Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs February 2020

By Jawwad Kazi
UPSC

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs February 2020
(Study Material)

By Jawwad Kazi

https://t.me/jawwadkazicurrentaffairs

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# Contemporary Issues

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**MISCELLANEOUS**

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| 4 Forex reserves rise to record $476 billion |
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| 2 Four Indian pilots begin astronaut training in Russia |
| 3 Study rates benefits of a post-lunch nap at work highly |
| 4 Govt. plans research on ‘indigenous’ cows |

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| 2 Upgraded 155mm artillery gun handed over to Army |
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| 4 Credit, debit card details of 4 lakh Indians up for sale |
| 5 New structure soon for Military Affairs dept. |
| 6 Peninsular command by next year end, says General Rawat |
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## Criminalisation of Politics

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<td>Recently, SC issued mandatory directions to political parties to end the issue of criminalisation of politics. Examine how this particular judgment will help in uprooting the issue of criminalisation of politics.</td>
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### Context
- **Supreme Court** recently remarked that there has been an alarming increase in the incidence of criminals in politics and gave various directives to the government to curb it.
- 46% MPs have criminal cases and 29% have serious criminal charges against them.

### Directions to political parties to end Criminalisation of Politics
- SC issued following directions in exercise of powers under Articles 129 and 142 of the Constitution of India:
  - **Uploading the Information of Criminal Cases:**
    1. Political parties [at the Central and State election level] to upload on their website detailed information regarding individuals with pending criminal cases who have been selected as candidates.
    2. Reasons for such selection, as also as to why other individual without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates.
  - **Merit v/s Winnability:** The reasons as to selection shall be with reference to the qualifications, achievements and merit of the candidate concerned, and not mere "winnability" at the polls.
  - This information shall also be published in one local vernacular newspaper and one national newspaper, on the official social media platforms of the political party, including Facebook & Twitter.
  - **When should the details be Published:** Within 48 hours of the selection of the candidate or not less than two weeks before the first date for filing of nominations, whichever is earlier.
  - **Report of Compliance:** to the Election Commission within 72 hours of the selection of the said candidate.
  - **Contempt of Court:** If a political party fails to submit such compliance report with the Election Commission, the Election Commission shall bring such non-compliance by the political party concerned to the notice of the Supreme Court as being in contempt of this Court's orders/directions.

### Significance of the judgment
- **Compelling parties to be Virtuous:** The SC order forces political parties to be more transparent, moral and stain free.
- **Informed Voting:** Ensure that voters are informed of candidate’s criminal antecedent before voting.
- **Selection of Virtuous Candidates:** It will push the parties to allow candidates based on virtuous merits.
- **Empowering the Clean Candidates in Political Parties:** The Candidate can now question his political party leader on the basis of SC Judgement as to why other candidate was given a ticket and not him.
### Election Within Political Parties:
The directions will propel political parties to hold organisational elections and strengthen electoral democracy.

### Responsibility on the Political Parties rather than on the Candidate:

1. This particular judgement of SC is different from other judgments because it puts responsibility on political parties to justify any move for selection of tainted candidates.
2. It highlights that criminalisation of politics can be arrested only by "cleaning" the political parties.

### Limitations of the Order

- **ECI Responsibility Raised but not its Powers:** It gives ECI no powers to take action against the non-compliant parties.
- **Judiciary Increased its workload:** It has asked ECI to report incidents of non-compliance which will add work to already burdened judiciary.
- **Voters Discretion in Voting a Candidate:**
  - Voters are not entirely ignorant of the criminal antecedents of candidates and at times look at it positively.
- **Scope of Misuse:** Incumbent governments have shown a tendency to target political rivals, misusing law enforcement agencies.
- **Demand and Supply issue:**
  - **Supply side issue:** Individuals with criminal antecedent seek to enter politics for preservation and expanding wealth.
  - **Demand side issue:** Where the dependence of parties on illegal finance is high, and where voters see many such individuals as capable of "getting work done".
- **Vagueness on what constitutes a serious criminal charge:**
  - The law is clear on debarring someone convicted in a criminal case from continuing as an elected representative or from contesting for such positions.
  - Political parties and leaders would argue that it is not difficult for a potential opponent or rival to file a case against a likely candidate.

### Earlier SC Interventions

- It removed the statutory protection of convicted legislators from immediate disqualification in 2013.
- In 2014, it directed the completion of trials involving elected representatives within a year.
- In 2017, it asked the Centre to frame a scheme to appoint special courts to exclusively try cases against politicians.
- In 2018 it asked for political parties to publicise pending criminal cases faced by their candidates.

### Way Forward

- **Additional Measures to Decriminalise the Politics:**
  1. Bringing greater transparency in campaign financing is going to make it less attractive for political parties to involve gangsters.
  2. A strong legislation to regulate the functioning of political parties and an unbiased and independent authority to implement it.
  3. **Giving Teeth to ECI:**
     - **Auditing Power to ECI:** to audit financial accounts of political parties.
     - **Powers to take action against political parties instead of just filing complaints and reporting to judiciary.**
  4. Political parties should themselves refuse tickets to tainted candidates.
  5. **Amend RPA Act:** To debar persons against whom chargesheet of heinous nature has been filed.
(6) **Amendment to RTI Act:** Political parties should be brought under the RTI Act.

**Source** The Print, Livemint, RSTV

### Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act

#### Syllabus
**GSII:** Government policies and interventions

#### Question
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was recently approved by the Union Cabinet. Discuss the significance of the proposed amendments. Also analyze the issues that remain unaddressed.

#### Context
- The Union Cabinet recently approved the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 (MTP Bill, 2020) which is soon to be tabled in the Parliament.

#### About the MTP bill, 2020 and its provisions
- **Salient features of proposed amendments:**
  - Proposing requirement for the opinion of -
    1. one RMP for termination of pregnancy, up to 20 weeks of gestation
    2. two RMP 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 which will be defined in the amendments to the MTP Rules.
  - It would include 'vulnerable women' including survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women (like differently-abled women, Minors) etc.
  - **Relaxations for Abnormal:** Upper gestation limit not to apply in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by the Medical Board.
  - **Composition of Medical Board:** The composition, functions and other details of the Medical Board to be prescribed subsequently in Rules under the Act.
  - **Privacy of Mother:** 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.

#### Benefits
- **Abnormalities in the Foetus:**
  - A number of foetus abnormalities are detected after the 20th week, often turning a wanted pregnancy into an unwanted one.
  - This extension would allow termination of pregnancy in cases where some anomaly in the foetus is reported after 20 weeks.
- **Lawful Termination of Pregnancy:** The law will help the rape victims, ill and under-age women to terminate the unwanted pregnancy lawfully.
- **Extension to Unmarried Women:** For unmarried women, the Bill seeks to relax the contraceptive-failure condition for "any woman or her partner" from the present provision of the 1971 Act for "only married woman or her husband", allowing them to medically terminate the pregnancy.
Reducing the Burden on Judiciary: The proposed amendments will reduce the burden on the judiciary, given the plethora of cases seeking permission for abortion beyond the prescribed duration of 20 weeks.

Strengthens the Reproductive Rights of Women and consequently reducing the maternal mortality rate in India.

Privacy of Women: The law safeguards the privacy of women seeking abortions thus encouraging them to go for a legal and medically safe route for termination of pregnancy.

UN SDG Target 3.7: This seeks to establish universal access to sexual and reproductive health.

Issues Unaddressed

Technology-aided detection of “undesirability”:
1. The amendments have opened up the possibility for any congenital anomaly to be used as grounds for abortion.
2. With advancements in diagnostic technologies, more anomalies will be detected, including those which are compatible with life.
3. What constitutes an anomaly changes depending on what is considered socially desirable.
4. Technology-aided detection of “undesirability” could now find social support, as has been the case with female foetuses.

Evolving Risky Abortions: With congenital anomalies as a ground for abortion, the eugenic mindset of having socially desirable children could push more women into risky late abortions.

Increase cases of Sex Determination: A more liberal abortion law can aggravate sex selective abortion.

Conclusion

Balance Between Mother and Baby’s Rights: The need to approach medical boards advising courts in cases of late abortions under this Act will be critical to balancing women’s right to choose with risk to the woman and the motives for abortion.

Source Indian Express, The Hindu, Pib, livemint

15th Finance Commission

Syllabus GS 3: Indian Economy. GS 2: Constitutional Bodies.

Question

What are the major recommendations of 15th Finance Commission's interim report? Compare it with the 14th finance commission.

Why is it in the news?


Final report in October 2020 for the period 2021-2026.

The devolution formula spells out the Central government’s plans to share the taxes collected by it with the States.

About Finance

A constitutional body- Article 280.
**Commission**

- **Purpose:** To determine the method and formula for distributing the tax proceeds between the Centre and states, and among the states.
- It is usually constituted once in five years.

**Term of References for 15th Finance Commission**

- **Population:** Data from the 2011 census and not the 1971 census.
- **Parameters:** The Commission has considered criterion like population, area, demographic performance, income, forest cover and ecology, and tax efforts, to arrive at the states’ share in the divisible pool of taxes.
- **Defence:** To examine whether a separate mechanism for funding defence and internal security is to be set up.
- **Performance based Incentives:** It has been asked to offer fiscal incentives to States which perform well on certain parameters like:
  - Sanitation and fewer populist measures.
  - Efforts made by the States in expansion and deepening of the tax net under GST.
  - Efforts made by the States in moving towards replacement rate of the population growth.

**Interim report for fiscal 2020-21**

- **Devolution to states:**
  - The Commission has reduced the vertical devolution from 42% to 41%.
  - The 1% decrease in the vertical devolution is roughly equal to the share of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Defence and Internal Security:**
  - The Commission had also constituted a group on defence and internal security.
  - Its mandate will be ‘to examine whether a separate mechanism for funding of defence and internal security ought to be set up, and if so, how such a mechanism could be operationalised.
- **Local Bodies Share:**
  - The commission has increased the total share of local bodies (from 3.5% to 4.3% of resources).
  - The share of urban local bodies (from 30% to 40% by end of XV FC’s period).

**Focus Points of the report**

- **Southern states stand to lose:** The population and Area parameter used by the Commission:
  - This parameter has been criticised by the southern states, as they believe that the terms are loaded against the more progressive (and prosperous) southern states.
  - The previous Commissions used both the 1971 and the 2011 populations to calculate the states’ shares. They gave greater weight to the 1971 population (17.5%) as compared to the 2011 population (10%).
  - The Fifteenth Finance Commission used 2011 population.
  - Southern states argued that using the latest Census would penalise them for effective population control measures.
  1. The combined population of the Hindi-speaking northern states - 39.48%.
  2. Their spread - 32.4% of the country’s area.
  3. They get a slightly more than the proportional share of the divisible pool of taxes (45.17%).
  4. The southern states - 20.75% of the population.
  5. They live in 19.34% of the area, with a 13.89% share of the taxes.
- **The demographic effort:**
In order to reward population control efforts by some states, the Commission developed a criterion for demographic effort. This uses total fertility rate (TFR) as a measure, rewarding states with lower TFR. It is assigned a weight of 12.5%.

- **Tax Efforts:**
  - This performance-based criterion has been re-introduced after ten years. It is assigned a weight of 2.5%.

- **Forest Cover:**
  - These criteria reward the states that have provided “ecological services” to the country.
  - The Commission has assigned a weight of 10% for forest cover.

### Share of states

- **Higher Share:**
  - Uttar Pradesh has received the highest share among the states at 17.9% of the total funds, followed by Bihar at 10.06%, MP at 7.8% and Maharashtra at 6.1%.
  - Bihar’s, Madhya Pradesh’s and Maharashtra’s share has increased marginally.

- **Lower Share:**
  - Shares of southern states like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have come down.
  - Kerala’s share fell from 2.5% to 1.9%, Andhra Pradesh’s from 4.3% to 4.1% and Telangana’s share from 2.4% to 2.1%.
  - The only southern state whose share has increased is Tamil Nadu.

### Criticism

- The criteria of population control has not offset the impact of use of 2011 population data.
- The 1% reduction in state’s share is more than the share of J&K earlier.
- While the share of urban local bodies with a population of over a million has increased, parallelly the percentage of outcome tied funds has also been increased from 10% to 50%.
- The states are critical of the probability of a creation of a separate fund on defence and security from the gross tax pool before computing the divisible pool.
- Despite the inclusion of demographic effort the southern states who have fertility rate below the TFR have not benefitted.
- Similar is the case with Tax effort criteria for states like Karnataka.

### Source

The Hindu, Indian Express, Minutes, LiveMint.
# Role of Women in Indian Army

## Syllabus
- **GSI:** Role of Women
- **GSIII:** Security issues.

## Question
A fresh debate on giving command positions to women in the Army, besides combat roles and permanent commission, has been on for a while. Bring out the Arguments in favor of women in commanding roles and arguments against it.

## Context
- Supreme Court has **ordered government to grant Permanent Commission** to women in 10 streams of the army where they are currently recruited.
- This will enable them to be in **Command posts** roles which requires a longer service than they were allowed.
- It would also qualify them for **pension** unlike earlier.
- The Delhi High Court had earlier ordered it but the order was not implemented.
- The SC has however not given any direction regarding induction of women in Combat roles.

## Women in Indian Army
- **1992:** Induction of women into non-medical roles.
- **Issue of Short Service Commission:**
  - Women officers were brought in for 5 years of service under “Special Entry Scheme”, which was converted into Short Service Commission (SSC).
  - Male officers unlike women officers, who joined under the SSC scheme **could opt for a permanent scheme after the completion of 10 years.**
- **2008:** Permanent commission was extended to **women in streams of Judge Advocate General (JAG) and Army Education Corps.**
- **2019:**
  - The government decided to grant permanent commission to women in all ten branches where they are inducted for Short Service Commission.
  - But they were not to be given Command positions and would serve in staff positions.
  - Also until now, women are not allowed to serve in combat units such as the Infantry and the Armoured Corps.
  - Women are inducted in **combat roles (junior ranks) and combat supervisory roles (officers)** in all wings of the Indian Armed Forces, except in the Indian Army (inducted for support roles only) and Special Forces of India (trainer role only).

## Arguments for and against women in command roles

### For
- Commanding roles are not going to be automatic for women and will be granted on the basis of merit, qualification and experience, hence there should be no objection to it.
- With changing warfare, the need for frontline experience is reducing and hence its importance for commanding roles must be reduced.
- Soldiers respect professionalism and leadership qualities of their officers irrespective of their gender.
- The argument against women is out of patriarchal mindset and must therefore be given up.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Against</th>
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</table>
| • It is not advisable considering that the bulk of the soldiery comes from villages where the society is male dominated.  
• They may find it difficult to accept women in Commanding roles.  
• Army must not be made a vehicle of social experiment. As society becomes more progressive, the Army will reflect the it.  
• Male officers are more likely to have had frontline experience making them better suited to lead the troops. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arguments Against women in combat roles</th>
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</table>
| • **Leading the Male troops**: Soldiers come largely from rural backgrounds and may not be willing to accept a woman officer in combat.  
• Since the soldiers are bound to shield the women officers from danger it may become operationally a unviable idea.  
• **Different Training standards for Male and Females**: The male officers with tougher training standards and postings => better suited to lead troops into combat.  
• **Physiological difference**: Men are argued to be better suited physically for combat related roles.  
• **Societal Hurdles**: Combat roles need sacrifice on many fronts which women officers may find challenging to undergo. Pregnancy, motherhood, domestic obligations, spouse career etc. make it challenging.  
• **Dangers of Women being taken as PoW**: It can become a deeply emotive issue which could have an impact on the society much larger than in case of a male PoW.  
• **Health and Hygiene Issues**: In conflict zones there are “minimal facilities for habitat and hygiene.” |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arguments in Favour</th>
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</table>
| • **Women Centric Challenges have been handled already**: Challenges like domestic issues, fitness, pregnancy have been handled by the Army in a very mature manner over the year.  
• **Patriarchal arguments**: Citing reasons like domestic obligations rested only women reflect the deep rooted patriarchy of our society.  
• **Physiological Limitations are a Joke**: Women have already proven themselves at par with men in every prospect they have been allowed. Their physiology played no role showcasing their capabilities.  
• **Accepting the Women Leadership by Male troops**: Soldiers respect professionalism, good leadership, irrespective of whether it is demonstrated by a male or female officer.  
• Several armies of the World deploy women in combat roles eg. USA, Israel etc. |

**Source** The Print, The Hindu, RSTV
### Defence Pensions

#### Syllabus | GS 2 Polity and Governance Schemes for welfare for ex-servicemen
---|---
#### Question | Q. Why has the budgetary allocation for defence pension risen to such alarming levels? Suggest remedies to tackle the issue of rising pension bills

#### Why is it in news?
- The Union Budget for 2020-21 has allocated Rs 1,33,825 crore to defence pensions which is up by 10 times the allocation made in 2005-06.

#### Introduction
- **High budgetary allocation**: 4.4% of the total expenditure of the central government or 0.6% of GDP. 28.4% of Defence Ministry allocation.
- Defence pensions expensive than capital expenditure of Defence Ministry and equals salaries.
- MGNREGA has an allocation of 46% of the bill for defence pensions.

#### What was the previous system of pensions?
- **Until 1973**: One Rank One Pension system was applicable to armed forces till 1973.
- Government terminated OROP by an executive order.
- **Last salary drawn system**: From 1973 to 2015, ex-servicemen were paid pensions on the basis of last salary drawn by the veteran along with other allowances.
- This system neglected the length of service and laid emphasis only on last salary drawn in service.

#### What is Rank Pay system?
- The Rank pay is a scheme implemented in 1986, in the wake of 4th Central Pay Commission recommendations.
- **4th CPC**: 4th Central Pay Commission reduced the basic pay of seven armed officers’ ranks of 2nd Lieutenant, Lieutenant, Captain, Majors, Lt. Colonel, Colonels, Brigadiers and their equivalent in the air force and Indian Navy by fixed amounts designated as rank pay.
- In this system, every rank was accorded a pay scale irrespective of length of service of soldier or officer-> lower pay scales of defence personnel as compared to their civilian or police counterparts.
- This has led to dissent amongst veterans.

#### Koshyari Committee
- The 10-member committee under MP Bhagat Singh Koshyari submitted its report in 2011 on the issue of OROP.
- **Definition of OROP**: The committee had defined OROP as “OROP implies uniform pension be paid to armed forces personnel retiring in the same rank with the same length of service irrespective of their date of retirement and any future enhancements in the rate of pension to be automatically passed on to the past pensioners.”

#### What is One Rank-One Pension Scheme?
- One Rank One Pension (OROP) means the payment of the same pension to military officers for the same rank for the same length of service, irrespective of the date of retirement.
- The scheme is effective from July 1, 2014, with 2013 as the base year with a periodic review after every 5 years.
Why is the bill so high?

- 26 lakh pensioners and 55,000 pensioners are added every year.
- OROP: Government announced the OROP (One Rank, One Pension) scheme in 2015 which cost it Rs 8,600 crore.
- 7th Pay Commission: The implementation of the Seventh Pay Commission recommendations in 2017 again increased the defence pensions bill.
- Early retirement: Defence personnel retire at a young age and thus continue to get pensions for a longer period of time than their civilian counterparts.
- Exclusion from NPS: Unlike the civilian side, military personnel have been excluded from the ambit of the NPS because of their short service span.

Way forward

- Eliminating disparities in armed forces: The government must work upon to eliminate the civil-military disparity as well as the combat-non combat disparity in a time bound manner.
- Increasing age of retirement: Recently, the Chief of Defence Staff has called for increasing the retirement age of soldiers to 58 years -> help in reducing the rising pension bills.
- NPS for soldiers: National Pension Scheme should be made applicable to soldiers with some suitable modifications to reduce the expenditure on pensions keeping in mind the interests of soldiers.
- Deputation to paramilitary forces: Retired defence personnel can be absorbed into central or state paramilitary forces after giving training so as get most out of their services.
- Armed forces pay commission: Supreme Court has recommended the government to constitute a separate armed force pay commission to specifically study and recommend appropriate salaries for armed forces personnel.

Alternative measure to secure funds for modernization

1. Setting up a non-lapsable defence fund
2. Monetisation of surplus defence assets such as land
3. Tax free defence bonds

Sources

Indian Express, Live Mint, PIB, Economic Times, Indian Defence Review

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Syllabus | GS 3: Indian Economy
---|---
Question | Critically Analyze the role of credible statistics in function of economy like India.
Why is it in the news?

- In recent times the credibility of the official statistics released by the Government has been questioned by economists and statisticians.
- In order to restore the data credibility, the Finance Minister, in a budget speech said the government will bring in a National Policy on official statistics.
- The Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation has constituted a 28 member Standing Committee on Statistics (SCES) chaired by former Chief Statistician Pronab Sen to improve quality of data amid criticism of the government over political interference.
May 2019, MoSPI merged the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) into the National Statistical Office (NSO).

**Background**
- **Developments that brings into questions the data credibility:**
  - In 2018, government released the GDP growth estimates for previous years based on the new method of calculation - Back series GDP data.
  - In 2019, two members of the National Statistical Commission (NSC) resigned citing -
    - lack of involvement in key decisions such as the GDP back series
    - delay in publishing the employment-unemployment report for 2016-17 despite its approval
  - In 2019, India's former chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian had questioned the country's GDP figures of between 2011-12 and 2016-17.
  - Mr. Subramanian says that India has over-estimated GDP growth for 2011-2017 by as much as 2.5% and he urged to re-look at India's economic statistics.

**History of institutional data**
- India’s modern statistical system took shape under the leadership of Prof. Mahalanobis, known as ‘father of Indian Statistical System’.
- In the 1940s, Indian Statistical Institute emerged as one of the great centres for the study of statistical methods attracting many statisticians from all over the world.
- The methods employed by India, became the standard for household surveys worldwide.
- However, over past several years, the Indian statistical system has come under scrutiny.
- Government has been facing scrutiny by academics and experts over delaying or suppressing data.

**Significance of appropriate and timely data**
- **Required for better Policy making:**
  - The timely release of the statistics helps government frame better policies in tune with ground realities and problems.
  - Acknowledging the fault lines on economic front, government can take targeted decisions.
  - It is important to emphasize the role of the quality reporting and data collection in carrying out structural reforms.
  - **RBI policy rates:**
    - The real numbers of economic slowdown and employment scenario helps RBI take better monetary decisions to revive economy.
    - The jobs crisis that India is facing currently, would not have been as bad if the need for stimulus was realized in time.
  - **Investment Decisions:**
    - The fiscal and monetary data presents a real picture of economic environment which is key for investors to take informed investment decisions.
    - If the economic picture is not clear, the private sector would be reluctant to invest.

**Way ahead**
- **India can restore the reputational damage suffered to data generation by way of following:**
  - **Revisiting the Methodology:**
    - The entire methodology and implementation for GDP estimation must be revisited.
Restoration of "institutional independence" and integrity to the statistical organizations.

**Strengthening the Institutions:**
- A statutory backing and greater autonomy must be given to the National Statistical Commission (NSC).
- An empowered NSC would effectively mean that reports prepared under its watch can no longer be held back from the public.
- An unbiased and independent statistical system is important for academic research and for crucial for policy making.

**Regular Review of Data:**
- An independent panel could be establishing to review the entire exercise.
- Regular processes should be put in place for systematically testing for data consistency.

**National Policy on Official Statistics:**
- The policy announced in the budget speech is expected to meet the growing challenges of a real-time monitoring of the increasingly complex economy.
- The policy would use latest tech including artificial intelligence, big data etc. in order to come up with reliable and authentic data.
- It would lay down a roadmap towards modernized data collection, integrated info portal and timely dissemination of collected info.

Facts and data are vital for the survival for a democracy. For it is these facts and data which make our governments accountable.


