Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs September 2020

By Jawwad Kazi
UPSC

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs September 2020
(Study Material)

By Jawwad Kazi

https://t.me/jawwadkazicurrentaffairs

© Unique Academy Publications Pvt. Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

Year 2020

Cover Design : Unique Academy Publications Team

Typesetter : Unique Academy Publications Team

Printed By : M. S. Process, Sadashiv Peth, Pune.
### INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>P. No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Farmers Protest Against Agriculture Market Reforms</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SC guidelines on criminalization of politics</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mission Karmayogi</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Independent Fiscal Council for India</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>RBI’s Loan Recast Scheme</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>GST Compensation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ease of Doing Business</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Industrial Relation Code 2020</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Direct Tax Evasion in India</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Quota within Quota debate</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>India’s Nutrition Challenge</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Facebook controversy and challenges of Big Tech</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Online Gambling</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Afghan Talks</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Hybrid Warfare</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>P. No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>POLITY</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constitution and Statutory Provisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Article 254</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>MCI replaced by National Medical Commission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>National Human Rights Commission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Standing Committees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Judgements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Land acquisition order gifted govt. laxity: CJI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kesavananda Bharati, a saviour of the Constitution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Special Benches to hear cases against legislators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Code of Ethics for News Channel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Same Sex Marriages in India</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>New grievance redress system unveiled in J&amp;K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mission Karmayogi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>ECONOMY</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banking Sector and Monetary Policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>RBI alters Priority Sector Norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Loan Moratorium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>RBI releases document on UCBs’ cybersecurity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Marginal Standing Facility (MSF)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government Policies and Taxation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Merchant Export from India Scheme (MEIS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Banking Regulation Act, 1949</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Country-of-origin onus on Importers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hike in wheat MSP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code Bill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General Economy**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>State Business Reform Action Plan 2019 (BARP) Ranking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Startup Rankings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Draft on Interest Rate Derivatives (IRDs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Domestic Systemically Important Insurers (D-SIIs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Exports Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>GDP falls 23.9% in first quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>India's trade with China and US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>World Bank seeks ‘universal eligibility’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**III INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Bilateral and Multilateral Relations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial cooperation (BECA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Address aspirations of Tamil people, Modi urges Rajapaksa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>India, China agree on 5-point action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,000 sq km now under China’s ‘Stretches along LAC in are PLA hands amid mobilisation: intelligence agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Agreement on Reciprocal Provision Supplies and Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gilgit-Baltistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International Institutions**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Shanghai Cooperation Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>UN Security Council (UNSC) Sanction’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Quad discusses Indo-Pacific infrastructure and 5G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>G7 backs extension of debt freeze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>China cautious on G4 push for UNSC reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International Events**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sri Lankan govt. tables 20th Amendment Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>UN Sanctions on Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Cyprus Issue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IV ENVIRONMENT**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kaziranga National Park to be expanded by 3,053 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Project Dolphin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>‘Green Blue Policy’ of New Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Measurement of Mt Everest again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>California Fires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>India’s tiger census of 2018 sets Guinness record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>National Mission for Clean Ganga Quarterly Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>World Rhino Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Global Climate Summit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lion-tailed macaque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Fridays For Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Amphibians in Madhya Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sandalwood Spike Disease (SSD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>India-Denmark Green Strategic Partnership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**V SOCIAL ISSUE**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NCRB Data for 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Health in India’ report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CAG Audit of Government Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Water Heroes Contest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘Streets for People’ challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>State of Young Child in India Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VI SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Scramjet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Graphene Masks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Phosphine gas on the Venus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Solar Cycle 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>VAIBHAV Summit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rusting of Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Brucellosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cloud computing for better flood inundation mapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gravitational Lensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Outbreak of Scrub Typhus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cyanobacteria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### VII INTERNAL SECURITY 76

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>JIMEX 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>National Investigation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>National Security Plan for Cyberspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### VIII CULTURE 77

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Ranati Chola inscription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kakati Devi Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Origin of Indian Culture Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jnanpith Award</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IX PIB GIST 79

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Indian Power Market goes Green</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>US-India 2020 Summit of US-ISPF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Start-Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Australia-India-Japan Economic Ministers’ Joint Statement on Supply Chains Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ADB &amp; India Sign $500 Million Loan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ARISE-ANIC Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PM Matsya Sampada Yojana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Shikshak Parv Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>New All India Institute of Medical Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda Bill 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Global Initiative to reduce Land Degradation and Coral Reef program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Swamih Investment Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Strengthening Clinical Trial Research Capacity in Neighbouring Countries

### India - Denmark MoU

### 20 years of Himalayan Chandra Telescope

### MISCELLANEOUS TIDBITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Global Innovation Index (GII)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>World Solar Technology Summit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Singapore Convention on Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Body to monitor net neutrality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cess Receipts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>CAG on GST and PSU stake sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dismantling of INS Viraat set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Digital Literacy Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Indra 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Karnataka to seek nod for Mekedatu project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Restoration of Grasslands in Rajasthan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Vodafone wins $2 bn tax case</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Farmers Protest Against Agriculture Market Reforms

- **Syllabus: GS 3**: Economic Development: Transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints.

**Why is it in the news?**
- Thousands of farmers across Punjab, Haryana and several other states have been staging protests since the government introduced few farm Bills in the parliament.

**Three Bills that became Act are as follows:**

**About the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020:**
- The Union Cabinet has approved an amendment to the Essential Commodities Act (ECA) 1955.

**Background:**
- Government had enacted ECA to regulate the production, supply and distribution of a host of commodities it declares ‘essential’.
- ECA gives consumers protection against irrational spikes in prices of essential commodities and ensures adequate supplies.
- However, always monitored prices give no incentives to farmers to farm.
- The frequent stock limits and intervention discourages traders and the private sector to invest in better storage infrastructure.

**Key Provisions of Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020:**
- The new Act deregulates the production, storage, movement and distribution of the food commodities.
- It has removed cereals, pulses, onions, potatoes, edible oil and oilseeds from the purview of ECA.
- Stock limits can only be imposed on traders and others when there is an extraordinary price increase.

**Concerns:**
- The deregulation of food grains may lead to inflationary food price spikes.

**About The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020:**
- The Act seeks to provide for barrier-free trade of farmers’ produce outside the markets notified under the various state agricultural produce market laws (state APMC Acts).
- The Act will prevail over state APMC Acts.
- The government is putting this up as part of “one nation, one market.”

**Background:**
- The APMC Act of most States currently restricts the primary sale of commodities to within the limits of an APMC Mandi.

**Issues with APMC Act:**
(1) It discouraged free trade and competition.
(2) The traders (buyers) inside the mandi take advantage and fix the prices by forming a cartel.
(3) The maximum profit is gained by the middleman and very less remains for the farmers.

- **Concerns for States**: Fees charged on APMC forms the significant part of state revenue. Declining relevance of APMC will result in decline revenue collected from APMC fees.

**Key Provisions of new Act:**
- The farmer is not bound to sell only to APMC-licensed buyers/ commission agents.
- **Trade of farmers’ produce**: The Ordinance allows intra-state and inter-state trade of farmers’ produce outside the physical premises of market yards.
- **Electronic trading**: The Ordinance permits the electronic trading of farmers’ produce in the specified trade area.
- **Dispute resolution mechanism**: The parties involved in a trade-related dispute may apply to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate for relief through conciliation.

**Significance:**
- By opening up agricultural market for farmers, and removing barriers to inter-State trade, the changes allows the farmer more choices.
- It will raise farmers’ income and also reduce wastage and improve quality.
- Traders and food processors will be able to buy freely from the farmers.

**About The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020:**
- **Aim**: Facilitating contract farming, where a private buyer contracts to purchase a crop at a certain price at the beginning of a season.
- **Quality norms and Assessment**: Once agreed, buyers procure the harvested produce at the pre-decided rate subject to its meeting agreed quality norms.
- There will be Dispute Settlement Mechanism with a conciliation board. Parties can later approach the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and finally to the Collector.
- **Significance**: Both the farmers and buyers are insulated from excessive market risk.
- **Concern**: Due to contract farming foodgrain trade may go into the hands of corporates and food security may be threatened as a result of scarcity.

**Why are Farmers Protesting?**
- The new Acts were brought about without consultation with those for whom the laws have been made, i.e. the farmers.
- **Free hands to Private Players**: 
  (1) Most farmers believe that the reform is not delivering on the promise of freedom to farmers but the freedom to private capital to purchase the produce at cheaper prices.
  (2) There won’t be any regulation or oversight by the government.
  (3) Farmer’s will suffer in the bargain with the private sector in an unregulated market.
- **MSP Issue**: 
  (1) There are apprehensions that the Government may gradually move out of the MSP mechanism.
  (2) The farmer may be economically compelled to sell lower than MSP.
- **Weak Legal Backing**: 
  (1) The Acts does not allow the farmer to approach the civil court.
  (2) Instead, the disputes will be settled by a Conciliation Board, appointed by an SDM.

**Government’s Response**
Government asserted that the MSP system will continue and the Bill only provides an added opportunity to farmers.

It will lead to better price realisation for farmers and will introduce competition.

It will force the APMCs to reform and help overcome bottlenecks in the Agri market.

**Punjab Farm Bills and Constitutional Provisions**

- Punjab Assembly passed three Bills to formally negate the Centre’s three Acts.
- Article 254(2) of the Constitution allows states to bring laws over conflicting Central law in some circumstances (of the concurrent list), provided the law gets President’s Assent.
- The parliament can again bring a law on the same subject overruling the state law.

**Conclusion:**

**Legal Challenge:**

1. Not all states have been on board with these reforms.
2. The Acts empowers the Centre to issue orders to States on this issue.
3. Both agriculture and markets are State subjects. Trade and commerce in foodstuffs is part of the concurrent list. Hence a legal question may arise.

**Alternative:**

1. Massively fund APMC market system.
2. Remove trade cartels.
3. Provide farmers good roads, logistics of scale and real time information.
4. Appointment of State Farmers Commission as suggested by NCF.

---

**SC guidelines on criminalization of politics**

**Syllabus: GS2: Legislature and its structure and functioning.**

**Why is it in news?**

- Bihar’s election is going to be a first major election after mandatory guidelines issued to political parties by the Supreme Court.
- SC has asked High Courts to immediately start hearing of long-pending criminal cases against sitting and former legislators.

**Supreme Court Judgement:**

**Disclosure of Information Regarding Pending Cases:** Political parties to upload on their website.

1. Detailed information regarding criminal cases pending against the candidate.
2. Why other individuals without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates.

**Nature of Disclosure:**

1. One local vernacular newspaper and one national newspaper.
2. On the official social media platforms of the political party, including Facebook & Twitter.

**Report of Compliance:** The political party concerned shall submit a report of compliance with these directions with the Election Commission within 72 hours of the selection of the said candidate.

**Punishment of Noncompliance:** Noncompliance with these guidelines will be considered as
contempt of court.

Significance of the Judgement:
- **Informed Voting:** Ensure that voters are informed of candidates' criminal antecedents before voting.
- **Moral Pressure on Political Parties:** Parties will now have to justify why a certain candidate with a criminal antecedent was selected and not the clean candidate. This 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 based on SC Judgement as to why other candidate was given a ticket and not him.
- **Responsibility on the Political Parties rather than on the Candidate:** Unlike earlier judgments it puts the responsibility on political parties to justify any move for the selection of tainted candidates.

Reason for Rising Criminalisation of Politics:
- **Nexus Between Political Parties and Criminal Network:** Political parties have nexus with the criminal network which acts as an inlet for criminals in politics.
- **Expenditure on Elections:**
  1. Even after putting restrictions on election expenditure, candidates spend way beyond these limits to win elections.
  2. Political parties depend on criminal networks for election funding.
- **Lack of Inner Party Democracy:**
  1. With the increase in personality-based politics, inner-party democracy is declining.
  2. No questions are asked within the political party about the criminal credentials of the candidate.
- **Winnability of Candidates:** Candidates with criminal backgrounds have been found to have more chances of winning elections than noncriminal background candidates.
- **Poor Criminal Justice System:**
  1. Due to the poor criminal justice system and pending cases, criminal cases against politicians take a longer time.
  2. This has been used by candidates to claim innocence and party ticket.

Way Forward:
- **Bringing Political Parties under RTI Act:**
  1. Political parties, especially funding to political parties should be brought under the RTI act.
  2. This brings transparency in political funding and accountability to political parties.
- **Amendment to Representation of People Act:**
  1. Currently, convicted candidates are barred from contesting elections for a limited period of time.
  2. RPA needs to be amended to permanently bar candidates convicted for heinous crimes.
- **Empowering Election Commission:** Currently, Election Commission has powers to register political parties but no power to take action against noncompliant political parties.
- **Reducing the Misuse:**
  1. Political Party in power can misuse provision for disqualification on the basis of criminal cases against rival parties.
  2. To avoid this, only cases registered one year before the election should be considered.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express.
Syllabus: GS 2 - Governance and Social Justice.
● Role of civil services in a Democracy.
● Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability.

Why is it in news?
● The Union Cabinet gave its approval for Mission Karmayogi.

More about Mission Karmayogi
● It is a post recruitment human resource development program.
● Covers 46 lakh Central government employees at all levels.
● An outlay of ₹510 crore over a five-year period.
● Service matters - confirmation after probation, deployment, work assignments and notification of vacancies - will be integrated into the proposed framework.

Public Human Resource Council:
(1) The Prime Minister’s Public Human Resource Council will be set up - apex body to direct the reforms.
(2) It will also include state Chief Ministers, Union Cabinet ministers and eminent national and global Academicians, thought leaders and Industry leaders.

