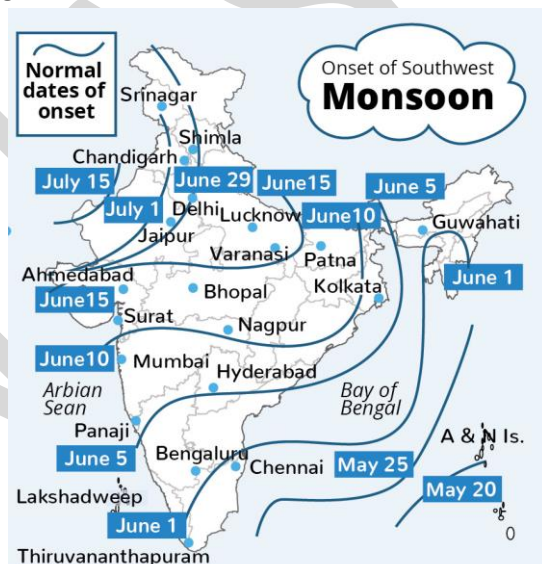
- **Concentrated rainfall:** Rainfall is getting increasingly concentrated within a narrow band of days within the monsoon season. IMD data shows that over several previous years nearly 95 per cent of monsoon precipitation in 22 major cities of the country had happened over a period of just three to 27 days.
- **Change in patterns of regional variations in rainfall:** Areas that have traditionally received plenty of rainfall are often remaining dry, while places that are not expected to get a lot of monsoon rain have sometimes been getting flooded.
- **Break in monsoon:** During the break period, the monsoon trough shifts towards the north from its usual position and brings rainfall to the Himalayan and north eastern states, while the rest of the country remains mostly dry.
 - It has shifted to July from August. This has increased the amount of rainfall received during August.
 - The monsoon trough is the confluence of winds that causes rainfall during the season and usually extends from Punjab in the west to West Bengal in the east.

About IMD

- IMD established in 1875 and headquartered in New Delhi, is under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.
- It is the principal agency responsible for **meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology**.
- IMD is also one of the six Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres of the World Meteorological Organization.

Impact of IMD move

- **Better tracking of Monsoon:** and improve its impact-based forecasts, wherein it will inform state governments about what to expect from an extreme weather event to help them prepare better.
- **Adjustment by Farmers:** New dates will likely nudge farmers in some parts of the country to make slight adjustments in the time of sowing and harvesting of their crops.
 - For example-crops that need transplantation, such as rice, require advance knowledge about the arrival of rain.
- **Effect on water management practices:** Water management agencies, for example those managing the dams in the central plains, should now expect more rain only in the latter part of June.
 - They would now be prompted to preserve and hold on to some water until later in the month.
 - Similar adjustments would need to be made towards the end of the monsoon season as well.
- **Heat action plans:** Cities that execute heat action plans, just ahead of the monsoon, would have to factor in the need to be prepared for longer periods of heat.
- **Planning for other activities:** Such as industrial operations, power sector, or those using cooling systems, would also need to change their behaviour.
 - The power grid can, for example, have more realistic planning for peak periods of electricity consumption in certain months.



5.12. AUSTRALIAN BUSH FIRE

Why in News?

Recently, Australia is facing worst wildfires seen in decades that led to a huge humanitarian and environmental crisis.

More in News

- In total, more than 7.3 million hectares (17.9 million acres) have been burned across Australia.
- Total area under fire is almost 7 times greater than the 2019 Amazon fires and three times than California fires.

Cause

The start of the fires has been attributed to natural causes like **lightening or human induced like arson**. But climate change is the reason why these fires have become so deadly. Some other major cause are:

- **Prolonged drought:** Australia has seen prolonged drought (the three years between 2017 and 2019 were the driest 36-month period ever in the New South Wales) and 2019 was the hottest year on record with 1.5°C above average. The more extreme weather patterns and higher temperatures increase the risk of bushfires and allow them to spread faster and wider.
- **Positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD):** In 2019, the problem has been compounded by the presence of one of the strongest-ever positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) events. Positive IOD events are often associated with a more severe fire season for South-east Australia.
- **Rare stratospheric warming over Antarctica:** Temperatures were 30°C to 40°C higher than normal in the region 10 to 50 km from Earth's surface — another extraordinary weather event that could have contributed to the unusual heat and dryness in Australia.

Concept of Bushfires

- Forest fires, or bushfires, **routinely occur** across the world in **hot and dry seasons**.
- **Dry leaves, grass, shrubs, deadwood etc** are easily combustible. Ignition **happens naturally**, from lightning strikes for example, or **accidentally**, from human induced sources such as arson etc.
- **Suitable speed and direction of wind** helps spread a forest fire faster.
- It **usually comes to an end due to rain** or because there is **no further contiguous vegetation** to spread to.
- **In Indian Context**, During the **summer months**, fires are common in the forests of India as well.

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)

- The IOD **refers to the difference in sea-surface temperatures in the eastern and western Indian Ocean**. This either aids or cuts off moisture supply to Australia, depending on whether the western Indian Ocean is cooler or the eastern.
- This year, the **eastern Indian Ocean** has been **unusually cold (i.e. positive IOD)**, and that contributed to the rainfall deficiency over Australia.

Impact

- **Economic:** In states like New South Wales, Entire towns have been engulfed in flames and heavy structural damages have occurred. Also, in countryside farmers have occurred immense losses because of burning of their crop fields and animals.
- **Health:** Major cities like Sydney and Melbourne have been under a thick blanket of smoke with air quality dropping by 20 times below the healthy limits.
- **Environment:**
 - Experts warn that these fires will release another 350 million tones of CO₂ into atmosphere. The emitted CO₂ will stay in the atmosphere for almost a century.
 - The rising heat from the intense bushfires creates massive, powerful clouds called **pyrocumulonimbus, or pyroCb**.
 - ✓ These “fire clouds” are created “when fires loft enough heat and moisture into the atmosphere” to produce smoke-infused thunderstorms
- **Wildlife and Biodiversity:** More than one billion mammals, birds, and reptiles across eastern Australia are estimated to have been affected by the current fire catastrophe. Many animals and plants have been incinerated or suffocated by smoke and ash.

6. SOCIAL ISSUES

6.1. INCOME INEQUALITY

Why in news?

A new study **published by Oxfam recently** declared that India's richest 1 % hold more than four-times wealth held by 953 million people that is the bottom 70% of the country's population.

Key highlights of the report

- Report underlined that **economic inequality is out of control**, with extremes of wealth existing alongside great poverty.
- **Gap between richest and the rest**
 - The world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.
 - India's richest 1% of the population hold 42.5% of national wealth while the bottom 50%, the majority of the population, owns a mere 2.8%
 - An additional 0.5% tax on the wealth of the richest 1% over the next 10 years can create 117 million jobs in education, health and elderly care, etc.
- **How badly off are women as compared to men**
 - Globally, extreme poverty rates are 4% higher for women than men.
 - This gap rises to 22% during women's peak productive and reproductive ages, largely due to childcare responsibilities.
 - In India, poor women and girls put in ₹19 trillion of unpaid care work every year.

Understanding inequality

- **United Nations** describes inequality as “the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities.
- **Classification:** Two large umbrellas are **Economic inequality and social inequality**. Both these categories are deeply intertwined and inequality in one often affects the inequality in another.
 - **Economic Inequality:** The most quantified and calculated form of inequality. It has two predominant forms:
 - ✓ **Income inequality:** It is the inequality/disparity in the incomes commanded by the top percentile of the population in comparison to the bottom percentiles, and
 - ✓ **Wealth inequality** which is calculating disparities in wealth instead of income.
 - **Social Inequality:** Social inequality is the distribution of resources in a society based on power, religion, kinship, prestige, race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and class. It is therefore the differentiation of access to social goods in society brought about by these factors.
- Inequality can be measured with **Lorenz Curve** and **Indices like Gini index, Atkinson's index, Robin Hood index (Hoover index)**

Difference between income and wealth

- **Income:** Income is all the money received from employment (wages, salaries, bonuses etc.), investments, such as interest on savings accounts etc.
- **Wealth:** It refers to the total amount of assets of an individual or household. This may include financial assets, such as bonds and stocks, property and private pension rights.

Inequality in India: An overview

- **Economic inequality:** India is the second-most unequal country globally, with millionaires controlling 54% of its wealth.
 - At the national level, inequality is found to have risen in India between 1983–2012, which has been mainly driven by income gaps between India's states, and a growing urban-rural divide.
- **Social inequality:** In India, one of the most distinctive forms of social inequity come within the spheres of **gender and caste**, where, people coming from the marginalized sections of these social categories, are directly impacted in terms of their opportunities, access to livelihood, education and health facilities.

Consequences of Inequality

- **Slower poverty reduction**, for instance though, India's Multidimensional Poverty Index value reduced from 0.283 in 2005-06 to 0.123 in 2015-16, more than 364 million people, continue to experience deprivation in health, education, sanitation and basic services due to income inequality.
- **Social unrest**, as high inequality is likely to undermine democracy, promote corruption and cronyism. The gap between rich and poor is helping to fuel **authoritarianism**.
 - Moreover, in more unequal countries, not only trust is lower and crime rate is higher, these societies are more stressed, less happy and have higher levels of mental illness.
- Extreme inequality **inhibits social mobility** which means that children of poor parents will stay poor. It results in **inequality in opportunities** due to lack of proper education, training in skills, lack of connections and assets.
- **Urban exclusion**, that is where, each city today has gated communities in form of posh areas on one hand, whereas, around 17 million people live in the slums of these megacities, where even basic amenities liked garbage disposal and sewerage are missing, and help creating a **vast urban divide**.

Way ahead

- **Policy reorientation:**
 - **Progressive taxation**, in order to redistribute resources across society.
 - **Social spending**, on public services such as education, health and social protection. Evidence from more than 150 countries – shows that overall, investment in public services and social protection can tackle inequality.
- **Free up women's time** by easing the millions of unpaid hours they spend every day caring for their families and homes. Invest in public services including water, electricity and childcare that reduce the time needed to do this unpaid work.
- **Low- productivity workers** should be incentivized to move to sectors that are more productive. **Simultaneously, fundamental reforms** need to be delivered to increase the productivity of these sectors. Thus, need for:
 - Robust labour protections
 - Institutional and policy support for collective bargaining, social safety nets and trade protectionism
- **Leveraging technology:** Technology should be looked at as a tool to address poverty and inequality. To leverage technology as a tool, the government must:
 - promote technological innovation, use it in agricultural, industrial and services sectors along with creating an encouraging regulatory environment.
 - promote digital literacy and internet penetration, especially in local languages.
 - reskilling and better aligning education outcomes with industry needs.

Government Measures

Several initiatives have been taken up by the Government to eliminate poverty, inequality, such as:

- **Expanding the social security net** through Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (Accident Insurance), Atal Pension Yojana (Unorganized Sector) and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana (Life Insurance)
- **Providing institutional support for entrepreneurship** with the help of MUDRA Bank, to provide microfinance to entrepreneurs in rural India and a National Hub for SC/ST entrepreneurs has been created.
- **Financial inclusion** via Prime Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana that strives to ensure that the economically weaker sections have access to bank accounts.
- According to Economic Survey 2017-18, **utmost priority to social infrastructure** like education, health and social protection is being given by the Government to engineer an inclusive and sustainable growth in India.

6.2. GLOBAL SOCIAL MOBILITY INDEX

Why in News?

World Economic Forum (WEF) has come out with its **first-ever Global Social Mobility Report**.

Global Social Mobility Index

- **It is designed to** provide policy-makers with a means to identify areas for improving social mobility and promoting equally shared opportunities in their economies, regardless of their development.
- The WEF's Global Social Mobility Index assesses the 82 economies on "10 pillars" spread across the following five key dimensions of social mobility:

- Health;
- Education (access, quality and equity, lifelong learning);
- Technology;
- Work (opportunities, wages, conditions);
- Protection and Institutions (social protection and inclusive institutions).
- **Key Findings**
 - **Denmark holds the first place** followed by Norway, Finland and Sweden.
 - **India ranks 76th out of 82 economies.** It ranks 41st in lifelong learning and 53rd in working conditions.
 - **Five economies most to gain from boosting social mobility** are China, the United States, **India**, Japan and Germany.
 - **It calls for a new financing model for social mobility:** Improving tax progressivity on personal income, policies that address wealth concentration and broadly rebalancing the sources of taxation can support the social mobility agenda.
 - **Increasing social mobility by 10 per cent** would benefit social cohesion and **boost the world's economies** by nearly **5 per cent by 2030.**

What is Social Mobility?

- It can be understood as the movement in personal circumstances either “upwards” or “downwards” of an individual in relation to those of their parents.
 - In absolute terms, it is the **ability of a child to experience a better life than their parents.**
 - On the other hand, relative social mobility is an assessment of the **impact of socio-economic background on an individual's outcomes in life.**
- It is much broader than just looking at income inequality. It can be measured in reference to a **wide range of outcomes—such as health or educational achievement.**

6.3. MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2020

Why in News?

Recently, Cabinet has approved **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020** for amending Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.

Salient features of proposed amendments

- It proposes requirement for opinion of **one registered medical practitioner (RMP) for termination of pregnancy, up to 20 weeks** of gestation and introducing the requirement of opinion of **two medical practitioner for termination of pregnancy of 20-24 weeks of gestation.**
- **Enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks** for special categories of women including survivors of rape, victims of incest (Sexual relations between close relative) and other vulnerable women (like differently-abled women, Minors) etc.
- **Limit of 24 weeks for termination of pregnancy will not apply in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities** diagnosed by the Medical Board. The composition, functions and other details of the Medical Board will be prescribed.
- Name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed except to a person authorized in any law for the time being in force.
- Relaxing the contraceptive-failure condition for **“any woman or her partner”** from the present provision for “only married woman or her husband”, allowing them to medically terminate the pregnancy.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971

- **It provides for grounds of abortion:**
 - Where there is a risk that if child is born, it would suffer from physical and mental abnormalities.
 - Where pregnancy can be a threat to life of women or would cause grave physical and mental injury to her.
 - Where pregnancy caused due to rape or due to the failure of contraceptive methods.
- **It provides for criteria for approval at different stages:**
 - In the first 12 weeks with the approval of one Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP).
 - Between 12-20 weeks, pregnancy can be terminated with the approval of 2 RMPs.
 - Beyond 20 weeks, termination of pregnancy is allowed only after approval of the court.
- Written consent from guardians is required for minors to access abortion.
- Failure of contraceptive methods can be stated as a reason for seeking abortion by “married women” only.