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### Bru Migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GSII: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections. GSIII: Internal security.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Recently a quadripartite agreement allowed some 35,000 Bru tribal people to settle permanently in Tripura. Analyze the positive and negative implications of this agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Recently, a quadripartite agreement was between Union Government, Governments of Tripura and Mizoram and Bru-Reang representatives to end the 23-year old Bru-Reang refugee crisis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| About Bru and timeline of bru Migration, ethnic violence and settlement | **About Bru:**
|                   | Bru (Reang in Tripura) are an indigenous tribe living in Northeast India, mostly in Tripura, Mizoram and Assam. |
|                   | They are a nomadic tribe and a large number of them depend on jhum cultivation. |
|                   | Their language is known as Kaubru. A good percentage of them are followers of Vaishnavism. |
|                   | They are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Tripura. |
**Migration of Brus:**
- **1947:** Bru (Hindu Tribe) went to Mizoram after being displaced due to a hydro project.
- **1994:** Bru National Union formed, demanded **Bru Autonomous District Council** under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- **1995:** First signs of conflict as Mizo organisations — the Young Mizo Association and the Mizo Students’ Association — demanded that Brus be left out of the state’s electoral rolls as they were not an indigenous tribe.
- **1996:** Amid pushback by Mizos against demand, bru take up arms and form Bru National Liberation Front.
- **1997:** Ethnic Violence Breaks out, around 5,000 families comprising over 30,000 Bru tribal were forced to flee the state and seek shelter in Tripura, where they were housed in temporary camps at Kanchanpur.
- **2005:** BNLF lays down arms after Mizoram promises to repatriate refugees.
- **2009:** Fresh clashes see another Bru exodus.
- **Since 2010,** the Government of India has been making sustained efforts to permanently rehabilitate these refugees but the issue remained unresolved.
- **2018:** Centre signs deal to repatriate Brus with financial aid, but deal falls through later that year.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Provisions of the Agreement</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Living Choice:</strong></td>
<td>Bru community given choice of living in either the state of Tripura or Mizoram.</td>
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<td><strong>The Bru who returned to Mizoram in the eight phases of repatriation since 2009, cannot, however, come back to Tripura.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Survey to Ascertain numbers:</strong></td>
<td>To ascertain the numbers of those who will be settled, a fresh survey and physical verification of Bru families living in relief camps will be carried out.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed Deposit for Each Family:</strong></td>
<td>The government has provided that each family will receive approx. 4 lakh in fixed deposit for a period of two years.</td>
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<td><strong>Scheme for Investment:</strong></td>
<td>The government will, then, devise a scheme on how should they invest it further.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Housing Provision:</strong></td>
<td>plans for land and housing assistance grants have been made.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cash Assistance for 2 years:</strong></td>
<td>A relief of ~5,000 per month as cash assistance to these families for two years from the date of their shifting to their new location.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Free Ration:</strong></td>
<td>The families will be given free ration for two years from the date of their resettlement in Tripura.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Special Development Project:</strong></td>
<td>The Centre will implement a special development project for the resettled Bru. This will be in addition to the Rs 600 crore fund announced for the process, including benefits for the migrants.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significance Of the Agreement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Permanent Solution:</strong></td>
<td>This agreement will bring a permanent solution for the rehabilitation of thousands of Bru-Reang people in Tripura. It adequately addresses the insecurities of a tribe that survived &amp; fled violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Easy Absorption in Tripura:</strong></td>
<td>The Brus were displaced to Mizoram because of hydroelectric projects in Tripura. It means that the absorption of Bru people in Tripura will not be very difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elaborate Rehabilitation Plan Avoids bureaucratic whims:</strong></td>
<td>Bru people have been provided a cushion from what could have ended up becoming a long process, subject to bureaucratic whims.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issues Not Addressed by the Agreement</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Diversion of Forest Lands:</strong> Settlement of Brus would decrease the forest cover even more because of their practice of shifting cultivation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>No Resettlement of Brus who repatriated to Mizoram:</strong> Those who repatriated in the earlier phases will not be allowed to resettle in Tripura under this agreement. That means those in Mizoram will still have to fear tribal tensions. They are demanding a package similar to the one for Brus in Tripura. If not settled in Tripura they may still demand for autonomous district council in Mizoram.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>BNLF Militancy:</strong> The militancy may harm local bengali-speaking people in tripura.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Ethnocentric States:</strong> The agreement to settle Bru tribal people in Tripura and not in Mizoram from where they were displaced, could encourage the creation of ethnocentric States in the northeast.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Conflicts with Indigenous tribes:</strong> Activists argue that the “solution” has the potential of creating conflicts between the Brus and indigenous communities of Tripura and also in Assam especially when Assam NRC is in progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Inter-Tribe conflicts:</strong> Northeast has had a history of ethnic conflicts, not only between the “indigenous” and “settlers” but inter-tribe too — and issues could also arise within smaller sub-groups within the same tribe.</td>
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**Conclusion**

• The agreement is aimed at bringing lasting peace and prosperity in the region, which is marked by ethnic strife and conflicts.
• A strong step as part of Centre’s agenda of mainstreaming north-East Region and solving perpetual long drawn problems to achieve the motto of ‘Sabka sath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas’.

**Source**
The Print, Livemint, the Hindu
### Syllabus

**GS 3: Indian Economy:** Infrastructure: Energy.

### Question

With India heading towards 100% electrification, the per capita energy consumption of India is expected to grow 2-3 folds. However, there is no significant change in the per capita power consumption. Discuss.

### Why is it in the news?

- The Economic survey has pointed out a paradigm shift in power sector over the years due to efforts of government to foster investment in the sector.
- The survey applauded government’s universal electrification drive and increase in power generation and transmission capacities.

### More in the news

- **Survey Findings:**
  - India improved its ranking in the Energy Transition Index (to 76th position) published by World Economic Forum.
  - Installed power generation capacity increased to 356 GW in 2019 from 344 GW in 2018.
  - The capacity of thermal power is recorded to be 64% followed by renewable energy.
  - More than 46% of power generation in India, comes from private sector.

### Power sector in India

- India is the third largest producer and the third largest consumer of electricity in the world.

- **India’s Energy Mix -**
  - **Thermal:** 229.40 GW
  - **Renewable:** 84.39 GW
  - **Hydro:** 45.39 GW
  - **Nuclear:** 6.78 GW

- **Renewable energy:**
  - It is the fast emerging as a major source of power in India.
  - The Government has set a target to achieve **175 GW installed capacity of renewable energy by 2022.**
  - There are plans to double wind power generation capacity to 60 GW by 2022.
  - The government plans to double the share of installed electricity generation capacity of renewable energy to 40% till 2030.

### Issues/Challenges

- **Fuel Security Concerns:**
  - Thermal capacity addition is affected by the growing fuel unavailability concerns faced by the industry.
  - Coal supplies by CIL is restricted to 65% of actual coal requirement by coal based thermal plants.
  - It leads to dependence on increased coal imports with the cascading result of high power generation costs.
  - To improve availability, Government has liberalized Coal exploration by reducing entry barriers.

- **Decline in power demand:**
As per a report by SBI, electricity demand in India contracted to an eight-year low in September last year. This has negatively affected the power producer, power distributor and the lenders.

**Low Plant Load Factor:**
- PLF is used to determine a plant’s power producing capacity.
- The Plant Load Factor (PLF) in the thermal segment had edged down to 52.5 per cent in the second quarter of FY-20.
- The Plant Load Factor (PLF) has significantly dropped over the past 10 years from 77.5% in 2009-10 to 61.06% in 2018-19.
- The private power plants have much lower PLFs of 55.69%. Private players claim poor coal supplies as a reason behind it.

**A weak economy or Economic Slowdown:**
- The demand, supply/generation and capacity utilization of power plants are troubled by the broader ongoing economic slowdown.
- Due to economic slowdown, there is financial inability of power distribution companies to purchase power.

**Poor Financial Health of State Distribution Companies (Discoms):**
- The following have adversely affected the financial health of State Discom.
  1. Populist tariff schemes and operational inefficiencies.
  2. Mismatched between revenue and expenses.
  3. Leakage in transmission & inefficiency in collection of payments.
- Discoms currently plagued with huge out-standing debt of around 2.6 lakh crore in 2019 i.e. at pre-UDAY level.
- The huge burden of debt prevents the sector of any further bank advances.

**Government Initiatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Initiative Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td><strong>Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana or Saubhagya:</strong> Launched in 2017, the scheme to provide free electricity connections to all households in rural areas and poor families in urban areas. Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) has been designated as its nodal agency for the Saubhagya scheme. All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, shall be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td><strong>A draft amendment to Electricity Act:</strong> It discusses separation of content &amp; carriage Direct benefit transfer of subsidy, 24*7 Power supply is an obligation Penalisation on violation of PPA Setting up Smart Meter and Prepaid Meters along with regulations related to the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td><strong>Ujwal Discoms Assurance Yojana (UDAY):</strong> UDAY provides for the financial turnaround and ensures a sustainable permanent solution to the problem. It is aimed at reviving electricity DISCOMS and improving demand. UDAY bonds: 75% of debt will be taken by state through UDAY bonds to banks and other financial institutions to raise money to pay off the banks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td><strong>Cabinet nod for FDI in coal mining:</strong> Government has opened up the coal sector completely for commercial mining for all local and global firms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Way ahead

- **Fuel Reforms:**
  - There is need to ramp up coal production by both public and private sector in a time-bound manner.
  - Promote private sector participation in coal production by further easing the regulatory framework, clearances and approvals.
  - Government should ensure adequate coal supplies and 100% Plant Load Factor.

- **Optimal Energy Mix:**
  - There is need to develop both conventional and non-conventional forms of energy based on following factors -
    - The pattern of energy demand seen in the country.
    - The availability of fuels.
    - Fuel production and import costs.

- **Financing Facilities for Energy Sector:**
  - A robust and sustainable credit enhancement mechanism for funding in Energy Sector needs to be put in place.
  - It should be through increased participation by global funding agencies like World Bank, AIIB, ADB etc.

- **Public private partnership (PPP) model:**
  - The private sector has been playing a key role in generating power.
  - A more supportive environment that promotes PPP model, will help in bridging the energy deficit of the country.

- **Strengthen the state electricity regulatory commission (SERC):**
  - The government steps in the past few years had left the power sector with stranded losses.
  - The SERCs should be given autonomy to decide the state level interventions to improve power sector health without interference.
  - SERCs should make stricter regulations for transmissions & distribution companies to follow the stringent Standards of Performance and compliances.

Source: The Hindu, ET, LiveMint.

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**Role of Law Commission of India**

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<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 2 Governance Executive bodies and their mandate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Q. Majority of recommendations of Law Commissions of India have not turned into reforms. Account for the reasons behind this and suggest measures on progressive legal reforms?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is it in news?</td>
<td>• The Union Cabinet has approved the formation of the <strong>22nd Law Commission</strong>, which advises the government on complex legal issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Introduction** | **Executive body**: Law Commission of India is an Executive body under the Department of Legislative Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice.  
**Composition of the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Law Commission**:  
- The commission will have four full-time members, a member secretary, and a full-time chairperson.  
- **Ex-officio members**: Law and Legislative Secretaries in the Law Ministry.  
- **Part-time members**: not more than five part-time members will be part of the Law Panel.  
- **Chairperson**: retired Supreme Court Judge or Chief Justice of a High Court. |
| --- | --- |
| **Origin and evolution of Law Commission** | **The first Law Commission** was established in 1834 under the **Charter Act of 1833** under the Chairmanship of **Lord Macaulay**.  
- It had recommended **codification of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**.  
- The government established the **First Law Commission of Independent India in 1955** with the then Attorney-General of India, **Mr. M. C. Setalvad**, as its Chairman. |
| **Functions of LCI** | **Reports on reference by govt**: The Commission prepares and submits to the Central Government reports on all issues referred by Union or state government.  
**Repeal or review of obsolete laws**: It reviews the existing laws in India to suggest reforms and to enact new legislation.  
**Judicial Administration**: It undertakes studies and research to suggest reforms in the justice delivery systems. |
| **Recent reports by LCI** | **Death penalty**: Its 262\textsuperscript{nd} Report recommended **abolition of the death penalty** for all crimes except terrorism-related offences and waging war against the nation.  
**Hate speeches**: The 267\textsuperscript{th} report drafted a new law — **The Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2017** — inserting new Sections to fortify democracy against hate speeches.  
**Food adulteration**: It recently recommended life imprisonment for those convicted of manufacturing and selling adulterated food.  
**On getting bail**: In its 268\textsuperscript{th} Report, highlighted the problem regarding getting bail. It noted that it has become the norm for the rich and powerful to get bail with ease, while others do not. |
| **Significance of Law Commission of India** | **Encouraging public participation**:  
The Commission prepares a consultation paper highlighting various issues and debates around the subject matter.  
Suggestions, comments and views on such identified issues are invited from public and considered.  
**Contribution to legislature**:  
- 20\textsuperscript{th} Law Commission gave draft of bills in Arbitration law, Electoral reforms, the establishment of commercial courts, prevention of corruption etc.  
- Some of these bills are either introduced or in the process of being introduced in the Parliament.  
**Reliance by Judiciary**  
- Supreme Court has relied on the reports and recommendations of the Law Commission of India.  
- Eg. In the **Bacchan Singh vs State of Punjab** case which gave the “rarest of rare” case doctrine the SC had used Law Commission reports. |
Issues and challenges

- **Slow reforms**: Majority of the recommendations are not acted upon by the Governments.
- **Lack of funds**: LCI is totally dependent on the Ministry of Law and Justice for funds required to carry out its functions.
- **Huge number of references**: Lack of freedom to take suo-moto cognisance of issues because it is burdened with references.
- **Short tenure**: Three years’ tenure is insufficient to carry out research and publish reports and pursue their implementation.
- **Delay in appointments**: Eg. Delay of one and half year in appointment of this 

Way ahead

- **Allocation of more funds**: Adequate finances to carry out quality research with a scope to engage law scholars from eminent law firms and institutes.
- **Spearheading implementation**: The Commission should be provided with powers to pursue the implementation of reforms.
- **Statutory status**: The Commission should be given a statutory status to ensure continuity and autonomy as then the Commission will only be responsible to the Parliament and not the ministry.
- **Ensuring independence**: Bureaucrats should not be included in the Commission to remove avoidable interference and ensure independence and autonomy of the Commission.
- **Appointments**: Appointment of members of the Commission should be done with the concurrence of the Chairperson to discourage favouritism in appointments.

Sources The Hindu, Live Law, PIB, Indian Express, Live Mint, PRS,

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10 India-US Trade Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 2 International Relations Bilateral trade and treaties.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Q. Why has India and US failed to sign the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) over past few years? Critically analyse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is it in news?</td>
<td>India and US have failed to arrive at a limited trade deal despite continuous engagement from both sides in view of the upcoming visit of US President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent developments</td>
<td><strong>Revoking GSP status</strong>&lt;br&gt;US revoked the Generalised System of Preferences status to India on grounds that India had not assured the US that it will provide equitable and reasonable access to its market.&lt;br&gt;GSP had allowed India duty-free imports of goods up to 5.6 billion USD into US from India.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developing country status allowed for preferential treatment against CVD investigations and de minimis thresholds.

**Failure to strike a deal:**
- India and US have failed to strike even a limited trade deal.
- This has raised serious questions on the trade diplomacy between India and USA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recently signed defence deals</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deals worth $3 billion signed</strong></td>
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</table>

- India and the U.S. recently concluded defence deals worth over $3 billion for 24 **MH-60R Seahawk Multi-Role Helicopters** for the Navy and six **AH-64E attack helicopters** for the Army.
- The deals were signed on the side-lines of the discussions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump.
- **Overall defence trade:** The defence trade has increased from near zero in 2008 to $15 billion in 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>India-US trade dynamics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Trade:</strong> $142.6 billion in 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trade Surplus:</strong> $25.2 billion in 2018.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the India-US Trade deal?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market access:</strong> U.S.'s demands in medical devices and dairy &amp; agricultural products are seen as sensitive products for the India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price control:</strong> Loosening price control mechanism on essential medicines and devices would push prices up and make them unaffordable for the general public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diplomatic Relations:</strong> India has remained tough on trade negotiations because the governments wants to avoid any future deterioration of relations between two countries on account of trade disputes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why has the trade deal failed?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Generalized System of Preference (GSP) is the largest and oldest US trade preference programme.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It is designed to promote economic development by allowing duty-free entry for thousands of products from designated beneficiary countries.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the GSP programme, nearly 2,000 products including auto components and textile materials could enter the US duty-free if the beneficiary developing countries meet the eligibility criteria established by Congress.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Challenges in bilateral trade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tariffs:</strong> Bilateral tensions have increased over each side’s tariff policies. These include the US 25% steel and 10% aluminium tariffs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to US, market barriers in Indian market include both tariff and non-tariff barriers, as well as multiple practices and regulations that disadvantage foreign companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual Property issues:</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>
India and US have for long differed on patent issues regarding pharmaceuticals and US has blamed Indian IP laws of being regressive and protectionist.

India remains on the “Special 301” Priority Watch List for 2018, based on such concerns as its treatment of patents, infringement rates, and protection of trade secrets.

**Data localization:**
- Reserve Bank of India has mandated for payment gateways like Mastercard, VISA to store the data of Indian users in India.

**US has been wary of India’s decision to impose data localization requirements.**

**Agriculture and dairy:**
- The US has long demanded greater access for American agriculture and dairy products.
- Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) barriers in India limit U.S. agricultural exports. US has questioned the scientific and risk-based justifications of such barriers.
- India has denied US greater market access in order to protect its domestic agriculture and dairy interests as milk and dairy products processing industries are currently not in position to compete with American products.

**Way ahead**
- **Diversifying trade:** Both countries should work upon strategies to diversify bilateral trade to achieve mutual benefits and reduce trade deficits over time.
- **Signing a limited trade deal:** India and US need to arrive at some basic level of understanding on trade disputes and sign a limited trade deal to instil confidence in international investors and traders.
- **Cooperation in electric mobility:** US has advanced in research in electric vehicles and India should leverage this to achieve the goals of India’s electric vehicles mission.

**Sources**
The Hindu, Indian Express, PIB, The Diplomat, MEA website.

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**The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019**

**Syllabus**
- GSII: issues relating to old age.

**Question**
- Discuss the pros and cons of **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019.**

**Context**
- The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok sabha recently.

**About the Bill and its Provisions**
- **About the Bill:**
  - The Bill seeks to amend **The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Bill, 2007** which protects all senior citizens and parents including those who are neglected and are unable to support themselves.
  - 2019 Bill expands the scope and adds certain provisions for their wellbeing and safety.
**Provisions:**
- Expanding the definition of ‘children’ & ‘parents’, ‘maintenance’ & ‘welfare’.
- **Capping on Maximum Monthly Allowance Removed:** The ceiling of Rs 10,000/- as maintenance amount has been removed.
- Preference to dispose of applications of senior citizens early has been included.
- **Registration** of Senior Citizens Care Homes/Homecare Service Agencies.
- **Minimum standards** for senior citizen care homes.
- Appointment of **Nodal Police Officers** for Senior Citizens in every Police Station and at District level Special Police Unit for Senior Citizens.
- Maintenance of **Helpline** for senior citizens.

**Pros**
- **Expansion in Definition of Children:**
  - This increases the scope in the number of people who should be morally and legally obliged to pay the maintenance.
  - It clears and expands the definition of parents: It now includes parents in law and grandparent too in the definition of parents.
  - **Check Crime Rates:** Appointment of nodal police officers will tackle concerns about crime against the elderly.
  - **Registration of complaints via modes like online or phone call,** registered post => easier access.
- **No Capping on Monthly Allowance:**
  - Now the tribunal will decide the monthly allowance on a case to case basis.
- **Quick Disposal of Applications:**
  - It asks for disposal within 90 days and within 60 days for seniors above 80 years => time-bound justice.
- **Ensuring Minimum Standards of Senior Care Homes:**
  - Ensure their physical and mental health and hygiene standards.
- **Improves the definition of maintenance and welfare:** Includes safety and wellbeing and not mere capital payment to parents.
- **Punishment Prescribed:** The provision of warrant by tribunal for every default by children would act as a deterrent and compel the children, legally if not morally, to take care of their parents.
- **Care homes:**
  - The 2019 bill changed the term old age homes to care homes.
  - It allows private and non-governmental organizations to establish care homes which means more number of care homes will be established across the country, especially when the number of aged (60+) is likely to double by 2025 in India as per UNESCO Estimates.

**Cons**
- **Privatizing a social responsibility:**
  - The expansion of the definition of children -> government is unwilling to be held accountable for the welfare of senior citizens.
- **Senior Citizens who don’t’ rely on their children for maintenance:**
  - Many middle-class elderly people are not dependent on their children for support but rely on the interest they earn on their personal savings.
  - The removal of the ceiling on the maintenance allowance is of no help to them.
### Special Police Unit
- Scarcity of human resources in police may hamper the creation of a special police unit.

### Ambiguity in minimum standards
- Rules are not yet clear for the registration and maintenance of old age homes and the home-care service agencies.

### Issues with Tribunal
- **Appointment of Jury:** There are no provisions related to the criteria of appointment to a Jury in the tribunal.
- **No Appellate Authority:** The appellate authority of the maintenance tribunal has not been provided in the bill.

### Other Issues
- No provisions for senior citizens with no relative and no income.
- No support from the state in the form of pension or healthcare specifically for senior citizens.
- Does not address mental health issues like dementia, depression, alzheimers.

#### Conclusion
- Although a welcome step, this legislation alone will not be able to resolve the issue of India's elderly population.
- The state must also take the onus for providing the services that one of the most vulnerable section of the society needs.

#### Source
- The Scroll, Indian Express, RSTV, PRS India

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### Global Value chains and India

#### Syllabus
- **GS 3: Indian Economy:** issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources.

#### Question
- Discuss the significance of being part of Global Value Chains and factors that hinders India's prospects into it.

#### Why is it in the news?
- The latest World Development Report (by World Bank) focuses on global value chains (GVCs).
- GVCs have become vital for production and trade.
- It holds significance for India as currently, India lacks significant integration in GVCs.

#### About the Global Value Chain (GVC)
- **Concept:** GVC is a chain of separate but interlinked and coordinated activities undertaken within a single firm or be divided among multiple firms in different geographical locations.
- **Example:**
  - Goods designed, manufactured, marketed and sold in several countries with each country specializing in some aspects.
  - The Apple I-phone product is conceptualized and designed in an advanced country like in the US.
  - The parts are made in different countries like South Korea or Taiwan, but the final product is assembled in China.
  - It is then sent back to the US for marketing.
- **Significance:**
Around 70% of the world trade is structured within GVCs of multinational corporations. That means Inputs and products manufactured in GVCs.

- It can greatly raise productivity, thereby benefiting both the investor and investee countries.
- It helps in boosting export.
- It will spread industrialisation, thereby creating more and better jobs.
- It accelerates economic growth and helps reduce poverty.

### GVCs and India

- India's total share in global merchandise exports is around 1.7%.
- India's total share in global services export is around 3.4%.

#### In Low-Profit products:
- Small basket or low-profit products constitute - Small diamonds, rice, meat, jewelry, shrimps, textile etc.
- About 70% of India's export earnings come from 'small basket' or low-profit products.
- This small basket is only 30% of the world's value trade. The small size of the global basket limits the potential for future growth.

#### In High-Profit products:
- These products constitute - Electronics, computers, and other ICT products, telecom, factory machines, high ended engineering products etc.
- These products constitute about 70% of global value trade and only 30% of India's earning come from these products.
- India has a weak global export share in these high-profit commodities, nearly around 0.4%.