Capacity Building Commission:
(1) An autonomous Capacity Building Commission to be established to manage the reformed system and harmonise training standards across the country.
(2) Its mandate would be to prepare annual Capacity building plans and seek approval from Human Resource Council.
(3) It will include experts in related fields and global professionals.

iGOTKarmayogi:
(1) The programme will be delivered through an Integrated Government Online Training or iGOTKarmayogi digital platform.
(2) It will have content drawn from global best practices rooted in Indian national ethos.

Background/Limitations of existing system:
● Lack of interest in existing civil services training programmes.
● Focus on Academic Training and a huge gap the off-site learning and on-site experience.
● Low Flexibility: Currently the work allocation is majorly done on the basis of rules, which limits the flexibility, and ignores the core competency of the officers.

Other Issues with Civil Servants:
(1) Inefficiency and red-tapism.
(2) It is prone to corruption.
(3) Afraid of taking bold decisions.
(4) Poor touch with ground realities
(5) Lack of lifelong and continuous learning environment.
The Unique Academy

Significance of Mission Karmayogi:

- **Professional and Upgraded:**
  1. Prepare Indian civil servants for the future.
  2. Make them more creative, imaginative, proactive, innovative, progressive, energetic, transparent, and technology-enabled.

- **Right Person to the Right Role:**
  2. The work allocations can be done by matching an official’s speciality to the requirements of the post.

- **Capacity Building:**
  1. The Mission will use state-of-the-art infrastructure to augment the capacity of civil servants.
  2. It will improve government’s human resource management practices.

- **Improving Efficiency:**
  1. The Mission picks up the issues of mapping and targeted performance assessments.
  2. It will help improve efficiency and providing better service to citizens.

- **Mitigating the Gap between the academic training and on-field experience.**

- **Frontline Workers taken on Board:**
  1. Including public service workers in Group C is a positive departure from previous administrative reform initiatives, which were largely focused on Group A and B.

**Issues/ Challenges:**

- Tendency in the Bureaucracy to resist the change.
- Centralised Tendency of the Program. The centralised set up may offer coordination and standardisation, but a diverse public workforce needs a decentralised training and learning ecosystem.
- **Short of Structural Overhaul:** The program’s focus is more on improving competencies, skills, and updating knowledge. However, the other issues denting the bureaucracy such as political interference, vendetta transfers, corruption, etc. is not given due attention.

**Way Ahead:**

- **Planning and Transparency:**
  1. Linking training to career progression or performance is complex in practice and needs careful planning and a high degree of transparency and credibility.
  2. The methodology for performance assessment should be consistent, credible and transparent.

- **Structural Reforms:**
  1. The bottom-up administrative re-engineering of both the administrative and law enforcement apparatus is required.
  2. Though the mission has welcomed goals, it falls short of serious reform of a system.

- **Behavioural Change is Required:**
  1. The endeavour should be of preparing civil servants to meet the challenges of changing modern society.
  2. There should be a behavioural change in the bureaucracy and they should embrace the changes.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express, The Print.
The Unique Academy

Syllabus: GS 3: Indian Economy.

Why is it in news?
- The fiscal situation has been under severe stress and the economic fallout of Covid 19 induced lockdown has further deteriorated it.

Current Scenario:
- Rising Fiscal Deficit:
  1. The fiscal deficit of the Centre in 2019-20 stood at 4.6%, 0.8 percentage point higher than the revised estimate.
  2. For the current year the deficit is estimated at about 7% of GDP as against 3.5% estimated in the Budget due to a sharp decline in revenues.
- Rising Debt: Overall debt of Centre and States could go up to 85%. N K Singh committee established to review FRBM Act had recommended it at 60% of GDP.

Background:
What is fiscal council?
- Robert Hageman in OECD journal - ‘a publicly funded entity staffed by non-elected professionals mandated to provide nonpartisan oversight of fiscal performance and/or advice and guidance on key aspects of fiscal policy.

Need for Fiscal Council:
- Brings Transparency and Accountability: An unbiased report to Parliament helps to raise the level of debate and brings in greater transparency and accountability.
- Discourage Populism: Costing of various policies and programmes can help to promote transparency over the political cycle to discourage populist shifts in fiscal policy and improve accountability.
- Public Awareness: Scientific estimates of the cost of programmes and assessment of forecasts could help in raising public awareness about their fiscal implications and make people understand the nature of budgetary constraint.
- Rule Based Policies: Council will work as a conscience keeper in monitoring rule-based policies.
- Improves level of debate within and outside Parliament.
- More Accurate Forecast: According to IMF study, countries with independent fiscal council tend to have more accurate forecast.

Issues with Fiscal Policy:
- Repeated postponement of budget targets.
- Timely non-settlement of bill payments.
- Off-Budget financing to show fiscal deficit.
- CAG has highlighted various obfuscations to keep liabilities hidden such as:
  1. Borrowing from National Small Savings Fund by FCI for food subsidy.
  2. Financing irrigation projects via Long Term Irrigation Fund of NABARD.

Various Committees on the issue:
N.K Singh (2017):
(1) It had suggested the creation of an independent fiscal council.
(2) It would provide forecasts and advise the government on whether conditions exist for deviation from the mandated fiscal rules.

(1) D.K. Srivastava committee on fiscal statistics also suggested the establishment of a fiscal council.
(2) The council can co-ordinate with all levels of government to provide harmonized fiscal statistics and provide an annual assessment of overall public sector borrowing requirements.

Finance Commission: 13th and 14th finance commissions also advocated its establishment.

Criticism of Fiscal Council:
● It will become a scapegoat for failures of Ministry of Finance.
● Any institution by itself does not deliver results, it is the political will and the commitment and competence of the people of the institution that does.

Way forward:
● No Political Interference: Such council should be free from political interferences.
● Ideologically Unbiased: Members of such council should not have any predisposed ideologically motivated goal. They should be rational in their advises.
● Statutory Backing: Such council should be given statutory backing by amending FRBM act to increase its independence.

Source: The Hindu, Indiam Express.
RBI’s Loan Recast Scheme

- **Syllabus**: GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**Why is it in the news?**
- The Reserve Bank of India has come up with the loan restructuring scheme for stressed borrowers, without classifying them as NPAs.
- A special window would be provided for one-time loan restructuring to companies and individuals.

**Context:**
- The loans under stress have increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.
- Several companies and individual borrowers are finding it difficult to pay back their loans, as the incomes have substantially reduced.
- RBI has come up with the loan recast/restructuring plan.
- Under the new facility, lenders can go for a one-time restructuring of loans.

**Who all are Eligible for the Scheme?**
- The companies and individuals whose loans accounts are in default for not more than 30 days as on March 1, 2020.
- Banks can invoke a resolution plan for ‘corporate borrowers’ till December 31, 2020 and implement it till June 30, 2021.
- Such loan accounts should continue to be standard till the date of invocation.
- The one-time restructuring window is available across sectors.

**Significance of the Scheme:**
- **Multiple Options**: The restructuring will offer the borrowers either of the following, depending upon the agreement:
  1. Reschedule their loan payment.
  2. Get a limited loan repayment holiday.
  3. Extension for repayment period.
  4. Lower interest rates on their existing loans.
- **Relief to Borrowers** - corporate as well as individual.
- **Impact on Banks:**
  1. The banks will be able to check the rise in NPAs, as the banks will not have to tag their borrowers as defaulters.
  2. Banks will have to deal with only borrowers who were in stress after the pandemic hit.
- **Supporting Economic Recovery:**
  1. It will prevent companies to go bankrupt and job cuts.
  2. It will help in maintaining liquidity and demand in the economy.

**Issues/ Challenges**
- **Burden on Banks:**
  1. The inability to pay back by the distressed companies or individuals even after restructuring
will further increase the NPA numbers.

(2) Banks will have to maintain additional 10% provisions against post-resolution debt.
(3) Most of the previous restructured assets have ultimately turned into the NPAs.

- **Misuse of Recast Provisions:**
  (1) The previous attempts of restructuring have been widely misused by shady promoters.
  (2) The promoters of corporates withdrew bank funds while their units suffered.
  (3) They approached the banks more than once to get their loans recast.
  (4) Some promoters managed to get fresh loans and they used loan recasts to evergreen their accounts and keep out of the NPA books.

**How is the new scheme different from previous recast schemes?**

- Unlike the earlier schemes, which did not have any entry barrier, this scheme is available only for companies facing Covid-related stress.
- The timelines for invocation of resolution plan and its implementation have been defined specifically. (Past schemes were largely open-ended).
- Independent external evaluation has been provided for along with process validation and specific post-resolution monitoring.

**Recommendations of Kamath Committee:**

- **Inter Creditor Agreement** - Mandatory in all cases involving multiple lending institutions.
- Lenders singing ICA will have to make a 10% provision. Non signing lenders - 20%.
- Resolution frameworks will be implemented before Dec 31, 2020 and implemented before 180 days from date of invoking.
- Restructuring can be done via extension of tenure by max of 2 years.
- May convert loan to equity.

**Way Ahead:**

(1) There is a need for proper checks to prevent any misuse of the restructuring package.
(2) The interest of depositors must be protected. Also, the aspect of financial stability of the banking sector needs to be kept in mind.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, LiveMint.

---

**GST Compensation**

- **Syllabus:** GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

**Why is it in the news?**

- The Union government is exploring raising a loan to pay the shortfall of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation amount to the States.
- States had been protesting the delay in payment of pending compensation.
- The disagreements emerged between the Centre and the states over the issue of borrowing the loans for compensating the states.

**Background**
GST came into being after the 101st Amendment Act, 2016.

The law has provision to compensate the States for loss of revenue arising out of implementation of the GST.

Compensation cess was introduced as relief for States for the loss of revenues.

States were guaranteed a 14% tax revenue growth in the first five years (till 2022).

Any shortfall against it is supposed to be compensated by the Centre using the funds specifically collected as compensation cess.

Compensation cess is levied on products considered to be ‘sin’ or luxury goods.

Data

GST compensation payments to states have been pending since April 2020.

The pending amount for April-July estimated at Rs 1.5 lakh crore.

The GST compensation requirement is estimated to be around Rs 3 lakh crore this year.

An estimated compensation shortfall of Rs 2.35 lakh crore likely, as the cess collection is expected to be around Rs 65,000 crore.

Current Scenario

There is strain on the finances of both Centre and states and is likely to continue for short to medium term.

The condition deteriorated due to Covid-19 pandemic and the prolonged shutdowns.

The states have been demanding their dues from the Centre.

The GST Act prohibits withdrawal of funds from the Consolidated Fund. Hence the Centre has proposed two borrowing options:

1. States can borrow ₹97,000 crore at a reasonable rate of interest from RBI. The amount can be repaid after five years through the collection of cess.

2. The entire gap of ₹2.35 lakh crore can be met by the borrowing by the States. Interest would have to be borne by them with only principal being serviced by Compensation Fund.

Point of Contention

State’s stand:

1. Several States have rejected both the options of borrowing.

2. States made it clear that the onus is on the Centre to borrow from the market to make good any shortfall in the Compensation Fund.

Centre’s stand:

1. Centre is under no obligation to make good the shortfall in GST.

2. If Centre goes for additional borrowing, then it would have deleterious macro-economic consequences.

3. GST Council should devise a solution.

Consequences for States

States no longer possess taxation rights, as most taxes were subsumed under GST.

GST accounts for almost 42% of states’ own tax revenues.

The delay would affect States ability to restart the economy effectively.

It could reduce state expenditure on subsidies.

It could reduce social security and welfare measures for low-income groups.

It can cause a stagnation in ongoing as well as proposed infrastructure projects.

It can reduce allocated budgets for sectors such as education and healthcare, amid the pandemic.
Centre has multiple options to raise money - eg. Raising sovereign bond, or loan against public sector unit shares etc.
Centre can command much lower rates than states.
Fighting recession via fiscal stimulus is Centre's responsibility.
Breaking of Constitutional promise on excuse of COVID makes a dent in credibility of Centre.
Cooperative Federalism necessitates factoring in future implications of every action.

Way Ahead:

Onus to be on Centre:
(1) Finances of almost half a states are under severe strain.
(2) The Centre should take lead as it has multiple options, unlike states, to raise money.

Concrete Road Map Required:
(1) The cess is levied only on a handful of items such as tobacco products, automobiles, aerated beverages etc. Any additions to this list are unlikely.
(2) It seems unlikely that Centre’s obligation can be met from collections made solely from the levy of cess.
(3) If the states are to be compensated from the collection cess fund, a definite roadmap is required.

Alternatives:
(1) Centre and States should find innovative ways to increase tax collections.
(2) It can revise internal revenue targets, to ensure that enough cess is collected.
(3) Tax authorities may pursue aggressive measures to meet their targets.
(4) An equitable procedure should be devised with a constitutional guarantee that there will not be any default in such payments to the states.

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, Financial Express, Mint.

Ease of Doing Business

Syllabus: GS 3- Economic Development.

Why is it in the news?
The World Bank has paused the publication of it’s Doing Business Report. The report carries the Ease of Doing Business Rankings.

Details
The suspension of the publication of the rankings has been announced in the wake of a number of reported data irregularities.
The irregularities were related to changes to data in the 2018 and 2020 reports.
The changes in the data were inconsistent with the Doing Business methodology.

About Ease of doing business ranking (EoDB)
The report is a popular ranking system that measures the ease of conducting business in a particular country.

A high Ranking means: The regulatory environment is more conducive to the starting and
The operation of a business.

- **The Following indicators are used for devising the index:**
  1. Starting a business.
  2. Dealing with construction permits.
  3. Getting electricity.
  4. Registering property.
  5. Getting credit.
  6. Protecting minority investors.
  7. Paying taxes.
  8. Trading across borders.
  9. Enforcing contracts.
  10. Resolving insolvency.