Intended benefits

- **Updating the law with advances in medical technology:** Present medical techniques allow for safe removal of a foetus at a relatively advanced state of pregnancy.

- **Reproductive rights to Unmarried women:** MTP Act, 1971 did not contain provisions for unmarried women seeking abortion in case of contraceptive failure.
- **Expanding access to safe and legal abortion services** (on therapeutic, eugenic, humanitarian or social grounds): Unsafe abortions can result in serious infection, future infertility, sepsis, bowel injury, internal injuries, and even death.
- **A number of foetal abnormalities are detected after 20 weeks:** The amendment allows termination in such cases without the ordeal of seeking court approval.
- **Easing burden on courts:** There have been several petitions in Courts seeking permission for abortion beyond the permitted gestational period on grounds of foetal abnormalities or pregnancies due to sexual violence faced by women.
- **Preventing socio-economic and psychological impacts of unwanted pregnancies:** There have been some cases where the 20-week mark passed due to delay in courts or low awareness among young girls, leaving many, including rape survivors, with unwanted pregnancies.
- **Ensuring dignity and confidentiality of women seeking termination:** There exists a social stigma related to abortion in India which hinders access to safe abortions.

6.4. ANGANWADI WORKERS

Why in News?

Madhya Pradesh government has issued an order restricting anganwadi workers from being employed for duties not relating to the Integrated Child Development Services.

About Anganwadi workers

- Anganwadi Worker (AWW) is a community based frontline honorary worker of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Programme.
- She acts as an agent of social change, mobilizing community support for better care of young children, girls and women.
- They are paid a monthly honorarium as decided by the Government from time to time. In addition many States/UTs are also giving monetary incentives to these workers out of their own resources.

Problems Faced by Anganwadi Workers

- **Inadequate honorarium:** Majority of the AWW belong to the below poverty-line category and the honorarium provided to them barely covers their basic expenditures.
- **Lack of social security benefits:** The workers do not have permanent jobs with comprehensive social security benefits like other government staff.
- **Excessive record maintenance:** The AWW have to maintain total 12 registers including survey register, immunization register, ANC register, referral register, dairy cum visit book etc. which is a tedious task.
- **Work overload:** The workload of the Anganwadi staff is heavy considering number of responsibilities.
- **Logistic supply related issues:** The Anganwadi workers face several problems related to logistics supply delay including medicine, medical kit etc.

Anganwadi Services is a component of Umbrella ICDS Scheme of Ministry of Women and Child Development alongwith: PM Matru Vandana Yojana; POSHAN Abhiyan; Scheme for Adolescent girls; Child Protection Scheme and National Creche Scheme

- The beneficiaries under the Scheme are children in the age group of 0-6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- It offers a package of six services, viz.
 - Supplementary Nutrition
 - Pre-school non-formal education
 - Nutrition & health education
 - Immunization
 - Health check-up and
 - Referral services
- Three of the six services namely Immunization, Health Check-up and Referral Services delivered through Public Health Infrastructure under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

Differences between ANM, AWW and ASHA

India has three cadres of Community Health Workers.

- **Auxiliary Nurse-Midwife (ANM)**, based at a sub-center and visits villages in addition to providing care at the subcenter.
- **Anganwadi Worker (AWW)**, who works solely in her village and focuses on provision of food supplements to young children, adolescent girls, and lactating women.
- **Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)**, Instituted as Part of **National Rural Health Mission**, who focus on promotion of immunizations and institutional-based deliveries, for which they receive a performance-related fee.

- **Poor Infrastructure:** The building facilities in terms of space and nature of construction are unsatisfactory with many of them not having basic drinking and sanitation facilities.
- **Lack of cooperation from community:** Their respective communities have an apathetic attitude towards their work due to which community participation or help is negligible.

Way Forward

- Along with honorarium, some performance based incentives and other social security benefits like pension schemes should be provided to AWW.
- Communities should be sensitized to help Anganwadi workers so that their work load can be managed.
- **Digital solutions** should be implemented for the maintenance of records.
- Up gradation of Infrastructure of AWCs should be done on priority basis.
- The responsibilities of the AWWs must be rationalized and additional assistance must be provided with additional responsibilities.

6.5. ADOPTION IN INDIA

Why in New?

Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) reported 246 cases of disruption and 10 cases of dissolution in adoption over the period of the last five years.

Adoption procedure in India

- Adoption is the permanent legal transfer of all parental rights from one person or couple to another person or couple.
 - Adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities as biological parents, and adopted children have all of the emotional, social, legal and kinship benefits of biological children.
- Adoption Regulations, 2017 notified by Ministry of Women and Child Development, under **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015** and subsequent **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016**, govern the adoption procedure in India.
- These provisions are in line with the **Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993** which was ratified by Government of India in 2003.
 - The Hague Convention of 1993 on **Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Adoption Convention)** protects children and their families against the risks of illegal, irregular, premature or ill-prepared adoptions abroad.
 - It also seeks to prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children

Fundamental principles governing adoptions of children from India

- The child's best interests shall be of paramount consideration, while processing any adoption placement.
- Preference shall be given to place the child in adoption with Indian citizens and with due regard to the principle of placement of the child in his own socio-cultural environment, as far as possible.
- All adoptions shall be registered on **Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System (CARINGS)** and the confidentiality of the same shall be maintained by the Authority.

THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION

Registration



Interested couple/single parent has to register with the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) by providing the requisite documents. The registration procedure is explained on the CARA website.

Document transfer

Once the registration is done, the prospective adoptive parents (PAP) have to transfer their documents to the nearest adoption agency, a list of which is made available on the CARA website.



Parental assessment



The agency will then counsel the parents and also conduct a home study. A report will be sent to CARA.

If the local agency gives a positive report, the PAP name will be added to the seniority list. As and when a child is available for adoption, the couple is notified. The PAP need to state their decision within 48 hours.



Completion of process



If they give their consent, the couple need to go to the agency to convey their willingness. The child will be given for adoption. The adoption process is completed through a court procedure, which the agency will facilitate.

Room for review

In case the PAP refuse to adopt the child presented to them on the website, they will be given another option within 60 days, if they are not in agreement with the second option too, they have to begin the process from scratch again.



Agencies involved

- **Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)** - It is a **statutory body** of Ministry of Women & Child Development and functions as the nodal body which ensures smooth functioning of the adoption process from time to time. It is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- **State Adoption Resource Agency (SARA)** - It acts as a nodal body within the State to promote and monitor adoption and non-institutional care in coordination with CARA.
- **Specialized Adoption Agency (SAA)** - It is a child care institution recognized by the State Government for the purpose of placing children in adoption.
- **Authorized Foreign Adoption Agency (AFAA)**- It is recognized as a foreign social or child welfare agency that is authorized by CARA on the recommendation of the concerned Central Authority or Government Department of that country for coordinating all matters relating to adoption of an Indian child by a citizen of that country.
- **District Child Protection Unit (DCPU)** – It is a unit set up by the State Government at district level. It identifies orphan, abandoned and surrendered children in the district and gets them declared legally free for adoption by Child Welfare Committee.

Issues with Adoption in India

- **Cases of Disruption and Dissolution:** Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has recorded 246 instances of disruption 10 cases of dissolution in adoption between 2014-15 & 2018-19, which means 6 in 100 children are being returned at advanced stages of adoption.
- **Psychological trauma to the child:** Children returning to the institution after being placed with a family face rejection and are scarred for a long time.
- **Low adoption rates for special needs, older and hard to place children:** Of the 3,200 children adopted by Indian families in one year, hardly 50 are those with special needs and the older children comprise a majority of children returned.
- **Denial of adoption to homosexual couples, trans couples and single men** (who cannot adopt a girl child).
- **Existence of unregistered child care institutions (CCIs):** Children in these institutions are vulnerable to poor care, physical and sexual abuse, and trafficking.

Disruption

- **Disruption means unmatching of child from adoptive family** due to non-adjustment of child with adoptive family after placement, but prior to the completion of legal process of adoption.
 - On disruption State Adoption Resource Agency holds counselling sessions with parents as well as child. Based on its findings, child or adoptive parent is temporarily removed from list until they can prove their preparedness again.
- **Dissolution means annulment of the adoption legally**, due to non-adjustment of child with adoptive family, after court decree for adoption has been obtained.

Way forward

- **Promoting interaction of the kids with the Prospective Adoptive Parents** in early stages of adoption for easier adjustment.
- **Recruitment of psychologists and counselors in CCIs:** The child should be taught about permanence of a relationship and familial bonds before placement.
- **Raising awareness among Indian families** for adopting special needs, older and hard to place children and providing necessary assistance for the same.
- Ensuring that all unregistered CCIs are working in compliance with the regulations and non-compliant CCIs must be closed.
- Enabling eligible homosexual and trans couples to adopt.

Recent Initiatives

CARA formed a **nine-member sub-committee** of child rights activists, members of SC-appointed child welfare committees (CWCs), and adoptive parents.

- The panel **developed a training curriculum** and held three-day workshops in 12 States.
- The objective was to educate social workers about their responsibilities such as ensuring vaccination, adequate nutrition and medical assistance, and addressing special needs of children.
- The trainees learned to better assess the suitability of parents who wish to adopt and to counsel and prepare children, especially the older ones.

6.6. ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION REPORT (ASER) 2019

Why in news?

Recently NGO Pratham published ASER Report 2019 'Early Years'.

About ASER 2019 Survey

- **Focusing on Early years:** The early years, is known to be the most important stage of cognitive, motor, social and emotional development in the human life cycle.
 - The 'Early Years' ASER collects data on the **schooling or pre schooling status of children in the age group 4-8.**
- It explores selected competencies categorized in **four domains:**
 - Early language acquisition,
 - Early numeracy skills,
 - Cognitive abilities and
 - Social and emotional learning.

About ASER

- ASER is **sample-based household survey** and **largest citizen-led survey** in India.
- It is an annual survey that aims to provide reliable annual estimates of **children's schooling status and basic learning levels for each state and rural district in India**
- Every year since 2005, ASER has reported on the ability to do basic reading and arithmetic tasks for children in **the 5-16 age group in Rural India.**
- In 2017, ASER '**Beyond Basics**' focused on the abilities, experiences, and aspirations of youth in the **14-18 age group.**

Key Highlights

Key Takeaways

- **Status of Pre-school and school enrolment patterns among young children (age 4-8):** More than 90% of young children in this age group are enrolled in some type of educational institution.
- **Status of Children in early primary grades (Std I-III):** The variation in age distribution which is widest in Std I, **decreases in each subsequent grade.** And older children continue to do better than younger ones on every task.
- **Private schools performing better than the Government schools:** They have a **learning advantage** on all the crucial factors, such as, age distribution in grade one, home factors such as affluence, mother's education and some baseline abilities that children enter grade one with.
 - They expose children to school-like curricula even before they have entered school.
- **Role of Mother's education:** Among the pre-primary section, children with mothers who completed eight or fewer years of schooling are more likely to be attending anganwadis or government pre-primary classes.
 - Whereas their peers whose mothers studied beyond the elementary stage are more likely to be enrolled in private LKG/UKG classes.

Pre-School Education and Care in India

- **The Right to Education Act** proposes that state governments make the necessary arrangements for **early childhood care and education** for all pre-school age children, that is 3 to 6 years.
- The **draft National Education Policy 2019** underlines the importance of early childhood education and prescribes guidelines for providing pre-primary education.
- However, the **India Early Childhood Education Impact Study 2017** presents evidence that young children do not follow the enrollment trajectories outlined by policy.

Concerns

- **Gender gaps:** It is visible among the young children of age 4-8 years, with more girls than boys enrolled in government institutions, and more boys than girls enrolled in private institutions.
- **Cognitive skills:** At age of 5, a large proportion of children is unable to do all of the activities. Moreover, children from less advantaged homes are **affected disproportionately.**
- **Difference in the age distribution:** Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE) mandates that children should enter Std I at age 6. However, **4 out of every 10 children** in Std I are younger than 5 or older than 6.
 - **Children in Std I in government schools are younger** than those in the same grade in private school.
- **Mismatch with curriculum expectations:** Children's skills and abilities improve in each subsequent grade. But the huge jump between curriculum expectations at each grade means that by Std III, their early language and numeracy **outcomes are already well behind curriculum expectations.**
 - **For example:** 41.1% of students in Std I can recognize 2-digit numbers, while 72.2% of students in Std III can do so. But according to NCERT's specification of learning outcomes, children are expected to be able to recognize numbers up to 99 in Std I itself.

- **Poor condition in anganwadis:** Children in anganwadis do worse than private pre-school children on cognitive as well as early language tasks.
 - **For instance:** 14% children in anganwadis could recognise letters or more compared to 52.9% in private pre-schools.

Recommendation

- **Focus on play-based activities:** Children's performance on tasks requiring cognitive skills is strongly related to their ability to do early language tasks and early numeracy tasks.
 - This suggests that focusing on play-based activities that build memory, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities is more productive than an early focus on content knowledge.
- **Reworking of curriculum and activities:** This is urgently needed for the entire age band from four to eight, cutting across all types of preschools regardless of whether they are run by private or Government.
- **Strengthen the existing network of anganwadi centres:** The findings of ASER 2019 make a clear case for strengthening these early childhood education centres so that they implement appropriate “school-readiness” activities.
- **Revisit state and national norms for age of entry to school:** ASER shows clearly that performance is closely related to children's age. Permitting underage children into primary grades puts them at a learning disadvantage which is difficult to overcome.
 - ASER data shows that 27.6 % of all children in Std I are under age six.
- **Breadth of skills is important, and focusing too early on formal subject learning is counter-productive:** ASER 2019 data shows a focus on activities that strengthen cognitive skills rather than subject learning in the early years may generate substantial benefits in terms of children’s future learning.
 - **Need to streamline the curriculum** at the pre-school stage so that all pre-schools focus on activities that build cognitive and early literacy and numeracy skills.