#### Concern:
- India has an insignificant presence in products, which have become important in world trade.
- Most large basket products are infra critical and high ended tech. products whose parts are manufactured in several countries.
- Most small basket products face competition from countries such as Bangladesh and Vietnam.

### Issues - Why India is not able to integrate into GVC in more items?

- **Lack of physical Infrastructure:**
  - GVCs need efficient logistics and procedures that ensure a fast turnaround of goods and services.
  - India’s logistics cost is $7/km of road transport, against $2.5 in China, $ 3.9 in Bangladesh, making India globally uncompetitive.
  - As per some studies, one day’s delay hit competitiveness as much as a tariff of over 1%.
  - The turn around times of Indian ports do not allow the Just in Time protocols to be implemented.
  - China, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, etc. have become part of GVCs through the quality trade infrastructure.

- **Other Factors that hinder India's proper integration in GVCs:**
  - Land acquisition difficulties and inflexible labor laws.
  - The effect of embedded taxes.
  - Indian firm’s capacity to access the markets.
  - Lack of proper technical standards in industrial products.
  - Lack of proper phytosanitary standards in the agriculture products.
Lack of cluster-based infrastructure investments.
Not able to compete with global products in quality, technology and turnaround time.

**Way ahead**
- **Quality Products**: Indian firms need to upgrade production process/technology and product quality to meet the requirement of GVCs.
- **The better outcomes depend on**:
  - Supporting economic policies such as open markets
  - Investor-friendly regimes
  - Predictable and stable taxes and rules
  - High-quality infrastructure
- **Focus to be on Import-Export Procedures**:
  - India needs to reform its import and export procedures, including goods and services tax (GST) rules.
  - It needs to ensure quick paperwork and trade clearances.
  - It must focus on trade facilitation.
  - **Legal and tax disputes** must be settled quickly, instead of long-pending of cases in courts for decades.
- **For Regional Value Chain to take off**, India needs to:
  - Improve its cross border infrastructure.
  - Remove tariff and non-tariff barriers.
  - Speed up the implementation of rules for improved technical standards.
- **Improve Logistic cost**:
  - India must invest in rail transport, world-class ports, air cargo and electricity.
  - India needs to improve its logistics cost to around 9-10% of GDP from the current 13-14% of GDP.
  - Setting up multimodal logistics parks will help address issues related to underdeveloped infrastructure.


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### LIC

**Syllabus** | GS 3: Indian Economy
---|---
**Question** | Critically analyze the decision of Union Finance Ministry to sell part of its holding in LIC via IPO.
**Why is it in the news?** | The Union Finance Minister has proposed to sell a part of its holding in Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) via initial public offer (IPO).
  - LIC IPO will form a part of the government's disinvestment policy.
  - The government has increased its divestment target to Rs 2.1 lakh crore for FY21 as against Rs 1.05 lakh crore target for the current financial year.
**More in the news** | LIC is 100% owned by government and it is likely to sell around 10% stake.
  - Before the IPO process, LIC Act have to be amended, as LIC is governed by LIC Act.
Based on the government’s target, the LIC stake sale could be valued at over Rs. 70,000 crore. Government is clear that the **ownership and control of LIC would be retained.**

**About LIC**
- It is among the biggest institutional investor in the Indian equity markets.
- It is the country's largest insurer, having market share of 76.28% in number of policies.
- It holds considerable stakes in various banks including SBI (9.8%), Axis and ICICI bank with 10.3% each. It holds substantial stake of 51% in IDBI.

**Rationale behind the Stake sell**
- **Government’s Rationale behind the stake sell:**
  - Listing would bring discipline and unlock its value.
  - It will give retail investors an opportunity to participate in wealth creation.
  - It would increase accountability, transparency and due process:
    1. The independent directors on board could question the rationale for various investments by LIC.
    2. Shareholders too could question the company on its investments.
- **Other likely Benefits:**
  - The stake sale will help government to meet its highest ever disinvestment target.
  - It will help attract foreign investors.
  - It may help government to meet its fiscal deficit target of 3.5%, as well as the government’s spending commitments.
  - It is likely to add a fresh infusion of money in the economy by getting foreign investments as against taking away liquidity from the Indian markets.
  - It will help make stock exchanges quite broad-based and will change India’s weightage and rating across various global indices.

**Other Side**
- **LIC is not a Loss-making Government Entity:**
  - LIC is a profit-making institution, which gives around Rs 2,600 crore dividends every year to the government.
  - It carries a brand name and net profits at Rs. 2.6 lakh crore annually, equals about 10% size of overall government expenditure.
  - It holds a stake in 34 of 50 benchmark index companies.
- **Public Trust in LIC as State Insurer may Erode:**
  - LIC offers the sovereign guarantee that means the policyholders funds are completely secure.
  - This is the reason that LIC policy premiums are higher than private sector counterparts.
  - LIC, where the ordinary people invest their hard-earned money, may face an uncertain future if it's stake are divested.
- **Rise to the Occasions:**
  - The life insurance giant has time and again been able to buy stake in ailing PSBs (like IDBI) that have been ridden with NPAs.
  - Government has used LIC on many occasions to stabilize the markets.
  - **Example: Analysts cite the offer for sale of ONGC in 2012 as a classic example of an LIC bailout. LIC had purchased almost 90% of the shares offered.**

**Conclusion**
- While government divests its stake in LIC, it should also take the responsibility of creating other profit-making entities with large market capitalization.
The reserves of such companies can support the Indian economy for key investments and in times of distress as well.

Source: The Hindu, Business Today, ET.

Syllabus GSIII: Infrastructure.

Question:
- What is the “National Infrastructure Pipeline” proposal? Discuss the significance of this huge investment plan. What do you think are the challenges in its implementation?

Why in News?
- The Finance Minister recently announced Rs 102 lakh crore ($1.4 trillion) National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) to spend in the infrastructure sector over a five-year period (2020-25).

More About NIP
- **Aim:** To identify technically feasible and economically viable infrastructure projects that can be initiated in fiscals 2020 to 2025.
- **Recommendation:**
  1. By 2030, around 42% of India’s population would be urbanised from the current 31%. Hence, urban infrastructure is to be modernised.
  2. **Affordable and clean energy:** Ensuring 24×7 power availability; reduce pollution via green & clean renewable energy & environment friendly fuel for transportation.
  3. **Digital Services:** Providing access for all, 100% population coverage for telecom & high-quality broadband services. Digital payments and e governance Infrastructure for delivery of banking and public services.
  4. **Quality Education:** World class educational institutes for teaching & research, technology driven learning meeting GER target of 35 by 2025 as per the draft National Education Policy, 2019.
  5. **Convenient and efficient transportation and logistics:** Including rail, roads, metro-connectivity, air, ports.
  6. **Housing and water supply for all:** Housing for all by 2022 under PMAY, negligible slum population, All households to have piped water meeting national standards by 2024, Wastewater recycling and treatment.
  7. **Disaster-resilient standards compliant public infrastructure.**
  8. **Agriculture infrastructure:** Increased irrigation & micro irrigation coverage; Integrated agro logistics systems from farm gate to end consumer storage, processing and packing, transportation, market and digital infrastructure for agriculture produce.
  9. **Good health and wellbeing:** Superior healthcare facilities, electronic health records infrastructure, accessible primary, secondary & tertiary healthcare infrastructure facilities across India to meet NHP 2017 goals.
### Funding of the scheme:
Jointly by the Centre, states and the private sector in the proportion of 39:39:22.

### Significance
- Addressing the Slowdown in Domestic Market.
- Multiplier Effect of the Investment on demand for raw material, labour etc.
- Improving GDP Growth Rate by kickstarting the virtuous cycle of investment, employment, demand and production.
- Boosting the investor confidence in the market.
- Achieving the $5 Trillion Economy by 2025 Goal.
- Achieving Sustainable Development Goals.
- It will help the country to meet the requirements of faster urbanisation.
- Creates additional fiscal space by improving revenue base of the government
- Ensures quality of expenditure focused in productive areas.

### Challenges/Concerns
- **Realising Funds required for infrastructure generation:**
  - Realising Rs 102 billion in the next five years will be a huge task given the precarious fiscal situation of the governments.
  - **Expecting 22% Investment from the Private Sector i.e 22.44 Lakh Crore:**
    - The Private sector would usually not invest until it sees revival in the GDP growth of the economy.
    - The GDP growth rate as of now is only **declining with no signs of bottoming out or revival of the economy.**
  - **Breaching the Fiscal Deficit Target:**
    - Investing in the capital expenditure i.e. infrastructure while having high revenue deficit will increase the Fiscal Deficit to much higher level.
  - **Banking Sector’s Reluctance to invest heavily in the infrastructure:**
  - **Problem of NPA:**
    - The banks in India are already under stress due to mounting non-performing assets. **As per latest RBI report the NPA amount to 10 Lakh Crore rupees.**
  - **Long Gestation Period:**
    1. Infrastructure projects usually have a very long Gestation period.
    2. Until and unless the project is completed the recovery for the bank will not start which might be the reason for reluctance to investment by the banks.
  - **Asset liability Mismatch banking sector:**
    - This will create the problem of liquidity in the bank.
  - **Projects in Energy Sector:**
    - 1/4th of the projects in NIP are proposed under the energy sector, which currently is not performing well.
  - **Structural issues which are already hampering the implementation of infrastructure projects:**
    - land acquisition, dispute resolution, enforcement of contracts are some of the problems.
  - **Change in the Govt at Centre and State Level:**
    - Projects started by earlier govts are discontinued by the new elected govts. depending on the party in power, denting the investor confidence in the infrastructure sector.

### Way Forward
- **Recommendations by the Taskforce on NIP:**
  1. **Long Term Investors:**
    - The govt should promote Long term investors in the market by promoting banks and infrastructure lending institutions to give more loans in the market.
  2. Credit growth in the infrastructure must increase,
  3. **Mediation:**
    - Setting up a mediation mechanism at ministry level to address contractual disputes.
**Structural Problems:** Push in the infrastructure by huge investment will only reap fruits if the structural problems like land acquisition, contract enforcement etc. are addressed first.

**Source** The Print, Livemint, pib.

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## Financial Inclusion

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<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 3: Indian Economy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>RBI recently chalked out an ambitious strategy for financial inclusion in India. Critically analyze the various aspects of financial inclusion in India.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Why is it in the news?**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has spell out an ambitious strategy for financial inclusion till 2024.

**More about RBI Strategy**

- **Aim:**
  - (1) To strengthen the ecosystem of digital financial services in all Tier-II to Tier VI centres.
  - (2) To create the necessary infrastructure to get towards a less-cash society by March 2022.
  - (3) To see that every adult had access to a financial service provider through a mobile device by March 2024.

- **Objective:**
  - (1) Increasing outreach of banking to provide access to every village within a 5-km radius or a hamlet of 500 households in hilly areas by March 2020.
  - (2) Entities such as fair price shops and fertilizer shops should also promote efficiency and transparency through digital transactions.

**The concept of Financial Inclusion**

- Financial inclusion refers to as the process of ensuring universal access to financial services at a reasonable cost.
- By way of financial inclusion, it is ensured that the vulnerable group/ weaker sections get access to financial services at an affordable cost.
- The Financial Inclusion includes the following services:
  - (1) Banking products
  - (2) Insurance and equity products
  - (3) Credits and Loans
  - (4) Day to day transactions
  - (5) Digital Payments

**Why Financial Inclusion?**

- **Lack of Access:**
  - (1) Many poor households in India lacks even basic access to financial services.

- **Uplifting Weaker Section:**
  - (1) The inclusion gives the financially weak a chance to change their economic prospects and lead better lives.
  - (2) Protection of the low income group’s financial wealth is ensured.
  - (3) It facilitate easy access to formal credit => freeing the vulnerable from money lenders.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Financial Inclusion via Digitisation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Development:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) It broadens the resource base of the financial system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) It develops a culture of savings among the large section of rural/remote population.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) The inclusion helps to bring more people into the formal financial fold and create more jobs.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improve Literacy and extend Reach:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Financial inclusion aims to improve financial literacy and financial awareness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) It aims to bring in digital financial solutions for the economically less-privileged people of the country.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) It intends to bring in mobile banking or financial services to reach the poorest people living in remote areas of the country.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Women Empowerment:</strong></td>
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<td>(1) Targets women by helping them get started engaging in financial management.</td>
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<td>(2) Encourages women to take up more employment opportunities and help her become financially independent.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Key Government Initiatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pradhan Mantri Jan-DhanYojana:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) It ensures comprehensive financial inclusion of all the households in the country.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) It provides universal access to banking facilities with at least one basic bank account to every household.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) It promotes financial literacy, access to credit, benefit transfer, insurance and pension facility.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stand Up India Scheme:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) It aims at promoting entrepreneurship among Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and women.</td>
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</table>
(2) It facilitates bank loans between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 1 Crore to at least one SC or ST borrower and at least one woman borrower per bank branch for setting up an enterprise.

- **MUDRA Yojana:**
  1. It aims to provide loans up to Rs. 10 lakh to non-corporate, non-farm- small/ micro enterprises.
  2. The scheme was flagged off in 2015 by government to ease the credit flow to India’s MSME sector.

- **Digital India:**
  1. **Vision:** To transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.
  2. Key vision areas are Digital Infrastructure as a Core Utility to Every Citizen and Digital Empowerment of Citizens.

- **Unified Payment Interface (UPI):**
  1. It is an app-level interface which aims to bring multiple payment service providers on a single platform.
  2. Any person with a valid bank account can transfer funds and make payments.

- **Bharatnet:**
  1. To provide affordable broadband connectivity for all distant and rural households.
  2. To realise the vision of Digital India, in partnership with States and the private sector.
  3. To facilitate the delivery of e-governance, e-health, e-education, e-banking, Internet and other services to the rural India.

- **The Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) and NEFT:**
  1. RTGS facilitate continuous and real-time settlement of fund-transfers (from one bank account to another).
  2. It is primarily meant for large value transactions (minimum Rs 2 lakh).
  3. NEFT a nation-wide payment system facilitating one-to-one funds transfer (both intra bank and inter-bank) with no minimum cap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Challenges</th>
<th>Illiteracy and Poverty:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ensuring financial inclusion in India where nearly one-fourth of population is illiterate and below the poverty line, poses a challenge.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Rural poverty contributes to lower farm income, lack of skills, lack of sustainable livelihood, under employment and unemployment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Unbanked and Under-banked Population:**
  1. India has about 19 crore adults without a bank account.
  2. Jan Dhan Yojana has opened more than 100 million new bank accounts, but many of them are inactive or carry a zero balance.

- **Other Issues:**
  1. Sparse populations
  2. Inconsistent network coverage
  3. Insufficient capital for building new business models
  4. Customers’ lack of trust and comfort with technology
  5. Last mile access

- **Challenges to Financial Inclusion through Digitisation:**
Lack of awareness and Dependency on Cash: The large chunk of population still carry out their day-to-day transactions in cash form only and not well aware of the digital facilities available.

Infrastructure Bottleneck: There is lack of availability of payments infrastructure in rural areas like PoS machines and many firms in rural areas are not equipped to handle card payments or receive NEFT, RTGS transactions.

Cyber Security and Privacy Issues: With the increase in digitisation, the potential of cyber threats and data breaches increases.

Way ahead

- **Awareness:** There is a greater need to popularize and promote the cashless transaction.
- **Financial literacy:** Here India needs to do a great deal of work, as financial literacy is still very poor in India.
- **Removing the Infrastructure and Regulatory bottlenecks:** Spending more on Infra, conducive regulatory environment and institutional support for banks.
- **Targeting:** Banks should target the un-banked, under-banked and financially excluded segments with the help of technology.
- **Security:**
  1. New authentication strategies and robust frameworks for securing the digital payments innovation are necessary.
  2. Appropriate rules also need to be set for data protection, privacy and technology.
  3. There is need to put in place the cybersecurity protection and reporting standards.

Source: The Hindu, ET, Indian Express, LiveMint.

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**India-Brazil Relations**

**Syllabus**

GS 2 International Relations: India and its bilateral relations

**Question**

Q. Bilateral trade between India and Brazil has remained sluggish despite having institutional mechanisms to resolve issues. Critically analyze.

**Why is it in the news?**

- Brazilian President **Jair Bolsonaro** visited India as the Chief Guest of the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi.

**Outcomes of the recent visit**

- **Trade target:** Ambitious target of $15 billion annual trade by 2022, from the current $8.2 billion in 2018-19.
- **Setting up of joint commission:** The **India-Brazil Joint Commission** for political, economic, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation will be the main forum for monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan and will convene every two years.
- **Key MoUs/Agreements:** Bioenergy, Investment, Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Traditional Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy, People to people contact and Trade and Investment Promotion.
### Evolution of India-Brazil Ties

- **1948:** Diplomatic relations were established.
- **2003:** In 2003, India, Brazil and South Africa set up **IBSA**, an important forum for dialogue among the three emerging countries.
- **2006:** India and Brazil established a **strategic dialogue mechanism**.

### Areas of co-operation

- **Political Cooperation**
  - Members of plurilateral fora such as BRICS, IBSA, G-20, and are members of multilateral bodies such as the United Nations.
  - In 2015 BRICS launched their **New Development Bank (NDB)**. This was outlined in the **Fortaleza declaration in 2014**.
  - Support for a **UN Security Council permanent seat for each other**.
- **Economic Cooperation:** Trade in 2018-19 was $8.2 billion. However down from $11.4 billion in 2014.
- **Trade Monitoring Mechanism:** India and Brazil have established an institutional mechanism to monitor and identify bottlenecks in bilateral trade and take appropriate measures to address them.
- **Energy**
  - ONGC Videsh is involved in hydrocarbon exploration in the Brazil.
  - Brazil has also joined India-led **International Solar Alliance** to give a push to renewable energy in the developing countries.
- **Defence Cooperation:** Brazil and India have signed a bilateral ‘Defence Cooperation Agreement’ in 2003 that calls for cooperation in defence-related matters, especially in the field of Research and Development, acquisition and logistic support between the two countries.

### Significance of Brazil for India

- **Mineral resources:** Brazil rich in mineral resources like gold, bauxite, iron ore, tin diamond, platinum, copper, etc which India lacks.
- **Biofuel:**
  - The bio-energy sector offers large business potential for Brazilian companies, who are already leaders in this sector.
  - ‘National Biofuel Policy’ of India and ‘Renova Bio’ Programme of Brazil have some common objectives.
- **Huge market for India:** Brazil provides a huge market for India’s exports.
- **Reforms in global institutions:** Both the countries demand reforms in Institutions of global governance to give equitable weightage to the Global South. Eg. IMF, UNSC etc.

### Challenges

- **WTO dispute:** Brazil has been a critic of the Indian Government’s production & export subsidy to farmers, especially on sugarcane for which it has recently approached the WTO.
- **Climate change cooperation:** Brazilian President has rejected scientific studies on climate change while India has been a leading nation in combating climate change.
- **Connectivity:** The single most important hurdle in realizing deeper cooperation is perhaps geography. Also, there is no direct air connectivity between the two countries.
- **BRICS:** BRICS has received criticism due to a lack of common vision despite having tremendous potential in strengthening ties between member countries.

### Way forward

- **People to people contacts:** Direct air connectivity and more diplomatic missions can help in increasing people to people contacts.
**Operationalization of Social Security Agreement (SSA):** Operationalization of SSA will allow investments in each other’s pension funds, to help business processes and encourage the flow of investment.

**Finalising BIT:** Needs to be concluded on a priority basis, so as to ease and boost investment into each other’s market.

**Trade and investment:** Create an environment conducive to trade and investment by cutting into red-tapism and by providing stable social and political order.

**Two plus Two mechanisms:** Establishing a Two plus Two mechanism for regular high-level meetings which can also act as a channel for deeper cooperation.

**Sources**
The Hindu, Indian Express, MEA website, ORF, IDSA.

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### 17 Genome India Project

**Syllabus**
GS 3 Science and Technology.

**Question**
Q. What is the Genome India Project? What are the ethical issues associated with genome sequencing?

**Why is it in news?**
Recently, the Ministry of Science and Technology has approved an ambitious gene-mapping project called the Genome India Project (GIP).

**Introduction**
- **Aim of GIP:** To build a grid of the [Indian “reference genome”](#), to understand fully the type and nature of diseases and traits that comprise the diverse Indian population.
- **Funded by:** Department of Biotechnology
- **Nodal agency:** The IISc’s Centre for Brain Research, an autonomous institute. Its director will be the coordinator.
- **Research Methodology**
  - Data collection through a simple blood test from participants and the information will be added to bio banks.
  - Every person whose genomes are sequenced would be given a report.
  - The participants would be informed if they carry gene variants that make them less responsive to certain classes of medicines.
  - The information will then be processed using mathematical models developed by IITs to generate results and arrive at definite conclusions on the project.

**Background**
- **IndiGen initiative**
  - The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) has conducted Whole Genome Sequencing of 1,008 Indians from different populations across the country under the [IndiGen Genome project](#).
  - The IndiGen initiative was undertaken by CSIR in April 2019, which was implemented by the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB), Delhi and [CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad](#).
The objective was to enable **genetic epidemiology** and **develop public health technologies applications** using population genome data.

**What is Genome and genome sequencing?**

- **Genome**: A genome is defined as an **organism’s complete set of Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid (DNA)**, including all of its genes.
- Each genome contains all of the information needed to build and maintain that organism.
- Every human cell contains a pair of chromosomes, each of which has three billion base pairs or one of four molecules that pair in precise ways.
- Sequencing a genome means **deciphering the exact order of base pairs in an individual**.
- It has been known that the portion of the genes responsible for making proteins called the **exome** occupies about 1% of the actual gene.
- The genome has to be mapped in its entirety to know which genes of a person’s DNA are “mutated”.

**Genome sequencing projects over the world**

- **Genomics England**: The UK was the first country to launch a program called Genomics England which aims to sequence up to 100,000 whole genomes from patients with rare diseases, their families, and cancer patients.
- Estonia and France too have undertaken similar projects.

**Potential benefits of Genome India Project**

- **Precision medicines**: Results can be used to develop precision medicines to treat diseases for which no specific treatment is available.
- **In Agriculture**: Could be used to treat crops affected with pests, insects and rodents so that sustainable agriculture can be promoted.
- **Understanding genetic diversity**: Will provide a great volume of data which will be helpful to understand the genetic diversity.
- **Rare genetic diseases**: Genome maps have been used to find out genes that are responsible for relatively rare, single-gene inherited disorders such as cystic fibrosis and Duchene muscular dystrophy.

**Issues with genome sequencing**

- **Synthetic human genome**: Synthetic human genome could be created which will be against the law of nature and can prove disastrous for the entire mankind.
- **Privacy concern**: Genome data can be used by government agencies for various purposes and is no less than state surveillance.
- **Social and ethical issue**: Scientific studies of genes and classifying them could reinforce stereotypes and allow for politics to take up a racial turn which is detrimental to security and integrity of the country.
- **Selective breeding**: Selective breeding is a major concern related with genome mapping which involves breeding of babies as per the requirement of parents by doing suitable tweaks in the genome of parents.

**Way ahead**

- **Data privacy law**: India need to bring a strict data privacy law to ensure that the sensitive data from GIP does not go into wrong hands and privacy of individuals is maintained.
- **Ownership and control of data**: Who owns and controls the data arising out of the GIP should be clearly defined so as to fix the responsibility for any breach of privacy.
- **Punitive measures to preserve medical ethics**
  - Banning synthesis of human genome in laboratory
  - Imposing ban on selective breeding
Restricting gene mapping and modification only to government authorized or public sector health agencies.