**India and the Ranking:**
- In the 2018 ‘Doing Business’ report, India moved for the first time ever into the top 100.
- World Bank had called it “sustained business reforms”.
- In the 2020 report, India jumped 14 places to move to the 63rd position.

**Primary Indications behind the Irregularities**
- **Manipulations:**
  1. A Wall Street Journal indicated that some nations including China, Azerbaijan, UAE and Saudi may have had data “inappropriately altered”.
  2. The most recent Doing Business report showed that Middle East countries sharply improved their rankings and the Latin American countries lagged behind.

- **Capitalist Bias:**
  1. In early 2018, World Bank’s then-chief economist, Paul Romer, had said methodological changes to the report may have been biased against Chile’s socialist president.
  2. The report published in 2017 had dropped Chile to 55th from 34th in 2014.

**Response of World Bank**
- The World Bank has decided to conduct a systemic review and assessment of data changes.
- It would correct the data of countries that were most affected by the irregularities.

**Impact of Data Irregularities on India:**
- Currently, there is no information in the public domain to show that India’s rankings have been affected.
- Experts have questioned in the past whether changes to the report’s underlying methodology helped boost New Delhi’s performance.
- However, as per the government officials, this would neither halt nor deter India’s commitment towards Ease of Doing Business.

**Importance of Doing Business Rankings for Countries:**
- **Investments:** The high ranking improves country’s stature as a better investment destination and helps promote FDI in the country.
- **Growth and Development:** The minimum regulations incentivise the local and foreign firms to invest and expand and also contribute to economic growth and job creation.

**Drawbacks of Doing Business Rankings:**
- **Limited Sample Size:** It does not really reflect the ground realities of entire country, as in India, only two main business centres- Mumbai and Delhi are judged.
Tailoring of Policies: Instead of trying to enact wider structural reforms, government may tailor its policies to specifically fit the World Bank’s criteria.

Social Infrastructure: The Index does not take into consideration the social and physical infrastructure as well as grievance redressal systems.

Way Ahead:
To Restore the Credibility of the Rankings:
1. The integrity and impartiality of World Bank’s data and analysis is paramount.
2. World Bank should immediately take the appropriate action and perform an audit of the processes for data collection and review for Doing Business.

Sources: The Hindu, The Wire, LiveMint.

Industrial Relation Code 2020

Syllabus: GS 3: Indian Economy: Growth, development and employment.

Why is it in the news?
- The Parliament recently passed the code on Industrial Relations 2020.

Background
- Labour falls under the Concurrent List of the Constitution.
- The central government wants to codify 44 central labour laws into four broad codes.
- Besides the Industrial Relation Code, following are the other three:
  1. Code on Wages- Parliament has already approved.
  3. The Code on Social Security- It has been introduced in Parliament.

- The draft code on Industrial Relations has been prepared after amalgamating and rationalizing the three Central Labour Acts:
  1. The Trade Unions Act, 1926.
  2. The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946.
  3. The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

More about the Code
- Aim: To improve the business environment in the country by reducing the labour compliance burden of industries.
- What it proposes: To make it easier for an employer to engage and disengage workers based on requirement.

Key Provisions of the Code:
- Definition of factory - Without power Raised from 10 to 20 workers and With power Raised from 20 to 40 workers.
- Applicability of standing orders: All industrial establishment with at least 300 workers or more must prepare standing orders on the matters listed in a Schedule to the Code. These matters relate to:
  1. Classification of workers.
  2. Manner of informing workers about work hours, Holidays, paydays, and wage rates.
(3) Termination of employment.
(4) Grievance redressal mechanisms for workers.

**Fixed term Employment:**
(1) A worker can be hired for any duration, depending on season and orders.
(2) Fixed-term employees will get all statutory benefits like social security, wages, etc.

**Trade Unions:**
(1) Seven or more members of a trade union can apply to register it.
(2) Trade unions having membership of at least 10% of the workers or 100 workers (whichever is less) will be registered.

**Negotiating unions:**
(1) In case of multiple trade unions, the trade union with support of at least 51% of workers will be recognised as the negotiating union. It was 75% in 2019 Bill.
(2) When no single union covers 51% of the workers, representatives from all unions with 20% or more worker membership can form a negotiating council.

**Lay-off and retrenchment:**
(1) The Code defines lay-off as the inability of an employer, due to shortage of power, coal or breakdown of machinery, from giving employment to a worker.
(2) It provides for employers to terminate the services of a worker (Retrenchment).
(3) Before lay-off, prior Government permission is required for establishments with 300 or more workers (earlier it was 100 in 2019 Bill).

**Powers to the central government to revise the threshold:**
(1) The 2019 Bill empowered the government to increase or decrease the threshold to seek prior permission before closure, lay-off or retrenchment.
(2) The 2020 Bill only allows an increase in the threshold through notification.

**Basic wages and dearness allowances:**
(1) Industrial establishments in which 50 to 100 workers are employed, are required to pay 50% of basic wages and dearness allowance to a worker who has been laid off.
(2) The establishment also obliged to give one month’s notice and wages for such period to a worker who has been retrenched.

**Resolution of industrial disputes:**
(1) The central or state governments may appoint conciliation officers to mediate and promote settlement of industrial disputes.
(2) If no settlement is arrived at, then any party to the dispute can make an application to the Industrial Tribunal.

**Notice of change:** Employers who propose changes in the conditions of service are required to give a notice to the workers.

**Tribunals:** The bill provides for setting up of a two-member tribunal so as to some of the important cases will be adjudicated jointly.

**Exemption:** The appropriate government may exempt any new industrial establishment or class of establishments from the provisions of the Code in public interest.

**Right to strike:**
(1) The Bill Prohibits strikes and lock-outs in all industrial establishments without a notice.
(2) Industrial Disputes Act had such restrictions only in respect of public utility services.
(3) No strike during conciliation proceedings, or and 60 days after the conclusion of such
Significance of Code on Industrial Relations 2020

- **Better Compliance and Ease of doing Business:**
  1. The Codification removes multiplicity of definitions.
  2. Flexibility in running any business is considered most valuable asset available to an enterprise.

- **Bring transparency and accountability:**
  1. The fixed term employees are entitlement to wages as well as statutory and social security benefits at par with regular employees.
  2. It will lead to better industrial relations, and thus higher productivity.

- **Promote new enterprises and creating new opportunities.**

Criticism of Code on Industrial Relations 2020:

- **Favour Industries:**
  1. The code make it easier for industries to hire and fire workers based on requirement.
  2. The rights of the workers belonging to small establishments will be watered down with no protection of trade unions and some other provisions.
  3. The code curtails worker’s right to strike and even of mass leave.

- **Weakens the Negotiating Rights of the Workers:**
  1. As several trade unions are active in companies, it will be tough for any one group to manage 50% support.

- **Government control:**
  1. Under the Code, the ministry has amended the definition of “strike” to bring “mass casual leave” within its ambit.
  2. The prior approval of government is needed for exit provisions relating to retrenchment and others.
  3. The code seeks to vest powers with the government officers for adjudication of disputes involving penalty as fines.

Conclusion:

- **Striking Balance:**
  1. Economic recovery is vital during the times of slowdown and pandemic, so investment friendly laws are required for more investment and expansion.
  2. However, protection of labour’s interest is equally important.
  3. Government needs maintain a balance between the economic prospects and labour rights.

Sources: PRS India, The Hindu, Mint, BS.
Direct Tax Evasion in India

Syllabus: GS3: Indian Economy: Mobilisation of Resources.

Why is it in news?
- While replying to a question in Lok Sabha, Minister of State, Finance Ministry claimed that only 1 percent of the Indian population pays income tax and declares earnings above the non-taxable income.
- This due to the evasion of direct tax.

Reasons for Direct Tax Evasion:
- **High Tax Rate:**
  1. Corporate Tax in India is considered as one of the highest in the world. The income of more than 10 lakhs is taxed at 30%. Cess, surcharges further add to the burden.
  2. This high rate of income tax demotivates people from paying taxes.
- **Uneconomic Spending by Government:**
  1. Various populist measures of government like loan waiver, subsides. Taxpayers think of this as misuse of their hard-earned money.
  2. An increasing number of corruption scams add to this feeling.
- **Compliance Burden:** Compliance burden acta as a disincentive to pay taxes.
- **Informal Economy:**
  1. More than 90% of India’s workforce is engaged in an informal economy where payments happen in cash most often on daily basis. These cash transactions are difficult to regulate.
- **Income Exemption:**
  1. For example income from agriculture is exempted from income tax.
  2. People show their income from other sources as agricultural income to avoid taxes.
- **Changing nature of Businesses:**
  1. With growing digitization and social media marketing, the nature of businesses is changing fast. For example Gig economy.
  2. Income tax regulations are not keeping pace with this.
- **Litigations:**
  1. One of the biggest concerns of the current Indian tax regime has been litigation.
  2. There are huge number of backlogs of tax cases in courts across India, the result of which is wastage of precious time and resources.

Impact:
- **Resource Crunch for the Government:**
  1. Income Tax act as revenue for the government which it spends on socio-economic policies.
  2. Due to evasion taxes the government has to borrow from the market.
- **Crowding Out of Private Sector:** As the government turns to the market for borrowing, borrowing costs for the private sector increases.
- **Reduces Accountability:** As per the Economic Survey, the tax system enforces the social contract...
where taxpayers demand accountability for the money spent from the exchequer.

**Measures Taken by Government:**

- **Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme:**
  1. This is a direct tax scheme announced in Budget 2020, for settling tax disputes between individuals and the income tax department.
  2. As per the scheme income tax disputes settled under it cannot be reopened in any other proceeding by the income tax department or any other designated authority.
- **Demonetization:** Demonetisation has brought all the cash within the formal economy which makes tax evasion difficult.
- **Promotion of Digital India:**
  1. Under the Digital India campaign digital payment has been promoted.
  2. Merchant Discount Rate on payment through UPI has been removed.
- **Direct Tax Code:** Economic Task Force was established under the chairmanship of Akhilesh Ranjan to come up with the Direct Tax Code.
- **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements:** India has signed DTAA with various countries to avoid double taxation.

**Way Forward:**

- **Formalization of Economy:** Formalisation of the economy will increase the tax base and record-keeping makes tax evasion difficult.
- **Rationalization of Tax Rate:**
  1. The taxation structure should maintain a balance between tax revenue on the government and the tax burden on taxpayers.
  2. Cess and surcharges should be used sparingly.
- **Reduce the Trust Deficit:** The government needs to improve the spending pattern to increase the trust of taxpayers.
- **Faceless Assessment of Tax:**
  1. This will reduce the personal contact between income tax officers and taxpayers which will reduce tax terrorism.
  2. New technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain technologies can be used for this.

**Sources:** The Hindu, Indian Express.

---

**Quota within Quota debate**

- **Syllabus:** GS II - Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

**Why is it in News?**

- A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court reopened the legal debate on sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for reservations.

**Background:**

- The Bench ruled in favour of giving preferential treatment to certain SCs over others to ensure
equal representation of all SCs.

- In a 2005, a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court had ruled that state governments had no power to create sub-categories of SCs for the purpose of reservation.
- So, it referred the issue to a larger Bench to decide.

**Highlights of the judgement:**

- There is a “caste struggle” within the reserved class as a benefit of reservation is being usurped by a few.
- The constitutional goal of social transformation cannot be achieved without taking into account changing social realities.
- The question is how to trickle down the benefit to the bottom rung.
- Caste, occupation, and poverty are interwoven.
- The State cannot be deprived of the power to take care of the qualitative and quantitative difference between different classes to take positive measures.

**Special quotas framed by some states:**

- **Tamil Nadu:**
  (1) A 3% quota within the SC quota is accorded to the Arundhatiyar caste, after the Justice M S Janarthanam report.
  (2) Report stated that despite 16% of the SC population, they held only 0-5% of the jobs.

- **Andhra Pradesh:**
  (1) In 2000, the Andhra Pradesh legislature passed a law reorganising 57 SCs into sub-groups.
  (2) It split the 15% SC quota in educational institutions and government jobs in proportion to their population.
  (3) However, this law was declared unconstitutional in 2005 E V Chinnaiah Case.

- Punjab has had laws that gave preference to Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs within the SC quota.

**What is sub-categorisation of SCs?**

- Among the Scheduled Castes, there are some that remain grossly under-represented despite reservation in comparison to other Scheduled Castes.
- This inequality within the Scheduled Castes is underlined in several reports, and special quotas have been framed to address it.

**Can States declare a caste as Schedule Caste? – SC judgement**

- It ruled that only the President has the power to notify the inclusion or exclusion of a caste as a Scheduled Caste.
- States cannot interfere in the list.

**Arguments in favour of sub-categorisation:**

- Inequality within Scheduled Castes as benefits have not trickled down to the “weakest of the weak”.
- **Concept of Creamy Layer:**
  (1) The “creamy layer” puts an income ceiling on those eligible for reservation.
  (2) While concept applies to OBC, it was applied to promotions of SCs for the first time in 2018 in Jarnail Singh v Lachhmi Narain Gupta case.
- **Sub-categorisation does not violate Article 341:**
  (1) In the E V Chinnaiah case in 2005, Supreme court had held that merely giving preference does not tinker, rearrange, subclassify with the list in any manner.
(2) Since there is no inclusion or exclusion of any caste in the list as notified under Article 341, it doesn’t violate it.

- Does not Violate Right to Equality as it would achieve equitable representation of all SCs in government service.