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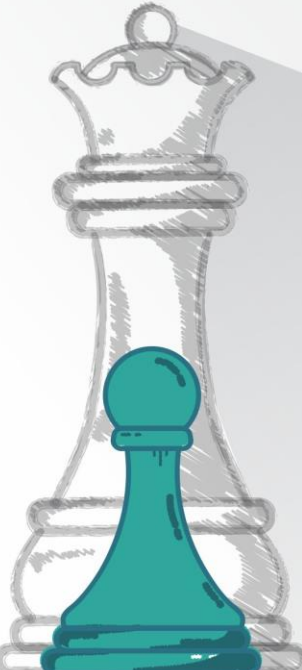
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7. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

7.1. REGULATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Why in news?

Recently, various prominent personalities have highlighted the need of regulating **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**.

More on the news

- Renowned personalities like Bill Gates, Elon Musk, Sundar Pichai, Jaron Lanier have cautioned against an impending robot apocalypse, which might come as a result of Artificial Intelligence.
- Stephen Hawking had highlighted that AI could destroy humanity if we aren't proactive to avoid the risks of unfettered AI.

About Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- It is simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computers.
- It refers to the ability of machines to perform cognitive tasks like thinking, perceiving, learning, problem solving and decision making and execute tasks in real time situations without constant supervision.
- Particular applications of AI includes expert systems, speech recognition and machine vision.
- It encompasses machine learning, where machines can learn by experience and acquire skills without human involvement.

Significance of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- It has the potential to overcome the physical limitations of capital and labour and open up new sources of value and growth.
- It has the potential to drive growth by enabling
 - **Intelligent automation** i.e. ability to automate complex physical world tasks.
 - **Innovation diffusion** i.e. propelling innovations through the economy.
- **Role in social development and inclusive growth:** access to quality health facilities, addressing location barriers, providing real-time advisory to farmers and help in increasing productivity, building smart and efficient cities etc.
- The **exponential growth of data** is constantly feeding AI improvements.

Examples of AI use in India-

- A Statement of Intent has been signed between NITI Aayog and IBM to develop Precision Agriculture using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Aspirational Districts.
- Microsoft India is using AI sensors to make farming and healthcare smart.

Need for regulating Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- **Ethical concerns-** With popularization of a new technology, its virtues are not guaranteed. For instance, the internet made it possible to connect with anyone and get information from anywhere, but also easier for misinformation to spread.
 - There are real concerns about the potential negative consequences of AI, from **deep fakes** to nefarious uses of **facial recognition technology**.
- **Data Management-** as there is lack of clarity on data flow and data ownership which might result into **data colonialism** (data generated by developing countries yet not benefitting them).
 - Further, data collection for feeding AI algorithms has its associated **privacy concerns e.g. mass surveillance**.
 - AI could contribute to the forgery of documents, pictures, audio recordings, videos, and online identities which can and will occur with unprecedented ease.
- **Biasedness:** The algorithms used in artificial intelligence are discrete and, in most cases, trade secrets. They can be biased, for example, in the process of self-learning, they can absorb and adopt the stereotypes that exist in society or which are transferred to them by developers and make decisions based on them.
- **Accountability:** If an AI system fails at its assigned task, someone should be made responsible for it. e.g. an anti-terrorism facial recognition program revoked the driver's license of an innocent man when it confused him for another driver.
 - Similarly, when any AI algorithm takes a decision related to social dimensions, it is crucial is taken on transparent parameters. These AI algorithms can and do make decisions that create significant and serious issues in people's lives.

- **Super-intelligence:** A sufficiently intelligent AI system can redesign itself or can create a better successor system and so on leading to **intelligence explosion**. It is crucial to ensure this super-intelligence will be good to human kind and that will depend upon its technological capabilities and ethicality.

Challenges in regulating Artificial Intelligence

- **Excessive Regulation-** Since the AI is still in its preliminary stages, some critics believe that, excessively strict regulation is neither necessary nor desirable.
 - Such a trend might discourage the needed research in the development of this field.
- **Lack of consensus-** among the countries over the mechanisms and tactics in regulation of AI.
- **Conflict of Interests-** There are doubts over **how regulators will use AI**, which will provide greater certainty for regulated entities. For example, regulators might themselves use AI to identify violations within a massive set of compliance data.
- **Absence of widespread expertise in AI technologies-** This could lead to policy decisions being taken based on a narrow spectrum of opinions
 - There are large gaps in data collection, preparation, and benchmarking capabilities.
- **Lack of Predictability:** The algorithms taking over social functions must be predictable to those they govern. The local, specific behavior of the AI may not be predictable apart from its safety, even if the programmers do everything right.

Way Forward

- International agencies could be guided by the **Asilomar AI Principles** (by Future of Life Institute, a non-profit organization) which are **23 guidelines** for the research and development of AI.
- **Need for a responsible AI-** Resolutions can be brought to regulate Robotics, and code of ethical conducts can be brought for Robotic engineers, as well as Research ethics committees. **Following set of ethical principles** could be adopted like-
 - Minimize Biasedness and arrest inequalities and discrimination arising out of it
 - Robots should act in the best interests of humans.
 - Human interactions with robots should be voluntary.
 - Ensuring equitable benefits to all
- AI systems should be **made legally liable** for their actions through making their programmers and users accountable.
- Regulation must be **continuous** and adapt with evolution of technology.
- There is need to **find country specific** data, trained workforce, fine-tuned algorithms and technology suited to local needs.

Various steps taken towards regulation of AI

- **OECD Principles on Artificial Intelligence** - adopted by 42 countries including OECD members and non-members.
- **United States' AI strategy-** has so far been led by corporations such as Google and Microsoft, who are focusing on self-regulation and rapid technological development.
 - **Google-** published their own **AI principles** to help guide ethical development and use of the technology.
 - Also in January, 2020 the US has issued broader set of draft principles for federal agencies' treatment of artificial intelligence.
- **European Union** - The **Communication on Artificial Intelligence** document which among other issues, outlines the need to have an ethical and legal framework is in place.
- **China-** launched its **New Generation AI Development Plan** and currently soliciting submissions from AI experts to develop its own governance principles.
- **United Kingdom-** has developed the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, and the Office for AI.

Status of India in this regard-

- **National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence-** NITI Aayog has identified five areas where AI can be useful. It has noted the lack of regulation around AI as a major weakness for India.
- **Center of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence** (CoE in AI) by National Informatics Centre (NIC) which is a platform for innovative new solutions in AI space, a gateway to test and develop solutions for projects undertaken by NIC at central and state level.

Asilomar AI principles



7.2. BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY

Why in news?

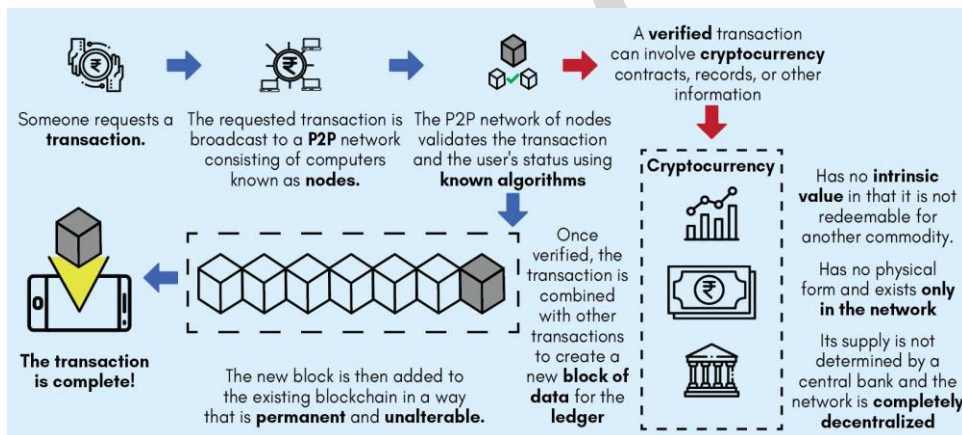
National Informatics Centre (NIC) has set up the **Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Blockchain Technology** in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

More on news

- It aims to provide Blockchain as a service and allowing all stakeholders to benefit from shared learning, experiences and resources.
- It will **facilitate the Government Departments** in building proof of concepts for use of Blockchain technology in different dimensions of governance leading to large scale deployment of some such applications.
- New and previously unforeseen applications of Blockchain in the Government are expected to enhance transparency, traceability and trust in e-governance systems.

About Blockchain technology

- A blockchain is a specific type of data structure which can be used to transact across nodes or participants. The ownership rights are recorded in **cryptographically stored and linked blocks** which contain records of ownership of assets among the participants that can remain anonymous.



- Blockchains are open, distributed ledger that can chronologically record transactions between two parties efficiently in near real time.
- The prerequisite for each subsequent transaction to be added to the ledger is the respective consensus of the network participants (called nodes), thereby creating a continuous mechanism of control regarding manipulation, errors, and data quality.
- The blockchain technology generally has **key characteristics of decentralization, persistency, anonymity and auditability**. With these traits, blockchain can greatly save the cost and improve the efficiency.

Applications of Blockchain

- **Banking-** For efficient banking operations and efficiently using the KYC procedures offered by this technology. For instance-
 - **SBI** leads as the first bank to use KYC and facilitate remittances based on blockchain.
 - **Yes Bank** adopted this technology to fully digitise vendor financing for one of its clients which enables timely processing of vendor payments without physical documents and manual intervention while tracking the status of transactions in real time.
 - **Cross border remittances** can be made faster and less costly.
- **Capital Markets-** in the areas of-
 - **Trade Settlement-** Faster transfer of securities and payments and reduced trading cost by removing intermediaries
 - **Commercial Papers Issuance and Trading-** Smart contract based issuance and allocation of Commercial paper to investors, settlement of delivery and payments
- **Cybersecurity-** Sensitive data moved to the blockchain can effectively manage access by minimizing the risk of leaks to hackers. For instance-
 - The Block Armour solution is the company which ring-fences an organization's critical resources, securely providing access to authorized users and devices.
- **Healthcare and pharmaceuticals-** It involves a lot of **sensitive clinical data** which demands a secure and reliable system. For instance-

- **Kare4u Healthcare Solutions** has partnered with hospitals, insurance companies and patients to implement its Blockchain-enabled mobile platform “**HealthPro**” to connect hospitals, insurance companies and host medical records of patients.
- **Agriculture-** The food supply chain is one characterized by asymmetry of information. The complex network comprises farmers, brokers, distributors, processors, retailers, regulators and consumers.
 - Improved data sharing will result in stakeholders getting their dues (particularly poor farmers with small land holdings) and consumers having control on food quality.
 - Last year Coffee Board had launched the **Coffee Blockchain initiative**. Under it, **country's first blockchain-based marketplace app** for trading in Indian coffee was launched which aimed at getting growers better returns by removing middlemen.
- **Telecom-** to eliminate spam calls and financial fraud by unregistered telecom marketers and open up new revenue streams for the telecom companies etc. For instance-
 - Tech Mahindra has partnered with Microsoft and their Blockchain Solution enables customer's preference registration, consent acquisition, dynamic preference setting, stakeholder onboarding etc.
- **Governance-** Digital identities, maintaining digital certificates of citizens from birth to death and that of different types of asset ownership, electronic voting, educational certificates, monitoring welfare programs, tracking procurement of all key products and services across Government departments, protecting patents, copyrights and trademarks, confidential access and tracking of health records of all citizens, cybersecurity of critical infrastructure are some of the key applications of Blockchain technology
 - E.g. Andhra Pradesh has piloted two projects on **managing land records** and streamlining **vehicle registrations**. West Bengal has implemented Blockchain based issuance of Birth certificates to newborn.
 - NITI Aayog is building a platform called '**IndiaChain**' — a shared, India-specific blockchain infrastructure to leverage the trinity of Jan-Dhan-Yojana, Aadhaar and the mobile.
 - ✓ It will transform the functionality of public administration using blockchain for efficient and transparent distribution of government subsidies, streamlined record-keeping, systematic tax monitoring, and regulated supply chain management.
 - ✓ The project also has plans to step into the education sector to curb fraudulent degrees and certifications, and seamlessly manage massive amounts of data in the pharmaceuticals and healthcare industry.
- **Insurance sector-** Inherent inefficiencies in the claim management system of the Insurance Industry lead to losses of about Rs. 10,000 crores per year. Implementing blockchain for claim management is the ultimate solution to mitigate these issues. For instance-
 - e.g. Cognizant has partnered with insurance providers such as ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, SBI Life Insurance, HDFC Life, Kotak Life and more to develop a secure data-sharing solution built on blockchain platform.
- **Blockchain-powered smart contracts** where every piece of information is recorded in a traceable and irreversible manner would enhance ease of doing business, augment the credibility, accuracy and efficiency of a contract and reduce the risk of frauds substantially.
- **Real Estate-** Property deals, which are still carried out on paper making them prone to disputes, can be benefitted through in-built transparency, traceability and efficiency in this system.
 - Blockchain solves these issues by digitizing land titles, therefore, each land would have a digital address stored on the blockchain with details of occupancy, ownership records, finance, specifications of the property and associated legal disputes.

Challenges in Adoption of Blockchain Technology

- **Lack of Scalability** can put a strain on the adoption process, especially for public blockchains. The processing speed is way less than the traditional transaction networks. E.g. Visa can process more than 2000 transactions per second. In contrast, Bitcoin blockchain can process 3-7 transactions per second, and Ethereum can handle approximately 20 transactions in a second.
- **Lack of interoperability-** Most of the blockchains present in the market **work in silos**. With so many different networks and approaches, the blockchain space is in a state of confusion with **no clear approach** and **a lack of standards** do not allow different networks to communicate with each other.
- **Data Portability-** As with other record keeping systems, once data is logged in one system, transferring that data to a new system may be problematic.

- **Regulation-** Some technologies like the permissionless Bitcoin Blockchain **bypass regulation completely** to tackle inefficiencies in conventional intermediated payment networks. Another challenge of the Blockchain approach is that it **reduces oversight**. India is **yet to implement clearly defined regulations** on blockchain technology.
- **Lack of awareness, high cost** and **limited availability of skilled workforce** is also a major impediment in the development of blockchain technology.
- **51% attack:** It refers to malicious users or a group of users taking control of more than 50% of the network's mining power. This enables them to **recreate the blockchain**, thereby altering previous transactions and broadcasting to blockchain users that the attacker's chain is valid. As it would be the longest chain, other users may automatically accept it, even though it was illegitimate.