**Sources**
The Hindu, Indian Express, PIB, RSTV, Down to Earth

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## 18

### Corona Virus Outbreak

| Syllabus | GS 2 Issues relating to Health  
GS 3 Science and Technology Life Sciences: Vector-borne diseases |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Q. WHO has declared Public Health Emergency due to emergence of Corona Virus in China. Give reasons for emergence of such diseases an suggest way forward.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Why is it in news? | ● The novel Corona virus outbreak has claimed more than 1000 lives in China.  
● 3 patients in India have tested positive for Corona virus. |
| Introduction | ● **What is a Corona Virus?**  
● Coronaviruses are so named because of the crown-like appearance of their virus particles when seen under an electron microscope (Corona meaning crown).  
● Coronaviruses are a diverse group of viruses that infect and cause disease in humans and other animals, including pigs and chickens.  
● It is a zoonotic disease since it has spread from animals to humans.  
● There are seven strains of human Corona Viruses. Important ones:  
  ➢ SARS-CoV  
  ➢ Middle East respiratory syndrome Corona Virus (MERS-CoV)  
  ➢ Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) – Wuhan pneumonia or Wuhan coronavirus |
| Transmission, symptoms and treatment of nCov | ● **Transmission:** Human coronaviruses most commonly spread from an infected person to other through air by coughing and sneezing, close personal contact, touching an object or surface with virus on it and then touching eyes, mouth or nose without washing hands.  
● **Symptoms:** Common symptoms are coughing, fever, shivering, muscle pain etc.  
● **Diagnosis and Treatment**  
  ➢ Laboratory tests on respiratory specimens and serum to detect it are used.  
  ➢ No vaccine or specific treatment is available for treatment of novel Corona Virus.  
  ➢ Supportive care along with treatment for associated symptoms is the only treatment available right now. |
| Previous outbreaks of Corona Viruses | ● **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) 2003**  
   ● It first infected humans in Guangdong province of China in 2002 in 24 countries and resulted in more than 8000 confirmed cases in 2003.  
   ● Primarily transmits from person to person.  
● **Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) 2012 in Saudi Arabia**  
   ● It is caused by the MERS CoV (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus).  
   ● Mortality rate: 30% |
### What are zoonotic diseases?
- Zoonotic Diseases
  - Diseases that pass from animals to humans.
  - Since they are new to humans, the human body does not have any immunity to them.
  - They are caused by harmful germs such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites.

### How Zoonotic Diseases spread?
- Direct contact and Indirect contact.
- Vector-borne: being bitten by insects like mosquitoes, fleas or ticks.
- Food borne: eating contaminated food.

### What measures are being taken to contain the outbreak?
- **Screening at airports**: Countries worldwide are screening passengers arriving from China and neighbouring countries for high fever as well as other probable symptoms of coronavirus.
- **Isolation of patients**: Patients suspected of having infected from Corona Virus are being quarantined to curb the spread of infection.
- **Shutdown in China**:
  - China has imposed severe restrictions on travel in the Hubei province.
  - Only essential services are given permission to operate and complete lockdown imposed in Wuhan city and adjoining suburban areas.

### What steps has India taken to contain the spread of nCov
- **Screening at airports**: Airport authorities have been asked to monitor passengers from China as well as south-east Asian countries.
- **Travel warning issued**: The government has issued a travel warning to travellers from China and urged people to refrain from visiting China.
- **E-Visa**: Electronic Visa facilities have been blocked for the time being for Chinese nationals. E-Visa already issued will also be invalid.
- **Instructions to airlines**: The Ministry of Civil Aviation has issued instructions to all national and international airlines to comply with the above advisory for their operations from China.
- **Evacuation of Indians from China**: Government has evacuated around 650 Indian nationals from Wuhan by a special Air India flight recently.

### WHO intervention on nCov
- **PHEIC**:
  - WHO has declared the recent outbreak of Novel Corona Virus as Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).
  - This is done when there is "an extraordinary event which is determined to constitute a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease.
  - All countries should be prepared and must share full data with WHO.
- **Impact of declaration of PHEIC**: will trigger tighter containment and information-sharing guidelines to all countries.
- **WHO advisory to public**: People to do regular handwashing, cover mouth and nose while coughing or sneezing, and avoid close contact with anyone suspected of being infected or showing respiratory illness symptom

### Impacts of the outbreak
- **Aviation and tourism**: The largest impact of the outbreak has been on the aviation and tourism sector due to cancellation of flights and hotel bookings as a result of lockdown.
- **World markets**: World markets dropped considerably due to lockdowns in Wuhan which is the 3rd largest business destination in mainland China.
| **Domestic markets of China**: Domestic exporters and manufactures are suffering due to transport restrictions and are demanding additional credit from the Chinese government. |
| **China’s credit rating**: Moody’s said it may negatively affect China sovereign credit rating. |

**Way forward**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Curbing spread of the virus:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Complete lockdown may not prove to be a long-term solution for curbing spread of virus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Awareness campaigns and proper diagnosis and isolation will only help to effectively minimise further transmission of the infection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development of vaccine: Research on development of vaccine as well as the treatment needs to be expedited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information sharing: Countries having patients with Corona Virus infection should engage in sharing accurate information about the spread of disease with WHO as well as neighbouring countries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources**
The Hindu, Indian Express, WHO, ICMR, WebMD
Lok Sabha clears Bill to include more tribes in ST category in Karnataka

Why in news?

- The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2019, which seeks to grant Scheduled Tribes status to certain communities in Karnataka, was passed by voice vote in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

More in news

- About the Bill:
  1. It seeks to include the Parivara and Talawara communities in the ST category in Karnataka.
  2. The Siddi tribes of Belagavi and Dharwad in Karnataka would also be included in the category, apart from those living in Uttar Kannada.
  3. The Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha during the winter session.

- Synonyms of Nayaka:
  1. The Karnataka government had recommended for inclusion of "Parivara' and Talawara' communities as synonyms of 'Nayaka' appearing at SI No 38 in the list of Scheduled Tribes of the State of Karnataka.

- Procedure:
  1. The first specification of Scheduled Tribes in relation to a particular State or Union territory is by a notified Order of the President after consultation with the State Government/UT concerned.
  2. Any subsequent inclusion in or exclusion from and other modifications in the list of Scheduled Tribes can be made only through an amending Act of Parliament.

Sources

The Hindu

Bill to regulate pesticide business gets green light

Why in news?

- Union Cabinet recently approved Pesticides Management Bill, 2020, which, it claims will regulate the business of pesticides & compensate farmers in case of losses from the use of spurious agro chemicals.

More in news

- Current Regulations: pesticide business is regulated by Insecticide Act 1968 which would be replaced by the new bill.

- Provisions under the new Bill:
  1. Farmers would be empowered to get all information as the data would be in open source and in all languages.
  2. 'Central fund likely': "If there is any loss because of the spurious or low quality of pesticides then there is a provision for compensation.
  3. If required, the government will form a central fund which will take care of compensation.
  4. All the information regarding the available pesticides would be available in the public domain, in all languages in digital format, so that farmers can make the right decision on their use.
  5. The bill also plans to regulate pesticides-related advertisements to check misleading claims by industries and manufacturers.
• India is among the leading producers of pesticides in Asia. In the domestic market, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana are among the states with the highest recorded consumption.

**Sources**
The Hindu

## ART Bill approved by Union Cabinet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>The Union Cabinet recently approved Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill, 2020 to monitor medical procedures used to assist people to achieve pregnancy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in news | More about the Bill:  
(1) **National Board:**  
➢ The Bill provides for a national Board which will lay down a code of conduct to be observed by those operating clinics.  
➢ It will also formulate minimum standards for laboratory and diagnostic equipment and practices to be followed by human resources employed by clinics and banks.  
➢ The States and Union Territories will also have to form State Boards and State authorities within three months of the notification of the proposed legislation.  
(2) **National Registry:** Under the proposed law, a national registry and registration authority will maintain a database to assist the national Board to perform its functions, according to a statement issued by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry.  
(3) **Strict punishment:** The Bill also proposes stringent punishment for those who practise sex selection, indulge in sale of human embryos or gametes and those who operate rackets.  
(4) **Confidentiality clause:** The Bill will also ensure confidentiality of intending couples and protect the rights of the child.  
(5) **Other Mentions:**  
➢ In the Surrogacy Regulation Bill 2020, the government was looking to restrict the maximum age of surrogates from “above the marriageable age” to 50 years.  
➢ India has one of the highest growths in the number ART centres and ART cycles performed every year.  
➢ India has become one of the major centres of this global fertility industry, with reproductive medical tourism becoming a significant activity.  
➢ This has also introduced a plethora of legal, ethical and social issues; yet, there is no standardisation of protocols and reporting is still very inadequate.  
| Sources | The Hindu |

## Centre to form new law panel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>Recently, the Union Cabinet gave its approval to set up the 22nd Law Commission. The Law Commission advises the government on complex legal issues. The term of the previous law panel ended last August.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td>Other Details:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Unique Academy

(1) 3-year Term: Law Ministry will now notify the new panel, which will have a three-year term.

(2) Members:
(a) Apart from having a full-time chairperson, the commission will have four full-time members, including a member-secretary.
(b) Ex-Officio Members: Law & Legislative Secretaries in the Law Ministry will be the ex-officio members.
(c) Part time Members: It will also have not more than five part-time members.
(d) Head of the Commission: A retired Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court.

(3) Task of Law Commission:
(a) It shall, on a reference made to it by the Central Government or suo motu, undertake research in law and review of existing laws in India for making reforms and enacting new legislation.
(b) It shall also undertake studies and research for bringing reforms in the justice delivery systems for elimination of delay in procedures, speedy disposal of cases, reduction in cost of litigation, etc.

- Originally formed in 1955, the commission is reconstituted every three years and so far, 277 reports have been submitted to the government.
- About the Last Law Commission:
  (1) The last Law Commission, under Justice B.S. Chauhan (retd.), had submitted reports and working papers on key issues such as simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies and a uniform civil code.
  (2) While it supported simultaneous polls, the Commission had said the time for a common code was not yet ripe.
  (3) In 2015, a proposal was mooted to make the law panel into a permanent body either through an Act of Parliament or an executive order (resolution of the Union Cabinet).
  (4) The move was, however, shelved after the Prime Minister’s Office preferred the existing system to continue.

Sources
- The Hindu

Technical Textiles Mission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
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<tr>
<td>● The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the setting up of a National Technical Textiles Mission at an total outlay of ₹1,480 Crore.</td>
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<td>● Aim: To position the country as a global leader in technical textiles and increase the use of technical textiles in the domestic market.</td>
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<tr>
<th>More in the news</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Data:</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Indian technical textiles segment is estimated at $16 billion which is approximately 6% of the $250 billion global technical textiles market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) The penetration level of technical textiles in India varies between 5% and 10% against the level of 30% to 70% in developed countries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● The Mission will be implemented for four years from 2020-2021 and will have four components.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The first component:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(1) It will focus on research and development and innovation and will have an outlay of Rs. 1,000 crore.
(2) The research will be at both, fibre level and application-based in geo, agro, medical, sports and mobile textiles and development of bio-degradable technical textiles.

- **The second component:**
  (1) It will be for promotion and development of market for technical textiles.
  (2) The Mission will aim at taking domestic market size to $40 billion to $50 billion by 2024.

- **The third component:**
  (1) It will focus on export promotion so that technical textile exports from the country reach from the Rs. 14,000 crore now to Rs. 20,000 crore by 2021-2022.
  (2) It will ensure 10% average growth every year till the Mission ends.

- **The fourth component** will be on education, training and skill development.

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**Judiciary**

**Supreme Court upholds changes to SC/ST atrocities law**

**Why in news?**
- SC recently upheld a 2018 amendment which barred persons accused of committing atrocities against those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from getting anticipatory bail.

**More in news**
- The judgement was regarding the constitutionality of Section 18A of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act of 2018.

- **Purpose of Section 18A:** The sole purpose of Section 18A was to nullify a controversial March 20, 2018, judgment of the Supreme Court diluting the stringent anti-bail provisions of the original Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989.

- **March 20, 2018 Judgement:**
  (1) SC had held that there was no “absolute bar” on accused person obtaining anticipatory bail under Section 438 CrPC, “if no prima facie is made out or if judicial scrutiny reveals the complaint to be prima facie malafide”.
  (2) The March 20, 2018 judgment was a response to the court’s belief that the law was abused to file false complaints.
  (3) The verdict had led to widespread violence. Consequently, Parliament amended the 1989 law and inserted Section 18A into it. Section 18A reaffirmed the original legislative bar on pre-arrest bail.

- **Recalling the Judgment:**
  (1) Earlier, on October 1 last year, the SC had recalled the March 20, 2018 judgment in a review petition filed by the government.
  (2) It had said it was against “basic human dignity” on the part of the March 20, 2018 judgment to treat the members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes as “a liar or crook”.

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Source: The Hindu
- **Petitions against Section 18A:** A number of petitions were filed in SC to declare Section 18A “arbitrary and unconstitutional”. All of them were dismissed by the Bench recently as without merit.

- **Other Details of the latest Judgement:**
  1. A High Court would also have an “inherent power” to grant anticipatory bail in cases in which prima facie an offence under the anti-atrocities law is not made out.
  2. A High Court, in “exceptional cases”, could quash cases to prevent the misuse of the anti-atrocities law.

**Sources**  
The Hindu

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**‘Review court can refer questions to larger Bench’**

**Why in news?**  
- A nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court recently upheld the decision of the five-judge Sabarimala Review Bench to refer to a larger Bench questions on the ambit and scope of religious freedom practised by multiple faiths across the country.

**More in news**  
- The nine-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) S.A. Bobde, said a Bench engaged in the review of a particular judgment could indeed refer other questions of law to a larger Bench. Arguments on merits would be heard from February 17.
- Bench also framed following 7 questions of law which it would decide:
  1. What is the scope and ambit of religious freedom under Article 25 of the Constitution?
  2. What is the interplay between religious freedom and rights of religious denominations under Article 26 of the Constitution?
  3. Whether religious denominations are subject to fundamental rights?
  4. What is the definition of ‘morality’ used in Articles 25 and 26?
  5. What is the ambit and scope of judicial review of Article 25?
  6. What is the meaning of the phrase “sections of Hindus” under Article 25 (2) (b)?
  7. Whether a person not belonging to a religious group can question the practices, beliefs of that group in a PIL petition?

- **Wider issues**
  1. On November 14 last year, the Gogoi Bench, in a majority judgment, did not decide the Sabarimala review cases before it. Instead, it went on to frame “larger issues” concerning essential religious practices of various religions.
  2. It further clubbed other pending cases on subjects as varied as female genital mutilation among the Dawoodi Bohras to entry of Parsi women who married inter-faith into the fire temple and Muslim women into mosques and referred them all to a larger Bench.
  3. The reference order also asked the larger Bench to consider the rule pertaining to the prohibition of entry to women of menstruating age into the Sabarimala temple.

**Sources**  
The Hindu

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**A child cannot be put behind bars, rules SC**
### Why in news?
- The Supreme Court has made it clear that the police have no right to detain children in conflict with law in a lockup or a jail.

### More in news
- **Other Details:**
  1. **Special juvenile police unit:** A juvenile in conflict with law, if apprehended, has to be placed immediately under the care of the special juvenile police unit or a designated child welfare officer.
  2. The child has to be produced before the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB).
  3. “Once a child is produced before a JJB, bail is the rule. If for some reason bail is not granted, a child cannot be put behind bars.
  4. He has to be lodged either in an observation home or in a place of safety.
  5. The law is meant to protect children and not detain them in jail or keep them in police custody, said the court.
- The eight-page order on February 10 came after the court’s attention was drawn by the recent media reports about “children being detained in police custody and tortured in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh”.
- The Bench has issued notice to the Uttar Pradesh and Delhi Commissions for Protection of Child Rights and directed them to file their responses within three weeks.

### Sources
The Hindu

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### ‘District judge postings only via promotion’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>● The Supreme Court recently held that subordinate judicial officers cannot apply or compete for direct appointment as District Judge even if they have a previous experience of seven years as an advocate.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in news | ● **Other Details:**
  (1) The only way to become a District Judge is via promotion in accordance with the Rules under Article 234 and proviso to Article 309, said an SC Bench.
  (2) **Article 234:** Appointments of persons other than district judges to the judicial service of a State shall be made by the Governor of the State in accordance with rules made by him in that behalf after consultation with the State Public Service Commission and with the High Court exercising jurisdiction in relation to such State.
  (3) **Article 309:** Recruitment and conditions of service of persons serving the Union or a State Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, Acts of the appropriate Legislature may regulate the recruitment, and conditions of service of persons appointed, to public services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of any State. |
| Sources     | The Hindu |

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### SC passes interim order on Mahadayi tribunal’s award

| Why in news? | ● The Supreme Court recently passed an interim order allowing an application by the State of Karnataka to notify Mahadayi Water Dispute Tribunal’s award.
  ● The implementation of the award would, however, be subject to the final judgment of the Supreme Court in the civil appeals filed by Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra, challenging the allocation of water from the Mahadayi river among them. |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
**Aug 2018 Tribunal Award**

(1) The tribunal had allocated 13.42 TMC water (including 3.9 TMC for diversion into the depleted Malaprabha river basin) **from the Mahadayi river basin to Karnataka.**

(2) Maharashtra was allotted 1.33 TMC water while Goa was given 24 TMC in the final decision of the tribunal.

(3) The United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-2 government had constituted the **Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal in 2010.**

(4) The Karnataka government had petitioned the tribunal seeking the release of 7.56 TMC of water for the **Kalasa-Banduri Nala project.**

(5) The Kalasa-Banduri Nala (diversion) project, which will utilise 7.56 TMC of water from the **inter-State Mahadayi river, is being undertaken by Karnataka to improve drinking water supply to the twin cities of Hubballi-Dharwad and the districts of Belagavi and Gadag.**

(6) It involves building barrages across **Kalasa and Banduri, the tributaries of the Mahadayi river, to divert 7.56 TMC water to the Malaprabha river, which fulfils the drinking water needs of the twin cities.**

**About Mahadayi/MandoviRiver**

(1) It is described as the **lifeline of the Indian state of Goa.**

(2) The Mandovi and the Zuari are the two primary rivers in the state of Goa.

(3) Mandovi joins with the Zuari at a common creek at Cabo Aguada, forming the Mormugao harbour.

(4) Panaji, the state capital and Old Goa, the former capital of Goa, are both situated on the left bank of the Mandovi.

(5) With its cerulean waters, Dudhsagar Falls and Varapoha Falls, it is also known as the Gomati in a few places.

**Sources** The Hindu

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### Constitutional and Statutory Bodies

**J&K to get delimitation commission**

**Why in news?**

- About six months after the State of Jammu and Kashmir was split into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, the government moved to start the **delimitation of Assembly constituencies in J&K.**

**More in news**

- On a request by the Department of Legislative Affairs of the Ministry of Law and Justice, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora named Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra as his nominee to the proposed Delimitation Commission for Jammu and Kashmir recently.

- An official of the Commission said the EC was ready to provide secretarial assistance to the Commission once appointed, as it is required to do.

- **Delimitation Commission:**
  
  (1) **Delimitation commission or Boundary commission** of India is a commission established by the Government under the provisions of the **Delimitation Commission Act.**
(2) The main task of the commission is **redrawing the boundaries of the various assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies** based on a recent census.

(3) Representation from each **State is not changed during this exercise**.

(4) However, the **number of SC and ST seats in a state are changed in accordance with the census**.

(5) The present delimitation of constituencies has been done on the basis of **2001 census under the provisions of Delimitation Act, 2002**.

(6) The Commission is a **powerful and independent body whose orders cannot be challenged in any court of law**.

(7) Orders are laid before **Lok Sabha & respective State Legislative Assemblies. However, modifications are not permitted**.

**Sources** The Hindu

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**President gives nod for delimitation in NE States**

**Why in news?**

- President Ram Nath Kovind cancelled an earlier order of the Union government that **deferred the delimitation exercise in the northeastern States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland**.

**More in news**

- **Background:**
  1. The delimitation exercise to readjust the division of each State and Union territory into territorial constituencies for the purpose of elections to the Lok Sabha and to the State Legislative Assemblies on the basis of 2001 census figures was completed by November 26, 2008.
  2. However, this exercise under aegis of the Delimitation Commission, **was postponed in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland on apprehension of threat to the peace and public order**.

- **Latest Order by Law Ministry:**
  1. It noted that there has been a **significant improvement in the security situation and a reduction in insurgency incidents**, making the situation conducive for carrying out the delimitation exercise now.

- **About Delimitation commission:**
  1. The Delimitation commission or **Boundary commission of India** is a commission established by the GoI under the provisions of the Delimitation Commission Act.
  2. The main task of the commission is **redrawing the boundaries of the various assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies** based on a recent census.
  3. The **representation from each State is not changed** during this exercise.
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  6. The **Commission is a powerful and independent body whose orders cannot be challenged in any court of law**.

**Sources** The Hindu
# Miscellaneous

## 12,000 cases in Foreigners’ Tribunals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>The Centre informed the Lok Sabha recently that the Assam government has not constructed any detention camp in the State to exclusively detain those who do not have documents proving their citizenship under the National Register of Citizens (NRC).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td>Assam published the final NRC on August 31 last year, in which more than 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants were excluded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People in detention: Union Minister of State for Home said a total of 1,381 people were currently in detention centres in Assam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cases referred to Foreigners Tribunal: As per the information furnished by the government of Assam, the number of cases referred to the Foreigners Tribunals in the last three years are 9,457 cases (2017), 2,051 cases (2018) and 599 cases (2019, up to November).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detenues in the Centres: The Minister quoted Assam government data on the number of detenues in holding centres in the last three years, after they were declared foreigners by the Foreigners Tribunal: Goalpara has 209 persons; Kokrajhar – 105; Silchar – 79; Tezpur – 661; Jorhat – 286 and Dibrugarh – 41.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A total of 761 detenues were released from the centres in the last three years.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About Foreigners Tribunals:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) The Foreigners’ Tribunals are quasi-judicial bodies meant to “furnish opinion on the question as to whether a person is or is not a foreigner within the meaning of Foreigners Act, 1946”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Two kinds of cases in FT: those against whom a “reference” has been made by border police, and those whose names in the electoral rolls have a D (Doubtful) against them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, and has empowered district magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals (quasi-judicial bodies) to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not. Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sources
The Hindu

## Trust formed for Ram temple construction: PM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently told the Lok Sabha that the Cabinet had approved a scheme for the construction of a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya by setting up an autonomous trust, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, to take forward the process as per the Supreme Court’s orders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td>Other Details:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) SC Mandate: The Supreme Court mandated 3-month deadline to set up a trust was to end on February 9, a day after Delhi votes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) One member from Dalits: The Union Home Ministry notified the Trust that there would be 15 trustees, out of which one would always be from the Dalit society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Miscellaneous

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### Area to Trust

Mr. Modi announced that the government had decided to transfer the entire 67.703 acres to the trust. “This trust will be fully autonomous to take any decision regarding the construction of temple.”

### 5 acre to Sunni Waqf Board

The Uttar Pradesh government had approved the Supreme Court’s direction to grant 5 acres to the Sunni Central Wakf Board, he said.

Sources: The Hindu

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## Bond rule in Bengaluru draws fire

### Why in news?

- Several organisations, which are up in arms against the Bengaluru police’s decision to have them sign indemnity bonds of up to ₹10 lakh as a pre-condition for permission to stage protests, are planning to challenge this in court.

### More in news

- Section 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973
  - The police have issued notices to organisers of protests seeking bonds under Section 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
  - This gives powers to the magistrates to seek a bond from a person they have information that will likely commit a breach of peace.
  - Earlier, the police used to seek a bond of up to ₹10,000 and only in special cases. But four months ago, when a rally caused large-scale damage to public property, the order was amended to allow for a bond up to ₹10 lakh.