**Arguments against sub-categorisation:**

- **The test of social and educational backwardness:**
  (1) It cannot be applied to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as the special treatment is given to the SCs due to untouchability with which they suffer.
  (2) In a 1976 case, State of Kerala v N M Thomas, the Supreme Court laid down that “Scheduled Castes are not castes, they are class.”

- **Protection:**
  (1) A rigid President’s list was envisaged to protect from such potential arbitrary change.
  (2) Allowing states to change the proportion of reservation will result into the decision to appease vote-banks.

**Constitutional Provisions:**

- **Equality and special provisions:**
  (1) Article 16(1) and 16(2) assure citizens equality of opportunity in employment or appointment to any government office.
  (2) Articles 15(4) and 16(4) state that the equality provisions do not prevent the government from making special provisions in matters of admission to educational institutions or jobs in favour of backward classes, particularly the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs).

- **Protection:**
  (1) Article 15(1) generally prohibits any discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, caste, sex or place of birth.

- **Limit of 50%:**
  (1) In the Indra Sawhney case of 1992, the Supreme Court fixed the upper limit for the combined reservation quota should not exceed 50% of seats.

**Way Forward:**

- **The objective of reservation:**
  (1) It is to ensure that all backward classes march hand in hand.
  (2) It will not be possible if only a select few get all the coveted services of the government.

- **Changing social realities:**
  (1) The constitutional goal of social transformation cannot be achieved without taking into account changing social realities.
  (2) We need to work on how to carve out the sub-lists and assign them appropriate quota in changing social realities.

- **Non-arbitrary classification:**
  (1) Government should release the findings of Rohini Commission which was set up with same task.
  (2) A classification cannot be arbitrary. It should be based on credible evidence.

- **Population share:**
  (1) We should determine the population share of each caste group in the absence of a caste census.
India’s Nutrition Challenge

Syllabus: GS2: Health-Related Issues

Why is it in news?
- The Government of India launched a campaign declaring the month of September as “POSHAN Maah 2020”.
- **About Poshan Maah 2020**: It invites citizens to send nutritional recipes and aims to create awareness about the POSHAN Abhiyan through community mobilization.

Background:
- **State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World**:
  1. Published by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO.
  2. 189.2 million (28 per cent) out of 673 million undernourished people are in India in 2017-19.
  3. India accounts for 28 per cent (40.3 million) of the world’s stunted children (low height-for-age) under five years of age, and 43 per cent (20.1 million) of the world’s wasted children (low weight-for-height) in 2019.
- **National Family Health Survey (NFHS, 2015-16)**: The proportion of underweight and stunted children was as high as 35.8 per cent and 38.4 per cent respectively.

Government Initiatives:
- **National Nutrition Mission (NNM)**: Also known as the POSHAN Abhiyan, aims to reduce stunting, underweight and low birth weight each by 2 per cent per annum; and anemia among children, adolescent girls and women, each by 3 per cent per annum by 2022.
- **Eat Right Movement**: Launched by FSSAI, it aims to improve public health in India and combat negative nutritional trends to fight lifestyle diseases.
- **Other steps** - ICDS, Mid Day Meal, PDS, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, National Food Security Act, Total Sanitation Campaign etc.

Determinants of Malnutrition in India:
1. **Mother’s Education and Health**: Women’s education has a multiplier effect not only on household food security but also on the child’s feeding practice and the sanitation facility.
2. **Sanitation and Clean Drinking Water**: Proper sanitation and clean drinking water help in the absorption of nutrients.
3. **Prevalence of Communicable and Non-communicable diseases**: According to the Global Burden of Disease Study 1990–2017, if the current trend continues, India cannot achieve these targets under NNM by 2022.
4. **Policy Implementation**: Nutrition gets low priority in government policy, hence programs dealing with malnutrition do not come to a logical conclusion.
5. Vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment and malnutrition.
6. Nutrition determines the capability of an individual to participate in an economy which in
turn determines the nutritional intake of the household. Poor find it difficult to come out of this self-enforcing cycle.

(7) Societal factors: Societal factors such as caste, gender and class determines nutritional intake by a particular section of the population.

Way Forward:
- **Bio-fortification:**
  1. Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in food, to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal health risk.
  2. It is very cost-effective in improving the diet of households and the nutritional status of children.
- **Strong Economic Growth:** Economic growth with a strong trickle-down impact will increase the purchasing power of the poor to have nutritious food and to break the vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition.
- **Robust Public Healthcare Infrastructure:**
  1. Communicable and non-communicable diseases increase the out of pocket expenditure on health care services.
  2. Robust public health care infrastructure is required to reduce this.
- **Women Empowerment:** The capability of women to make choices is directly reflected in the food security of the household.
- **Promotion of Agri Bio-Diversity:** Diversity of crops contrary to the current practice of monoculture can add to a balanced diet which is locally and culturally suitable.
- **Food Chain Management:** Due to the lack of storage facilities, a significant amount of food is wasted.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu.

---

12 Facebook controversy and challenges of Big Tech

- Syllabus: GS II : Pressure Groups and Formal/Informal Associations and their Role in the Polity.

Why is it in News?
- Controversy triggered by a report in the US publication Wall Street Journal about the political affiliation of Facebook.
- The report claimed that Facebook deliberately ignored incendiary content from members of the ruling party and as well as right-wing voices.

Complaints against Facebook:
- Political partisanship.
- Not being attentive enough to hate speech and fake news.
- Differential Treatment of hate speech in India vis a vis other developed country.
- Opaque algorithms that direct users to particular kinds of content.
- Inadequate privacy controls.
- Inordinate and unaccountable power to shape public discourse.
Regular threats of death and rape to journalists and dissenting voices unchecked.

**Business model of Social media giants:**
- Their business model is based on monetizing the attention of the users through advertisement.
- Opaque algorithms monitor user's behaviour and try to maximise the revenue based on the interactions of the user.
- This has led to a surveillance capitalism that violates the privacy of the individual and manipulates his behaviour.
- Fake news, hateful content, radicalization etc are outcomes of this business model.

**Bigtech:** Big Tech refers to the major technology companies such as Apple, Google, Amazon and Facebook. These are the most dominant IT based companies and have enormous economic clout as well as social influence.

**US House of Representative panel report on Big Tech companies:**

- **Findings -**
  1. These companies wield tremendous power and abuse it.
  2. They enforce exorbitant fees, oppressive contract terms and extracting valuable data from people and business that rely on them.
  3. They are in ‘Conflict of interest’ as they ran the marketplace for their respective domains while also competing in it.
  4. They used self-preferencing, predatory pricing or exclusionary conduct to benefit themselves.

- **Recommendations:**
  1. Structural separations of big tech.
  2. These companies must be broken into smaller companies.
  3. It is to ensure that they would not be able to have as much influence as they have currently over the digital marketplace.
  4. These companies be prohibited from operating in an “adjacent line of business”.
  5. There should be a “presumptive prohibition” against big tech companies going for mergers and acquisitions.

**Way Ahead:**
- **Promote social media ethics:**
  1. Every company should self-regulate the content.
  2. It should enforce the core principles like truth and accuracy, transparency, independence, fairness and impartiality, responsibility and fair play.

- **Create guidelines on specific issues:**
  1. Parliament must create guidelines to enforce regulation in four areas - elections, harmful content, privacy and data portability.

- **Enforce transparency:**
  1. Bigtech companies should reveal how their system works.
  2. Content management algorithm should be disclosed to appropriate press bodies to maintain transparency.

- **Other:**
  1. Prevent companies from combining data that they track from different sources.
  2. Make Google offer access to search data on equal terms, not only to customers who agree to use its advertising software.

**Sources:** Indian express, the week, the Hindu, NDTV, Washigntonpost, Times of India, the Print.

Why is it in News?
- Google had pulled Paytm from Playstore for violation of its gambling policies.
- Recently debate whether Dream 11 & Paytm First Games are proxies of online gambling as they involve financial transactions - currently classified as games of skill.
- Several High Court rulings have considered them a game of skill and not game of chance.
- The issue is now before SC.
- Game of skill - Exempt from ambit of gambling.

Facts:
- India - around 70 crore internet users.
- Online betting or online gambling industry is one of the emerging industries.
- More than 30 crore players are using apps like Play Games24x7, FanFight, Dream11 and Paytm First Games to gamble on rummy card games and ‘Fantasy’ Cricket.
- The numbers are anticipated to be doubled by the next year and the industry revenue is estimated to hit ₹25,000 crores by 2024.

 Constitutional/legal aspect -
(1) Gambling and betting are state subjects and states have respective laws.
(2) Most states exempt games of skills from ambit of gambling.
(3) But these laws are very old laws and have not kept pace with time. They do not clearly define what falls in skill category.
(4) Hence Judiciary has to interpret in individual cases.
(5) Betting in horse racing is regulated.
(6) Casinos in Sikkim and Goa are regulated and allowed under a license in 5 star hotels.

Change of perception towards gambling:
- Societal attitudes towards gambling have changed in the last century.
- Though gambling is now seen as a legitimate form of recreation, Indian laws have not kept pace with the times.

Gambling Vs Betting:
(1) Gambling is referred to as card games where high stakes are involved.
(2) Betting is referred to as casino games and putting a bet on an event such as a match.

Regulation of gambling in India: A British Legacy
- The primary law on which States have framed their gambling legislation is a British-era law ‘Public Gambling Act, 1867’.
- While India follows a British-era prohibitionist law, the U.K. legalized and regulated various forms of gambling and betting many decades ago.

Recommendations of Law Commission:
- Regulated gambling and betting in sports will ensure the detection of fraud and money laundering.
Gambling and betting should be through licensed operators, with a linkage to PAN card and Aadhaar card.

**Protection of minors:**
- Put a bar on the participation of minors and those who get subsidies or do not fall within the purview of the Income Tax Act or the GST Act.
- Establish a council to prevent the problem of gambling and gambling by minors.

**Finance:**
- The commission called for the regulation of casinos, maintenance of accounts, audits, and the safeguarding of its employees.
- It is recommended to make proceeds from gambling and betting taxable.
- Match-fixing and sports fraud should be made criminal offenses.

**Exemption:**
- The exemption granted to horse-racing from the gambling prohibition should be extended to other skill-centric games, with the operators focusing on the safety and protection of players involved in such games.

**Legalizing gambling/betting in India**
- **Advantages:**
  1. It would help to curb black money and the terror financing.
  2. It will bring good revenue to Government.
  3. It would generate employment opportunities.
  4. Investment in the casino industry (online gaming) would propel tourism and employment.
- **Disadvantages:**
  1. Integrity would be spoiled.
  2. It affects ordinary people and their income.
  3. The socio-economic and cultural circumstances of the country are not pragmatic to accept legalized gambling activities as it is still treated as a social stigma.
  4. This would favor the amassing of money by a handful of game operators.

**Issues associated with Online Gambling:**
- **Parallel economy:** Online Gambling has introduced a parallel economy which paradoxically turn the Legally earned money into Black Money.
- **Jurisdiction:** There will be the issue of jurisdiction as online gambling goes way beyond India’s borders.
- **Protection of right players:** Ensuring that online gambling is safe and protects the interests and rights of players is a difficult job.

**Way Ahead:**
- **Legal aspects:**
  1. Make Online gambling legal in India.
  2. Implement Law Commission recommendations with immediate effect.
  3. Prepare the central model law so that states can create their laws according to model law.
- **Other:**
  1. Review the taxation system with the view of emerging online gambling.
  2. Enhance skill sets of people to increase employment.
  3. Ensure technological advancement to eliminate the invidious role played by bookies who place illegal bets on overseas websites.
Ensure sanctions or penal measures that can be invoked against any erring operators.

Sources: Indian Express, The Hindu, Economic Times, NDTV, Outlook, Livemint, the Print

---

### Afghan Talks

**Syllabus: GS2: International Relations**

**Why is it in news?**

- In September, the intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation opened in Doha, Qatar were held.

**Background:**

- **U.S.-Taliban peace deal:**
  1. **Troops Withdrawal:** The US will draw down to 8,600 troops in 135 days and the NATO or coalition troop numbers will also be brought down, proportionately and simultaneously. And all troops will be out within 14 months.
  2. **Taliban Commitment:** Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.
  3. **Removal of sanctions:** UN sanctions on Taliban leaders to be removed by three months.
  4. **Release of prisoners:** Up to 5,000 imprisoned Taliban and up to 1,000 prisoners from the other side held by Taliban will be released.

- The intra-Afghan talks are part of US-Taliban Peace deal.

- **Role of India:**
  1. India’s External Affairs Minister participated in this intra Afghan talks.
  2. India reiterated that the peace process must be "Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled".
  3. This was the first time India was participant to the conference which included Taliban. India still considers Taliban as terrorist group.

**Concerns for India:**

- **Pakistan’s growing significance in Afghanistan:** As a result of the deal, Pakistan military (through its ally Taliban) will become dominant players in Afghanistan’s power circles, which is not in line with Indian interests.

- **Relations between Taliban and Pakistan:** The Taliban did not name India among the countries that supported the peace process, but specially thanked Pakistan for the support, work and assistance provided.

- **Silence on anti-India terror groups:**
  1. Under the US Taliban deal, Taliban has committed to turn down its contact with al Qaeda.
  2. But it is silent on other terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Toiba or Jaish-e-Mohammed.

- **Limited Interest by Major Power:** Major Powers like Russia, China or USA have shown limited interest in intra Afghan talks. None is ready to take responsibility for the results of talks.

**Way Forward:**

- **Isolation of battlefield:** To resolve conflict within Afghanistan, the battlefield needs to be isolated
i.e. external support to the terrorist activities needs to be abandoned.

- **Engagement with Iran:** Iran understand threat posed by Taliban militancy in Central Asia. India and Iran should put pressure on new government to end activities inimical to their interest.