Government Steps

- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has supported a multi institutional project titled **Distributed Centre of Excellence in Blockchain Technology** with C-DAC, IDRBT and VJTI as executing agencies. **Objectives of this initiative are**
 - Evolving an ecosystem around R&D organizations, Government departments and Academia to foster Blockchain technology
 - Design, development and pilot deployment / prototyping of Blockchain based applications in the domains of Governance, Banking & Finance and Cyber Security
 - Conduct research to address the issues and challenges related to Blockchain usage in identified application domains
 - Evolving Blockchain framework using open-source implementations to suite the identified application domain requirements
 - Capacity building in Blockchain technology.
- Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in partnership with NASSCOM has launched **FutureSkills platform**. It focuses on 10 emerging technologies including Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, etc.
- **Department of Science and Technology** has launched **National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber Physical Systems (NM-ICPS)**. It has a roadmap to develop Blockchain, AI, Internet of Things, Big Data Analytics, Robotics etc.

Conclusion

Although blockchain is in its infancy, India is pacing towards its adoption and inclusion. Implementing this technology across all spheres of business will certainly prove to be a game-changer despite the roadblocks in its adoption.

7.3. 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (2019-NCOV)

Why in news?

Recently, Coronavirus was declared global health emergency by WHO. **World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 an official name for coronavirus disease.**

More in News

- According to WHO the current outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was first reported from Wuhan, China, on 31 December 2019.
- On January 30, 2020, the **International Health Regulations Emergency Committee** of the **World Health Organization** declared the outbreak a "**public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)**".
 - Declaring a global health emergency gives the director general of the WHO the power to offer recommendations that could prevent the spread of a disease, like travel advisories or restrictions, and allow them to review public health measures in place in affected countries.
 - The announcement also imposes more disease-reporting requirements on countries.
- This is the **sixth declared global health emergency** in the past decade. Other five are H1 virus that caused an influenza pandemic (2009), West Africa's Ebola outbreak (2013-2016), polio (2014), Zika virus (2016), and the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2019).

About Novel Coronavirus

- Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV).
 - A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.
 - The **genome structure of the virus** which is spreading in China is **70 per cent similar to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)**.
- These viruses consist of a core of genetic material surrounded by an envelope with protein spikes, which gives it an appearance of a crown (Latin: corona).
- **Coronaviruses are zoonotic**, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people.
- **Symptoms:** Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.
- **Mode of transmission:** It is believed that the viruses transmit using secreted fluid from the respiratory system. Coronaviruses can spread through coughing and sneezing without covering the mouth, touching or shaking hands, making contact with a surface or object that has the virus etc.
 - On rare occasions, a coronavirus may spread through contact with faeces.
- **Diagnosis:** The infection can be diagnosed by PCR Test (Polymerase chain reaction). This test identifies the virus based on its genetic fingerprint.
- **Treatment:** At present, there is **no specific treatment** for the new virus, and **no vaccine is available** to prevent it.
- **Impact of Coronavirus outbreak:**
 - **Economic impact:** The Coronavirus outbreak has resulted in **closures of multiple air, rail and road routes**, as well as **production cuts** and **temporary closures of manufacturing plants**, which are expected to shave-off billions of dollars from China's GDP.
 - **Supply Chains are Under Stress:** It is disruption to global supply chains that poses the greatest threat to markets. The technology, electronics and auto sectors are the most vulnerable to impacts from Coronavirus.
 - **Aviation Industry:** Several countries like US, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Maldives, and Japan etc. have imposed Travel restrictions **on Chinese tourists and visitors** and have cut direct transportation links with China.

Coronavirus and India

- India's first novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection confirmed in Kerala. Kerala declared coronavirus as '**State Calamity**', which later it withdrew.
- A High-level Group of Ministers has been constituted on directions of Prime Minister to review management of Novel Coronavirus.
- India evacuated its citizens from the coronavirus-hit Hubei province and its capital Wuhan.
- Travel Advisory issued informing the public to refrain from travel to China and that anyone with travel history in China since 15th January 2020 could be quarantined.

How Kerala is Tackling Coronavirus?

To tackle the challenge, the state health department has used its past experience in managing the Nipah outbreak. Steps taken by Kerala Government are:

- Health department set up a state-level control room and a rapid response team which were directly linked to the 14 district medical offices.
- Isolation units were prepared in all the six medical colleges and 14 district government hospitals.
- Kerala health officials deployed at airports to screen passengers for the symptoms of deadly virus.
- Government is using the mainstream media and social media to spread awareness among the people about the threat posed by the coronavirus in the thickly populated state.

7.4. RARE DISEASES

Why in news?

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently released the **draft National Policy for Rare Diseases**.

Background

- Ministry of Health and family Welfare, formulated a **National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases (NPTRD) in July, 2017**.
 - It envisaged the setting up of a corpus fund of ₹100 crore towards funding treatment of rare genetic diseases, but this never picked up due to budget constraints.

- Implementation of the policy was, however, **faced with certain challenges** like bringing States on board and lack of clarity on how much Government could support in terms of tertiary care.
- To solve this, there was need for wider consultation and recommendations, hence a decision was taken to **reframe the National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases**.
- An Expert Committee was constituted by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in November, 2018 to review the NPTDR, 2017.
- Based on the report of expert committee, draft **National Policy for Rare Diseases** was released.

What are Rare Diseases?

- It is a **health condition of low prevalence**, affecting a small number of people, as compared to other prevalent diseases in the general population.
- **WHO** defines rare disease as often debilitating lifelong disease or disorder condition with a prevalence of 1 or less, per 1000 persons. However, different countries have their own definitions.
- They include **genetic diseases, rare cancers, infectious tropical diseases and degenerative diseases**. 80% of rare diseases are genetic in origin and hence **disproportionately impact children**.
- Despite being less prevalent and individually rare, collectively they affect **between 6% and 8% of total population in any country**.

Indian Scenario

- In India, **about 95% rare diseases have no approved treatment** and less than one in 10 patients receives disease-specific treatment.
- Very few pharmaceutical companies manufacture drugs to treat rare diseases and **India has no domestic manufacturer**.
- The **most common rare diseases** include Haemophilia, Thalassemia, Sickle-cell Anaemia and Primary Immuno Deficiency in children, auto-immune diseases etc.

Why are they a Public health issue?

- **Lack of epidemiological data:** It impedes understanding of the extent of the burden of rare diseases and associated morbidity and mortality. Economic burden of most rare diseases is also unknown.
- **Varying definitions and prevalence thresholds:** Different countries have their own definitions to suit their specific requirements and resources. Inconsistent definitions and diverse terminology can result in confusion.
 - India, like many other developing countries, currently has no standard definition of rare diseases.
- **Diagnosis of a rare condition:** It may take up to several years, due to difficulty in diagnostic modalities and lack of awareness among doctors as well as general public.
 - For many rare diseases, diagnostic facilities are unavailable or no diagnostic method exists.
 - Delay in diagnosis or a wrong diagnosis increases the suffering of the patients exponentially.
- **Impact of disease:** In most cases, rare diseases are serious, chronic, debilitating and life threatening, often requiring long and specialised treatments.
 - They place a huge physical, psychological, and socioeconomic burden on patients and their families. Also, they often result in some form of handicap, sometimes extremely severe.
- **Challenges in research and development:** The clinical explanation may be skewed or partial because of a very small pool of patients and lesser known pathophysiology, natural history of these diseases.
 - Rare diseases are chronic in nature, where long term follow up is particularly important. As a result, they lack published data on long-term treatment outcomes and is often incompletely characterized.
- **Challenges in treatment: Unavailability** of treatment as around 95% of them do not have any approved treatment. Only 300 therapies are available to treat them.
 - **Prohibitive cost of treatment:** Due to lack of a significant market for drug manufacturers, there is no incentive to develop drugs for them. For this reason, rare diseases are also called 'orphan diseases' and drugs to treat them are called '**orphan drugs**'.

Salient Features of Draft Policy

- It lists **450 diseases as rare** but does not provide a detailed roadmap on treatment.
- It creates **three categories of rare diseases-**
 - diseases requiring one-time curative treatment,
 - diseases which need long-term treatment, but cost is low,

- diseases that require life-long treatment and cost is high.
- **Standardisation and monitoring: National Registry for Rare Diseases** will be created at Indian Council of Medical Research which will help to arrive at a definition of rare diseases, best suited to India.
- **Financial support for treatment:** Provide financial support to patients of rare diseases living below the poverty line under its umbrella scheme **Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi**.
 - It will also fund one-time treatment cost to the tune of ₹15 lakh for certain treatable rare diseases, for patients under its health insurance scheme, **Ayushman Bharat/ Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**, which covers 40% of the population.
 - There is no clarity of Centre and State responsibilities and on category III patients.
- **Institutional framework:** Government plans to notify certain medical institutes as **Centers of Excellence for Rare Diseases**.
 - Constituting an inter-ministerial **Consultative Committee** at National Level to co-ordinate and oversee activities on rare diseases.
 - Constituting a **Rare Diseases Cell** within MoHFW, ICMR and DoP in the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.
- **Funding framework:** Creating a **corpus fund** at Central and State Level for rare diseases.
 - It recommends **crowd funding as a source to fund treatment of rare diseases and** advises hospitals to report such cases on digital platforms to gather funds.
- **Awareness generation:** developing materials for generating awareness in the general public, patients and their families and for training of health care providers.

Conclusion

There is an immediate need to create **awareness** among general public, patients and their families and doctors. Any policy on treatment of rare diseases will have to strike a **balance** between access to treatments and health system sustainability.

In US, Orphan Drugs Act provides incentives to drug manufacturers to encourage them to manufacture drugs for rare diseases, and similar incentives are also provided in the UK and certain other developed countries. Similar steps can be taken in India.

7.5. DRONE REGULATION

Why in news?

Ministry of Civil Aviation announced a scheme **providing a window up to January 31, 2020 for voluntary registration of all drones and their operators.**

More about News

- On successful submission of voluntary disclosure of possessing drone, a **Drone Acknowledgement Number (DAN) and an Ownership Acknowledgement Number (OAN) will be issued online** which will help in validation of operation of drones in India.
- However, the **DAN and the OAN do not confer any right to operate drones in India** if it does not fulfil the DGCA's drone regulations.
- Further, ownership of drones in India without a valid DAN or OAN shall invite **penal action as per applicable laws.**

Drones in India

- As per Ministry of Civil Aviation, drones are **defined** as a technology platform that has wide-ranging application from photography to agriculture, from infrastructure asset management to insurance.
- Drones range in **size** from very small and those that can carry multiple-kilograms of payload. The DGCA has defined five different categories of drones:
 - **Nano:** Less than or equal to 250 grams
 - **Micro:** From 250 grams to 2kg
 - **Small:** From 2kg to 25kg
 - **Medium:** From 25kg to 150kg
 - **Large:** Greater than 150kg

- The **industry value** of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) in India is projected to touch \$885.7 million by 2021, while the global market size is expected to reach \$21.47 billion.
- However, the number of **illegal drones** in India is likely to be between 50,000 and 60,000, as on October 2019 which requires a regulation of drones in India.

Drone Regulation in India

- In August 2018, the Centre came up with the first set of norms **Drone Regulations 1.0** which are intended to enable **visual line-of-sight daytime-only** and a **maximum of 400 ft** altitude operations of Drones.
- Under these guidelines, air space has been partitioned into:
 - **Red zone** denotes “**no fly zone**” (include airspace around airports; near international border, Vijay Chowk in Delhi; State Secretariat Complex in State Capitals, strategic locations/vital and military installations; etc.)
 - **Yellow zone** is controlled airspace which signifies airspace requiring Air Defence Clearance or Air Traffic Control clearance.
 - **Green zone** signifies unrestricted airspace zones. However, even for the Green zone, there is a **need to get clearance** from the Digital Sky Platform.
- Under these regulations, a process has been prescribed for drone operators to obtain **Unique Identification Number (UIN), Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP)** and other permissions.
- Currently, India has a ‘**No Permission-No Take off**’ (NPNT) clause, which implies that a drone cannot be operated in Indian skies unless the regulatory permission is received through **the Digital Sky Platform**.
 - Users will be required to do a **one-time registration** of their drones, pilots and owners. **For every flight** (exempted for the nano category), users will be required to ask for permission to fly on a **mobile app** and an automated process permits or denies the request instantly.
- The pilot also needs certification, requiring a **remote pilot licence** before operating a drone.
- In January 2019, a white paper on drone policy 2.0 was released, that paved the way for wider application of drones, such as the **delivery of goods beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS)**.
- Foreigners are currently not allowed to fly drones in India. For commercial purpose, they need to lease the drone to an Indian entity who in-turn will obtain Unique Identification Number (UIN) and UAOP from DGCA.

About Digital Sky Platform

- It is a software-based **self-enforcement unmanned traffic management (UTM) system** which is expected to facilitate registration and licensing of drones and operators in addition to giving instant (online) clearances to operators for every flight.
- The Platform **regulates all drones** in the micro and higher categories.
- It allows operators to **apply for a Unique Identification Number (UIN)**, that needs to be issued for all drones and Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit online for approval by the civil aviation regulator.

About Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP)

- UAOP is a permit required by the owners of the drones to fly them which can be obtained from the **Director General of Civil Aviation**.
- These UAOPs are not transferrable and shall be applicable for not more than five years.

India’s Draft Drone Policy 2.0 (Released in 2019)

- **New forms of air freight permitted:** It recommends expanding operations to beyond VLOS and beyond the current limit of 400 feet.
- **Drone corridors:** The policy conceives of drone corridors to keep commercial UAS operations out of non-segregated airspace in which manned aircraft operate.
 - Additionally, designated areas known as ‘**Droneports**’ to facilitate the landing and take-off of drones.
- **Life cycle for drones:** Proposes maximum life cycle for drones to ensure airworthiness and operators must apply for re-certification at the end of a drone’s life cycle.
- **Drone Directorate:** Recommends establishing a Drone Directorate within the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).
- **DigitalSky service providers (DSPs):** It introduces new players DSPs which would be public or private agencies registered in India.
- **Permissible Night-time Operations:** Permissions and other necessary requirements to be obtained to enable night-time drone flights.
- **FDI:** It proposes 100% FDI under automatic route in UAS and RPAS-based commercial civil aviation services. Under Drone Policy 1.0, there is no mention of FDI.

Need for drone regulations

- **For leveraging drone’s potential for commercial operations:** It will foster various new forms of air freight capabilities, allowing transport of **temperature and time sensitive commodities** like bodily organs, life-saving medicines etc.