Sources: The Hindu

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## Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh

### Why in news?

- The long-pending and much-sought-after Special Category Status (SCS) to Andhra Pradesh is not a closed chapter, says its Chief Minister.

### More in news

- Special Category Status (SCS)
  - It’s a classification given by Centre to assist development of those states that face geographical & socio-economic disadvantages like hilly terrains, strategic international borders, economic and infrastructural backwardness, and non-viable state finances.
  - The concept of a SCS was first introduced in 1969 when the 5th Finance Commission sought to provide certain disadvantaged states with preferential treatment in the form of central assistance and tax breaks, establishing special development boards, reservation in local government jobs, educational institutions, etc.
  - This formula was named after the then Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Dr Gadgil Mukherjee.
  - After the dissolution of planning commission and formation of NITI Aayog, recommendations of 14th Finance Commission were implemented which meant discontinuation of Gadgil formula based grants.
  - 14th Finance Commission effectively removed the concept of SCS after its recommendations were accepted in 2015.
  - Criteria for special category status:
    - (a) Hilly and difficult terrain
    - (b) Low population density or sizeable share of tribal population
    - (c) Strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries.
(d) Economic and infrastructural backwardness
(e) Non-viable nature of state finances

(7) Benefits states confer with special category status:
(a) Central govt. bears 90% of the state expenditure on all centrally-sponsored schemes & external aid while rest 10 percent is given as loan to state at zero % of interest.
(b) Preferential treatment in getting central funds
(c) Concession on excise duty to attract industries to state.
(d) 30% of the Centre's gross budget also goes to special category states.
(e) These states can avail the benefit of debt-swapping and debt relief schemes.
(f) States with special category status are exempted from customs duty, corporate tax, income tax and other taxes to attract investment.
(g) Special category states have the facility that if they have unspent money in a financial year; it does not lapse and gets carry forward for the next financial year.

Sources The Hindu

Rajasthan seeks higher Central assistance for water scheme

Why in news?
• The government in Rajasthan has sought changes in the norms for Central assistance for the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), which envisages supply of 55 litres of water per person per day to every rural household by 2024, in order to reduce the financial burden on the States. The flagship Central scheme at present stipulates the share in 50:50 ratio.

More in news
• The Union Ministry of Jal Shakti is holding discussions with all the States in five phases for their action plans under the JJM.
• About JJM:
  (1) The Mission was announced in August 2019.
  (2) The chief objective of the Mission is to provide piped water supply (Har Ghar Jal) to all rural and urban households by 2024.
  (3) It also aims to create local infrastructure for rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse in agriculture.
  (4) The Jal Jeevan Mission is set to be based on various water conservation efforts like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of greywater for agriculture and source sustainability.
  (5) The Jal Jeevan Mission will converge with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.

Sources The Hindu

U.P. govt. invokes NSA

Why in news?
• The Uttar Pradesh government has invoked the National Security Act (NSA) against Dr. Kafeel Khan of Gorakhpur for his alleged inflammatory comments against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) at Aligarh Muslim University recently.

More in news
• The National Security Act, 1980:
(1) It was promulgated in 1980 after the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), 1971 was repealed in 1977.
(2) The purpose of the Act is "to provide for preventive detention in certain cases and for matters connected therewith".
(3) The act extends to the whole of India. It Contains 18 sections.
(4) This act empowers the Central Government and State Governments to detain a person to prevent him/her from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of India, the relations of India with foreign countries, the maintenance of public order, or the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community it is necessary so to do.
(5) The act also gives power to the governments to detain a foreigner in a view to regulate his presence or expel from the country.
(6) The act was passed in 1980 during the Indira Gandhi Government.
(7) The maximum period of detention is 12 months.
(8) The order can also be made by the District Magistrate or a Commissioner of Police under their respective jurisdictions, but the detention should be reported to the State Government along with the grounds on which the order has been made.
(9) The National Security Act may also be invoked if a person assaults a policeman on duty.

Sources
The Hindu

Poll panel working on remote voting system

Why in news?
- The model of an Aadhaar-linked electronic voting system, which will enable electors to cast their votes from any part of the country — irrespective of where they are registered to vote — or even abroad, is being prepared for the Election Commission of India by the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M), ECI officials said.

More in news
- Other Details:
  (1) Blockchain Technology Used: The IIT-M is developing a system for two-way remote voting in controlled environment using blockchain technology.
  (2) Integration with ERO: It will have to be integrated with ECI’s ERO-Net so if a person votes remotely, the electoral roll will reflect that.
  (3) Aadhaar Linking: With the proposed linking of Aadhaar with voter IDs at an "advanced stage", the two-way system would be possible only when the linking is complete.
  (4) The model is likely to be presented before the Commission next month & if approved, a prototype can be readied by the year-end or early next year.
  (5) If the project is given the go-ahead by the EC, election laws will have to be changed.
  (6) 2019 Election:
    (a) The ECI had used a one-way electronic system for service electors for the first time in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.
    (b) The postal ballots were transmitted electronically to the service electors, which led to an increased turnout or 60.14%.

Sources
The Hindu
Assam Accord Clause 6: panel gives report to CM

| Why in news? | ● The high-power committee that the Centre constituted in July last for the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord submitted its report to Assam’s Chief Minister. |
| More in news | ● Clause 6 of Assam Accord:  
(1) It envisages constitutional, legislative and administrative measures to safeguard, protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.  
(2) It also seeks to ascertain who fits into the definition of an Assamese. |
| Sources | The Hindu |

Environment

Stubble burning incidents come down

| Why in news? | ● The number of stubble-burning incidents in 2019 was the least in four years, the Economic Survey says. |
| More in news | ● Other Details in the Economic survey:  
(1) Data from ICAR:  
(a) According to satellite data, there were 61,332 instances of stubble-burning in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh between October and November, 2019.  
(b) There were 75,532 instances in 2018, 88,948 in 2017 and 127,774 in 2016, according to data sourced from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.  
(2) Significant reduction:  
(a) With various efforts, overall, the total number of burning events recorded a significant reduction.  
(b) However, the continuation of this practice by farmers is reported every year starting winter, and the serious concerns about its impact on air quality are raised.  
(3) Fire Events and Increase in PM level:  
(a) The number of fire events peaked from mid-October till the first week of November 2019.  
(b) This led to an increase in the levels of particulate matter in Delhi in October and November, compared with September 2019.  
(4) Reasons for increase in PM Levels:  
(a) The pollution levels spike when farmers in these three States burn the residue after harvesting paddy to clear the fields of the summer harvest and make way for wheat sowing.  
(b) The smoke from these fires travels to Delhi, leading to a gaseous cocktail that causes air quality to plummet. |
5) **Ban not enforced**: There has been a ban on burning this agricultural residue, but the State authorities have not been able to entirely stop it.

6) **Conservation**:  
   (a) Agriculture conservation should be **promoted with “low lignocellulosic” crop residues, such as rice, wheat, maize.**  
   (b) Crop residue-based briquettes ought to be encouraged & thermal power plants in the vicinity ought to be encouraged to undertake firing of crop residues with coal.

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### 2,130 Kerala islands now under CRZ cover

**Why in news?**  
- As many as 2,130 backwater islands of Kerala, including Maradu, have been brought under the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) regime thereby imposing curbs on development activities.

**More in news**  
- **Development Activity**: No new development activity will be permitted in these islands in an area between the High Tide Line (HTL) and 50 metres towards the landward side, which is the CRZ area of these islands.
- **High tide line**: The HTL is the line on the land up to which the highest water line reaches during the spring tide.
- **About National Centre for Earth Science Studies**:  
   (1) It’s an autonomous research Centre under the **Earth System Science Organization (ESSO) of MoES**.  
   (2) It was instituted by the government of Kerala in 1978, at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. CESS was the earliest institute in the country to embrace the concept of Earth System Science.  
   (3) It promotes scientific and technological research and development studies in the earth sciences.

**Sources**  
The Hindu

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### New mascot for National Games is Goa’s State bird, flame-throated bulbul

**Why in news?**  
- Goa’s State Bird **flame-throated bulbul**, also called the Rubigula, was chosen as the mascot of the **36th National Games to be held in Goa**.

**More in news**  
- **About Rubigula or Flame-throated Bulbul**:  
   (1) It is a member of the bulbul family of **passerine birds** (birds of a large order distinguished by having feet that are adapted for perching, including all songbirds).  
   (2) Found only in the forests of **Western Ghats in southern India**.  
   (3) They are **olive backed with yellow undersides**, a triangular orange-red throat and a white iris that stands out against the contrasting black head.  
   (4) **IUCN Status**: **Least Concern**  
   (5) It is a bird of forest that is only rarely seen at the edges of forests or inside coffee plantations.

**Sources**  
The Hindu
The nest is a small cup, placed in undergrowth from 1 to 3 metres from the ground level and is usually made of yellowing leaves bound with cobwebs and can easily be mistaken for a wind-blown accumulation of dry leaves.

Sources

India moves to include elephant, bustard in global conservation list

**Why in news?**

- India will be moving to include the **Asian Elephant** and the **Great Indian Bustard** in the list of species that merit heightened conservation measures.
- The list will be debated at the 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), an environment treaty under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

**More in news**

- **Gujarat convention**
  1. COP is scheduled from Feb 17 to 22 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
  2. There are 130 parties to the convention and India has been a member since 1983.
  3. The elephant faces risks particularly in neighbouring Bangladesh and Nepal.
  4. India is home to several migratory species of wildlife, including the snow leopard, Amur falcons, bar-headed geese, black-necked cranes, marine turtles, dugongs and hump-backed whales.
  5. Having the elephant and the Great Indian Bustard in the list — more formally known as Appendix 1 — would coax countries neighbouring India, where wild animals such as tigers and elephant foray into, to direct more resources and attention to protecting them.
  6. There are now 173 species in Appendix 1.
- **The Union Environment Ministry reports India as having 29,964 elephants according to the Project Elephant Census in 2017.** The pachyderm merits the highest level of protection, or Schedule 1, under the Wildlife Protection Act.
- **India to lead**
  1. India has been designated the President of COP for next 3 years.
  2. Seven species that include Dugong, Whale Shark, Marine Turtle (two species), have been identified for preparation of Conservation and Recovery Action Plan.
- **Theme of CMS COP13 in India is, “Migratory species connect the planet and we welcome them home.”**
- **The CMS COP 13 logo is inspired by ‘Kolam’, a traditional artform from southern India.** In the logo of CMS COP-13, Kolam art form is used to depict key migratory species in India like Amur falcon, humpback whale and marine turtles.
- **The mascot for CMS COP13, “Gibi - The Great Indian Bustard” is a critically endangered species which has been accorded the highest protection status under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.**
- **The Indian sub-continent is also part of the major bird flyway network, i.e, the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) that covers areas between the Arctic and Indian Oceans, and covers at least 279 populations of 182 migratory water bird species, including 29 globally threatened species.**

Sources

National Water Right Convention in Bhopal held recently
### Why in news?
- In Madhya Pradesh, a National Water Conference was held in the capital Bhopal to solve the water crisis and make the state a water-rich state.

### More in news
- **Purpose of the conference:**
  1. To finalize the guidelines for the Water Rights Act in Madhya Pradesh.
  2. A framework for better implementation of this act will also be made in the conference.
  3. Madhya Pradesh Government has announced to implement the Water Rights Act in the state soon. **MP will be the first state in the country where this law will be implemented.**
  4. There was plenty of water in the state before due to rivers like Narmada, Chambal, Son, Betwa and Sindh but as a result of decline in groundwater during the last few years, **water crisis has arisen in most parts of the state.**

### Sources
- The Hindu

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### ‘Time running out to reduce greenhouse gas emissions’

### Why in news?
- Five global risks that have the potential to impact and amplify one another in ways that may cascade to create global systemic crisis, have been listed by ‘The Future of Earth, 2020,’ which was released recently by the **South Asia Future Earth Regional Office, Divecha Centre for Climate Change, Indian Institute of Science.**

### More in news
- As many as 222 leading scientists from 52 countries conducted the survey by Future Earth, an international sustainability research network.
- The **Bengaluru launch** was among similar parallel ones across other parts of the world scheduled between February 13 and 21.
- **Aim of the Report:** The report was prepared with the aim of reducing carbon footprint and halting global warming below 2 degree Celsius by 2050.
- **Findings in the report**
  - **5 Global Risks:** The report, released lists following global risks:
    1. failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation;
    2. extreme weather events;
    3. major biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse;
    4. food crises;
    5. water crises.
  - **Interrelated factors:** Offering examples of how the interrelation of risk factors play a role, scientists say extreme heat waves can accelerate global warming by releasing large amounts of stored carbon from affected ecosystems, and at the same time intensify water crises and/ or food scarcity.
  - **Biodiversity Loss Increases Vulnerability:** The loss of biodiversity also weakens the capacity of natural & agricultural systems to cope with climate extremes, increasing our vulnerability to food crises.
  - **Rising temperature:**
    1. This has inspired declarations of a climate crisis or climate emergency by the leaders of more than 700 cities, States and governments.
    2. Yet, during 2019, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reached more than 415 ppm, and the five years from 2014 to 2018 were the warmest recorded over land and ocean since 1880,” read the report.
Populism versus grassroots movements: Right-wing populism, a breed of politics that exploits people’s fears during times of economic decline & growing inequality, and that focuses on nationalist tendencies to clamp down on borders & reject immigrants,” is on the rise around the world. This often leads to a denial of climate change facts or impacts.

Altered Land Areas: Humans have now “significantly altered” 75% of our planet’s land area; about a quarter of species in assessed plant and animal groups are threatened.

Sources: The Hindu

Fire sweeps through high ranges of Kottayam

Why in news?
- After a series of low-intense landslips that rocked the region during the monsoon, the vast swaths of forests, grasslands, and plantations in the high ranges of Kottayam have now been taken over by numerous wind-driven fires, giving locals and firefighting officials sleepless nights.

More in news
- According to officials with the Fire and Rescue Services, the fast-moving flames, accompanied by extreme heat and spells of dry wind, have turned the forest fringes on the foothills of the Western Ghats incandescent.
- The sharp rise in fire incidents over the last couple of weeks has left the 250-plus Fire and Rescue Services personnel and the 16 fire tenders across the eight fire stations in Kottayam stretched to their limit.
- 300 acres destroyed: A fire that broke out at Moonnilavu two days ago has so far destroyed crops on over 300 acres.
- The fires have left the forests and plantations reduced to charred stumps in many locations.
- Tough to Handle: The incidents reported from the desolate grasslands on the hilltops are tough to handle, considering the difficulty in deploying personnel and machines at such locations.

About Kottayam:
(1) Kottayam is a city in Kerala, located on the basin of Meenachil River and has a moderate climate.
(2) The city is known for its trade in natural rubber, and the national Rubber Board is headquartered in the city, as is the Plantation Corporation of Kerala.
(3) Kottayam Port is India’s first multi-modal inland container depot.

Sources: The Hindu

Going energy neutral, 13 SCR railway stations tap the sun

Why in news?
- The South Central Railway (SCR) has become the first in Indian Railways to come up with the concept of ‘Energy Neutral’ stations, capable of meeting 100% energy requirements by tapping natural solar power through Solar PhotoVoltaic (SPV) panels commissioned on about 13 station buildings.

More in news
- ‘Energy Neutral’ stations:
  (1) This eco-friendly concept is based on the principle of developing station buildings with total solar power tapping capabilities commensurate to exact load requirements of those particular stations.
(2) This is done by **installation of SPV panels on the rooftops** which are integrated with the on-grid (or) off-grid solar energy plants to derive power supply to the entire station. The total capacity of solar panels installed at the 13 ‘energy neutral’ stations is 99 kWp with the cost incurred, being around ₹50 lakh.

(4) The anticipated **energy generation from these stations comes to around 1.3 lakh units annually** and it is expected that solar power will also lead to savings of Rs. 13 lakh each year.

(5) In addition, the generation of clean solar energy will help reduce carbon footprints to the tune of 1,170 tonnes per annum.

(6) All the power needs of 13 stations like lighting, fans, pumps are met through the solar energy generated.

**Sources**
The Hindu

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**Scientists radio-tag Indian pangolin**

**Why in news?**
- For the first time, scientists have radio-tagged the Indian pangolin, an endangered animal that is rarely sighted in forests here.

**More in news**
- Radio-tagging involves attaching a transmitter to an animal to monitor its movement.
- Tagging the animal will help understand the habits of the reclusive, nocturnal animal.
- About Pangolin
  1. The Indian pangolin, which dons a thick scaly skin, is hunted for meat, skin, scales and used in traditional Chinese medicine.
  2. Pangolins are among the most trafficked CITES-protected, wildlife species in the world.
  3. The projected population declines range from 50% to 80% across the genus.
  4. Out of the eight species of pangolin, the Indian and the Chinese pangolins are found in India.
  5. Both these species are listed under Schedule I Part I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
  6. **IUCN Status**
     - (a) **Indian Pangolin**: Endangered (found on the Indian subcontinent)
     - (b) **Chinese pangolin**: Critically Endangered (found in northern India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, northern Indochina, through most of Taiwan, and southern China)

**Sources**
The Hindu

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**Encroachment of M.P. National Park land continues unchecked**

**Why in news?**
- The Madhav National Park has **claimed denotified land is unavailable for allotment to 39 tribal families displaced 20-years ago** to make way for a tiger corridor, even though hundreds of others compensated for to vacate the Park continue to farm and encroach upon the corridor unchecked.
- Moreover, **tigers are yet to be reintroduced in the park, let alone the corridor’s development.**

**More in news**
- About Madhav National Park
(1) It is situated in Shivpuri District of Gwalior division in northwest Madhya Pradesh.
(2) It was named after Madho Rao Scindia, the Maharaja of Gwalior belonging to the Scindia dynasty of the Marathas.
(3) With a varied terrain of wooded hills — the forest being dry, mixed and deciduous- and flat grasslands around the lake, it offers abundant opportunities of sighting a variety of wildlife.
(4) Animal Species: deer, nilgai, sambar, chausingha or four-horned antelope, blackbuck, sloth bear, Indian leopard and the common langur.
(6) Sakhya Sagar and Madhav Sagar lakes, created on Manier River in 1819, are two important biodiversity support systems in the park besides several perennial and seasonal streams and nullahs.
(7) Species that can be seen here are marsh or mugger crocodile, Indian python and the monitor lizard.

New species of urban lizard found

Why in news?
● Guwahati, the largest city in the Northeast, has yielded a new species of lizard — the urban bent-toed gecko.

More in news
● About the New Species:
(a) Study Published in: Zootaxa, a peer-reviewed scientific mega journal for animal taxonomists
(b) The new species of lizard, zoologically named Cyrtodactylus urbanus, is markedly different in molecular structure, blotch and colour from the Cyrtodactylus guwahatiensis, or the Guwahati bent-toed gecko, that was discovered two years ago.
(c) All bent-toed geckos in Northeast India were earlier thought to be a single species, the Cyrtodactylus khasiensis found primarily in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya.
(d) Photographs taken of the urban bent-toed from the Basistha area of Guwahati in 2011 made global experts realise it was a different species.

Wayanad Tiger Reserve proposal fails to find favour

Why in news?
● Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, though home to more than half the number of tigers present in Kerala, may not be notified as a tiger reserve as the proposal lacks public support.

More in news
● Tiger Population in Kerala:
(1) The Status of Tigers in India report released last year had estimated the tiger population of Wayanad as between 75 and 80 individuals.
(2) There are five Tiger Reserves in the neighbouring States that share boundaries with Wayanad.
(3) Periyar Tiger Reserve, the first one in Kerala, has an estimated population of 30 to 35 big cats whereas Parambikulam, the second reserve, has a population of 20 to 25 tigers.
● Reasons Cited for inclusion as a Tiger Reserve:
(1) More than half of the tiger population in the State was found in Wayanad.
(2) Notification would ensure financial aid from the Centre and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)
(3) Better conservation and management of the tiger population.
(4) Help generate more employment opportunities
(5) Issue of human-wildlife conflicts in the district: Cattle lifting by the ailing tigers and their straying into human habitations have often triggered widespread public protests in the district.

- About Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary:
  (1) Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is an animal sanctuary in Kerala with an extent of 344.44 km² with four ranges namely Sulthan Bathery, Muthanga, Kurichiat and Tholpetty.
  (2) Established in 1973, it is now an integral part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. It is bounded by the protected area network of Nagarhole and Bandipur of Karnataka in the northeast, and on the southeast by Mudumalai of Tamil Nadu.
  (3) A variety of large wild animals such as Indian bison, elephant, deer and tiger are found there.
  (4) Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is the second largest wildlife sanctuary in Kerala.
  (5) Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the safest havens for different species of vultures like the White-rumped Vultures and the Red-headed Vultures.
  (6) Scheduled tribes here include Paniyas, Kurumas, Adiyans, Kurichiyas, Ooralis and Kattunaikkans.

**Sources** The Hindu

### India’s bird population on the decline

**Why in news?**
- Over a fifth of India’s bird diversity, ranging from Short-toed Snake Eagle to Sirkeer Malkoha, has suffered strong long-term declines over a 25-year period, while more recent annual trends point to a drastic 80% loss among several common birds, said a new scientific report.

**More in news**
- State of India’s Birds 2020 (SoIB)
  (1) It used a base of 867 species, analysed with the help of data uploaded by birdwatchers at online platform, eBird.
  (2) Adequate data on how birds fared over a period of over 25 years are available only for 261 species. Current annual trends are calculated over a 5-year period.
  (3) Several spectacular birds, many endemic to the sub-continent, face a growing threat from
    (a) loss of habitat due to human activity,
    (b) widespread presence of toxins, including pesticides;
    (c) hunting and trapping for the pet trade.
  (4) Diminishing population sizes of many birds because of one factor brings them closer to extinction because of the accelerated effects of others.
  (5) For every bird species that was found to be increasing over long term, 11 have suffered losses, some catastrophically.
  (6) Health of avifauna based on scientific groupings like raptors, habitat, diet, migratory status & endemcity: raptors overall are in decline, with ‘open
The Unique Academy

### Rare urban sparrows:
- Of 101 species categorised as being of High Conservation Concern, 59 based on range & abundance and the rest included from high-risk birds on the IUCN Red List — endemics such as Rufous-fronted Prinia, Nilgiri Thrush, Nilgiri Pipit & Indian vulture were confirmed as suffering current decline.
- All except 13 had a restricted or highly restricted range, indicating greater vulnerability to man-made threats.
- Common sparrow, long seen as declining in urban spaces, has a stable population overall, although data from major cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad & Chennai confirm that they have become rare in cities and urban areas.
- Possible reasons: decrease in insect populations, nesting places, with no conclusive evidence on radiation from mobile phone towers playing a part.

### Bandipur: Kerala opposes alternative route

#### Why in news?
- The Kerala government has opposed in the Supreme Court an alternative route proposed by Karnataka to bypass the night-time traffic ban on the National Highway 212 through the Bandipur National Park.

#### More in news
- Reasons for Opposing the Alternative Route:
  1. The alternative route goes through the Nagarhole Tiger Reserve in Karnataka and Tholpetty wildlife sanctuary in Kerala “where wild animals are wandering freely in heavy numbers.”
  2. It will take more time for the land acquisition for developing the route.
  3. Further, clearance from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is mandatory.
  4. Mudumalai, Bandipur Tiger Reserves and Wayanad Wildlife sanctuary make one contiguous tiger territory and tigers move freely within this area. It is illogical and inappropriate to impose enhanced level of restriction only in one part of this tiger territory to protect tigers.
- NH 212 connects not only major cities like Bengaluru and Cochin but also smaller ones like Vythiri, Chundel, Kalpetta, Muttil, Meenangadi, Sulthan Bathery, Gundelpett, Begur and Nanjangud towns. It is a vital economic link and the easiest route between the two States, Kerala and Karnataka.
- For uniform curbs Across Country Needed
  1. If at all any restrictions of vehicular movement is to be done in wildlife areas, it should be done uniformly across the country under the relevant laws such as the Wildlife Protection Act and not under the Motor Vehicles Act.
  2. Otherwise it amounts to colourable exercise of power.
  3. There is no provision under the MV Act to protect wildlife.