- **Reforms in Afghan govt:**
  1. State’s failure to meet the expectations of the general public often leads to militancy.
  2. Thus, administrative reforms within Afghanistan government are the need of the hour.

- **Capacity building:** India should continue infrastructural development in the nation and hold conversations with Taliban too, if situation escalates.

- **Training the Afghan forces:** India should continue to provide military aid and weapons to Afghanistan’s Army to contain terrorism and safeguard Indian interests in the region.

*Source: The Hindu, Indian Express.*

---

**Hybrid Warfare**

**Syllabus:** GS III- Challenges to Internal Security.

**Why is it in News?**
- The Chinese company Zhenhua Data Information Technology ltd was monitoring over 10,000 Indian individuals and organisations in its global database of foreign targets.

**Details:**
- **What Zhenhua did?**
  1. It monitors the digital footprint of its targets using Artificial Intelligence tools across social media platforms, maintains an information library.
  2. The library includes content from news sources, forums, papers, patents, bidding documents and positions of recruitment.

- **Targets and Threats:**
  1. Targets are individuals and institutions in politics, government, judiciary, art and sports, business, technology, media, and civil society.
  2. This information can be used for strategic and intelligence services of China for hybrid warfare.

- **Legal dimension:**
  2. Rules and act only covers personal data and not information available freely or accessible in the public domain.

- India is yet to have a data protection law for protecting the privacy of individuals and national security.

**Hybrid Warfare:**
- **Meaning:**
  1. It refers to using non-military tools to achieve dominance or damage, subvert or influence.
  2. These tools include information pollution, perception management and propaganda.
  3. The new weapons in this war closely linked to the lives of the common people.
  4. These methods aim to disrupt and disable an opponent's actions without engaging in open
The Unique Academy

hostilities.

- **Tools:**
  1. Disinformation and misinformation operations.
  2. Political and economic coercion such as election interference & debt trap diplomacy.
  3. Cyber and space operations such as jamming GPS signals and transmitting fake GPS signals.
  4. Proxies and state-controlled forces.

- **Threats:**
  1. **Cyber Attacks:**
     - This may include attacks on critical infrastructure like power grids, business systems, and defence systems.
     - These may be used to disrupt economic activities, undermine institutions, and discredit political leadership and the intelligentsia.
  2. **Undermining Democracy:**
     1. The foreign government may manipulate the data, spread propaganda and misinformation and influence democratic systems like elections through use of social media, websites, advertisements etc.
     2. The 2016 election of the USA and UK Brexit vote are suspected to have been influenced through such interference by Russia.
  3. **Incitement to Social Discord:**
     1. The information may be used to create disharmony and communal tensions within a society,
     2. It will eventually a threat to the unity of the country.
  4. **Terrorism:**
     1. Campaigning to proliferate hate and despair and to strike fear in adversaries.
     2. Targets are cultural icons and symbols to destroy the identities, heritages, and belief systems that oppose their ideologies.

**Way Forward:**

- **New strategy for military:**
  1. We should develop an adaptable and versatile military to overcome.
  2. Military personnel should be trained in new kind of warfare.

- **International cooperation:**
  1. Hybrid threats are an international issue, so international cooperation is necessary.
  2. Cooperation should be to understand, detect and respond to hybrid warfare to their collective interests.
  3. Multinational frameworks should be developed to facilitate cooperation and collaboration across borders.

- **Strengthen Cyber infrastructure:**
  1. We should increase our cyber security to protect civilians from non-military tools & information pollution.
  2. We should develop hilly skilled cyber army for defensive as well offensive strategy.
  3. We should create more awareness about channels of such propaganda among the people.

- **Credible Communication:**
  1. Transparent and credible information must be provided to counter propaganda.
  2. Television channels should actually commence shows on Defence Atmanirbhar on prime time to convey the seriousness of resolve to China.

Sources: Indian Express, The hindu, ORF, economic times, business standard, the week
Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)

Syllabus: GS3: Internal Security

Why is it in news?
- Recently many activist and anti CAA protesters have been booked under UAPA.

Background:
- **UAPA 1967:** It was enacted by the Indira Gandhi government in 1967. Its main purpose was to deal with secessionist movements and protect the integrity of the nation.
- **2004 Amendment:** After the repeated misuse of Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act were repealed. Then UAPA act was amended to deal with terrorist organisations.
- **2019 Amendment:** It gives power to designate individual as terrorist.
  1. Approval for seizure of property by NIA:
  2. An investigating officer is required to obtain the prior approval of the Director General of Police to seize properties that may be connected with terrorism.
  3. If the investigation is conducted by an officer of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the approval of the Director General of NIA would be required for seizure of such property.
  4. Investigation by NIA: Empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases.
- **Insertion to schedule of treaties:**

Issues/Challenges with UAPA:
- **Misuse:**
  1. Conviction rate under UAPA act is very low.
  2. No objective criterion has been laid for categorization of individual or organisation a terrorist, and the government has been provided with “unfettered powers” to declare an individual as a terrorist.
- **Against Federal Structure:** With new amendment, NIA, which under administrative control of Home Ministry, can go in any state without the permission of the state.
- **Against the principle of Natural Justice:**
  1. Under UAPA act accused himself has to prove his innocence against might of state.
  2. Those arrested under UAPA can be incarcerated up to 180 days without a charge sheet being filed.
  3. It thus directly violates Article 21 of the constitution.

Need for UAPA:
- **Speedy Investigation of terror Activities:** Sweeping powers to investigating agencies will help in speedy investigation of terrorist activities in India.
- **Increasing terrorist activities against India:**
(1) There are increase in terrorist activities against Indian, especially from neighbouring countries. 
(2) Designating individuals promoting such activities as a terrorist will put effective pressure on such countries.

- To protect sovereignty and Integrity of India: According to Article 19, Protection of sovereignty and integrity of India are reasonable restriction against fundamental rights guaranteed in Article 19.

Way forward:
- **Cooperative Federalism:** Actions against terrorist should be taken with taking state governments in confidence.
- **Strengthening the judicial system:** Government should further strengthen the judicial system for timely implementation of rulings in terrorism-related cases to create fear in minds of terrorists.
- **Use of Alternative Laws:** Given the impact on fundamental rights of citizens, UAPA should be used when no other laws are effective to deal with situation.
- **Improving Investigating Skills of Officers:** Accountability should be put on investigating officers to reduce the false cases registered under this act.

*Source: Indian Express, The Hindu.*
1. Article 254

**Why is it in news?**
- Opposition ruled states are legislating new bills to overrule Farm Bills enacted by Central government.

**About Article 254:**
- Article 254 of the Indian Constitution deals with the doctrine of repugnancy.
- Repugnancy here is a legal term that means inconsistency between two or more parts of a legal instrument.
- **M. Karunanidhi versus Union of India:** The SC while interpreting Article 254(1) held that where the provisions of a Central Act and a State Act in the Concurrent list are fully inconsistent and absolutely irreconcilable, the Central Act will prevail and the State Act will be.
- **Article 254 (2):**
  1. Laws made by State government will prevail over central law on the matter enumerated in Concurrent list if it has been reserved for the consideration of the President and has received his assent.
  2. But Parliament can override this law by the new law.

2. MCI replaced by National Medical Commission

**Why is it in news?**
- As per information released by the Health Ministry, the National Medical Commission (NMC) has replaced the Medical Council of India (BoG-MCI).

**Details:**
- Last year the Parliament has passed National Medical Commission Bill 2019 to replace the Medical Council of India.
- The Bill sets up four autonomous boards under the supervision of the NMC.
- Each board will consist of a President and four members (of which two members will be part-time), appointed by the central government (on the recommendation of a search committee).
- **These bodies are:**
  1. The Under-Graduate Medical Education Board (UGMEB).
  2. Post-Graduate Medical Education Board (PGMEB).
  3. Medical Assessment and Rating Board.
  4. Ethics and Medical Registration Board.

3. Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha

**Why is it in news?**
• Opposition parties are demanding to fill the vacant post of Deputy Speaker in Lok Sabha.

Details:
• Deputy Speaker is elected by member of the House.
• He is elected after the election of speaker has taken place.
• The date of election is fixed by the speaker.
• Deputy Speaker performs the duties of the speaker’s office when it is vacant.

4. National Human Rights Commission

Why is it in news?
• NHRC has issued warnings to state governments for violation of human rights.

Details:
• National Human Rights Commission is established under Protection of Human Rights Act 1993, which was amended in 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993</th>
<th>Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Composition of NHRC:
  (1) Chairperson to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
  (2) Two other members knowing human rights.
  (3) Other Members: Chairpersons of four National Commission (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Women and Minorities). |
| • Composition of NHRC:
  (1) Chairperson to be Chief Justice or Judge of the Supreme Court.
  (2) Three members of which at least one to be women.
  (3) Other Members of the Commission. |
| • Chairperson to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. |
| • Chairperson of SHRC: Chief Justice or Judge of a High Court. |
| • Term of office: Chairperson and members of both NHRC and SHRC will be five years or age of seventy years, whichever is earlier. |
| • Term of office:
  (1) Three years or till the age of seventy years, whichever is earlier.
  (2) Reappointment of members of the NHRC and SHRCs for a period of five years. |
| • Secretary-General of NHRC and Secretary of a SHRC to exercise powers as delegated to them. |
| • Secretary-General and Secretary to exercise all administrative and financial powers (except judicial functions), subject to the respective chairperson’s control. |
5. Standing Committees

Why is it in news?

- The Rajya Sabha Secretariat is mulling over changing the rules governing the standing committees’ tenure to make it two years from the present one.

Details:

- It has been proposed to allow the panels to have enough time to work on the subjects selected by them.
- The tenure of all standing committees end on September 11, and they can’t hold deliberations till new panels are formed.
- Many chairpersons of the current panels have felt that a significant amount of the tenure of their committees was lost due to the pandemic.
- Many panels have not been able to complete reports on the subjects they were working on.
- Parliamentary Committees: Parliamentary Committees are of two kinds: Standing Committees and Ad hoc Committees.
- **Standing Committee:**
  1. Standing Committees are permanent and regular committees which are constituted from time to time in pursuance of the provisions of an Act of Parliament or Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.
  2. The work of these Committees is of continuous nature. The Financial Committees, DRSCs and some other Committees come under the category of Standing Committees.
- **Ad hoc Committee:**
  1. Ad hoc Committees are appointed for a specific purpose and they cease to exist when they finish the task assigned to them and submit a report. The principal Ad hoc Committees are the Select and Joint Committees on Bills.
  2. Railway Convention Committee, Joint Committee on Food Management in Parliament House Complex etc also come under the category of ad hoc Committees.

Judgements

6. Land acquisition order gifted govt. laxity: CJI

Why is it in news?

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) questioned the infallibility of a land acquisition judgment delivered by a Constitution Bench saying the verdict had left things “unsaid”.

Land Acquisition Verdict by Constitutional Bench:

- It dealt with payment of compensation for land acquired by the government.
- It said acquisition would not lapse as long as the government earmarked the compensation money by paying it into the treasury.
- It means, the money need not actually reach the farmer or the landowner.
• Acquisition would also not lapse just because the farmer refused the compensation and claimed higher.

7. Kesavananda Bharati, a saviour of the Constitution

Why is it in news?
• Kesavananda Bharati Swamiji, who was the sole petitioner in the historic Fundamental Rights case passed away.

Kesavananda Bharti Judgement:
• Though the judgment is a landmark case, he did not win any relief in the case.
• The amendments in the Kerala land reforms law, which he had challenged, were upheld by the Supreme Court in 1973.
• The case was heard by a Bench of 13 judges — the largest formed in the Supreme Court. It was passed with 7:6 majority.
• Basic Structure Doctrine:
  (1) The Kesavananda Bharati judgment innovated the Basic Structure doctrine which limited Parliament’s power to make drastic amendments that may affect the core values enshrined in the Constitution, like secularism and federalism.
  (2) The verdict upheld the power of the Supreme Court to judicially review laws of Parliament.
• Separation of Power: It evolved the concept of separation of powers among the three branches of governance — legislative, executive and the judiciary.

8. Special Benches to hear cases against legislators

Why is it in news?
• The Supreme Court has asked the Chief Justices of High Courts to head Special Benches and immediately hear long-pending criminal cases against sitting and former legislators.

Details:
• Over 4,400 criminal trials have been held up, some for decades, because the powerful MPs and MLAs had approached the High Courts and got an interim stay. Some date back nearly 40 years.
• The Supreme Court asked the Chief Justices to list such cases immediately before their own respective Special Benches and review if the stay on the criminal trial needs to continue at all.
• It ordered the case to be listed again in two weeks.

Policy

9. Code of Ethics for News Channel

Why is it in news?
• The News Broadcasters Association (NBA) has told the Supreme Court to make its code of ethics against airing malicious, biased and regressive content applicable to all TV news channels.

Suggestions of NBA:
• The Supreme Court should direct the government to include its ethical code in the Programme Code of the Cable Television Networks Rules, 1994.
• All news channels, whether they are NBA members or not, will then have to follow the Programme Code containing the proposed amendments.
• News Broadcasters Services Authority (NBSA) should be granted recognition as an “independent
self-regulatory mechanism” to receive and deal with complaints.

About News Broadcasters Association (NBA)

- It represents the private television news & current affairs broadcasters. It is the collective voice of the news & current affairs broadcasters in India.
- It is an organization funded entirely by its members.
- The NBA has presently 26 leading news and current affairs broadcasters (comprising 70 news and current affairs channels) as its members.
- The NBA presents a unified and credible voice before the Government, on matters that affect the growing industry.