- They can also be used to discharge materials for **supplementing agricultural irrigation**, survey landscapes, actively monitor rail/road traffic, or survey/inspect agricultural land.
- **Security imperatives:** A well-articulated drone policy is required, given the new risks and the potential that it has to **jeopardise the overall safety environment**, including that of the aviation sector.
 - **Drone Weaponization:** Without proper regulation of the commercial drone market, drone weaponization could be added to our growing list of cyber threats and could result in concerns for public safety.
 - **Recent global attacks** such as, on Saudi Arabian refineries and killing of Iran's top military commander are few such instances.
- **Privacy concerns:** In this day and age of social media and constant digital communication, **drones' imaging capabilities** pose a bigger threat as they can be used to **breach privacy** by blackmailing people or capturing unwanted surveillance.
- **For boosting Drone startup ecosystem:** The drones/UAVs are still considered as an emerging technology and currently, just about 40 drone startups are active in India.
 - A robust drone industry by start-ups and manufacturers alike has the power to help India leapfrog innovation cycles in aviation.

Conclusion

While India has crafted a world leading drone policy framework, formalizing the use of drones will need synchronised efforts of policy makers and industry for practical and secure implementation across the country.



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8. CULTURE

8.1. REPUBLIC DAY PARADE 2020

Why in news?

India celebrated its 71st Republic Day on 26th January, 2020.

More on news

- **Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro** was the chief guest for this year's ceremony.
- 22 tableaux comprising of 16 States/UTs and 6 Ministries/Departments were presented at the parade.
- Prime minister paid homage at the National War Memorial and the **first tri-service formation** took part in the celebrations this year.

Cultural Themes at the Parade

- **Kaksar folk Dance:** It is performed by Abhujmaria tribe in Bastar region of **Chhattisgarh**, to invoke the blessings of the deity and to enjoy a rich harvest. It allows the dancers to choose their life partners from the same dance troupe.
- **Gramiya Kalai (folk arts):** **Tamil Nadu's** tableau showcased these folk arts and **statue of Ayyanar**, the guardian folk deity.
- **Bathukamma Festival:** This floral festival celebrated in **Telangana** region during Durga Navratri. Bathukamma is a beautiful flower stack of different seasonal flowers, arranged in seven concentric layers in the shape of a temple gopuram. Goddess Gauri is worshipped in the form of Bathukamma.
- **Bhortal Nritya-** It comes from Barpeta region of **Assam**. It was developed by Sattriya artist Narahari Burha Bhakat. Dancers equipped with cymbals perform on fast beats known as 'Zhiya Nom'.
- **Tribal Museum of Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh's** tableau was based on the Tribal Museum of Bhopal showcasing Gond, Baiga, Korku, Rajwar, Sahariya, Bhil, Bhabria tribes.
- **Lord Lingaraj's Rukuna Rath Yatra-** Lord Lingaraja is worshipped as both Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu (Harihara) at the Lingaraj temple in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- **Brahmotsavam-** This festival is celebrated in Tirumala Tirupati temple. **Andhra Pradesh** tableau also showcased classical Kuchipudi dance, **Kondapalli** handicrafts and **Kalamkari** paintings using natural colours.
- **Anubhav Mantapa-** It is the Center for Experiences founded by Basavaveshwara, showcasing the first Socio-religious centre of the 12th century Kalyana Karnataka.
- **Living Root Bridges: Meghalaya** is famous for Double-decker (located at Nongriat in Cherrapunji) living root bridge shaped from roots of rubber trees. It is a unique natural phenomenon shaped by human ingenuity.
- **550th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev:** **Punjab** tableau depicted principles of Kirat Karo, Naam Japo and Vand Chhako, which form the cornerstone of Sikhism.
- **'Save the frog'** campaign of the **Goa** Government and **Jammu and Kashmir's 'Back to village' programme** was also featured in tableaux.
- **Rani ki Vav – Jal Mandir: Gujarat** presented a tableau based on the unique theme of Rani ki Vav – JalMandir located in Patan city. It is a unique architectural marvel that stands as testimony to ancient construction work and craftsmanship.
 - Built in 1083 by Rani Udayamati in memory of her husband King Bhimdev-I, son of Mulraj, founder of the Solanki dynasty; **Rani Ki Vav also holds the distinction of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site**

8.2. ASHFAQULLAH KHAN

Why in news?

Recently, Uttar Pradesh cabinet approved a proposal to set aside Rs 234 crore for a zoological garden, in Gorakhpur, to be named after the **freedom fighter and revolutionary Shaheed Ashfaqullah Khan**.

About Ashfaqullah Khan

- **Ashfaqullah Khan** along with **Ram Prasad Bismil**, was sentenced to death for the **Kakori conspiracy of 1925**.

- He was born on October 22, 1900, in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh.
- He was **among the dejected youth** that was disappointed when Gandhi called off the **non-cooperation movement**.
- He felt a “**dwindling faith in non-violent strategies**” and started to believe that freedom from the shackles of colonialism called for more “**radical methods**”.
- Ashfaq **composed poems** mostly in **Urdu** and a few in Hindi, under the pen names **Varasi and Hazarat**.
- In the mid-1920s, Ashfaqullah Khan and Ram Prasad Bismil went on to found the **Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)**.
 - HSRA published **its manifesto** titled “**The Revolutionary**” in **1925**, which, stated that “The immediate object of the revolutionary party in the domain of politics is to establish a federal Republic of United State of India by an organized and armed revolution.

About the Kakori Conspiracy

- In **August 1925**, an armed robbery took place on board the Kakori Express, carrying money.
- The robbery was carried out to fund the activities of the HSRA (Hindustan socialist and republican army) in which **Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan** and over 10 other revolutionaries stopped the train and fled with the cash they found in it.
- In a trial which went on for about 1.5 years and ended in 1927, Bismil, Khan, Rajendra Lahiri and Roshan Singh **sentenced to death**, and the others given life sentences.

8.3. CULTURAL FESTIVALS IN NEWS

Why in news?

- Recently, the Lai Haraoba, a five-day long **ritualistic festival observed by Manipuri Meitei communities**, was celebrated.
- Mizoram government will be organising **Zo Kutpui (festival)** in at least 10 states across India and countries such as US, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

About Lai Haraoba

- Lai Haraoba means ‘**Festivity of the Gods**’ or **merry making of Gods**.
- This festival is marked to celebrate the **creation of the universe** and the recollection of the evolution of plants, animals and human beings
- The festival is observed to honour **Umang Lai** deity of the state.
- During the festival, men and women dance in front of the idols of gods and goddesses and also perform dance drama, enactment of **Khamba and Thoibi**, the hero and the heroine of a popular folklore.
- It is celebrated through oral literature, music, dance and rituals.
- **About Meiteis:**
 - Meiteis are the majority **ethnic groups of the state of Manipur**.
 - A significant population of the Meitei also are settled in domestic neighbouring states such as **Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura** and contiguous areas of Bangladesh and Myanmar.
 - They speak Meiteilon (Manipuri), a Tibeto-Burman language. It is one of the **officially recognized languages of India** which was included in the **Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in 1992**.

About Zo Kutpui

- The event will **witness various cultural programmes** by different Mizo tribes.
- The exercise is an **attempt to unify and strengthen** the brotherhood among various Mizo tribes living in different parts of the world.
- **Other important festivals of Mizoram:** **Mim Kut** (celebrated in the months of August and September, when the maize crop is ready for harvesting), **Chapchar Kut** (celebrated in the month of March), **Thalfavang Kut** etc.
- **About Mizos**
 - Mizo people are an ethnic group native to north-eastern India, western Burma and eastern Bangladesh.
 - This term covers several ethnic peoples who speak various Kuki-Chin languages.
 - The Mizo traditionally practiced slash-and-burn agriculture, moving their villages frequently.
 - Among the most prominent of the Mizo groups are the Lushai, Pawi (Lai), Lakher (Mara), and Hmar.

9. ETHICS

9.1. DEATH PENALTY

Why in news?

Recently, a report titled '**Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics 2018**' revealed that there has been a significant drop in the number of death sentences awarded by trial courts in India.

About Death Penalty

- Death penalty, also known as capital punishment, is a practice sanctioned by law whereby a person is put to death by the state as a punishment for a crime.
- It is a matter of active controversy in various countries and states, and positions can vary within a single political ideology or cultural region.
- India retains capital punishment for a number of serious offences.
 - Although, as per the **Article 21** of the Constitution, deprivation of life of anyone is unconstitutional. But, it also says if there is a '**procedure established by law**' then state can deprive a person from his life.
 - It is now awarded only in cases of hardened criminals and only in rarest of the rare cases.

Arguments in favour of death penalty

- **Deterrent Theory of Punishment-** Death penalty acts as a deterrent. If the death sentence is removed, the fear that comes in the mind of people committing heinous crimes will be removed.
 - Further, the anticipatory suffering of the criminal, who may be kept on death row for many years, makes the punishment more severe than just depriving the criminal of life.
- **Elimination of the criminals.** When the public peace is endangered by certain particularly dangerous forms of crime such as terrorism, death penalty is the only means of eliminating the offender.
 - Society must be protected from the **risk of a second offences** by a criminal who is not executed and who may be released, after release may commit murder again.
- **Severity of crime-** Justice demands that those convicted of heinous crimes of murder be sentenced to death.
 - By inflicting death on those who deliberately inflict death on others, the death penalty ensures justice for all.
- **No scope of reformation-** in some extreme, where keeping a person alive would not solve any purpose.
 - In some cases, where the morality of the entire society is shaken, death sentence is the only punishment which can be given. E.g. recent brutal rape cases, 26/11 terrorist attack.
- **Criminal loses the right to live-** as a person committing a murder by taking the life of another, forfeit their own right to life.
- **Saves the resources of the state-** as some proponents point out that the tax payers money should not be wasted in '**decades of appeals**' for the hardened criminals.
- According to JS Mill, all humans know the difference between what's right and what's wrong, it's in human nature to break the law. Those criminals are nowhere near reaching a desirable end, nor do they have capacity to be virtuous and hence death penalty is justifiable for the greater utility of the society.

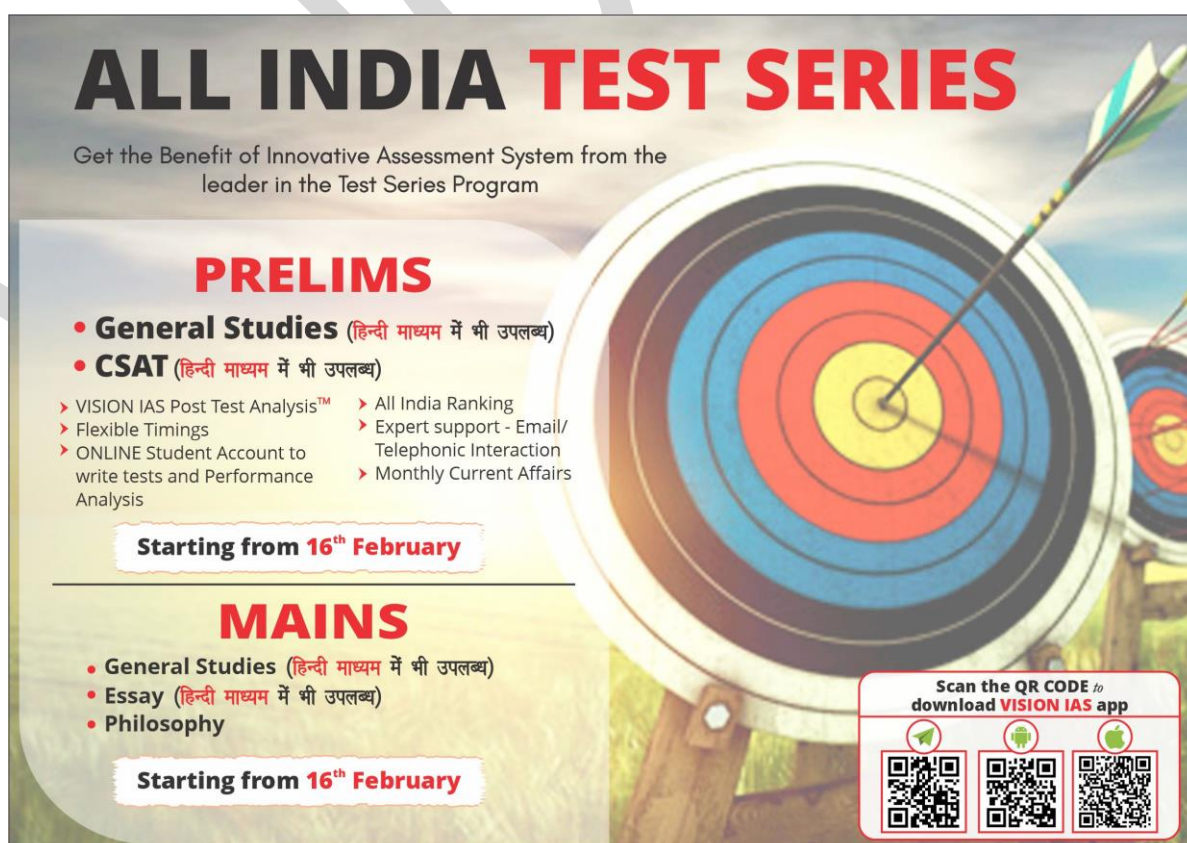
Arguments against death penalty

- The death penalty does not serve the **penological goal of deterrence** any more than life imprisonment. Further, life imprisonment under Indian law means imprisonment for the whole of life subject to just remissions which, in many states in cases of serious crimes, are granted only after many years of imprisonment which range from 30-60 years.
- **Retribution** has an important role to play in punishment. However, it **cannot be reduced to vengeance**. The notion of "an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" has no place in our constitutionally mediated criminal justice system. Capital punishment fails to achieve any **constitutionally valid penological goals**.
 - In focusing on death penalty as the ultimate measure of justice to victims, the **restorative and rehabilitative aspects of justice are lost sight of**.
- It is **difficult to distinguish** cases where death penalty has been imposed from those where the alternative of life imprisonment has been applied. There exists **no principled method** to remove such arbitrariness from capital sentencing.