### Use biodegradable grow bags

#### Why in news?
- Polythene grow bags used to plant saplings in nurseries will no longer be allowed in government afforestation projects.
The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), an apex body that decides on permitting the felling of trees in forests for industrial activities, recommended that the State governments/Union Territory administrations should ensure that the cost model prepared for CA /Penal CA shall incorporate the cost of alternative biodegradable bags in place of polythene bags.” This was decided at an FAC meeting on January 20.

More in news

- CA refers to compensatory afforestation whereby industries must make good the forest loss by acquiring alternative land and paying the State forest department for planting trees.
- The Centre, in 2016, banned plastic bags having a thickness less than 50 microns, under the revised Plastic Waste Management Rules and several States have announced banning of polythene bags as well as some on single use plastics.
- About the FAC:
  (1) It is a key statutory body under MoEFCC.
  (2) It’s role is advisory in nature.
  (3) It considers questions on the diversion of forest land for non-forest uses such as mining, industrial projects, townships and advises the government on the issue of granting forest clearances.

Sources

The Hindu

New highway threatens tiger territory in Arunachal Pradesh

Why in news?

- After cutting through the Namdapha National Park, India’s easternmost tiger reserve, a new highway project has been cleared through yet another big cat reserve in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Documents received in response to an RTI inquiry by Seijosa-based green activist Tana Jorjo Tara reveal that the BJP government in the State plans to build a 692.7 km highway through the 862 sq km Pakke Tiger Reserve (PTR) in East Kameng district.

More in news

- About Namdapha National Park:
  (1) It is a large protected area in Arunachal Pradesh of Northeast India.
  (2) With more than 1,000 floral and about 1,400 faunal species, it is a biodiversity hotspot in the Eastern Himalayas.
  (3) The national park harbours the northernmost lowland evergreen rainforests in the world at 27°N latitude.
  (4) It also harbours extensive dipterocarp forests, comprising the northwestern parts of the Mizoram-Manipur-Kachin rain forests ecoregion.
  (5) It is the fourth largest national park in India.
  (6) The land cover changes with increasing elevation from tropical evergreen forest to temperate broadleaf and mixed forest.
  (7) Secondary forests cover 345.47 km² (133.39 sq mi); seasonal snow occurs at above 2,700 m (8,900 ft) between Dec and Mar.
  (8) Additionally, the park has extensive bamboo forests.
  (9) The area falls under both the Palearctic and Indo Malayan biogeographic areas resulting in a diverse species assemblage.

Sources

The Hindu
Odisha’s Rushikulya rookery all set to welcome turtles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Preparations are almost done at the Rushikulya rookery on the Odisha coast to welcome and protect olive ridley turtles during mass nesting, likely to begin in a week.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>More in news</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Gahirmatha marine sanctuary and Rushikulya rookery coast</strong> in Ganjam district are main Olive Ridley Nesting sites in Odisha.</td>
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<td>• Of these sites, <strong>Gahirmatha marine sanctuary is largest rookery (mass nesting site) of Olive Ridley turtles.</strong></td>
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<td>• Odisha is home to 50% of the total world’s population of Olive Ridleys and about 90% of Indian population of sea turtles.</td>
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<td>• Recently, Odisha forest department added another olive ridley mass nesting site Bahuda Rookery at beach on <strong>Bahuda river mouth in Ganjam district.</strong></td>
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<td>• It is located around 20 km to south of <strong>Rushikulya rookery coast.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Olive Ridley</strong></td>
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<td>(1) Olive Ridley turtle (Lepidochelys olivacea) is smallest and most abundant of all sea turtle found in world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) It gets its name from its olive coloured carapace, which is heart-shaped and rounded.</td>
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<td>(3) It is best known for their unique mass nesting called Arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach each year to lay eggs.</td>
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<td>(4) It is found in warm waters of Pacific and Indian oceans.</td>
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<td>(5) They are found along both-eastern &amp; western coasts of India.</td>
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<td>(6) It spends entire lives in ocean and migrates thousands of kilometers between feeding and mating grounds in course of a year.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Breeding season</strong></td>
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<td>(1) Olive Ridley turtles commence their journey from Indian Ocean towards the Bay of Bengal during their mating season in October and November every year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) A single female can lay upto 100 to 150 eggs in a pit dug on beaches. Six weeks later these eggs hatches and newly hatched turtles start journey to their Indian Ocean habitat.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Threats</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Accidental killing of <strong>adult turtles through entanglement in trawl nets and gill nets due to uncontrolled fishing during their mating season around nesting beaches.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) <strong>Poaching for meat, shell and leather, and their eggs.</strong> Development and exploitation of nesting beaches.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Protection Status</strong></td>
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<td>(1) Though found in abundance, their numbers have been declining over the past few years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) It is included in the <strong>Vulnerable category by the IUCN Red list.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) In India, it is protected under <strong>Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) Moreover, trading in its products are banned under <strong>CITES.</strong></td>
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| Sources | The Hindu |
M.M. Hills sanctuary to be a tiger reserve soon

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<tr>
<td>● The decks have been cleared to notify the Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife</td>
<td>Sanctuary in Karnataka’s Chamarajanagar district as a tiger reserve. The approval from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is expected any time now.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Once notified, Chamarajanagar district will have the rare distinction in the country of having three tiger reserves.</td>
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<td>● It already has Bandipur and Biligiri Ranganatha Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve within its territorial limits.</td>
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<td>● Also, with this, Karnataka will have six tiger reserves, the others being Nagarahole, Bhadra, and Anshi-Dandeli, apart from Bandipur and BRT Tiger Reserves.</td>
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<td>● The sanctuary will be renamed Malai Mahadeshwara Hill Tiger Reserve with a core area of 670.95 sq km spread across Malai Mahadeshwara Reserve Forest, Hanur Reserve Forest and Yediyarahalli Reserve Forest.</td>
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<td>● The sanctuary presently has about 20 tigers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● About MM Hills Sanctuary:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary or Male Mahadeshwara Wildlife</td>
<td>Sanctuary is a protected Wildlife sanctuary in the Eastern Ghats and is located in Karnataka.</td>
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<td>(2) It is named after the presiding deity &quot;Lord Male Mahadeshwara&quot; of the famed Malai Mahadeshwara Hills Temple located within the sanctuary.</td>
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<td>(3) The sanctuary is part of a contiguous tiger habitat, located very close to the tri-junction of the states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.</td>
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<td>(4) The sanctuary has Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (Karnataka) to its North and East, Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (Tamil Nadu) to its South and Biligirirangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve (Karnataka) to its West.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(5) Flora: The predominant forest type of the sanctuary is dry and moist deciduous forests. As per research reports published, Lantana has invaded substantial areas around Malai Mahadeshwara Hills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6) Fauna: The sanctuary also has other fauna like gaur (Bos gaurus), wild boar (Sus scrofa), leopard (Panthera pardus), dhole, spotted deer (Axis axis), barking deer (Muntiacus muntjak), sambar (Cervus unicolor), four-horned antelope (Tetracerus quadricornis), black-naped hare (Lepus nigricollis), chevrotain, common langur, bonnet macaque, honey badger (ratel) etc.</td>
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Sources The Hindu
### Operation Vanilla brings island closer

**Why is it in news?**
- India’s flood relief mission to Madagascar will be followed up this week with the island’s Defence Minister Rakotonirina Leon Jean Richard visiting Lucknow and Delhi from Tuesday.
- This will be the first such high-level trip since India incorporated the island off the coast of Africa into the “Indian Ocean Region (IOR)”.

**More in news**
- More about the visit
  1. Mr. Richard is expected to discuss implementing a memorandum of understanding on defence cooperation signed during President Ramnath Kovind’s visit to Antananarivo in March 2018.
  2. Mr. Richard will discuss the devastation in Madagascar due to flooding after a cyclone and heavy rain in the island’s north-west left at least 31 dead and affected nearly 1,00,000 people.

- Operation Vanilla
  1. Last week, the Indian Navy conducted “Operation Vanilla”, with INS Airavat delivering relief material such as food, clothing, medicines and water.
  2. The humanitarian gesture by India also showcased India’s strategic capabilities in the furthermost islands of the IOR.

**Source** The Hindu

### Bhutan ends free entry for Indian tourists

**Why is it in news?**
- The Government of Bhutan has decided to levy a daily Rs. 1,200 ($17) fee for “regional tourists” from India, the Maldives and Bangladesh, beginning July 2020.

**More in news**
- **Sustainable Development Fee:** The fee, called a Sustainable Development Fee (SDF), is meant to help the government deal with burgeoning numbers in tourist traffic, which it is seeking to regulate through a new tourism policy.
- **Present status:**
  1. Currently international tourists, pay $250 (Approx. INR. 18,000) as a minimum charge per day per person, which includes a $65 a day “Sustainable Development Fee”, as well as a $40 visa charge.
  2. Tourists from India, Bangladesh and Maldives do not have to pay any charges right now.

**Source** The Hindu

### India to work with Russia on copters

**Why is it in news?**
- Issues concerning the production localisation of Ka-226T light utility helicopters are in the process of being resolved, N.M. Srikanth, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Indo-Russian Helicopters Limited (IRHL), said on Thursday.
More in news

- Localisation of K226-T helicopters:
  1. At the ongoing Defexpo 2020, Russian Helicopters (RH) signed a road map with IRHL for localisation of Ka-226T helicopter production in India.
  2. The IRHL is a joint venture between Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Russian Helicopters (RH), which will assemble the Ka-226T helicopters in India.
- Ka-226T
  1. The Kamov Ka-226 is a small, twin-engine Russian utility helicopter.
  2. Ka-226T features coaxial main rotor system, maximum take-off weight of 3.6 tons and is capable of transporting up to 1 ton of payload.
  3. Ka-226T can be easily fitted with a transport cabin enabling the transportation of up to 6 people, or with modules carrying special equipment.

Source: The Hindu

India to study air corridors with Central Asian countries

Why is it in news?
India would like to explore setting up “air corridors” between India and five Central Asian nations, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Thursday.

More in news

- Air corridors: The air corridors would include regular cargo flights with special clearing and customs facilities to expedite the movement of goods, especially fresh fruit and other agricultural produce.
- Concerns on Chabahar
  1. Businessmen and diplomats present however remained sceptical of the viability of Chabahar without considerable progress on infrastructure.
  2. At present, most of the trade between Central Asia goes via Bandar Abbas in Iran, northern Europe or China.
  3. In recent years, the government has been seeking to develop more direct routes from Chabahar, a trilateral arrangement with Iran and Afghanistan, the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and becoming a part the Ashgabat Agreement.
- What is Ashgabat Agreement?
  1. It is an agreement on the Establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor between the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Sultanate of Oman, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan signed on 25 April 2011 (Ashgabat Agreement).
  2. Ashgabat Agreement envisages facilitation of transit and transportation of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.

Source: The Hindu

PM Modi offers help to Xi to deal with virus outbreak

Why is it in news?
India has offered assistance to China to deal with the coronavirus outbreak, sources said on Sunday.
Mr. Modi also conveyed appreciation for China’s support in the evacuation of Indian nationals from Wuhan.

More in news

- Evacuation of 645 citizens: India has evacuated 645 citizens from Wuhan so far. All of them have tested negative for coronavirus.
Chinese statement: Chinese Ambassador Sun Weidong said China is ready to work with India to strengthen communication and coordination, and to safeguard the health and safety of Indian citizens in China.

Timing of the gesture: India’s gesture came two days after Chinese President Xi Jinping held a telephone conversation with U.S. President Donald Trump about Beijing’s preparedness to deal with the spread of the virus.

Casualties and spread of n-Coronavirus: China’s National Health Commission recorded 89 deaths on Saturday, pushing the total deaths to 811.

Source: The Hindu

India-Bangladesh rail link to be ready by 2021

Why is it in news?

- The landmark rail line to connect the north-eastern region with Bangladesh will be ready by the end of 2021, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday.

More in news

- More about the rail link
  1. The railway link will connect Gangasagar in Bangladesh to Nischintapur in India and from Nischintapur to Agartala railway station.
  2. Cost sharing: Ministry for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) will bear the cost of laying 5.46 kms track on the Indian side while the cost of laying 10.6 kms track on the Bangladesh side is being borne by the Ministry of External Affairs.
  3. The 15-km Indo-Bangla railway project would be beneficial for both sides as it will reduce the distance from Bangladesh to Kolkata by 50 percent.
  4. Currently, the rail distance between Agartala-Kolkata is 1613 km while it will be reduced to only 514 km once the proposed Indo-Bangla railway project is opened.

Source: The Hindu

India amends tax pact with Sri Lanka

Why is it in news?

- The double taxation avoidance agreement between India and Sri Lanka was amended on Wednesday, an official press release has announced.

More in news

- Amendment to DTAA: The amendment was made to the India-Sri Lanka Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) of 2013 and the new changes would enable the government to blunt tax evasion.
- What is a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement?
  1. The Double Tax Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) is a tax treaty signed between two or more countries to help taxpayers avoid paying double taxes on the same income.
  2. A DTAA becomes applicable in cases where an individual is a resident of one nation, but earns income in another.

Source: The Hindu

CIA spied through Swiss encryption firm: report

Why is it in news?

- The CIA read the encrypted messages of several countries, including India, through its secretly owned Switzerland-based company trusted by governments all over the world to keep the communications of their spies, soldiers and diplomats secret, according to a leading American daily.
More in news

- More about the report
  (1) The report by The Washington Post and German public broadcaster ZDF published on Tuesday said the company, Crypto AG, entered into a deal with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1951 and came under its ownership in the 1970s.
  (2) The joint reporting project, which uncovered the secret operation from CIA-classified documents, described how the U.S. and its allies exploited other nations’ gullibility for years, taking their money and stealing their secrets.
- Crypto AG
  (1) The company specialised in communications and information security and was founded in the 1940s as an independent firm.
  (2) The firm had clients such as Iran, military juntas in Latin America, India, Pakistan and even the Vatican, the report said.
- **Use of rigged devices**: The spy agencies rigged the company’s devices so they could easily break the codes that countries used to send encrypted messages.

Source

The Hindu

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**USTR takes India off developing country list**

**Why is it in news?**

- The U.S. government has changed an administrative rule making it easier for it to impose countervailing duties (CVDs) on goods from India and certain other countries.

**More in news**

- **Classification of countries**
  (1) The United State Trade Representative (USTR) had, in 1998, come up with lists of countries classified as per their level of development to harmonise U.S. law with the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) Agreement.
  (2) These lists were used to determine whether they were potentially subject to U.S. countervailing duties.
- **Case of Countervailing Duties**
  (1) Countervailing duties, also known as anti-subsidy duties, are trade import duties imposed under World Trade Organization rules to neutralize the negative effects of subsidies.
  (2) Countries not given special consideration have lower levels of protection against a CVD investigation.
  (3) A CVD investigation must be terminated if the offending subsidy is de minimis (too small to warrant concern) or if import volumes are negligible.
  (4) The de minimis thresholds and import volume allowance are more relaxed for developing and least-developed countries.
- **Criteria used to determine eligibility for 2% de minimis**
  (1) Per capita Gross National Income or GNI
  (2) share of world trade
  (3) other factors such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) membership or application for membership, EU membership, and Group of Twenty (G20) membership.
- **Reason for putting India off the list**
  (1) India was taken off the list also because — like Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa — it is part of the G20.
India, along with Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam were taken off the list since they each have at least a 0.5% share of the global trade, despite having less than $12,375 GNI (the World Bank threshold separating high income countries from others).

Source: The Hindu

L&T to deliver first patrol boat to Vietnam

Why is it in news?
- The first high-speed patrol boat being built for Vietnam under the $100-million Line of Credit (LoC) will be delivered by September, said J.D. Patil, whole time director & senior executive vice president defence & smart technologies, Larsen & Toubro.

More in news
- **2014 $100 million LoC:**
  1. India had extended $100 million Line of Credit to Vietnam in 2014 for defence modernisation.
  2. Vietnam is procuring 12 such boats under the LoC extended in September 2014.
- **$500 million line of credit:** In 2016, India had extended another $500 million defence LoC to Vietnam and discussions are under way to identify the equipment.
- **Interest in Akash and Dhruv:** Vietnam has expressed interest in Akash surface-to-air systems and Dhruv advanced light helicopters.

Sources: The Hindu

European Union calls for swift end to all curbs in Kashmir

Why is it in news?
- The European Union (EU) has called for a swift removal of communication and political restrictions in Kashmir and is in touch with the Indian authorities for a continuing dialogue on the situation in Kashmir.

More in news
- Statement from EU spokesperson on the visit
  1. The visit confirmed that the Government of India has taken positive steps to restore normalcy.
  2. The visit presented a welcome opportunity to see the situation on the ground and to interact with local interlocutors.
  3. Some restrictions remain, notably on Internet access and mobile services, and some political leaders are still in detention.
  4. While we recognise the serious security concerns, it is important that the remaining restrictions are lifted swiftly.
- **Timing of the statement:** The statement was issued a day after a delegation of 25 diplomats, which included EU Ambassador to India Ugo Astuto and several other European envoys, returned from a visit to Jammu and Kashmir on February 12 and 13.

Source: The Hindu

India rejects Guterres mediation offer

Why is it in news?
- The government has rejected the latest offer by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to mediate between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, saying that it would only discuss the matter bilaterally.
MEAS statement
(1) The issue of [Jammu and Kashmir] that needs to be addressed is that of vacati on of the territories illegally and forcibly occupied by Pakistan.
(2) Further issues, if any, would be discussed bilaterally. There is no role or scope for third party mediation.
(3) India hopes the UN Secretary General would “emphasise on the imperative for Pakistan to take credible, sustained and irreversible action to put an end to cross-border terrorism against India.

Offer for mediation: Speaking in Islamabad at the beginning of a four-day visit to Pakistan, Mr. Guterres had said he had offered his offices and was “ready to help if both countries agree for mediation.”

India inks 14 MoUs with Russia for defence support, spares

Why is it in news?

14 MoUs were signed between Indian and Russian companies for setting up joint ventures covering a range of equipment from modern T-90 tanks to legacy Pechora air defence systems.

More in news

(1) The MoUs were signed during the 5th India Russia military industry conference held during the Defexpo 2020 in Lucknow.
(2) They come under the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on joint manufacturing of spares in India signed last September.
(3) The IGA stresses for mutual cooperation in manufacturing of spares, components, aggregates and other material related to Russian or Soviet-origin arms and defence equipment.

MoU between Bharat Dynamics and Almaz Antey: One important MoU was signed between the Bharat Dynamics Limited and the Almaz Antey of Russia for exploring the feasibility of a joint venture in India for the production of various sub systems of “air defence missile systems like Tunguska, Kavadrat, the OSA-AKA, Pechora air defence system as well as the Shilka self-propelled air defence gun system.

Source: The Hindu

Copter deal okayed ahead of Trump trip

Why is it in news?

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, met on Wednesday and cleared the procurement of 24 MH-60R multi-role helicopters for the Navy worth around $2.4 billion.

More in news

(1) MH-60R was earlier selected through a competitive process for 16 helicopters, with an option for eight more.
(2) But the deal fell through owing to pricing issues and other developments. Thereafter, the tender was cancelled.
(3) A fresh tender for 24 MH-60R helicopters was floated later and processed through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route of the U.S. government.

MH-60R Helicopter
(1) The Sikorsky SH-60/MH-60 Seahawk (or Sea Hawk) is a twin turboshaft engine, multi-mission United States Navy helicopter.
The helicopter is equipped for a range of missions including anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare (ASuW), search-and-rescue (SAR), naval gunfire support (NGFS), surveillance, communications relay, logistics support and personnel transfer and vertical replenishment (VERTREP).

It is the most capable naval helicopter available today designed to operate from frigates, destroyers, cruisers and aircraft carriers.

### CAA will cause Muslims to face exclusion: U.S. panel

**Why is it in news?**
- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released a fact sheet on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).
- It said that with the CAA in place, Muslims would primarily bear the punitive consequences of exclusion from the NRC which could include ‘statelessness, deportation, or prolonged detention.

**More in news**
1. **USCIRF**
   - The USCIRF describes itself as an independent, bipartisan US federal government commission that was created by The International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).
   - **What is IRFA?**
     - The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 was passed by the 105th US Congress (1997-99) and signed into law by the then President Bill Clinton on October 27, 1998.
     - It is a statement of the United States’s concern over violations of religious freedoms overseas.
   - **Mandate of USCIRF**: The USCIRF is mandated by US statute to “monitor the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad — not in the United States — using international standards to do so and makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

### India, Maldives agree to take on terrorism, radicalisation

**Why is it in news?**
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah met his Maldivian counterpart on Friday and discussed bilateral cooperation in the fields of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation, among other things.

**More in news**
- **Statement from MHA**: A statement issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said Mr. Shah and the Home Minister of Maldives, Sheikh Imran Abdulla, discussed issues of mutual interest in the area of security and law enforcement cooperation.
- **Meeting with senior officials**: The meeting was also attended by Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla and other senior officers from both sides. The delegation also met chiefs of the National Investigation Agency, the Narcotics Control Bureau, the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate.

### Services finalising requirements for drones from U.S.
### Why is it in news?
- The proposal to procure armed drones from the U.S. for the three services is very much under way and the qualitative requirements (QR) are currently being finalised, defence sources said.

### More in news
- **What is the proposal?**
  1. The proposal includes procurement of 10 High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) drones for each of the three services.
  2. The qualitative requirements (QR) are currently being finalised by the Indian Navy.
- **Meeting of Chiefs of Staff Committee**
  1. The Navy’s QRs are ready and that of the Army and the Air Force should be ready by the next meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC), likely within 40 days.
  2. The CoSC consists of the three chiefs and is headed by the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), who is also the permanent Chairman of CoSC.
- **High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) drones**
  1. A high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), Phantom Eye is designed and manufactured by Boeing Phantom Works, US.
  2. The UAV will be used to undertake intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions over the Indian Ocean Region.

### Source
The Hindu

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### India, U.S. to upgrade ties, call on Pak. to curb terror

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in news?</th>
<th>India and the U.S. on Tuesday resolved to upgrade their bilateral relationship to a Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership that will include issues such as defence, security cooperation and revitalisation of the Indo-Pacific quadrilateral dialogue.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### More in news
- **Highlights of statements**
  1. **On Pakistan**: Both sides also called upon Pakistan to rein in cross-border terror threats and sought justice for the victims of 26/11 attack and the Pathankot terror attack of 2016.
  2. **South China Sea**: Both sides also took note of the efforts of the ASEAN region to create a code of conduct in the South China Sea region.
  3. **On Internet**: India and the United States recognised the need for an innovative digital ecosystem that is secure and reliable, and facilitates the flow of information and data.
  4. **Revitalising QUAD**: Mr. Trump said the U.S. and India were working to revitalise the quadrilateral initiative consisting of Japan, the U.S., India and Australia. Both countries were also working on cybersecurity and counter-terrorism issues.
  5. **Mediation on Kashmir**: Renewing his offer of mediating between India and Pakistan, Mr. Trump said the issue of Kashmir had “two sides”.