10. Same Sex Marriages in India

Why is it in news?
- The Central government is opposing the Delhi High Court a petition seeking recognition of same-sex marriages.

Details:
- Solicitor General remarks:
  1. Our legal system, society and values do not recognise marriage between same sex couples.
  2. 2018 judgment of the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court merely decriminalises homosexuality or lesbianism, nothing more, nothing less.
- 2018 Judgment: Criminalisation of private consensual sexual conduct between adults of the same sex under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is clearly unconstitutional.

11. New grievance redress system unveiled in J&K

Why is it in news?
- It aims to create an interface with the public and focus on governance issues in the Union Territory.

Details:
- The system is being launched on a pilot basis in three districts — Jammu, Srinagar, and Reasi.
- It will gradually be rolled out in the remaining districts by October 2.
- It will replace the current portal that was launched in 2018.
- District Collectors and Deputy Commissioners will be the primary nodes for receiving, disposing and monitoring grievances.

12. Mission Karmayogi

Why is it in news?
- The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave its approval for Mission Karmayogi.

About Mission Karmayogi:
- It is a post recruitment human resource development program.
- The scheme will cover 46 lakh Central government employees at all levels, and involves an outlay of ₹510 crore over a five-year period, according to an official statement.
- An annual subscription of ₹431 will be charged per civil servant.
- Service matters such as confirmation after probation period, deployment, work assignments and notification of vacancies will all be integrated into the proposed framework.
- Public Human Resource Council: The Prime Minister’s Public Human Resource Council will be set
up as the apex body to direct the reforms, with an autonomous Capacity Building Commission to be established to manage the reformed system and harmonise training standards across the country.

- **iGOTKarmayogi**: The capacity-building programme will be delivered through an Integrated Government Online Training or iGOTKarmayogi digital platform, with content drawn from global best practices rooted in Indian national ethos.

---

**Banking Sector and Monetary Policy**

### 1. RBI alters Priority Sector Norms

**Why is it in news?**
- The Reserve Bank of India released revised Priority Sector Lending (PSL) guidelines to augment funding to segments including start-ups and agriculture.

**Fresh Categories:**
- **Following have been included as fresh categories eligible for finance under PSL:**
  1. Bank finance of up to ₹50 crore to start-ups.
  2. Loans to farmers both for installation of solar power plants for solarisation of grid-connected agriculture pumps and for setting up compressed biogas (CBG) plants.

**Weightage Assignment:**
- Higher weightage has been assigned to incremental priority sector credit in ‘identified districts’ where priority sector credit flow is comparatively low.
- The targets prescribed for ‘small and marginal farmers’ and ‘weaker sections’ are being increased in a phased manner.
- Higher credit limit has been specified for farmer producer organisations (FPOs)/farmers producers companies (FPCs) undertaking farming with assured marketing of their produce at a pre-determined price.
- Loan limits for renewable energy have been doubled.

**Significance:**
- The revision in PSL guidelines will incentivise credit flow to specific segments like clean energy, weaker sections, health infrastructure and credit deficient geographies.

**About Priority Sector Lending (PSL):**
- Priority sectors are those sectors which are considered as important for the development of the basic needs of the country.
- **Following are considered Priority Sectors:**
  1. Agriculture
  2. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
  3. Export Credit
2. **Loan Moratorium**

**Why is it in news?**
- The government clarified that the loan moratorium introduced during the lockdown “is extendable to two years”.

**Details:**
- The circulars issued by the RBI have devised a framework, which allowed concessions in interest rates and permits lenders to allow moratorium of up to two years.
- The RBI framework introduced by the circulars were specific to the pandemic situation.
- With the framework in place, banks were “fully empowered” to resolve COVID-19-related stress and customise relief to individual borrowers.
- **The various available concessions included:**
  1. Alteration to the rate of interest and haircut on amount payable as interest.
  2. Extension of the residual tenor of the loan, with or without moratorium, by up to two years.
  3. Waiver of penal interest and charges.
  4. Reschedule of repayment.
  5. Conversion of accumulated interest into a fresh loan with deferred payment schedule.
  6. Sanction of additional loan.

3. **RBI releases document on UCBs’ cybersecurity**

**Why is it in news?**
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has come out with a document to enhance cybersecurity of urban co-operative banks (UCBs).
- Active collaboration within UCBs and stakeholders would be necessary for sharing and co-ordinating various measures taken on cybersecurity aspects.

**Technology Vision for Cyber Security for Urban Co-operative Banks (UCBs) 2020-2023:**
- It plans to achieve its objective through a five-pillared strategic approach GUARD:
  1. Governance Oversight.
  2. Utile Technology Investment.
  3. Appropriate Regulation and Supervision.
  4. Robust Collaboration.
  5. Developing necessary IT, cybersecurity skill sets.

**Significance of the vision document:**
- It spires to involve more board oversight over cybersecurity.
- Enable UCBs to better manage and secure IT assets.
- Implement an offsite supervisory mechanism framework for UCBs on cybersecurity-related controls.
- Develop a forum for UCBs so that they can share best practices and discuss practical issues and challenges.
- Implement a framework for providing awareness/training for all UCBs.
4. Marginal Standing Facility (MSF)

Why is it in news?
• The Reserve Bank has decided to extend by six months the enhanced borrowing facility provided to banks to meet the shortage of liquidity till March 31, 2021.
• The move comes in the wake of ongoing economic woes created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background:
• As a temporary measure, the RBI had increased the borrowing limit for scheduled banks under the marginal standing facility (MSF) scheme.
• The borrowing limit under MSF was increased from 2% to 3% of their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL) with effect from March 27, 2020.

Marginal Standing Facility (MSF):
• MSF is a window for banks to borrow from the Reserve Bank of India in an emergency situation when inter-bank liquidity dries up completely.
• The MSF rate is pegged 100 basis points or a percentage point above the repo rate.
• MSF was launched by RBI in 2011-12.

5. Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) order

Why is it in news?
• The Supreme Court allowed telecom companies 10 years’ time to pay their adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues to the government.

Details:
• The government had proposed in court a 20-year “formula” for telcos to make staggered payments of the dues.
• However, the court say that the period of 20 years fixed for payment is excessive.
• The October 2019 judgment of the court in the AGR issue originally wanted the telcos to make the repayments in three months.
• The payment dues still amounts to ₹1.43 lakh crore.

What is AGR Issue?
• Telecom operators are required to pay licence fee and spectrum charges in the form of ‘revenue share’ to the Centre.
• The revenue amount used to calculate this revenue share is termed as the AGR.
• According to government, the calculations should incorporate all revenues earned by a telecom company, including from non-telecom sources such as deposit interests and sale of assets.
• The companies, however, have been of the view that AGR should comprise the revenues generated from telecom services only and non-telecom revenues should be kept out of it.
• Finally, the Supreme Court upheld the government's definition of adjusted gross revenue (AGR) in October judgment.

6. Merchant Export from India Scheme (MEIS)

Why is it in news?
• The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) has expressed concerns over government’s decision to cap export incentives under MEIS scheme at ₹2 crore per exporter on outbound shipments.
• FIEO said it is going to “seriously” affect traders.

Details:
• FIEO President said exports that will be made during September-December are based on orders that had been negotiated earlier, factoring in the existing Merchant Export from India Scheme (MEIS) benefit.
• These benefits are part of the export competitiveness and therefore the sudden change will affect exporters’ financially as buyers were not going to revise their prices upwards.

Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS):
• MEIS was introduced in the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) for the period 2015-2020.
• The MEIS was launched as an incentive scheme for the export of goods and the rewards are given by way of duty credit scrips to exporters.
• Government recently imposed a cap of ₹2 crore per IEC (Import Export Code), on MEIS benefit of exports made during September 1 to December 31, 2020.

7. Banking Regulation Act, 1949

Why is it in news?
• The Lok Sabha passed an amendment to the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 in September 2020.
• The amendment will bring cooperative banks under the direct supervision of the RBI.
• It will also bring cooperative banks under some of the same governance norms as commercial banks.

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

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

Background:
• According to an RBI report, there were 1,500 plus urban cooperative banks as on 31 March 2018.
• 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.

8. Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020
Why is it in news?
- Parliament recently passed the Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

Details:
- The Bill gives statutory powers to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau.
- The Bill empowers the DGCA to levy enhanced penalties of upto ₹1 crore, from the existing ₹10 lakh, on airlines, airports and other aviation entities.
- The Bill paves way for recognising regulatory bodies such as the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau.

9. Country-of-origin onus on Importers

Why is it in news?

Details:
- Importers will have to ensure that imported goods meet the prescribed ‘rules of origin’ provisions for availing concessional rate of customs duty under free trade agreements (FTAs).
- An importer would now have to enter certain origin related information in the Bill of Entry, as available in the Certificate of Origin.
- ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) FTA allows imports of most items at nil or concessional basic customs duty from the 10-nation bloc.
- Major imports to India come from five ASEAN countries are Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.
- CAROTAR 2020 supplements the existing operational certification procedures prescribed under different trade agreements.

To curb re-routing:
- The benefit of concessional customs duty rate applies only if an ASEAN member country is the country of origin of goods.
- This means that goods originating from China and routed through these countries will not be eligible for customs duty concessions under the ASEAN FTA.

10. Hike in wheat MSP

Why is it in news?
- The Cabinet has approved MSP hikes for six crops, including a 2.6% increase in the rate for wheat.
- The MSP rates were also hiked for five other winter crops- barley, gram, masur dal, safflower, and rapeseed and mustard.
- Last year, MSP for wheat had seen a 4.6% increase.

Details:
- The move comes amid large protests by farmers in the country.
- Farmers fearing that the new agricultural marketing reforms would result in the phasing out of MSP and public procurement.

About MSP
- MSP is recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), a decentralised agency under Agriculture ministry, government of India.
• MSP is price fixed by Government of India to protect the farmers against excessive fall in price during bumper production years.
• MSP announced for both RABI and Kharif SEASONS.
• CACP has categorised three types of cost of production (CoP): A2, A2+FL and C2.

11. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code Bill

Why is it in news?
• The Lok Sabha passed the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill.
• It was earlier passed by the Rajya Sabha.

Details:
• The Bill provides that insolvency proceedings against defaulting companies will not be initiated for at least six months starting from March 25. The Corporate Affairs Ministry later notified a further three-month extension in addition to six-month period.
• The creditors, including MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises), had several other options to recover their claims.
• The proposed amendments will help to prevent any company, stressed due to the COVID-19 situation, from being pushed into insolvency proceedings.
• A proviso for further extension of six months has also been given.
• The initial six-month period would end on September 24.

About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC):
• The Code offers a uniform and comprehensive insolvency legislation encompassing all companies, partnerships and individuals.
• It suggests two options:
   (1) Restructuring if the firm is viable.
   (2) Liquidation if the firm is not financially viable.
• Regulator under IBC: The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).

Time Limit:
• The IBC fixes the deadline for resolution to 330 days.
• However, as per recent Supreme Court verdict, the deadline of 330 days is not sacrosanct, as Supreme Court has asked to extend the deadline for resolution.

General Economy


Why is it in news?
• The ease of doing business rankings for states is released by the Department of Industrial Promotion and Internal Trade, Government of India.

Findings of the Report:
• Andhra Pradesh retained its top position in ease of doing business ranking 2019, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Telangana.
• Uttar Pradesh from North India, Andhra Pradesh from South India, West Bengal from East India, Madhya Pradesh from West India and Assam from North East India topped the ranking.
• Among Union Territories, Delhi bagged the top spot.
• The ranking was based on 180 reform points such as easy access to information, improved labour
laws, speedy construction permits etc.
• The 36 states/UTs participated in the action plan that is aimed at improving business environment in states by simplifying procedures, digitization of information and easing compliance burden.

About the Rankings:
• The rankings are released by Department of Industrial Promotion and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce.
• The parameters include areas such as construction permit, labour regulation, environmental registration, access to information, land availability and single-window system.

13. Startup Rankings

Why is it in news?
• Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has released its startup ecosystem rankings.

Details:
• Gujarat has again emerged as the best performer in developing start-up ecosystem for budding entrepreneurs.
• A total of 22 States and 3 UTs participated in the exercise.

Significance:
• It will help in promoting the start-up ecosystem by the Centre, States and UTs.
• Startups and many PSUs were coming forward with dedicated funds to startups.
• More than 36,000 start-ups were recognised by the department so far.

14. Draft on Interest Rate Derivatives (IRDs)

Why is it in news?
• The Reserve Bank proposed allowing foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to undertake exchange-traded rupee interest rate derivatives transactions.
• The transaction would be subject to an overall ceiling of ₹5,000 crore.

Interest Rate Derivatives (IRDs):
• IRDs are contracts whose value is derived from one or more interest rates, prices of interest rate instruments, or interest rate indices.

Aim:
• To encourage higher non-resident participation.
• Enhance the role of domestic market makers in the offshore market.
• Improve transparency and achieve better regulatory oversight.

15. Domestic Systemically Important Insurers (D-SIIs)

Why is it in news?
• The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has identified the LIC, General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC) and The New India Assurance Co. as Domestic Systemically Important Insurers (D-SIIs) for 2020-21.

Details:
• The LIC, GIC and The New India Assurance Co. are public sector insurers.
• IRDAI has asked the three public sector insurers to raise the level of corporate governance, identify
all relevant risks and promote a sound risk management culture.

About D-SIIs:

- D-SIIs are perceived as insurers that are too big or too important to fail.
- It’s distress or failure would cause a significant dislocation in the domestic financial system.
- Their continued functioning is critical for the uninterrupted availability of insurance services to the national economy.