- Supreme Court has acknowledged that **extremely uneven application of Bachan Singh case guidelines** (restricting death sentences to the rarest of rare cases) has given rise to a state of uncertainty in capital sentencing law which clearly falls foul of constitutional due process and equality principle.
- **Adverse Criminal Justice System:** Lack of resources, outdated modes of investigation, over-stretched police force, ineffective prosecution, and poor legal aid are some of the problems besetting the system. **Death penalty operates within this context** and therefore suffers from the same structural and systemic impediments and thus remains **fallible and vulnerable to misapplication**.
 - The vagaries of the system also **operate disproportionately against the socially and economically marginalized** who may lack the resources to effectively advocate their rights within an adversarial criminal justice system.
- The **exercise of mercy powers** under Article 72 and 161 have **failed** in acting as the final safeguard against miscarriage of justice in the imposition of the death sentence.
- Safeguards in the law have failed in providing a constitutionally secure environment for administration of this **irrevocable punishment**. Death row prisoners continue to face long delays in trials, appeals and thereafter in executive clemency. During this time, the prisoner on death row suffers from extreme agony, anxiety and debilitating fear arising out of an imminent yet uncertain execution. An amalgam of such unique circumstances produces physical and psychological conditions of near torture for the death row convict. Infliction of additional, unwarranted and judicially unsanctioned suffering on death sentence prisoners, **breaches the Article 21** barrier against degrading and excessive punishment.
- Aristotle believes everybody has the capacity to be virtuous and believes that one who did the crime still has a value in the society and does not deserve to die.

Conclusion

- The question as to whether or not it is morally acceptable for the state to execute people, and if so under what circumstances, has been debated for centuries. The ethical problems involved include the general moral issues of punishment with the added problem of whether it is ever morally right to deprive a human being of life.
- The Law Commission of India submitted a report to the government which recommended the abolition of capital punishment for all crimes in India, excepting the crime of waging war against the nation or for terrorism-related offences.



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10. NEWS IN SHORT

10.1. PADMA AWARDS

- **Padma awards** were announced recently on the occasion of Republic day.
- Padma Awards is one of the highest civilian Awards of the country, are conferred in three categories, namely,
 - **'Padma Vibhushan'** is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service;
 - **'Padma Bhushan'** for distinguished service of high order and
 - **'Padma Shri'** for distinguished service in any field.
- The **awards were instituted in 1954** to recognize achievements in all fields of activities or disciplines where an element of public service is involved.
 - They are given in various disciplines/ fields of activities, viz.- art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.
- They are conferred on the recommendations made by the **Padma Awards Committee**, which is constituted by the **Prime Minister** every year and headed by the **Cabinet Secretary**.
 - The nomination process is open to the public. Even self-nomination can be made.
- All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards.
 - However, **Government servants** including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are **not eligible** for these Awards.
- The total number of awards to be given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) should not be more than 120.
- The award **does not amount to a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name**
- The awardees are presented a **Sanad** (certificate) signed by the President and a **medallion**. There is **no cash prize**.

10.2. POLICE COMMISSIONERATE SYSTEM

- Recently, Uttar Pradesh cabinet approved implementation of the commissioner system of policing for the two cities, **Lucknow and Noida**,

that will give magisterial powers to their top police officers.

- The state government exercises control and superintendence over the state police forces. At the district level, a **'dual system'** of control exists. At the metropolitan level, many states have replaced the dual system with **the Commissionerate system**.

Dual system	Commissionerate system
Dual command structure over the district police means that control and direction over the police vests with the SP (head of district police) and the District Magistrate (executive) .	Unified command structure with the Commissioner of Police (rank of the Deputy Inspector General or above) as the sole head of the force within the city.
Separation of powers of the DM (e.g., issues arrest warrants and licenses) and the police (e.g., investigate crimes and make arrests). Therefore, less concentration of power in the police, and accountability to DM at the district level .	Powers of policing and magistracy concentrated in Commissioner. Directly accountable to state government and state police chief. Lesser accountability to the local administration. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It gives an integrated command structure which helps in speedy decision. It helps fix responsibility with the Commissioner and eliminates blame game between civil administration and police when something goes wrong. • It reduce workload of District Magistrate
SP is assisted by Additional/Assistant/ Deputy SPs, Inspectors and constabulary.	Commissioner is assisted by Special/ Joint/ Additional/ Deputy Commissioners, etc. Inspector downwards rank structure is the same.

10.3. POSTAL BALLOT

- Person with disabilities (PwDs) and people over 80 years of age were allowed to cast their vote in Delhi Assembly Election through postal ballot.
- **Postal voting** is a type of voting in elections whereby Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot Papers (ETPB) are **distributed to electors and returned by post**.
- **Service voters**, have the option of either voting **through postal ballot or through a proxy voter**. It includes
 - members of Armed Forces of the Union
 - members of forces to which provisions of Army Act, 1950 applies.

- members of armed police force of a State and serving outside that state
- persons who are employed by Gol in a post outside India.
- Under Section 62 of the **Representation of the People Act, 1951** prisoners are not allowed to vote but people under preventive detention can cast their votes through postal ballots.

10.4. INI STATUS TO THE INSTITUTE OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN AYURVEDA

- Recently, Cabinet approved conferring the status of **Institution of National Importance (INI)** to the **Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA)**, Jamnagar, Gujarat.
- Elevation of the proposed Institute to the status of Institution of National Importance **will provide it the autonomy to upgrade standard of Ayurveda education, frame various courses in Ayurveda** as per national and international demand, adopt advanced evaluation methodology, etc.
- It will help the institute **to develop tertiary care in Ayurveda and to secure inter-disciplinary collaborations** to give a contemporary thrust to Ayurveda.

Institute of National Importance

- Institutes of National Importance are established by **Acts of Parliament**.
- They serve as a pivotal player in developing highly skilled personnel within the specified region of the country/state.
- They are usually supported by the Government of India or even any other international institutes to develop centers of excellence in research, academics, and other such elite schools of education.

10.5. CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX 2019

- The latest edition of Corruption perception Index (CPI) 2019 was released.

About the index

- It is released by **Transparency International** annually since 1995.
- It ranks **180 countries** by their **perceived levels of public sector corruption**.
- It uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. More than two-thirds of countries score below 50 on this year's CPI, with an average score of just 43.

Key Highlights

- **Denmark** and **New Zealand** are at the **top spot**, followed by Finland, Singapore, Sweden and Switzerland in the top ten. Somalia is ranked last, preceded by South Sudan and Syria.
- **India** slipped to the **80th rank**, while its score remained steady at 41. Pakistan is ranked at the 120th place.

Transparency International

- It is an **international non-governmental organization** based in Berlin, Germany, since 1993.
- With more than 100 national chapters worldwide, it works with partners in government, business and civil society to put effective measures in place to tackle corruption.
- It also publishes **Global Corruption Barometer, and Global Corruption Report**.

10.6. WOMEN, BUSINESS & THE LAW REPORT 2020

- This is the sixth edition of the report by **World Bank** to analyze the **impact of laws and regulations** (legal gender equality) on **women's economic opportunity** (entrepreneurship and employment) in 190 economies.
- It measures **global progress toward gender equality in the law** and the legal differences on access to economic opportunities between men and women.
- **Women, Business & The Law index** measures **eight indicators** structured around women's interactions with the law and how it affects the economic decisions women make at various stages of their lives.
 - They are **Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension**.
 - Better performance in these areas is associated with more women in the labor force and with **higher income and improved development outcomes**.
- With a recent reform to parental leave, Canada became **eighth** country to **score 100** on the **Women, Business and the Law index**. Others include countries like Belgium, Denmark, France etc.
- The **global average was 75.2** — a slight increase from 73.9 in the previous index released in 2017. **On average, women have just three-fourths of the legal rights afforded to men**.
- **India** was ranked **117th** and scored **74.4** out of 100.
 - The report appreciated **Maharashtra's reform** to eliminate restrictions on women's ability to work in jobs deemed dangerous.

10.7. RAISINA DIALOGUE 2020

- The fifth edition of the Raisina dialogue 2020 was held recently in New Delhi.
- It is a **multilateral conference** committed to **addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community**, held annually in New Delhi since 2016. It is designed on the lines of Singapore's **Shangri-La Dialogue**.
- The Dialogue is **structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion**, involving heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials, as well as major private sector executives, members of the media and academics.
- It has emerged as India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-economics.
- The conference is **hosted by** the Observer Research Foundation in collaboration with the Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs.

10.8. GLOBAL RISK REPORT 2020

World Economic Forum (WEF) released Global Risk Report ahead of its annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

About the Report

- It is **part of the Global Risks Initiative** which brings stakeholders together to develop sustainable, integrated solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.
- A **"global risk"** is defined as an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, can cause significant negative impact for several countries or industries within the next 10 years.
- **Top five global risks** in terms of likelihood are all environmental and includes:
 - **Extreme weather events** with major damage to property, infrastructure and loss of human life
 - **Failure of climate-change mitigation** and adaptation by governments and businesses.
 - **Human-made environmental damage and disasters**, including environmental crime, such as oil spills, and radioactive contamination.
 - **Major biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse** (terrestrial or marine) with irreversible consequences for the environment, resulting in severely depleted resources for humankind as well as industries.
 - **Major natural disasters** such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and geomagnetic storms.

10.9. BLUE CORNER NOTICE

- Recently, the **Interpol issued a Blue Corner** notice to help locate fugitive self-styled godman Nithyananda, who fled India last year amid allegations of rape and sexual abuse.
- **About 'Blue Corner' notice:**
 - **According to the Interpol-** Notices are international requests for cooperation or alerts allowing police in member countries to share critical crime-related information.
 - **The Blue Notice** is issued to "collect additional information about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime."

About Interpol

- International Criminal Police Organization is an inter-governmental organization, having 194 member countries.
- It facilitates worldwide police cooperation and crime control. Headquartered in Lyon, France, it was founded in 1923 as the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC).
- It provides investigative support, expertise, and training to law enforcement worldwide in battling three major areas of transnational crime that is terrorism, cybercrime, and organized crime.
- The CBI is the nodal authority that executes and handles the issuance of all Interpol Notices in India. There are liaison officers in every state police force as well.

TYPES OF INTERPOL NOTICES



RED NOTICE: To seek the location and arrest of wanted persons with a view to extradition or similar lawful action.



YELLOW NOTICE: To help locate missing persons, often minors, or to help identify persons who are unable to identify themselves



BLUE NOTICE: To collect additional information about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime.



BLACK NOTICE: To seek information on unidentified bodies.



GREEN NOTICE: To provide warning and intelligence about persons who have committed criminal offences & are likely to repeat these crimes in other countries.



ORANGE NOTICE: To warn of an event, a person, an object or a process representing a serious & imminent threat to public safety.



INTERPOL-UN SECURITY COUNCIL SPECIAL NOTICE: Issued for groups & individuals who are the targets of UN Security Council sanctions committees.



PURPLE NOTICE: To seek or provide information on modus operandi, objects, devices and concealment methods used by criminals.

10.10. LIBYA SUMMIT

- Heads of state and lawmakers from Russia, Algeria, Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, Britain, China and the US gathered in Berlin under the auspices of the UN to discuss the future of Libya.
- Summit's main goal is to get foreign powers wielding influence in the region to stop interfering in the war — be it through weapons, troops or financing.
- **Key agreement**
 - Participants **committed to refraining from interference in the armed conflict or in the internal affairs of Libya** and urge all international actors "to do the same".
 - Participant call on all parties concerned for a sustained **suspension of hostilities, de-escalation and a permanent ceasefire**. The participants invite the UN to establish "technical committees" to monitor the implementation of the truce.
 - It urges all Libyan parties **to resume the inclusive Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process under the auspices of the UNSMIL** [the UN Support Mission in Libya] to reach an intra-Libyan solution.

10.11. GLOBAL TALENT COMPETITIVENESS INDEX

- Recently, Global Talent Competitive Index (GTCI) for 2020 compiled by **INSEAD** in collaboration with Addeco and Google was released.

About GTCI

- Launched for the first time in 2013, GTCI is an **annual benchmarking report that measures the ability of countries to compete for talent**. It ranks nations on the ability to grow, attract and retain talent.
- The report, which covers 132 economies and 155 cities, is based on research conducted by **INSEAD**.
- Theme of this year report is "**Global Talent in the Age of Artificial Intelligence**".

Highlights of the report

- **India has climbed eight places to 72nd rank in the 2020**. In the BRICS grouping, China was ranked 42nd, Russia (48th), South Africa (70th) and Brazil at 80th position.
- **Switzerland topped the index** followed by United States and Singapore.
- The pecking order underlines the domination of high-income countries - the top 25 in the list are all high-income countries, 17 of them from Europe.

10.12. WORLD ECONOMIC SITUATION AND PROSPECTS (WESP) REPORT

- Recently, **United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the five United Nations regional commissions** jointly released WESP report.

About the Report

- It is an annual UN flagship publication on **the state of the world economy**, viewed through the lens of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- **Global growth slowed to a 10-year low of 2.3% in 2019**, with a modest uptick projected at 2.5% in 2020 and 2.7% in 2021.
- Report warns that **economic risks** remain strong, aggravated by **deepening political polarization and increasing scepticism** about the benefits of **multilateralism**.

Key points related to India

- In India, **the rate of economic expansion fell sharply from 6.8 per cent in 2018 to 5.7 per cent in 2019** owing to slackening investment, subdued consumer sentiment, and weak manufacturing and services growth.
- In India, **more than 40 per cent of youth are not in education, employment or training**.

10.13. NO IMPORTS IN 'OTHERS' CATEGORY WITHOUT HSN CODE

- Every traded product is categorized **under a Harmonised System of Nomenclature code (HSN)**. Imports termed 'others' do not have HSN codes and are often tagged along with parts and accessories of categorized goods.
- **Ministry of Commerce and Industry will impose high duty** on all products categorized as 'others' if they are not carrying the specific globally accepted HSN code.
- **HSN is an identification code developed by the World Customs Organisation**.
 - It allows participating countries to classify traded goods on a common basis for custom purposes.
 - Custom organizations use this code to clear every commodity that enters or crosses any international border.
 - **India has 8 digit Indian Trade classification (HS) code** based on Harmonised System of Coding.
- **Now importers will have to approach Ministry to seek HSN code within 30 days** from Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

- **This measure will help government** to assess what is being imported country and ensure zero tolerance for substandard products and services.

10.14. WEF'S RESKILLING REVOLUTION

- India recently joined the World Economic Forum's **Reskilling Revolution as a founding government member**.
 - Founding governments include Brazil, France, India, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, UAE and the US.
- **Reskilling Revolution** is an initiative by the WEF to provide **one billion** people with better education, skills and jobs by 2030.
- It is aimed to address the need of reskilling which has risen due to –
 - jobs getting transformed by the technologies of the **Fourth Industrial Revolution**,
 - **changes in core skills** required to perform existing jobs,
 - **high demand** of high-tech and specialized interpersonal skills, including skills related to sales, human resources, care and education.
- WEF also released a report titled '**Jobs of Tomorrow: Mapping Opportunity in the New Economy**' to identify jobs that require reskilling.