### Source
The Hindu

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### J&K an integral part, India tells Human Rights Council

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in news?</th>
<th>Jammu and Kashmir will remain an integral part of India for ever, and the world should act against countries that shelter terrorists, India told the Human Rights Council on Wednesday.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Statement by India: The transformative changes wrought by our Parliament last August were meant to strengthen the integration of the State, including to give fullest play to representative government from the grassroots level upward.

More about Human Rights Council
(1) The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them.
(2) The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 March 2006 by resolution.

Source: The Hindu

India to carry out projects in Rakhine

India will carry out more development projects in the Rakhine province of Myanmar, which is considered the homeland of the Rohingya community. The decision was taken during the state visit of President U Win Myint of Myanmar.

Agreement on cooperation: Both sides agreed to expedite 12 projects in Rakhine under the second phase of the Rakhine State Development Programme as part of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation mechanism.

Objective: Creating hospitable conditions for the Rohingya community in the Rakhine province of Myanmar.

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)
(1) The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) is an initiative by six countries – India and five ASEAN countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam for cooperation in tourism, culture, education, as well as transport and communications.
(2) It was launched in 2000 at Vientiane, Lao PDR. Both the Ganga and the Mekong are civilizational rivers.
(3) Aim of MGC: The MGC initiative aims to facilitate closer contacts among the people inhabiting these two major river basins.
(4) The MGC is also indicative of the cultural and commercial linkages among the member countries of the MGC down the centuries.

Sources: The Hindu, PIB

No NSG waiver for India, says New Zealand Deputy PM

The path ahead for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) is yet “unknown”, said New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, who raised the issue with the government during his visit to Delhi this week.

Recent visit: Mr. Peter’s visit coincided with that of U.S. President Donald Trump and came during the violence over the CAA in the capital, which left 42 people dead.

No change in stand: Asked about India’s entry as a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which New Zealand blocked along with China and others in 2016, Mr. Peters said his government’s stand had not changed on the issue.

Fixed norms and criteria: New Zealand continued to ask the NSG to develop “fixed norms and criteria” for all non-signatories to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)
### Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)
1. The NPT is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament.
2. India did not sign it as the treaty was discriminatory.
3. **Reason for not signing NPT**: Treaties like NPT were selectively applicable to only non-nuclear powers and legitimized the monopoly of nuclear power by a few.

### WHO declares coronavirus outbreak a global emergency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in news?</th>
<th>The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the recent outbreak of novel coronavirus as Public Health Emergency of International Concern.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td><strong>Death toll rises</strong>: The death toll in China from the new coronavirus reached 213 on Friday, with overall cases worldwide rising rapidly in an outbreak that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global health emergency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Impact of the move</strong>: The WHO move will trigger tighter containment and information-sharing guidelines to all countries, but may disappoint Beijing, which had expressed confidence it can beat the “devil” virus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                    | **What is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)?**
|                    | (1) The WHO declares a Public Health Emergency of International Concern when there is “an extraordinary event which is determined to constitute a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease.” |
|                    | (2) All countries should be prepared for containment, including active surveillance, early detection, isolation and case management, contact tracing and prevention of onward spread of 2019-nCoV infection, and to share full data with WHO. |
|                    | (3) **Recent PHEIC**: PHEIC was declared in the year 2019 for the Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo, in 2016 for Zika virus, in 2009 for H1N1 swine flu, and in for 2014 polio and Ebola outbreaks. |

### World is not facing a pandemic yet, says WHO

| Why is it in news? | The World Health Organization said on Tuesday that the outbreak of the deadly novel coronavirus does not yet constitute a “pandemic”. |
More in news

● What is a pandemic?
(1) A pandemic is an epidemic of disease that has spread across a large region; for instance, multiple continents, or even worldwide.
(2) The last pandemic reported was the H1N1 flu pandemic in 2009, which killed hundreds of thousand worldwide.

● Current controls of n-CoV: Current control measures in place include early case detection, early isolation and treatment of cases, contact tracing and social detention measures in places where there is risk of transmission.

Source The Hindu

Donald Trump acquitted by Senate

Why is it in news?
● U.S. President Donald Trump, impeached by the House of Representatives, was acquitted by the Senate late afternoon on Wednesday, bringing to a close a bitter process that lasted close to five months.

More in news
● Grounds for impeachment: Mr. Trump was impeached by the House for conditioning $391 million in military assistance to Ukraine and a crucial White House meeting with its president Volodymyr Zelensky on the Ukrainians publicly announcing investigations into Mr Trump’s political rival, former Vice President Joseph Biden and his son, Hunter.

● Acquittal from charges
(1) Senators voted 52 to 48 to acquit Mr. Trump on the abuse of office charge, with Republican Mitt Romney voting alongside all 47 Democrats.
(2) They voted 53-47 as per party lines to acquit the president of the charge of obstruction of Congress.

Source The Hindu

India, African countries resolve to fight terror

Why is it in news?
● India and several African countries on Thursday pledged to deepen cooperation to combat the growing threat of terrorism and preserve maritime security in a joint deceleration adopted at the first India- Africa Defence Ministers conclave at the ongoing Defexpo.

More in news
● Lucknow Declaration:
(1) It emphasises on the need for stronger international partnership in countering terrorism and violent extremism, including through increased sharing of information and intelligence.
(2) The Declaration also called for strengthening the UN Counter-Terrorism mechanisms and to ensure strict compliance with the UN Security Council sanctions regime on terrorism.
(3) Seeks to increase cooperation in securing sea lines of communication, preventing maritime crimes, disaster, piracy, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing through sharing of information and surveillance.

● Attendance by 38 countries: The dialogue was attended by 12 Defence Ministers and 38 countries were represented at the conclave.

Source The Hindu

Coronavirus threat ‘very grave’ to world, not China, says WHO
### Pakistan retained on ‘grey list’ of FATF

**Why is it in news?**
- Pakistan has been retained on the ‘grey list’ of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for another four months, with a stern warning from the global watchdog that met in Paris (February 19-21) to complete the 27-point action plan it has been given by June 2020 or face being put on the ‘black list’.

**More in news**
- **Statement from FATF:** All deadlines in the action plan have expired. While noting recent and notable improvements, the FATF again expresses concern, given Pakistan’s failure to complete its action plan in line with the agreed timelines and in light of the terror financing risks emanating from the jurisdiction.
- **September 2019 deadline:** Pakistan was given a September, 2019 deadline to complete the tasks that included shutting down all access to funding of United Nations Security Council-designated terrorist groups, including the Taliban, al-Qaeda, the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed.
- **More about FATF**
  1. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 by the Ministers of its Member jurisdictions.
  2. **Objective of FATF:** To set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
  3. The FATF is therefore a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
  4. The FATF’s decision making body, the FATF Plenary, meets three times per year.

**Sources**
- The Hindu, FATF website

### Regional integration pegged to SAARC revival’

**Why is it in news?**
- Successful regional integration both economic and security depends on the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) becoming fully functional at the highest levels, Sri Lanka’s former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Sunday.
More in news

- **Kathmandu Summit 2017**: Mr. Wickremesinghe said the postponement of the Kathmandu SAARC Summit in 2017 due to heightened tensions between India and Pakistan had brought the regional grouping “to a standstill”.

- **Creating a sub-region**: Proposing an ‘Economic Integration Road Map (EIRM)’, Mr. Wickremesinghe said it was important to conceptualise a “sub-region”, consisting of the five southern States of India, and Sri Lanka, to tap the total population of 300 million people and a combined GDP of over $500 billion.

- **More about SAARC**
  
  1. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985.
  
  2. **Members** - SAARC comprises of eight member States:
     - Afghanistan
     - Bangladesh
     - Bhutan
     - India
     - Maldives
     - Nepal
     - Pakistan
     - Sri Lanka
  
  3. **Headquarters and Secretariat** - Kathmandu, Nepal.

Source: The Hindu

India gets invite for U.S.-Taliban deal event

**Why is it in news?**

- India has been invited to witness the ceremony to seal the peace deal between the U.S. and Taliban in Qatari capital Doha on Saturday.

**More in news**

- **Afghan Peace Process and US-Taliban Peace deal**: The Afghan peace process refers to both the proposals and negotiations in a bid to end the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

- **Taliban**
  
  1. The Talibans are sunni Islamic fundamentalists that are currently waging war in Afghanistan.
  
  
  3. They have emerged as a powerful political and military organization in Afghanistan.

- **US-Taliban conflict**
  
  1. US-Taliban The US waged war in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attack. The war was waged to roll back the control of Taliban.
  
  2. The US conducted two major operations to contain terrorism of Talibans.
     - Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-14)
     - Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (2015-present)

Source: The Hindu
# Social Issues

## NCRB data on Missing Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
<th>● According to a study by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the highest number of women and children who go missing in the country are from Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh respectively.  ● The NCRB study was based on the annual Crime in India Report compiled by the agency for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in the news</td>
<td>● The Supreme Court in 2019, had directed the NCRB to analyse the data on missing persons [especially on women and children].  ● The purpose was to identify the areas prone to persons being trafficked.  ● <strong>Findings of the Study:</strong>  (1) The States where the highest number of women went missing in the three years are Maharashtra, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.  (2) Mumbai and Pune recorded the highest number of such incidents.  (3) In 2016, as many as 28,316 women went missing in Maharashtra, followed by 29,279 in 2017, and 33,964 in 2018.  (4) In West Bengal, the number of missing women in 2016, 2017 and 2018 was 24,937, 28,133 and 31,299, respectively.  (5) Madhya Pradesh recorded 21,435, 26,587 and 29,761 missing reports of women in the three years.  (6) In Madhya Pradesh, Indore reported the highest number of missing children, with 596 in 2017 and 823 in 2018.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source**: The Hindu.

## Anganwadi beneficiaries in cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
<th>● According to government data, for every 100 anganwadi beneficiaries in the country, only seven are in urban areas.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in the news</td>
<td>● <strong>Primary cause behind low beneficiaries in urban areas:</strong>  (1) A severe lack of anganwadis in cities, leading to poor coverage of the government’s flagship programme in early childhood development.  (2) There are as many as 13.79 lakh anganwadis operational across the country.  (3) Of those anganwadis that can be monitored online, 1.09 lakh centres are in urban areas and the remaining 8.22 lakh were in rural areas of the country.  ● <strong>Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):</strong>  (1) The scheme by the Women and Child Development Ministry provides a package of six services.  (2) The services include supplementary nutrition; pre-school non-formal education; immunisation, nutrition and health education; as well as referral services.  (3) The aim of the scheme is to reduce infant mortality and child malnutrition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(4) Beneficiaries include children in the age group of six months to six years, and pregnant women and lactating mothers.

- **Data:**
  1. As per Census 2011, 32% of India’s 1.2 billion population live in cities.
  2. A Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey 2016-18, found that 35% of children under five were stunted and 17% were wasted.
  3. It also said 22% of children in the age group of 5-9 years were stunted and 23% were thin for their age.
  4. About 20% of those in the 10-19 years age group were thin for their age.

**Source:** The Hindu.

### Surrogacy Bill

**Why is it in the news?**

- The Union Cabinet approved the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2020, after incorporating the recommendations of a Rajya Sabha Select Committee.
- The Bill is aimed at banning commercial surrogacy and allowing altruistic surrogacy.
- The Bill was passed by Lok Sabha and sent to Rajya Sabha and then to Rajya Sabha select panel.

**More in the news**

- **New Provisions of the Bill:**
  - It allowed “willing” woman to be a surrogate mother.
  - The Bill would benefit widows and divorced women besides infertile Indian couples.
  - It removed the requirement of five years as the period of inability to conceive before opting for surrogacy.
  - It increased the insurance cover for the surrogate mother from 16 months proposed in the bill to 36 months.
- **Earlier Provisions of the previous Surrogacy Bill:**
  - The bill seeks to "allow ethical altruistic surrogacy to the intending infertile Indian married couple.
  - The couple should be between the age of 23-50 years and 26-55 years for female and male, respectively.
  - A woman should be allowed to act as a surrogate mother only once and should be a close relative of the intending couple.
  - The surrogate mother should be an ever-married woman having a child of her own and between the age of 25-35 years.
- **Concept:** Surrogacy refers to a practice where a woman gives birth to a child for an intending couple with the intention to hand over the child after the birth to the intending couple.
- There are two main types of surrogacy:
  - **Traditional:** In this method, the surrogate mother is impregnated with semen from the intended father or sperm donor and uses her own eggs. This means that the surrogate mother is genetically related to the child.
  - **Gestational Surrogacy:** This procedure involves in vitro fertilization (IVF) with the eggs of the intended mother or those of an egg donor. This arrangement means that the surrogate mother is not genetically related to the child.

**Source:** The Hindu
Draft policy on rare diseases

Why is it in the news?
- The Centre informed the court of having notified a draft national policy on rare diseases.
- The government had called for public opinion on the draft policy till February 15.

More in the news
- **Provisions of the Draft Policy:**
  1. The draft policy envisages provision of ₹15 lakh to those suffering from certain LSDs.
  2. The draft policy had categorised rare disorders amenable to one-time curative treatment such as Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation.
  3. It also categorised the disorders that were amenable to organ transplantation into one group, and states that they could be provided with financial support.

- **About Rare Disease:**
  1. There is no universal definition for rare disease, However, A rare disease, also referred to as an orphan disease, is any disease that affects a small percentage of the population.
  2. Most rare diseases are genetic, and are present throughout a person's entire life.
  3. Rare diseases became known as orphan diseases because drug companies were not interested in adopting them to develop treatments.
  4. Millions of Indians suffering from rare diseases do not have any government policy to fall back on, as government withdraw the national policy for treatment of rare diseases (NPTRD).

Source: The Hindu.

Deaths of drains & septic tanks cleaners

Why is it in the news?

More in the news
- The number of people who died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the country increased by almost 62% from 2018.

- **Data:**
  2. A national survey was conducted in 194 districts in 18 States where 48,345 manual scavengers were identified till January 31, taking the total to 62,904.
  3. These cases were reported from 18 States and Union Territories, while 13 States and UTs submitted “nil reports”.

- **Manual Scavenging:**
  1. Manual scavenging refers to the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing or handling in any manner, human excreta from dry latrines and sewers.
  2. It often involves using the most basic of tools such as buckets, brooms and baskets.

- **Government Initiatives:**
  2. The Act prohibited the employment of manual scavengers for manually cleaning dry latrines and also the construction of dry toilets.
  3. In 2013, this was followed by the ‘Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013’.

Source: The Hindu.
The new Act was wider in scope and importantly, acknowledged the urgency of rehabilitating manual scavengers.

Source: The Hindu.

Abuse reporting on helpline

Why is it in the news?
- According to data compiled by the CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF), of every 10 calls made to the emergency helpline 1098 to report abuse against children, one was from a survivor desperately seeking help.

More in the news
- The data is for 2018-2019 from the CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF).
- CIF is the nodal agency appointed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to manage CHILDLINE helpline 1098- a free, emergency phone service for children in need of help.
- It is the largest network of agencies involved in protection of children.
- **Data by CIF:**
  1. Last year, the helpline received a total of 62 lakh calls, which were converted into three lakh cases.
  2. The largest number of phone calls were made to seek intervention for abuse cases, which were at 53,696 or 17% of the total cases.
  3. This category of complaints was followed by those pertaining to child labour (13%), education (12%), runaways (11%) and missing children (11%).
  4. From the total 53,696 calls made regarding abuse against children, 6,278 calls were made by survivors seeking urgent intervention.
  5. About 37% of the complaints were about child marriage, 27% about physical abuse and 13% regarding sexual abuse.
  6. The remaining 23% constituted emotional, corporal, domestic and cyber abuse.
  7. CHILDLINE has also collated data to examine the profile of abusers.
  8. The analyses show that 35% of the total 8,000 cases of sexual abuse were committed by neighbours, 25% by strangers and 11% by family members.

Source: The Hindu.

Medical devices to come under drug regulator

Why is it in the news?
- According to credit rating agency ICRA, the Centre’s decision to notify all medical devices as drugs and bringing them under purview of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, from April is bound to push up the cost.

More in the news
- **Background:**
  1. The government has recently issued a notification to consider all medical devices as drugs.
  2. It would bring the devices under the purview of the drugs regulator and tightening regulations for them to improve safety and quality.

- **Re-categorization:**
  1. The notification will also re-categorize medical devices that are used for life support, diagnosis, treatment or alleviation of any disease or disability.
  2. These effectively cover all medical devices that are sold in the market.

- **Currently,**
  1. Medical devices are classified under four categories.
  2. Class A and B medical devices are low-risk ones like surgical dressing, alcohol swabs, thermometers, blood pressure monitoring devices among others.
(3) Class C and D are high-risk devices like implants, hemodialysis catheters, angiographic guide wire and heart valve.

- **Under medical devices rules**.
  - Low risk-devices are inspected by private notified bodies while licenses were given by CDSCO.
  - For high-risk devices, inspection and licensing are both done by CDSCO.
- The increased scrutiny on medical devices comes in the aftermath of Johnson & Johnson’s faulty hip implants.

**Future for the World’s Children Report**

- **Why is it in the news?**
  - According to a recently released report, no single country is adequately protecting children’s health, their environment and their future.
  - The report named "Future for the world's children report" was released by a Commission of more than 40 child and adolescent health experts from around the world.
  - The Commission was convened by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and The Lancet.

- **More in the news**
  - **Findings of the Report:**
    - The health and future of every child and adolescent worldwide is under immediate threat from ecological degradation and climate change.
    - There is also a threat from exploitative marketing practices that push heavily processed fast food, sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco at them.
    - Children in Norway, the Republic of Korea and the Netherlands have the best chance at survival and well-being.
    - Children in the Central African Republic, Chad, Somalia, Niger and Mali face the worst odds.
    - The number of children and adolescents who are obese has increased drastically.
  - **India’s status in the report:**
    - In the report assessing the capacity of 180 countries, India stands 77th (sustainability index).
    - India is at 131st position on a ranking that measures the best chance at survival and well-being for children.
    - Although India has improved in health and sanitation, it has to increase its spending on health.

**Source**
The Hindu, LiveMint
Cooperatives to come under RBI purview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
<th>The Union Cabinet has approved amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, which will empower the Reserve Bank of India to have regulatory oversight over cooperative banks.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

More in the news

- **Data on Cooperative banks:**
  1. According to an RBI report, there were 1,500 plus urban cooperative banks as on 31 March 2018.
  2. It has more than 8.6 crore depositors, Rs 5 lakh crore deposits and 1,540 multi-state, urban and other cooperative banks.

- **The Amendments** came in the wake of the recent Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank crisis.

- **It Will** bring 1,540 cooperative banks under the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regulation.

- **Aim:** To strengthen the financial stability of cooperative banks and boost public confidence in the banking system.

- **As per the Proposed Amendments**
  1. Administrative matters would continue to be under the Registrar, Cooperative.
  2. Cooperative banks would be regulated under the RBI’s banking guidelines.
  3. Their auditing would also be done as per RBI’s norms.
  4. Qualifications would be laid down for appointments, including that of Chief Executive Officers.
  5. Prior permission from the RBI would be required for the appointment of key positions.
  6. The regulator would deal with issues such as loan waivers.
  7. The RBI would also have powers to supersede the board of any cooperative bank in financial distress.

- **Currently:**
  1. Cooperative banks are governed by dual regulations- state cooperative bodies and the RBI.
  2. While financial supervision comes under the ambit of the banking regulator, appointments are mostly looked after by the state bodies.

Source: The Hindu, LiveMint.

CRR exemption for retail, MSME loans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
<th>The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has exempted banks from maintaining cash reserve ratio (CRR) for loans to retail and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The exemption would be for five years, if the loans are extended between January 31 and July 31, 2020.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
More in the news

- The exemption was available for incremental credit disbursed as retail loans to automobiles, residential housing, and loans to MSMEs.
- At present, CRR is 4% of net demand and time liabilities. Banks do not earn any interest for maintaining CRR with the RBI.
- **About CRR:**
  1. Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) is an instrument (direct instrument) of RBI’s monetary policy.
  2. The CRR requires that every scheduled commercial bank has to keep a certain proportion of their demand and time deposits with the RBI as cash reserves.
  3. By varying the cash reserve ratio, the central bank can vary the volume credit (money circulation) in the economy.
  4. When the RBI raises the CRR, money supply reduces and the price level comes down.

Source: The Hindu.

### UBI, PNB, OBC bank merger

**Why is it in the news?**

- The Centre is expected to announce the new name and logo of the entity to be emerged after the merger of Punjab National Bank (PNB) United Bank of India (UBI) and Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC)
- UBI, OBC want a new name for merged entity.

**More in the news**

- The Centre had announced that the United Bank of India and Oriental Bank of Commerce would be merged with Punjab National Bank.
- **The new entity** will be the second largest bank in the country after State Bank of India with a total business volume of Rs 18 lakh crore.
- **Post merger**, the combined staff strength of the new entity will be one lakh.
- The amalgamation process will require legal and regulatory compliances, besides approval of the three banks’ boards.
- **Infusion:** The government has already announced a capital infusion of Rs 16,000 crore into PNB and Rs 1,600 crore into UBI.

Source: The Hindu.

### Government Policies and Taxation

### Money earned in India by NRIs will be taxed

**Why is it in the news?**

- Union Finance Minister scotched fears that provisions introduced in the Budget would bring Indian workers’ income in zero tax jurisdictions, like the UAE, into the Indian tax net.

**More in the news**

- **The Finance Bill has proposed three major changes** to prevent tax abuse by citizens who don’t pay taxes anywhere in the world:
  1. Reducing the number of days that an Indian citizen can be granted non-resident status for tax purposes from 182 to 120
  2. Citizens who don’t pay taxes anywhere will be deemed to be a resident
  3. The definition of ‘not ordinarily resident’ has been tightened

Concern:
### Dividend Distribution Tax (DDT)

**Why is it in the news?**
- Union Budget proposed removal of the dividend distribution tax (DDT) levied on companies.
- Government said that the new regime was expected to encourage more people, especially in the low tax bracket, to invest in the capital market.

**More in the news**
- **Dividend Distribution Tax (DDT)** is a tax levied on dividends distributed by companies out of their profits among their shareholders.
- **Arguments by Government:**
  1. Now the dividend shall be taxed only in the hands of the recipients at their applicable tax rate.
  2. Single rate of taxation is always iniquitous as it favours taxpayers who are in higher tax brackets.
  3. Thus, it was a case of reverse subsidy from the poor to rich taxpayers.
  4. Further, non-residents were taxed at a higher rate than the treaty rate with the possibility of no tax credit in the home country.
- **Background:**
  1. While the DDT was pegged at 15%, the effective rate touched 20.56% due to surcharge and cess.
  2. Additionally, individuals were required to pay another 10% plus surcharge if the dividend income exceeded ₹10 lakh in a fiscal.
- **Objective of Abolishing DDT:**
  1. To increase the attractiveness of the Indian Equity Market and to provide relief to a large class of investors.
  2. It will make India an attractive destination for investment.

**Source** The Hindu.

### Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill 2020

**Why is it in the news?**
- The Union Finance Minister introduced the Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill, 2020, in Lok Sabha.
- The Bill aims to provide for resolution mechanism of disputed tax cases involving Rs 9.32 lakh crore.

**More in the news**
- The bill seeks to provide a formula-based solution without any discrimination.
- **Under the scheme**, taxpayers whose liabilities are caught in dispute can pay their taxes by March 31, 2020 and avail themselves of a complete waiver of interest and penalty.
- The Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill will be emphasises on trust building.
- The scheme will not be an open ended scheme and can be availed for a limited time.
- **Rationale:** It will reduce the litigation expenditure for the government and at the same may help in generating some revenue.

**Source** The Hindu.
Audit independence and accountability

Why is it in the news?
- The Centre has proposed significant amendments to existing regulations to enhance independence and accountability of auditors.