### 16. Exports Fall

**Why is it in news?**

- According to government data, India’s exports slipped 12.7% to $22.7 billion in August 2020.
- The export has contracted for the sixth straight month.

**Details:**

- The decline in exports is on account of decline in the shipments of petroleum, leather, engineering goods and gems and jewellery items.
- India's merchandise imports also declined 26% to $29.47 billion in August.
- It lead to the trade deficit of $6.77 billion, compared with a $13.86 billion deficit a year earlier.

### 17. GDP falls 23.9% in first quarter

**Why is it in news?**

- India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) shrank by a record 23.9% in the April to June quarter in comparison to the same period last year.
- It is India's worst contraction in decades.

**Details:**

- The contraction reflects the severe impact of the COVID-19 lockdown, which halted most economic activities.
- It is also a reflection of slowdown trend of the economy even pre-COVID-19.
- The economy is in a deeply vicious cycle, where demand is contracting heavily.
- At the same time, the capacity to neutralise the contraction has also contracted equally because of the tax revenue contraction.
- Agriculture was the only sector which recorded a modest growth of 3.4% in year-on-year terms.
- Construction, manufacturing and trade, hotels and transport were the worst-hit sectors.

### 18. India's trade with China and US

**Why is it in news?**

- According to government data, the trade deficit between India and China in April-June this fiscal year fell to $5.48 billion from $13.1 billion a year earlier.

**Details:**

- Bilateral trade between the countries too dipped to $16.55 billion during the first three months of 2020-21 from $21.42 billion.
- Centre had worked to “balance trade with China by increasing exports to China and reducing our imports from China.

**US is India's largest trading partner country:**

- USA remained India's top trading partner for the second consecutive fiscal year in 2019-20.
- In 2018-19, the USA surpassed China to become India's top trading partner.
• Bilateral trade between the USA and India in 2019-20 increased to USD 88.75 billion.

19. World Bank seeks ‘universal eligibility’

Why is it in news?
• The loan of $1 billion by World Bank to India has come with a condition of “universal eligibility” in procurements.
• The loan is for the purpose to prevent, detect and respond to the threat of coronavirus and strengthen national health systems.

What Universal Eligibility means?
• All preferential market access policies shall not be applicable on purchases made while implementing the national project.
• Preferential policies including Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) Order, Micro Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) Policy, certain benefits to start-ups.
• World Bank would have the right to review the procurement documents, inspect/audit all accounts, records and other files relating to the project.
• Compliance to these conditions has been made mandatory for the funding.

More:
• This is part of the “India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Strengthening Project.”
• It is a joint initiative of the Government of India and the World Bank that has $1 billion loan disbursed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).
• The Railway Ministry is one of the implementing agencies of the project.

International Relation

Bilateral and Multilateral Relations

1. Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial cooperation (BECA)

Why is it in news?
• The USA is pushing for Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial cooperation (BECA) at the next India-U.S. 2+2 ministerial dialogue likely to held in October end.

Details:
• Beginning 2016, India has signed three foundational agreements:
  (1) Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).
  (2) Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA).
• An extension to the GSOMIA, the Industrial Security Annex (ISA), was signed at the last 2+2
dialogue.
- BECA is fourth such agreement geo spatial cooperation and information sharing.

2. **Address aspirations of Tamil people, Modi urges Rajapaksa**

**Why is it in news?**
- Prime Minister of India has urged newly elected government of Sri Lanka to fully implement the 13th Constitutional Amendment.

**Details:**
- 13th Constitutional Amendment envisages a measure of power devolution to provinces especially where Tamils are in majority.
- Prime Minister of India called on the government of Sri Lanka to address the aspirations of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace and respect within a united Sri Lanka.
- Government of Sri Lanka has expressed its confidence about realising aspirations of Tamil people.

3. **India, China agree on 5-point action plan**

**Why is it in news?**
- India and China has greed on a five-point course of action to disengage and reduce tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in a four-and-a-half-month-long stand-off at LAC.

**The five-point plan:**
- Following the consensus between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping to “not allow differences to become disputes”.
- Disengaging quickly to ease tensions.
- Abiding by the existing India-China border protocols and avoiding escalatory action.
- Continuing the dialogue between the Special Representatives, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Mr. Wang.
- Other mechanisms and working towards new confidence-building measures (CBMs).

4. **1,000 sq km now under China’S stretches along LAC in are PLA hands amid mobilisation: intelligence agencies**

**Why is it in news?**
- Intelligence agencies claimed that about 1,000 square kilometres of area in Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is now under Chinese control.

**Details:**
- China has been amassing troops and fortifying its presence along the LAC since April-May.
- From Depsang Plains to Chushul there had been a systematic mobilisation by the Chinese troops along the undefined LAC.
- The standoff at the China border continues even after several rounds of diplomatic and military level talks.
- **Buffer zones:** As per the agreement, Indian troops also moved back from their existing positions leading to creation of buffer zones at all the disputed sites.

5. **Agreement on Reciprocal Provision Supplies and Services**

**Why is it in news?**
• India and Japan signed Agreement on Reciprocal Provision Supplies and Services.

Details:
• It will allow the Armed Forces of both sides to coordinate closely in services and supplies.
• It will increase interoperability between the Armed Forces of India and Japan and assist in maintaining regional security.
• It is aimed at greater maritime cooperation and can dramatically upgrade India-Japan naval exercises as the participants are expected to share maritime facilities for mutual benefit.

6. Gilgit-Baltistan

Why is it in news?
• India has said Pakistan’s proposed election in Gilgit-Baltistan had no legal ground.

Details:
• Pakistan in recent weeks has moved to give full provincial status to the Gilgit-Baltistan region through an election slated for November.
• The region earlier was known as the “Northern Areas” and Pakistan dealt with it through a special administrative arrangement.
• India considered the entire region of Jammu and Kashmir to be its integral part.

International Groups and Agreements

7. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

Why is it in news?
• India and Pakistan are attending SAARC meeting.

About SAARC:
• Members: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
• Objective: To promote welfare of people of South Asia, accelerate economic growth and increase collaboration and mutual assistance in economic, social, culture, technology and scientific field.
• SAARC cooperation due to the COVID-19: Creation of an India-led SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund, and exchanges between regional health professionals this year.

8. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Why is it in news?
• Defence Minister was on a three-day visit to Russia for the combined meeting of Defence Ministers of the SCO, Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Member States in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of victory in the Second World War.

About SCO:
• The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation, by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.
• The SCO’s main goals are as follows: strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the
member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture

9. **UN Security Council (UNSC) Sanction’s Committee**

**Why is it in news?**
- The UN Security Council, led by France, UK and the U.S., has rejected attempts by Pakistan to designate Indians as terrorists under its 1267 Committee for Counterterrorism Sanctions.

**About UNSC:**
- The UNSC is one of the six main organs of United Nations.
- Its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, which may meet whenever peace is threatened.
- All members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council.
- While other organs of the United Nations make recommendations to member states, only the Security Council has the power to make decisions that member states are then obligated to implement under the Charter.

**1267 Committee:**
- All the 15 members of UNSC are its members and chaired by non-permanent member.
- It mandate is to look after implementation of sanctions against designated terrorist.

10. **Quad discusses Indo-Pacific infrastructure and 5G**

**Why is it in news?**
- Senior officials from the Foreign Ministries of the Quad group of countries met virtually.

**Details:**
- US government proposed “clean telcos” a list of companies considered by the U.S. administration to be free from security risks and the risk of surveillance by the Chinese government.
- Members committed to a free, open and inclusive Indo Pacific region.

**About QUAD:**
- The Quad first emerged as a cooperative response to the devastation of the 2004 tsunami, with the navies of India, Australia, Japan, and the US engaged in the coordinated delivery of humanitarian and disaster relief.
- The dialogue was first initiated by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007.
- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is a mechanism which enables dialogue between four major democracies within the Indo-Pacific region, Australia, Japan, India, and the US, on issues of regional security.
- **Objective:** To secure a rule based global order, liberal trade practices and establish and maintain the freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Due to ambivalence over growing US-China tension in Asia-Pacific, Australia had left the quad in 2008.
- During the 2017 ASEAN Summits Australia re-joined Quad in negotiations to revive the quadrilateral alliance.

11. **G7 backs extension of debt freeze**

**Why is it in news?**
• G7 finance ministers backed an extension of a G20 bilateral debt relief initiative for the world’s poorest countries.

Details:
• It said that relief initiative must be revised to address shortcomings hindering implementation.
• In a joint statement, the ministers said they “strongly regret” moves by some countries to skip participation by classifying their State-owned institutions as commercial lenders.
• Two officials from G7 countries said the reference was targeted at China, which has refused to include loans by the state-owned China Development Bank and other government-controlled entities when dealing with countries seeking debt relief.

12. China cautious on G4 push for UNSC reforms

Why is it in news?
• China has said there were “enormous divisions” and a lack of consensus on taking forward the stalled reforms of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Details:
• The Foreign Ministers of the four countries that are seeking UNSC reforms and permanent membership of the body met virtually on Wednesday, expressing their frustration at the repeated attempts to stall and derail the reforms process.
• India begins a two-year term as one of the 10 non-permanent UNSC members in January, and has said it will continue pushing for reforms that have failed to materialise over many years.
• Chinese analysts have long been dismissive of the G4, and have in the past indicated that China would not favour the inclusion.

13. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Why is it in news?
• The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) said civil rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan’s conviction for criminal contempt of court by the Supreme Court seemed to be inconsistent with the freedom of expression law guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that India was a party to.

Details:
• ICJ is an international human rights organisation comprising judges and lawyers.

More about International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):
• ICCPR is a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966.
• It came into force in 1976.
• It is monitored by the United Nations Human Rights Committee.
• It commits its parties to respect the civil and political rights of individuals, including right to life, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, electoral rights and rights to due process and a fair trial.
• ICCPR is a part of the International Bill of Human Rights.
• It is also a part of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

14. Sri Lankan govt. tables 20th Amendment Bill
Why is it in news?
• Sri Lanka’s Justice Minister tabled the contentious 20th Amendment Bill in Parliament, as Opposition members protested by raising slogans against the move.

Details:
• The draft Amendment enhances the powers of the Executive President, while replacing the preceding 19th Amendment of 2015 that sought to clip them.
• The Bill envisages a diminished role for the Prime Minister and Parliament.
• The oppositional voices, including from Tamil political parties, have cautioned that the Bill might take Sri Lanka on the path to “autocracy” and “dictatorship”.

15. UN Sanctions on Iran

Why is it in news?
• The U.S. unilaterally proclaimed on Saturday that UN sanctions against Iran were back in force and promised to punish those who violate them.

Details:
• The sanctions in question were lifted in 2015 when Iran signed on to an international agreement not to seek to build nuclear weapons.
• Virtually every other member of the Security Council disputes Washington’s ability to execute this legal pirouette, and the council has not taken the measure any further.

16. Cyprus Issue- Arms embargo of Cyprus

Why is it in news?
• The United States has said it will lift for one year its 33 years old arms embargo on Cyprus to allow "non-lethal" military goods to be sold to the Mediterranean island.
• The move is however immediately slammed by Turkey.
• US Secretary of State reaffirmed US support for a comprehensive settlement to reunify the island.

Background:
• Cyprus has effectively been divided since 1974 when Turkish forces invaded its northern third in response to an Athens-engineered Greek Cypriot coup seeking union with Greece.
• The internationally recognised government of Cyprus controls the Greek Cypriot southern part of the island.
• Turkish Cypriots maintain a self-proclaimed independent state in the north, which is only recognised by Ankara.
• Greece, Turkey and Britain are guarantor powers of the island under a convoluted treaty which granted Cyprus independence from Britain in 1960.
• Relations between the two sides came to a head in 1974 after the coup.
• The UN-backed ceasefire was eventually declared with a buffer.
• Turkey recognises Northern Cyprus as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.
• The United Nations recognises it as a territory of the Republic of Cyprus currently under Turkish occupation.
• Cyprus and Turkey have had no formal diplomatic relations since 1974.
1. Kaziranga National Park to be expanded by 3,053 hectares

Why is it in News?
- The Assam government has approved the addition of 30.53 sq km to the 884 sq km Kaziranga National Park.

Details:
- The additions include encroachment-evicted areas and suitable wildlife habitat on river islands (sandbars) that are vulnerable to encroachment.
- The three additions are habitat corridors and would help provide connectivity to Orang and Nameri National Parks across river Brahmaputra.
- Kaziranga:
  (1) It is a National Park in Assam.
  (2) It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985.
  (3) It has two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses.
  (4) Kaziranga is declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006.
  (5) Kaziranga is recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for conservation of avifaunal species.
  (6) It has populations of large herbivores include elephants, gaur and sambar.
  (7) Kaziranga has the largest population of the Wild water buffalo anywhere accounting for about 57% of the world population.
  (8) Small mammals include the rare hispid hare, large Indian civet, small Indian civets, Bengal fox, golden jackal, sloth bear, Chinese pangolin, Indian pangolins, Chinese ferret badgers, and particoloured flying squirrel.
2. Project Dolphin

Why is it in News?
- Prime Minister announced Project Dolphin on Independence Day.

Details:
- Project Dolphin will be on the lines of Project Tiger to increase the population.
- National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) so far taking measures to save dolphins.
- Gangetic dolphin:
  1. The Gangetic dolphin is one of five species of river dolphin found around the world.
  2. It is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems.
  3. Male dolphins are about 2-2.2 metres long and females are little longer at 2.4-2.6 m.
  4. An adult dolphin could weigh between 70 kg and 90 kg.
  5. The breeding season of the Gangetic dolphin extends from January to June.
  6. They feed on several species of fishes, invertebrates etc.
  7. It is ‘endangered’ under IUCN red list.
  8. While no exact count is available, various estimates suggest that the Gangetic dolphin population in India could be about 2,500-3,000.
- Why Dolphins?
  1. Aquatic life is an indicator of the health of river ecosystems.
  2. The Gangetic dolphin is at the top of the food chain.
  3. So, protecting the species and its habitat will ensure conservation of aquatic lives of the river.