10.15. GLOBAL CONSORTIUM FOR GOVERNANCE OF DIGITAL CURRENCY

- Recently, **The World Economic Forum (WEF)** in its annual meeting in Davos, **launched a global consortium for digital currency governance**.
- Initiative aims to bring together leading companies, financial institutions, government representatives, technical experts, academics, international organizations, NGOs and members of the Forum's communities on a global level.
- It will aim **to increase access to the financial system through innovative policy solutions** that are inclusive and interoperable.
- The emergence of digital currencies in a myriad of different forms - from Bitcoin to Facebook's Libra to central bank-issued alternatives - has left the international community scrambling to build a suitable, integrated regulatory system.
 - Digital currencies are often cited as a tool for financial inclusion; however, they have remained outside of the realm of mass adoption due to a lack of good governance.
 - Properly regulated digital currency can be used for cheaper and faster cross-border payments, financial inclusion, and rooting out illicit finance.

10.16. NSE KNOWLEDGE HUB

- National Stock Exchange (NSE) launched an AI-powered learning platform **NSE Knowledge Hub**.
- It has been developed by NSE Academy, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the National Stock Exchange (NSE).
- This platform seeks to **assist the banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector**.
- It seeks to collaborate with organisations in the BFSI industry to enhance skills of their employees and academic institutions to prepare future-ready talent for the financial services industry.

10.17. TRACK AND TRACE PLATFORM FOR BUSINESSES

- Recently, The World Economic Forum (WEF) launched the **first neutral and public traceability platform** that is capable of visualising supply chain data from multiple organisations and sources.
- The platform is **based on the blockchain technology** and has been developed to assist businesses across industries address the consumer demands for ethical and environmentally friendly products.
- The **supply chain data will allow users to have a comprehensive picture** of the flow of goods and other key environmental and social indicators and certifications of supply chain partners thus **making them aware about the social and environmental impacts of the products they purchase**.
- It was **created in collaboration with** a dedicated group of champions comprised by Everledger, Lenzing Group, TextileGenesis and the International Trade Centre.

10.18. NATIONAL STARTUP ADVISORY COUNCIL

- Recently Central Government has notified the structure of the National Startup Advisory Council.
- **Composition of the NSAC**
 - **Chairperson:** Minister for Commerce & Industry.
 - **Ex-officio members:** Nominated by the concerned Ministries/Departments/Organisations, not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India.
 - **Non-official members:** Nominated by Central Government (for a term of 2 years), from various categories like founder of successful startups
 - **Convener** of the Council: Joint Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

- NSAC aims to advise the Government on measures
 - To build a **strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation and startups in the country**
 - To drive sustainable economic growth and generate large scale employment opportunities.
 - To promote ease of access to capital for startups, incentivize domestic capital for investments into startups and mobilize global capital for investments in Indian startups.
 - **To foster a culture of innovation amongst citizens and students, in particular**, promote innovation in all sectors of the economy across the country.
- It will also suggest measures to facilitate public organisations to assimilate innovation with a view to improving public service delivery, promote creation, protection and commercialization of intellectual property rights.

10.19. PURVODAYA SCHEME

- **Ministry of Steel** in partnership with CII and Joint Plant Committee recently launched **PURVODAYA: Accelerated development of eastern India through integrated steel hub in Kolkata, West Bengal.**
- It aims to **enable swift capacity addition and improve overall competitiveness of steel producers** both in terms of cost and quality.
- Through this programme, the government aims to **transform logistics and utilities infrastructure which would change the socio-economic landscape in the eastern India.**
 - It would also develop steel clusters and transform critical logistics and utilities infrastructure.
- It would encompass Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Northern part of Andhra Pradesh; thereby increasing contribution of eastern region to total steel production from present 70% to 87%.
- As per the National Steel Policy 2017, government aims to develop a total steel production capacity of 300 million tonne by 2030-31, **where around 200 million tonne is envisaged from the five eastern states.**

10.20. AROGYA SANJEEVANI POLICY

- **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority** has mandated all general and health insurance companies to offer a **Standard Health Insurance Product (SHIP) named Arogya Sanjeevani.**
- The health insurance market has a number of individual health insurance products at the

moment. It may be challenging for the customers to choose an appropriate product.

- **Arogya Sanjeevani aims to address this challenge.**
- SHIP is aimed at taking care of basic health needs, and enabling seamless portability among the insurers.
- **Important features:**
 - Minimum and maximum sum insured will be Rs 1 lakh and Rs 5 lakh respectively.
 - Minimum and maximum entry age will be 18 and 65 years with **lifelong renewability** and there is **no exit age**, while for children under Family Floater policies, it will be 3 months to 25 years.
 - Policy will only be an **indemnity policy**. It means it will work on a reimbursement basis.
 - The standard product should have the **basic mandatory covers** such as hospitalization expenses, pre-post hospitalization, Ayush treatment.
 - The **premium under this product** will be the same across India, and no geographic location or zone pricing will be allowed.

10.21. CENTRAL EQUIPMENT IDENTITY REGISTER (CEIR)

- Recently, the **CEIR portal has been launched by the government** to facilitate blocking and tracing of stolen/lost mobile phones in Delhi.
- The initiative is undertaken by the **Department of Telecom (DoT)** and was first launched in Mumbai.
- CEIR acts as a central system that connects to the **IMEI database of all network Operators** to share black listed mobile devices.
- Devices blacklisted in one network will not work on other networks even if the Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) card in the device is changed.
- The National Telecom Policy of 2012 called for the establishment of a National Mobile Property Registry to address the issue of “security, theft, and other concerns including reprogramming of mobile handsets”.

10.22. YOUTH CO: LAB

- Youth Co:Lab is a multi-dimensional and multi-level response to tackle the challenges young people face, by positioning them front and centre to find solutions to today’s most pressing problems.
- Co-created in 2017 by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** and the **Citi Foundation**, Youth Co:Lab aims to establish a common agenda for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to empower and invest in youth, so that

they can accelerate the **implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship.

- In India, the Youth Co:Lab initiative has been launched as a joint endeavour between UNDP India and **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog**.
 - It aims at fostering technology, promoting youth leadership and social entrepreneurship in India.
 - Through this, young entrepreneurs and innovators will get a chance to connect with governments, mentors, incubators and investors, who will help equip them with entrepreneurial skills.
 - It will convene **social innovation challenges** at the national and sub-national level, which will invite young people in the age group of 18-29 years and start-ups to showcase their proposed ideas and solutions to tackle some of the region's biggest social challenges.

10.23. OPERATION TURTSIELD

- Recently, the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau along with West Bengal forest department personnel, seized 983 Indian flapshell turtles and two Indian peacock softshell turtles from a West Bengal's market.
 - Operation Turtshield is a new Central programme to protect endangered turtles.
- The **flapshell turtle**, which is smaller in size, is killed for its meat which is considered a delicacy in both Bengal and Bangladesh. It is listed as **Least Concerned** under IUCN Red list.
- **Indian peacock softshell turtles** are categorised as **Vulnerable** in IUCN Red list. It is also listed in schedule-I of the Wildlife Protection Act and Schedule – I of CITES.
 - It is found in rivers, streams, lakes and ponds with mud or sand bottoms. It is omnivorous, juveniles observed feeding on mosquito larvae and fish, while adults consume snails, earthworms, prawns, fish, frogs, carrion, and vegetation.
 - **Major Threats:**
 - ✓ The species is heavily exploited for its meat and calipee (the outer cartilaginous rim of the shell).
 - ✓ Threats in the River Ganga to the species are those generic for all large river turtles, including reduction of fish stock, as a result of overfishing, pollution, increase in river traffic, and sand-mining, among others.

10.24. ONE TRILLION TREES INITIATIVE

- The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** at its Davos meeting has launched a global initiative to grow, restore and conserve 1 trillion trees around the world - in a bid to restore biodiversity and help fight climate change.
- **1t.org** offers a platform for leading governments, businesses, civil society and ecopreneurs committed to serving the global trillion trees community.
 - 1t.org is a **WEF initiative**, designed to support the **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, led by UNEP and FAO**.
- 1t.org exists to connect, empower and mobilize a global reforestation community of millions, unleashing their potential to act at an unprecedented scale and speed, to ensure the **conservation and restoration of one trillion trees within this decade**.

10.25. TROPICAL FOREST ALLIANCE 2020

- The World Economic Forum discussed about the global reforestation efforts and Tropical Forest Alliance (TFA) is a part of this effort.
- The Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 was founded in 2012 at Rio+20.
- It is a global **public-private partnership** dedicated to collaborative action to realize **sustainable rural development** and better growth opportunities based on **reduced deforestation** and sustainable land use management **in tropical forest countries**.
- The Alliance includes more than 150 partners who are committed to reducing tropical deforestation associated with the production of palm oil, soy, beef and pulp and paper.
- TFA involves working across Latin America, West and Central Africa and Southeast Asia to implement these commitments.
- TFA is funded by the governments of Norway, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and its **secretariat is hosted at the World Economic Forum**.
 - Its action area for 2019 include 10 priority actions to reduce tropical deforestation from global agricultural supply chains, as defined in the **Commodities and Forests Agenda 2020**.
 - The **Commodities and Forests Agenda 2020** summarizes the strategic priorities that must be addressed to eliminate tropical deforestation from beef, soy and palm oil production. **It is under the aegis of World Economic Forum**.

10.26. HARGILA

- The Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden and Aaranyak (a wildlife conservation organisation) were successfully able to hatch a pair of Greater Adjutant Stork (Hargila) chicks on an artificial platform within the Zoo enclosure.
- The **Greater Adjutant stork (Leptoptilos dubius)** is one of the rarest species of Storks out of twenty species of Storks in the world.
- In India, 8 species of residential storks are found including Hargila.
- Once abundantly distributed in South and Southeast Asia, this stork is now restricted to a few isolated pockets in **Assam and Bihar in India** and PrekToal in Cambodia
- **Threats:** Habitat loss, poaching and poisoning
- **IUCN Conservation status:** Endangered (EN)
- They **breed on tall trees**. Cutting down of nesting trees and infrastructural construction has resulted into a breeding failure of the species and many historical breeding colonies have gone missing in its historical distribution range.

10.27. PALAU IS FIRST COUNTRY TO BAN 'REEF TOXIC' SUN CREAM

- **Palau** (located in the western Pacific Ocean) has become first country to ban sun cream that is **harmful to corals and sea life**.
- The ban came into effect on January 1, 2020.
- An ingredient in sunscreen products - oxybenzone - is considered to be particularly harmful.
- According to **International Coral Reef Foundation**, the banned chemicals can cause:
 - corals to become **more susceptible to coral bleaching**,
 - **damage the DNA of coral**, and
 - deform and kill juvenile corals.
- **Other places to announce similar ban** include the **US Virgin Islands**, where the law takes effect in March; the **US state of Hawaii**, the ban comes into effect in 2021, and the **Dutch Caribbean island** of Bonaire.



10.28. ARCHAEA

- Recently, a **new archaeon (a kind of microorganism)** has been discovered in **Sambhar Salt Lake in Rajasthan**.
- It has been discovered by **National Centre for Microbial Resource — National Centre for Cell Science (NCCMR-NCCS)** in Pune.
- It has been named **“Natrialba swarupiae”**.
- Archaea are **single-celled prokaryotic microorganisms with structure similar to bacteria** but are more closely related to eukaryotes.
- Archaea are **slow-growing organisms** and due to their unique metabolism they **can thrive in extreme habitats** such as hot springs, cold deserts and hypersaline lakes.
- These are **known for** producing antimicrobial molecules, and for anti-oxidant activity with applications in eco-friendly waste-water treatment. The organism also harbours specific pathways for DNA replication, recombination and repair.
- These are **also present in the human gut, mouth, and on the skin** but very little is known about how archaea behave in the human body as it is **extremely difficult to culture them** and thus are **relatively poorly studied**.

10.29. BHUVAN PANCHAYAT V 3.0

- It has been developed by **National Remote Sensing Centre** of ISRO.
- It is a user-friendly **web Geo portal** under ISRO’s **SISDP project (Space Based Information Support for Decentralised Planning)** for better planning and monitoring of government projects.
 - SISDP project aims **to assist Gram Panchayats at grassroot level** with basic planning inputs derived from satellite data for preparing developmental plans, its implementation and monitoring the activities.
- It will provide **geo-spatial services to aid gram panchayat** development planning process of Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- It **aids database visualization, data analytics, generation of automatic reports**, model based products and services **for the benefit of Gram Panchayat members** and other stake holders such as PRIs and the public.
- For the first time, **thematic database on high scale** for the entire country is available with high integrated High Resolution satellite data for planning.
- Bhuvan, is the **national Geo-portal developed and hosted by ISRO** comprising of Geo Spatial Data, Services and Tools for Analysis.

10.30. DRDO YOUNG SCIENTISTS LABORATORIES

- Prime Minister dedicated the five Young Scientists Laboratories of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to the nation.
- **DRDO Young Scientist Laboratories (DYSLs)** are located in five cities viz, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and Hyderabad.
- Each lab will work on a **key advanced technology of importance** to the development of futuristic defence systems viz, Artificial intelligence, Quantum technologies, Cognitive technologies, Asymmetric technologies and Smart materials.
- **DYSLs will employ only scientists under age of 35** to develop cutting-edge and futuristic technologies for military weaponry.
- It will **boost indigenous research capabilities in the defence sector** by involving youth in defence research related activities.

10.31. SWARNA JAYANTI FELLOWSHIPS

- Recently, **Swarna Jayanti Fellowships have been awarded to 14 Scientists** associated with projects containing innovative research idea and with potential of making impact on Research & Development in the respective disciplines.
- The Swarna Jayanti Fellowships scheme was instituted by Government of India to commemorate India's fiftieth year of independence.
- Under this scheme, a selected number of young scientists, with proven track record, are **provided special assistance and support to enable them to pursue basic research** in frontier areas of science and technology.
- The **awardees are supported by Department of Science & Technology**, for fellowship and research.