More in the news
- **Why these changes?**
  1. It is against the backdrop of instances of many auditors and auditing entities coming under the regulatory lens for alleged misdoings.
  2. There is economic concentration of the “Big Four” audit firms.
  3. There is need to build the capacity of home-grown Indian firms that may need to be at par with global organisations in terms of audit procedures and manpower capacity.
- **The ‘Big Four’,** which operate in India through a network of local chartered accountants firms.
- **The paper has suggestions** for curbing five “threats” for the independence of auditors. The threats pertain to:
  1. Self-interest
  2. Self-review
  3. Advocacy
  4. Familiarity
  5. Intimidation.
- The paper has sought:
  1. Comments on whether the number of audits under one audit firm or auditor needs to be reduced.
  2. Inspection of audit engagements and developing a ‘Composite Audit Quality Index’ to improve accountability of auditors and audit firms are among other proposals.

Pesticide Management Bill, 2020

Why is it in the news?
- The Union Cabinet approved the Pesticides Management Bill, 2020.
- The bill seeks to replace the existing Insecticide Act, 1968.
- The new Bill will regulate the business of pesticides and compensate farmers in case of losses from the use of spurious agro-chemicals.

More in the news
- **Need of the new Bill:**
  1. Presently, the pesticide business is regulated by the Insecticides Act 1968.
  2. As per official statement, these 1968 rules have become age old and needs immediate rewriting.
  3. Many a times, farmers get spurious pesticides.
  4. There is rising concern over the need to protect farmers from spurious and sub-standard pesticides.
  5. There is also need to assess pesticides potential effects on the health of people and that of the environment.
- **Objective of the Bill:**
  1. To protect the interest of farmers and ensure they get safe and effective pesticides.
  2. The bill also intends to promote organic pesticides.
Data to be on Open Source:
(1) Farmers would be empowered to get all information as the data would be in open source and in all languages.
(2) Farmer will know about the strength and weakness of pesticides, the risk and alternatives.
(3) Also, farmers would essentially get these information from the dealers selling pesticides.

Other Provisions:
(1) All pesticide manufacturers have to be registered and bound by the new Act, once it is passed.
(2) Even their advertisements will be regulated that there should be no confusion or no cheating in any way of the farmers.
(3) If there is any loss because of the spurious or low quality of pesticides then there is a provision for compensations.
(4) The penalties collected from the companies and money put in by the government will be used to form a central fund which will take care of compensation.

Ports Authority Bill, 2020

Why is it in the news?
● The Union cabinet gave its nod for the tabling of the Ports Authority Bill, 2020, in the current session of Parliament.

Aim of new Bill:
(1) To provide more operational autonomy and flexibility to all the major ports in India.
(2) To allow the major ports to take decisions faster at the port level.

This would be done by constituting a Board of Major Port Authority for each major port, which will be vested with powers of administration, control, and management of such ports.

The new law would help in improving infrastructure.

Background:
(1) Many private ports have come up over the last few decades.
(2) There is a need of a system for taking fast decisions and ensuring fast development of the ports and maintaining world-class standards.

Government cuts its share in PMFBY

Why is it in the news?
● The Central government has almost halved its contribution to its own flagship crop insurance schemes- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).
● Centre slashed its share of the premium subsidy from the current 50% to just 25% in irrigated areas and 30% for unirrigated areas from the kharif season of 2020.

Steps by Central Government:
(1) The Union Cabinet approved the revamp of the PMFBY and the Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme.
(2) Enrolment in the two schemes has been made voluntary for all farmers, including those with existing crop loans.
(3) When the PMFBY was launched in 2016, it was made mandatory for all farmers with crop loans to enroll for insurance cover under the scheme.
(4) The revamp in PMFBY now reduces the burden on the Centre and increases the share of States.

**Currently under PMFBY:**
(1) Farmers pay a fixed share of the premium: 2% of the sum insured for kharif crops, 1.5% for rabi crops and 5% for cash crops.
(2) The Centre and State split the balance of the premium equally.
(3) **Objective:** To provide insurance coverage and financial support to the farmers in the event of failure of any of the notified crop as a result of natural calamities, pests & diseases.

**Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi**

**Why is it in the news?**
- The Centre has revised the farmer income support scheme’s beneficiary target down to just under 12 crore from 14 crore.
- The income support scheme Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, was launched in the year 2019.

**More in the news**
- **Benefit reach:**
  (1) So far, almost 8.5 crore farmers have benefited.
  (2) Empirical evidence suggests that saturation level will reach around 10 crore families.
- **The scheme** gives land-owning farmer families an annual sum of ₹6,000.
- **The Centre’s beneficiary estimate** of 14 crore was initially based on the number of landholdings recorded in the agricultural land census.
- **The revised estimate** of 11.97 crore is based on the 9.84 crore who have registered themselves on the portal so far (although only 8.45 crore have received money so far), plus an estimated 2.13 crore beneficiaries left out, mostly from West Bengal and Bihar.
- **States behind the reduction in beneficiaries numbers:**
  (1) West Bengal government has refused to join the scheme at all.
  (2) Bihar government’s approach of waiting for applicants means more than 60% of potential beneficiaries are yet to register.

**Technical Textiles Mission**

**Why is it in the news?**
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the setting up of a National Technical Textiles Mission at an total outlay of ₹1,480 Crore.
- **Aim:** To position the country as a global leader in technical textiles and increase the use of technical textiles in the domestic market.

**More in the news**
- **Data:**
  (1) Indian technical textiles segment is estimated at $16 billion which is approximately 6% of the $250 billion global technical textiles market.
  (2) The penetration level of technical textiles in India varies between 5% and 10% against the level of 30% to 70% in developed countries.
- **The Mission** will be implemented for four years from 2020-2021 and will have four components.
- **The first component:**
(1) It will focus on research and development and innovation and will have an outlay of Rs. 1,000 crore.

(2) The research will be at both, fibre level and application-based in geo, agro, medical, sports and mobile textiles and development of bio-degradable technical textiles.

- **The second component:**
  (1) It will be for promotion and development of market for technical textiles.
  (2) The Mission will aim at taking domestic market size to $40 billion to $50 billion by 2024.

- **The third component:**
  (1) It will focus on export promotion so that technical textile exports from the country reach from the ₹14,000 crore now to ₹20,000 crore by 2021-2022.
  (2) It will ensure 10% average growth every year till the Mission ends.

- **The fourth component** will be on education, training and skill development.

| Source | The Hindu |

## Miscellaneous

### MoU with Iceland and Portugal

**Why is it in the news?**
- The union cabinet approved the signing of an MoU with Iceland and Portugal.

**More in the news**
- **MoU with Iceland:**
  (1) In sustainable fisheries development to allow the two countries to exchange expertise and research in the fisheries sector.
- **MoU with Portugal:**
  (1) To develop a national maritime heritage complex at Lothal, Gujarat, to showcase India’s maritime heritage.

| Source | LiveMint |

### Amendments to DTAA with Sri Lanka

**Why is it in the news?**
- The Union Cabinet approved amendments to the existing double tax avoidance agreement (DTAA) with Sri Lanka.
- The move aimed at curbing tax evasion by exploitation of gaps and mismatches in tax rules.

**More in the news**
- **The existing DTAA** between India and Sri Lanka was signed on 22 January 2013, and entered into force on 22 October 2013.
- **Change:**
  (1) Updation of preamble text and inclusion of Principal Purpose Test, a general anti abuse provision in the DTAA.
- **Background:**
  (1) India and Sri Lanka are members of the Inclusive Framework and as such are required to implement the minimum standards under G-20 OECD BEPS Action Reports in respect of their DTAA with Inclusive Framework countries.
  (2) Minimum standards under BEPS Action 6 can be met through the Multilateral...
Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (MLI) or through agreement bilaterally.

(3) India is a signatory to the MLI. However, Sri Lanka is not a signatory to the MLI as of now.

(4) Therefore, amendment of the India-Sri Lanka DTAA bilaterally is required to update the Preamble and also to insert Principal Purpose Test (PPT) provisions to meet the minimum standards on treaty abuse under Action 6 of G-20 OECD Base Erosion & Profit Shifting (BEPS) Project.

**What is DTAA?**

(1) A DTAA is a tax treaty signed between two or more countries.

(2) Its key objective is that tax-payers in these countries can avoid being taxed twice for the same income.

(3) A DTAA applies in cases where a tax-payer resides in one country and earns income in another.

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**A panel to address fiscal policy issues**

**Why is it in the news?**

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission will soon set up a panel to address issues related to fiscal policy for both the Centre and the States.
- The commission also to present a road map for the same.

**More in the news**

- **Fiscal Committee:**
  (1) It will address some of the issues on fiscal policy, particularly in relation to the debt and the deficit of the States as well as the Central government.
  (2) There is a need to have a fiscal road map that covers the Centre and the State government.
  (3) The panel will be headed by Mr. Singh and have representation from the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, the Reserve Bank of India, the Ministry of Finance, the FRBM panel and some of the States.

- **Defence and Internal Security:**
  (1) The Commission had also constituted a group on defence and internal security.
  (2) Its mandate will be ‘to examine whether a separate mechanism for funding of defence and internal security ought to be set up, and if so, how such a mechanism could be operationalised.’
  (3) This group will be chaired by Mr. Singh with a member of Fifteenth Finance Commission as well as Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Secretary, Ministry of Defence and Secretary (Expenditure), Ministry of Finance as members.

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**Forex reserves rise to record $476 billion**

**Why is it in the news?**

- According to RBI data, country’s foreign exchange reserves swelled by $3.091 billion to a lifetime high of $476.092 billion in the week to February 14.
- The rise is mainly due to a rise in foreign currency assets.

**More in the news**

- **Attributers:**
  (1) Foreign currency assets, a major component of the overall reserves, rose by $2.763 billion to $441.949 billion in the reporting week
  (2) Gold reserves rose by $344 million to $29.123 billion.
The special drawing rights with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were down by $6 million to $1.430 billion.

**Forex Reserves:**
1. Foreign exchange reserves are reserve assets held by a central bank in foreign currencies.
2. The forex reserve is also kept as a cushion against any potential balance of payment related crisis.
3. India's foreign exchange reserves comprises of (i) Foreign currency assets (FCA), (ii) Gold, (iii) Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and (iv) Reserve tranche position (RTP) in the International Monetary Fund.

### Mauritius FPIs will continue

**Why is it in the news?**
- The SEBI has clarified that foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) from Mauritius will continue to be eligible for registration as foreign investors in India.
- However, the FPIs would be subject to increased monitoring.

**More in the news**
- **Background:**
  1. The regulatory clarification was necessitated after Mauritius was placed in the "grey list" of FATF.
  2. Grey list signifies ‘jurisdictions under increased monitoring’.
  3. There was an apprehension that the Mauritius-based FPIs will not be able to trade in the Indian capital market.
- **Significance:**
  1. Mauritius accounts for the second-largest chunk of foreign investments, as per data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL).
  2. In January 2020, Mauritius-based FPIs had total assets under custody (AUC) of Rs. 4.37 lakh crore, second only to that of the U.S. with Rs. 11.63 lakh crore.
- **About FPIs:**
  1. It is investment by non-residents in Indian securities including shares, government bonds, corporate bonds, convertible securities, infrastructure securities etc.
  2. The class of investors who make investment in these securities are known as **Foreign Portfolio Investors**.
  3. Any equity investment by non-residents which is **less than or equal to 10% of capital in a company** is portfolio investment. While above this the investment will be counted as **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**.
  4. Foreign Portfolio Investors includes investment groups of **Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs)**, **Qualified Foreign Investors (QFIs)** and subaccounts etc.

**Source**
The Hindu.
### DRDO chief stresses need for indigenous tech in Defence

**Why is it in news?**
- The government wants to increase indigenous production in the Defence sector up to 70% and reduce imports, said Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) chairman G. Satheesh Reddy.

**More in news**
- He, along with NITI Aayog member V.K. Saraswat, launched the EPluto 7G vehicle by Pure EV on the premises of Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad (IIT-H), on Sunday.
- **Battery manufacturing plants:** Mr. Saraswat said in 2020-2021, five to six 2 GWh battery manufacturing plants would come up and NITI Aayog was ready to encourage those who come up with proposals.
- **Lithium mining license abroad:** He said India is also considering getting lease of lithium mines abroad so that manufacturing cells will be easy, which costs 40% of the battery, in India.
- **Li-ion battery imports**
  1. India has quadrupled its imports of lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries and more than tripled its import bill on the product, from 2016-2018, the Union Science Ministry said in the Lok Sabha last Friday.
  2. Li-ion batteries are vital for powering a range of devices from cell-phones to electric vehicles.
- **Indigenous development:** To promote indigenous development of such batteries, the Union Cabinet in 2019 approved a programme, called a National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage in the NITI Aayog.
- **National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage**
  1. **Objective:** To promote clean, connected, shared, sustainable and holistic mobility initiatives; Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP) valid for 5 years until 2024.
  2. The Mission will recommend and drive the strategies for transformative mobility and Phased Manufacturing Programmes for Electric Vehicles, EV Components and Batteries.

**Source:** The Hindu, PIB

### Four Indian pilots begin astronaut training in Russia

**Why is it in news?**
- The four Indian pilots chosen as candidate-astronauts on Monday began their 12-month training at the Gagarin Research and Test Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC) in Moscow, Russian space business company Glavkosmos has announced.

**More in news**
- From IAF team
  1. The four candidates are fighter pilots from the Indian Air Force and were chosen from among hundreds of applicants over the last few months.
  2. At the end of all training modules in India and Russia, one or two of the four will be finally named to circle the earth in the first crewed Gaganyaan, which is planned around 2022.
**Contract for training:** In June 2019, the Human Space Flight Centre of the ISRO and the Russian government-owned Glavkosmos signed a contract for the training, which includes Russian support in the selection of candidates, their medical examination, and space training.

**More about the training programme:**
1. The 12-month training programme includes comprehensive and biomedical training of the Indian candidates, combined with regular physical practices.
2. They will study in detail the systems of the Soyuz manned spaceship, as well as be trained in short-term weightlessness mode aboard the Il-76MDK aircraft.

**Il-76MDK aircraft:** The Il-76MDK is an Ilyushin-78 military transport plane specially re-designed for parabolic flights of trainee astronauts and space tourists.

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**Study rates benefits of a post-lunch nap at work highly**

**Why is it in news?**
- A paper published recently by the non-profit National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S., argues that higher quality sleep during a power nap improves economic and psychological outcomes over an increase in the number of hours of sleep.

**More in news**
- More about the project
  1. The paper, was based on a project that measured sleep among 452 low income adults in Chennai, and acknowledges “generous funding and support” from the government of Tamil Nadu and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology-based Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, among others.
  2. Adults in Chennai have strikingly low quantity and quality of sleep relative to typical guidelines: despite spending eight hours in bed, they achieve only 5.6 hours per night of sleep, with 32 awakenings per night.

**Sleep efficiency:** Sleep efficiency is calculated by dividing the sleep you are getting by the time spent in bed, expressed as a percentage.

**Sources**

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**Govt. plans research on ‘indigenous’ cows**

**Why is it in news?**
- The government has unveiled a programme to research on ‘indigenous’ cows.
- The initiative, SUTRA PIC, is led by the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

**More in news**
- **Themes of initiative:** SUTRA PIC or Scientific Utilisation Through Research Augmentation-Prime Products from Indigenous Cows, has five themes:
  1. Uniqueness of Indigenous Cows,
  2. Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Medicine and Health,
  3. Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Agricultural Applications,
  4. Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Food and Nutrition and
  5. Prime-products from indigenous cows-based utility items.
- **Partners in the project:** It has the Department of Biotechnology, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Ministry for AYUSH (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy) among others and the Indian Council of Medical Research as partners.
- **Objective:** To perform
|   | (1) scientific research on complete characterisation of milk and milk products derived from Indian indigenous cows;  
  (2) scientific research on nutritional and therapeutic properties of curd and ghee prepared from indigenous breeds of cows by traditional methods;  
  (3) development of standards for traditionally processed dairy products of Indian-origin cow |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding for the project</td>
<td>Researchers from academic organisations as well as “capable voluntary organisations (NGOs) active in India with proven record of accomplishment in executing S&amp;T-based R&amp;D projects,” were invited to apply for funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>The Hindu</td>
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7

**Internal Security**

### Navy to get third Scorpene submarine in December

#### Why is it in news?
- The third Scorpene submarine, Karanj, will be delivered to the Indian Navy by December and all six submarine deliveries would be completed by 2022, Nicolas de La Villemarque, Vice President India, Asia and Pacific of Naval Group, said on Wednesday.

#### More in news
- **Talks underway on AIP**: Talks were underway with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) and the Navy for installation of Air Independent Propulsion System on the earlier Scorpene submarines.
- **What is Air Independent Propulsion (AIP)?**
  1. Air-independent propulsion (AIP) is a marine propulsion technology that allows a non-nuclear submarine to operate without access to atmospheric oxygen.
  2. An AIP module gives stealth and extended endurance to diesel-electric submarines by allowing them to stay submerged longer.
- **INS Karanj in trials**: Karanj was launched into water in January 2018 and is currently in advanced stages of sea trials.
- **Scorpene Class submarines**
  1. The Scorpène-class submarines are a class of diesel-electric attack submarines jointly developed by the French Direction des Constructions Navales (DCN) and the Spanish company Navantia, and now by Naval Group.
  2. It features diesel propulsion and an additional air-independent propulsion (AIP).
  3. First three submarines under the project 75-I of Indian Navy are INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi and INS Karanj.

#### Source
- The Hindu
Upgraded 155mm artillery gun handed over to Army

Why is it in news?
● The Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) on Friday handed over Sharang, the first 130mm M-46 artillery gun upgraded to 155mm to the Indian Army.

More in news
● Features of the upgrade:
  (1) The gun’s range has now gone from 27km to over 36km with the upgrade.
  (2) It also has more explosive capability and hence and more damage potential.
  (3) In all, OFB will upgrade 300 130mm guns to 155mm and the contract will be completed in four years.

● Modern artillery weapons
  (1) The Army inducted its first modern artillery guns system in November 2018.
  (2) These include M-777 Ultra-Light Howitzers (ULH) from the U.S. and K9 Vajra-T self-propelled artillery guns.

● K9 Vajra-T
  (1) The K9 Thunder is a South Korean self-propelled 155 mm howitzer originally designed and developed by the Agency for Defense Development and Samsung Aerospace Industries for the Republic of Korea Armed Forces.
  (2) K9 VAJRA-T (Lightning) is the Indian variant of the K9 which is manufactured by Larsen & Toubro under license, consisting 50% component (by value) including 14 major sub-systems developed by Indian companies.

Source: The Hindu

Green light for HAL copter

Why is it in news?
● The indigenous light utility helicopter (LUH) being developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) crossed a milestone on Friday as it received the initial operational clearance (IOC) at the ongoing Def-expo in Lucknow.

More in news
● Light Utility Helicopter
  (1) The HAL Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) is a single-engine light helicopter designed and developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) of India.
  (2) The type is set to replace the HAL Cheetah and HAL Chetak helicopters in service with the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force.
  (3) Another derivative, known as the Light Observation Helicopter (LOH), with glass cockpit will be used for reconnaissance and surveillance roles

Source: The Hindu

Credit, debit card details of 4 lakh Indians up for sale

Why is it in news?
● A whopping 98% out of a large packet of sensitive credit and debit card details, that have been put up for sale on the dark net, are those of Indian customers, Group-IB, a Singapore-based cybersecurity company has revealed.

More in news
● More about the leak
  (1) According to Group-IB’s statement released on Friday, the stash of 4,61,976 card payment details went up for sale on Wednesday on Joker’s Stash, one of the most secretive portals on the dark net for buying such information.
  (2) Group-IB has already informed Indian authorities about the leak.

● Source of leak: The company has also observed that the data is suspected to have been collected from phishing rackets, which are on the rise in India over the last few years.

Source: The Hindu
### Comprehensive data

Group-IB's threat Intelligence Team has found that the details are comprehensive in nature, and include card numbers, expiration dates, CVV/CVC codes.

### What is JavaScript or JS-Sniffers?

JavaScript or JS-Sniffers are programmes used for stealing credit and debit card information from e-commerce websites, and are among the latest concerns when it comes to cybersecurity and theft of sensitive card details.

**Source** The Hindu

### New structure soon for Military Affairs dept.

**Why is it in news?**

- Starting with the next meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), procurement cases will be put up as prioritised by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Major General Mukesh Agarwal, Defence Adviser to General Bipin Rawat said on Friday.

**More in news**

- **Proposal for formal structure**: A proposal has been sent to the Defence Ministry on a formal structure comprising civil and military officials for the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) headed by the CDS.

- **Proposed structure of DMA**
  1. The proposed DMA will have a Secretary, Transformation and Coordination, which will be the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), an Additional Secretary and five Joint Secretaries.
  2. The Additional Secretary will be a three-star officer while the Joint Secretaries include three officers, one from each service of the rank of Major General or equivalent.

- **Study of various models**: Major Gen. Agarwal said they had studied various models including the Ministry of External Affairs, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

**Source** The Hindu

### Peninsular command by next year end, says General Rawat

**Why is it in news?**

- Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat on Monday spelled out a road map for restructuring the Armed Forces that would holistically counter threats along the borders with China and Pakistan as well as in the Indian Ocean.

**More in news**

- **Peninsular command**: An Indian Ocean-centered Peninsular Command, possibly formed by merging the Eastern and Western Naval Commands, should start shaping up by the end of next year.

- **Establishing theatre commands**
  1. General Rawat said that one or two theatre commands will man the border with China.
  2. With Pakistan as the focus on the western front, Jammu and Kashmir should be a separate theatre, including the IB (International Boundary) part. Balance of Western theatre is another command.

- **What are theatre commands?**
  1. A theatre command is an organisational structure designed to control all military assets in a theatre of war to achieve military effects.
  2. A joint command is called a ‘theatre command’ in military parlance (of army, air force and navy).
Army to get offices under one roof

Why is it in news?
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday laid the foundation for a ‘Thal Sena Bhawan’ of the Army in Delhi cantonment that will bring various pockets of the Army Headquarters spread across Delhi under one roof.

More in news
- **Heavy vehicular movement:** There was movement of about 3,000-4,000 vehicles every day from the various Army establishments in the city. This would be not required once ‘Thal Sena Bhawan’ comes up and would significantly reduce fuel consumption, expenses and pollution.

- **Significance of the move**
  1. The newly created Department of Military Affairs (DMA), headed by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), would work from Thal Sena Bhawan.
  2. The proposed Thal Sena Bhawan would bring all Army Headquarters offices under one roof, thereby improving the working efficiency, while reducing the carbon footprint and logistics requirements.

- **Army chief office to stay in South Block:** The Army chief would continue to sit in South Block in close proximity to the Defence Minister and Sena Bhawan, the present Army HQ, will continue to exist, though some functions will be shifted to the new complex.

Source: The Hindu

Assam at the centre of fresh border row

Why is it in news?
- Assam is at the centre of a fresh inter-State border row in the north-eastern region.
- The Mizoram government has sought the revision of the boundary with Assam, based on the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR), 1873 and the Inner Line of the Lushai Hills Notification of 1993.

More in news
- **What is BEFR and Inner Line Permit?**
  1. The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations, 1873 prohibited “British subjects” or Indians from entering into these protected areas of north-eastern states.
  2. The BEFR allows Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland not to let non-resident Indians in without an inner-line permit for a temporary stay.

- **Origin of Mizoram:** Mizoram used to be the Lushai Hills district of Assam before being made a Union Territory in 1972 and a State in 1987.

- **Disputed area:** Mizoram shares a 123-km border with southern Assam and has been claiming a 509-square mile stretch “occupied” by the neighbouring State.

Source: The Hindu