10.32. HUMAN SPACE FLIGHT CENTRE (HSFC)

- It was inaugurated in January 2019 under Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to coordinate Indian Human Spaceflight Programme (HSP) and will be responsible for the implementation of Gaganyaan project.
- It will be involved in all the end-to-end mission planning, development of engineering systems for crew survival in space, crew selection and training and also pursue activities for sustained human space flight missions.

- HSFC will take support of the existing ISRO Centres to implement the first development flight of Gaganyaan under HSP.
- Currently, HSP work is split across various centres such as the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram and the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru.
- Recently, ISRO has proposed a **consolidated HSFC**, which will be established at **Challakere, Karnataka**. It will help India in the long run as currently India has to pay large sums of money for training and using such facilities in foreign countries.

10.33. INDIAN DATA RELAY SATELLITE SYSTEM (IDRSS)

- India plans for its own **space-to-space tracking and communication** of its space assets this year by putting up a new satellite series called **Indian Data Relay Satellite System (IDRSS)**.
- **About IDRSS**
 - A set of **2 IDRSS satellites** will be placed in **geostationary orbit**, enabling satellite to satellite communication and transfer of data.
 - It will track, send and receive real-time information from other Indian satellites, in particular those in low-earth orbits (LEO) which have limited coverage of earth.
 - It **will also be useful in monitoring launches** and benefitting **crew members of the Gaganyaan mission** ensuring mission control throughout their travel.
 - It is also significant for space docking, space station, as well as distant expeditions to moon, Mars and Venus.
 - It will also **reduce the dependence on the ground stations** in tracking satellites.
 - First satellite will be launched by 2020 end and second one by 2021.
 - India will join US, China, Japan and Europe who already have such DRS systems.

10.34. GOVERNMENT OWNED CONTRACTOR OPERATED (GOCO) MODEL

- Army has decided to **transfer Army Base Workshops (ABW)** presently being operated by the Central Government, on the lines of GOCO model to improve operational efficiency.
- Under GOCO model, **government will provide** land, infrastructure, plant and machinery, equipment system support, oversight and **facilitate the contractor**.
- The **contractor operates and utilises the facilities available**, manages all types of work and is also

responsible to get required licences, certifications and accreditations to deliver mutually agreed targets and maintains the plant machinery and services integral to the venture.

- It will be operated by the private industry for agreed upon terms and will enhance private participation in defence.
- This model is based on the recommendations of Lt. Gen. DB Shekatkar (Retd.) committee to “enhance combat capability and re-balancing defence expenditure.”

10.35. SUKHOI JETS

- Recently, the Indian Air Force (IAF) inducted the first batch of six of 18 Russian Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter jets at Tamil Nadu’s Thanjavur Air Force Station.
- It will bolster India’s offensive capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region against China as they can fly 1,500km without having to refuel mid-air, thus help providing security cover to island territories and sea lines of communication.
- These fighter jets are equipped with the air variant of the BrahMos cruise missile, with a range of 290km.
 - Brahmos is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile that can be launched from submarine, ships, aircraft, or land. It is a joint venture between India and Russia.
- The Indian Navy already has the Boeing built P-8I long-range, multi-mission maritime patrol aircraft in the area that is armed with Harpoon anti-ship missiles and is capable of conducting anti-submarine warfare.

10.36. SAKSHAM 2020

- Recently, month long fuel conservation campaign of Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) was launched as SAKSHAM 2020 (Sanrakshan Kshamta Mahotsav).
- All segments viz. School Children, Youth, Housewives, Drivers, Mechanics, Fleet Operators, Industries, Farmers etc. shall be involved in various fuel conservation activities, like:
 - Training program for riders of cars, bus and truck at Retail outlets to educate them about the conservation tips in the usage of Petrol & Diesel, including vehicle safety.
 - Mass awareness through Kisan Call Centre in the form of Tips/Jingles on Petroleum Conservation.
 - LPG Panchayat to educate villagers about the usage of LPG, its safety and conservation tips.
 - Fuel efficient driving Contest for car owners to promote fuel efficient driving.

- PCRA is a registered society set up under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.
- As a non-profit organization, PCRA is a national government agency engaged in promoting energy efficiency in various sectors of economy.
- It helps the government in proposing policies and strategies for petroleum conservation, aimed at reducing excessive dependence of the country on oil requirement.

10.37. SWACHH SURVEKSHAN LEAGUE 2020 (SS LEAGUE 2020)


Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) announced the results of Swachh Survekshan League 2020 (Quarter 1 and Quarter 2).

About SS League 2020

- It was introduced with the objective of sustaining the onground performance of cities along with continuous monitoring of service level performance when it comes to cleanliness.
- It is a quarterly cleanliness assessment of cities and towns in India and will be integrated with 5th edition of Swachh Survekshan 2020.
- The performance of cities in SS League 2020 is crucial to their ranking in Swachh Survekshan 2020 due to the 25% weightage of the quarterly assessments to be included in the annual survey.
- It is conducted in 3 quarters
 - April- June,
 - July – September
 - October- December 2019.
- It has 2000 marks for each quarter evaluated on the basis of monthly updation of Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) online Management Information System by cities along with citizen’s validation on the 12 service level progress indicators through outbound calls.
- Ranks have been assigned in two categories of cities with population
 - 1 lakh and above (with two sub-categories, i.e. 1-10 lakh and 10 lakhs and above)
 - less than 1 lakh (under this category, the rankings are given zone and population wise).
 - ✓ It includes five zones namely, North, East, Northeast, South and West.

About Swachh Survekshan

- It is a ranking exercise taken up by the Government of India to assess rural and urban areas for their levels of cleanliness and active implementation of Swachhata mission initiatives.
- The objective of the survey is to encourage large scale citizen participation and create awareness amongst all sections of society about the importance of working together towards.



A CLEAN SWEEP

Urban Local Bodies (ULB) from Gujarat & M.P. dominated the top ranking of the Swachh Survekshan 2020 survey. The rankings were based on collection, transportation, processing and disposal waste

Top five ULBs in the >10 Lakh population category

← Quarter 1 →	← Quarter 2 →
ULB, State	ULB, State
Indore, M.P.	Indore, M.P.
Bhopal, M.P.	Rajkot, Gujarat
Surat, Gujarat	Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra
Nashik, Maharashtra	Vadodara, Gujarat
Rajkot, Gujarat	Bhopal, M.P.

10.38. NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development recently invited applications for the Nari Shakti Puraskar for the year 2019.
- They were formerly known as Stree Shakti Puraskar.
- They are conferred by the **President** of India every year on 8th March, the **International Women's Day** to **individuals, groups, institutions or NGOs** in recognition of their exceptional and outstanding work in economic and social empowerment of women.
- It may be awarded to individuals, groups, institutions or NGOs who have:
 - Encouraged women to participate in decision making roles.
 - Encouraged women's skill development in traditional and non-traditional sectors.
 - Facilitated basic amenities for rural women.
 - Promoted women in sectors like science and technology, sports, art, culture etc.
 - Significantly worked towards safety and security, education, health and wellness etc for women.

10.39. BUDDHIST MONASTRIES IN NEWS

- **Bojjannakonda and Lingalmetta Monastries:** These are **the twin rock cut Buddhist monastries** at Sankaram village in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. They date back to the 3rd century BC.
 - **These sites have seen three forms of Buddhism** – Theravada period when Lord Buddha was considered a teacher, the Mahayana, where Buddhism was more devotional, and Vajrayana, where Buddhist tradition was more practised as Tantra and esoteric form.

- Visakhapatnam is also famous for Buddhist sites at Thotlakonda, Appikonda, and Bavikonda.
- **Moghalmari Monastery**
 - It is **located on the left bank of Subarnarekha River in the district of West Medinipur, West Bengal.**
 - The site is considered the **largest and oldest archaeological excavation in West Bengal.**
 - It is **also known as Dantapur Buddhist Monastery** and was documented in the travel journal of the Chinese Buddhist monk and scholar Xuanzang who visited India in the 7th century CE.
 - A study of inscriptions on clay tablets recovered recently from the Buddhist monastic site at Moghalmari in West Bengal confirmed the presence of two monasteries — **Mugalayikaviharika** and **Yajñapindikamahavihara.**
 - The monasteries dated from 6th century CE and were functional till the 12th century CE.
 - The **presence of two monasteries** dating to the same period **within a single compound** is unique in eastern India.

10.40. IRAN'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

- Recently US President warned Iran that if it strikes any American assets in retaliation, the **US would target its 52 sites which are important to Iran & the Iranian culture.**
- Iran is home to one of the world's **oldest civilisations dating back to 10,000 BC.**
- **Twenty-four Iranian sites are on UNESCO's World Heritage List,** (22 Cultural sites among them).
- **Important world heritage sites in Iran:** **Meidan Emam and Masjed-e-Jame** in Isfahan, **Golestan Palace** in Tehran, **Pasargadae and Persepolis** (capitals of the Achaemenid Empire, founded in the 6th BC) and **Takht-e Soleyman** (ancient Zoroastrian sanctuary).
- **Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict** (1954) is an international treaty focussed exclusively on the protection of cultural heritage during war and armed conflict.
 - **Convention defines cultural property** as "movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites.
 - There are currently **133 signatories to Convention.** Both the United States and Iran (as well as **India**) are signatories.

- **Rome Statute of 1998**, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, describes as a “war crime” any intentional attack against a historical monument, or a building dedicated to religion, education, art, or science.
 - 122 countries are States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. US is a signatory that has not ratified the Statute. **India has neither signed nor ratified the Statute.**

10.41. CLASSICAL LANGUAGE

- Recently, Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan, passed a resolution demanding the declaration of Marathi as a ‘Classical’ language.
 - **The Sammelan, is an annual conference of Marathi writers** and was started in 1878.
 - It has been **headed by leading Marathi intellectuals**, including Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda, and Prahlad Keshav “Acharya” Atre.
- Currently, **six languages enjoy the ‘Classical’ status: Tamil (declared in 2004), Sanskrit (2005),**

Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).

- As per Ministry of Culture, the **guidelines** for declaring a language as ‘Classical’ are:
 - **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 accrued to a classical language are:
 - **Two major annual international awards** for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages are given.
 - **A Centre of Excellence** for studies in Classical Languages is set up.
 - The University Grant Commission (UGC) awards **research projects for promoting these languages** and create a certain number of **Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages in the Central Universities.**

ESSAY

ENRICHMENT PROGRAMME 2020

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- ▶ Practical and efficient approach to learn different parts of essay
- ▶ Regular practice and brainstorming sessions
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11. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES IN NEWS

11.1. SCHEME FOR INTEGRATED TEXTILE PARK

Why in news?

Ministry of textiles is planning to overhaul the **Scheme for Integrated Textile Parks (SITP)** by setting up **Mega Textile Parks** to attract higher foreign investment in the textile sector.

Objective	Salient Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide the industry with world class state of the art infrastructure facilities for setting up their textile units. To facilitate textile units to meet international environmental and social standards. To mobilize private investment in the textile sector and generate fresh employment opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was launched by merging two schemes, namely, Apparel Parks for Exports Scheme (APES) and the Centre Infrastructure Development Scheme (TCIDS) in 2005. It was launched to encourage private investments and employment generation in textile sector. The scheme targets industrial clusters / locations with high growth potential, which require strategic interventions by way of providing world-class infrastructure support. Public Private Partnership mode is followed to setup Integrated Textile Parks (ITPs). Industry Associations, Groups of Entrepreneurs and Agencies of the State Governments are the main promoters. It is a demand driven scheme in which the prospective entrepreneurs can send their proposals to the Government, after completion of stipulated conditions as per guidelines. An ITP will include following components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land: must be more than 20 acres, under Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV); Common infrastructure: roads, water & electricity supply, etc; Buildings for common facilities: training center, testing lab, etc; Factory buildings: for production purposes. The ITPs can also get benefits from Amended Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (ATUFS), SAMARTH, etc Funding: Central Government will bear 40% of the project cost (90% of the project cost for first two projects each in the Special Category States) up to Rs.40 crores through grants in three installments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Funds are released in the form of Bank Loans and Grant/Equity by the Ministry of Textiles, State Industrial Development Corporation (SIDC) and Industrial Project Management Consultant (IPMC). Project cost will also cover support activities such as textile machinery, textiles engineering, accessories, packaging, etc depending on the needs of the ITP. <p>Present Status:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 59 textile parks have been sanctioned under SITP since its launch in 2005. Out of which 22 textile parks have been completed and rest are under various stages of construction. Slow progress is attributed to delay in obtaining land and other statutory clearances from state governments and slow fund mobilisation by the textile parks. From April 2000 to September 2019, India's textiles sector received Rs. 19,398.71 crore of FDI which is only 0.74% of the total inflows. In order to attract more FDI, the Textiles Ministry now plans to setup Mega Textile Parks of 1000 acres which will be located near strategic industrial corridors.

11.2. ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM

Why in news?

In the recent delta ranking under the Aspirational districts programme, **Sukma district of Chhattisgarh has topped.**

Objective	Salient Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To quickly and effectively transform the selected backward districts. To focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 115 districts across 28 states have been identified to implement the program under NITI Aayog. The 3 core aspects of the programme are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors) which promotes cooperative federalism, Competition among districts driven by a mass movement, which promotes competitive federalism. NITI Aayog anchors the programme with support from Central Ministries and the State Governments.

- 50 districts are allocated across 12 Ministries. 35 districts that are in the Left Wing Extremist Areas are allocated to the Ministry of Home Affairs, and 30 districts have been allocated to NITI Aayog.
- The programme is tracked by **49 indicators across 5 core thematic areas** in tune with the Sustainable Development Goals 2030: health and nutrition; education; financial inclusion; agriculture and water resources; skill development and basic infrastructure
- **Core Activities**
 - Convergence of scheme resources implemented with LWE funds.
 - Real-time progress tracking of the district plans.
 - Scaling-up of best practices from the Tata Trusts ecosystem.
 - Coordinated overlays of the CSO efforts, community action, and other development interventions
 - Integrated support from Central Ministries, State Governments, and District Administrations.
- **Delta ranking:** It measures the **incremental progress** achieved by the aspirational districts.
 - The composite score is based on real time data of 49 key parameters across six development sectors including health & nutrition, education, agriculture & water resources, financial inclusion & skill development and basic infrastructure.
 - It is facilitated by the 'Champions of Change' **dashboard** developed in association with the Andhra Pradesh government.

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PURPOSE OF THIS COURSE

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COURSE BEGINS	TOTAL NO OF CLASSES
18 Dec 1 PM	60

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