3. ‘Green Blue Policy’ of New Delhi

Why is it in News?
- The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is holding public consultations for the preparation of the Master Plan for Delhi 2041.

Details:
- Master Plan has focus on water bodies and the land around it, which is referred to as the “Green-Blue policy”.
- Green-Blue Infrastructure:
  1. ‘Blue’ infrastructure refers to water bodies like rivers, canals, ponds, wetlands, floodplains, and water treatment facilities;
  2. ‘Green’ infrastructure stands for trees, lawns, hedgerows, parks, fields, and forests.
  3. Concept is that both green & blue are interdependent and grow together with social benefits.
- Delhi has around 50 big drains (blue areas) managed by different agencies.
- Due to poor condition and encroachment of drains, the land around (green areas) has been affected.
- DDA will integrate them and remove all sources of pollution.
- Challenges:
  1. Multiplicity of agencies and DDA has no supervisory power over these bodies.
  2. Cleaning of water bodies and drains.

4. Measurement of Mt Everest again

Why is it in News?
China and Nepal together decided to re-measure the elevation of the world’s highest mountain.

Details:

- **Current height:**
  1. Everest’s current official height is 8,848m since 1956.
  2. It was measured by the Survey of India.

- **Why re-measurement?**
  1. The height is known to change because of tectonic activity, such as the 2015 Nepal earthquake.
  2. There is a debate about whether the height should be based on the highest rock point or the highest snow point.
  3. In 2010:
     a. China accepted Nepal’s claim of the snow height being 8,848m.
     b. Nepal recognised the Chinese claim of the rock height at 8,844.43m.

- **Everest’s first survey:**
  1. A team was led by Andrew Waugh of the Royal Surveyor General of India.
  2. The team discovered that ‘Peak 15’ (Mt Everest) was the highest mountain, contrary to the prevailing belief that Mt Kanchenjunga (8,582 m) was the highest peak in the world.
  3. Measurement was 29000 ft which was later converted into 8,840 m.
  4. The survey, based on trigonometric calculations, is known as the Great Trigonometric Survey of India.

- **Mt Everest:**
  1. It is also known as ‘Sagarmatha’.
  2. It lies on the border between Nepal and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.
  3. In 1865 the mountain—previously referred to as Peak 15—was renamed for Sir George Everest, British surveyor general of India from 1830 to 1843.
  4. Everest is shaped like a three-sided pyramid.
  5. Glacial action has been the primary force behind the heavy and continuous erosion of Everest.

5. **California Fires**

Why is it in news?

- More than two million acres have burned across the California so far in 2020, which makes this a record year.

Details:

- **Reasons:**
  1. **Climate of California:**
     a. High temperature and strong winds of Santa Ana.
     b. Santa Anas are dry, warm (often hot) winds that blow westward through Southern California toward the coast.
     c. Lack of rainfall and high temperatures in the summer which makes vegetation dry.
6. India’s tiger census of 2018 sets Guinness record

Why is it in News?
- India’s tiger census of 2018 sets Guinness record for world’s largest camera-trap wildlife survey.

India’s tiger census of 2018:
- It is the fourth cycle of the All India Tiger Estimation.
- It counted 2,967 tigers, which is about 75% of the global tiger population.
- Camera traps were placed in 26,838 locations across 141 different sites.
- It surveyed an effective area of 1,21,337 sq.km.
The length of the tiger from the tip of its nose to the end of its tail is between 2.6 to 3 m.
- It weighs between 135-280 kgs.
- The average life span of a tiger in the wild is about 14 to 16 years.
- The Indian/Bengal tiger is found mainly in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.
- In India, tigers are found in 19 states.
- There are 50 Tiger Reserves in our country today.
- It is classified as ‘Endangered’ in IUCN list.
- It is the national animal of both India and Bangladesh.

Why is it in News?
- A quarterly report submitted by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).
- NMCG has been tasked with overseeing the implementation of the clean-up.

Details:
- Background:
  1. In 2018, the CPCB had identified 351 stretches of rivers across the country.
  2. These stretches lacked recommended standards about biochemical parameters like the Biological Oxygen Demand, Dissolved Oxygen levels, faecal coliform.
- NGT order:
  1. States were ordered to ensure that infrastructure to treat “100% of sewage generated” be created by March 31, 2021.
  2. If not done, States would be fined ₹10 lakh per incomplete sewage treatment plant (STP).
• **Report Findings:**

1. Less than 5% of polluted river stretches identified by the CPCB across the country in 2018 may be clean by year end.

2. 41 projects in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal would be completed during January 2021-March 2021.

3. States of J&K, Kerala, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh have not given timelines for completion of their ongoing projects.

4. **Reasons:**
   - (a) Sub-optimal use of sewage treatment plants.
   - (b) The COVID pandemic affected sewage treatment infrastructure.
   - (c) Non availability of funds.

8. **World Rhino Day**

**Why is it in News?**

- Cricketer Kevin Pietersen is working in collaboration with National Geographic on ‘Save This Rhino: India’.

**Details:**

- **Indian Rhino:**
  1. These are one-horned rhinoceros.
  2. It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
  3. Their upper legs and shoulders are covered in wart-like bumps.
  4. They have very little body hair, aside from eyelashes, ear fringes and tail brush.
  5. The Indian rhino's single horn is present in both males and females, but not on newborn calves.
  6. The horn is pure keratin, like human fingernails, and starts to show after about six years.
  7. Among terrestrial land mammals native to Asia, Indian rhinos are second in size only to the Asian elephant.
  8. They are also the second-largest living rhinoceros, behind only the white rhinoceros.
  9. The rich presence of blood vessels underneath the tissues in folds gives them the pinkish colour.

- **Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020):**
  1. It is a joint programme of the Department of Environment & Forests, Govt of Assam, WWF India, the International Rhino Foundation and the US fish & wildlife service.
  2. Six rhinos were translocated from Pobitora and re-introduced into the Manas National Park between December 2010 and January 2011 under this vision.
  3. Earlier, under the same programme, two rhinos were translocated from Pobitora to Manas National Park in 2008.

9. **Global Climate Summit**

**Why is it in News?**

- UN declared that global climate summit will be held on December 12.

**Details:**

- It will be co-hosted by UN and Britain.
- It will be fifth anniversary of Paris Agreement.
• United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) will be held in Glasgow in November 2021.

• COP:
  (1) The Conference of Parties (COP) is the apex decision-making body of the United Nations Climate Change Framework Convention (UNFCCC).
  (2) The UNFCCC was formed in 1994 to stabilize the greenhouse gas emissions and to protect the earth from the threat of climate change.
  (3) COP members have been meeting every year since the year 1995.
  (4) As of 2019, the number of member countries in the UNFCCC has reached 197.
  (5) The first conference (COP1) was held in 1995 in Berlin.
  (6) The 3rd conference of parties (COP3) was held in Kyoto and then after Kyoto protocol was adopted.
  (7) COP25 was held in Madrid, Spain.

10. Lion-tailed macaque

Why is it in News?
• Habitat loss puts lion-tailed macaque on IUCN's endangered list for sixth time.

Lion tailed macaque:
• It is a primate endemic to small and severely fragmented rainforests of the Western Ghats in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
• According to IUCN, the population may decline by 20% in the next 25 years due to reasons, including hunting, road kills and habitat loss.
• Its status remained 'endangered' since 1996.

![Image source: Wikipedia](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

• It has silver-white mane which surrounds the head from the cheeks down to its chin, which gives this monkey its German name Bartaffe - "beard ape".
• With a head-body length of 42 to 61 cm and a weight of 2 to 10 kg, it ranks among the smaller macaques.
• The life expectancy in the wild is approximately 20 years, while in captivity is up to 30 years.
• It is a good climber and spends a majority of its life in the upper canopy of tropical moist evergreen
forests.
- Males weigh up to 15 kg, twice as much as the smaller females.

## 11. Fridays For Future (FFF)

### Why is it in News?
- Students and youth under the banner of Fridays For Future (FFF) protested outside the Union Environment Ministry for scrapping Draft EIA 2020.

### Details:
- The school strike for climate is also known as Fridays for Future (FFF), Youth for Climate, Climate Strike or Youth Strike for Climate.
- It is an international movement of school students who skip Friday’s classes to participate in demonstrations to demand climate justice from political leaders.
- It started in August 2018, when 15-year-old Greta Thunberg began a strike in Sweden.
- One of the main goals of the movement is to put moral pressure on policy-makers, to make them listen to scientists and then to take action to limit global warming.
- It was chosen as UN’s Champion of the Earth award for inspiration and action because of its role in highlighting the devastating effects of climate change.

## 12. Amphibians in Madhya Pradesh

### Why is it in News?
- Field study adds five amphibians to Madhya Pradesh’s fauna list.

### Details:
- Wildlife institute of India have obtained molecular confirmation (through DNA) of the cryptic species.
- Cryptic species is a term used to refer to species that appear the same but show up a difference when their DNA is examined.
- **5 species added:**
  1. Dwarf toad found in peninsular India;
  2. Odisha paddy frog, an inhabitant of eastern India;
  3. Wrinkled cricket frog, earlier observed in Karnataka;
  4. Pierre’s cricket frog, seen in Nepal, Bhutan and Assam;
  5. Western burrowing frog, earlier seen in western India.

## 13. Sandalwood Spike Disease (SSD)

### Why is it in News?
- India’s sandalwood trees, particularly of Karnataka, are facing a serious threat with the return of the destructive Sandalwood Spike Disease (SSD).

### Details:
- **SSD:**
  1. It is caused by phytoplasma — bacterial parasites of plant tissues.
  2. These parasites are transmitted by insect vectors.
  3. Between 1 and 5% of sandalwood trees lost every year due to the disease.
  4. The disease was first reported in Kodagu in 1899.
  5. It is very difficult to identify the symptoms of SSD. It can be noticed only when the tree gets
completely affected.
(6) There is no cure now.
(7) Presently, there is no option but to cut down and remove the infected tree to prevent the spread of the disease.

**Sandalwood forests:**
(1) Presently, the natural populations of sandalwood are available in Marayoor in Kerala and some patches of reserve forests and adjoining areas in Karnataka.
(2) As early as 1792, Tippu Sultan had declared it a ‘Royal Tree’ of Mysuru.
(3) The price of Indian sandalwood and its oil has risen significantly since 1995 at a rate of 20% annually mainly due to depletion in production.
(4) Sandalwood is classified as “vulnerable” by the IUCN in 1998.

### 14. India-Denmark Green Strategic Partnership

**Why is it in News?**
- India and Denmark are going to launch Green Strategic Partnership.

**Details:**
- It will be helpful in delivering sustainable solutions to India.
- Danish solutions related to wind power, water technology and energy efficiency are in great demand in India.
- India supported creating an India-Denmark Skill Institute to help Danish companies operating in India to select the people that they require from the local skilled population.

---

### 5 Social Issues

#### 1. NCRB Data for 2019

**Why is it in news?**
- The annual National Crime Records Bureau report for 2019 was released recently.

**Findings of the Report:**
- The number of suicide cases and accidental deaths registered an increase across the country from the 2018 figures.
- Suicides in the country went up slightly from 1,34,516 to 1,39,123.
- The most cases of mass/family suicides were reported from Tamil Nadu (16), followed by Andhra Pradesh (14) and Kerala (11).
- The most suicides were of daily wage earners (29,092), followed by self-employed persons (14,319) and the unemployed (11,599).
- The most suicides by unemployed persons were in Kerala at 14% (1,963), followed by 10.8% in Maharashtra and 9.8% in Tamil Nadu.
- The suicide rate in cities (13.9%) was higher compared to the all-India average.

**Accidental deaths:**
- Accidental deaths in the country increased by 2.3%.
• Compared with 4,11,824 in 2018, the figure stood at 4,21,104 last year.
• The rate (per lakh population) increased from 31.1 to 31.5.
• The most casualties of 30.9% were reported in the 30-45 age group, followed by 26% in the 18-30 age group.
• Maharashtra reported the highest deaths (70,329), amounting to nearly one-sixth of the total figure.

2. Health in India’ report

Why is it in news?
• The ‘Health in India’ report recently published by the National Statistical Organisation (NSO).
• The report is based on the 75th round of the National Sample Survey (July 2017-June 2018) on household social consumption related to health.

Findings of the Report:
• Two out of five children do not complete their immunisation programme.
• Most of these children remain unprotected against measles, and partially protected against a range of other diseases.
• In the national capital, less than half of all children have been given all eight required vaccines.
• Only 58% got their polio booster dose, while 54% got their DPT booster dose.
• Among States, Manipur (75%), Andhra Pradesh (73.6%) and Mizoram (73.4%) recorded the highest rates of full immunisation.
• At the other end of the spectrum lies Nagaland, where only 12% of children received all vaccinations, followed by Puducherry (34%) and Tripura (39.6%).

Contradictions in Data:
• Across the country, only 59.2% of children under five years are fully immunised, according to the NSO report.
• This contradicts the Centre’s Health Management Information System portal data, which claimed that full immunisation coverage for 2017-18 stood at 86.7%.
• Full immunisation means that a child receives a cocktail of eight vaccine doses in the first year of life.

3. CAG Audit of Government Schools

Why is it in news?
• The Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) presented its report in Parliament.
• The audit report was focused on hygiene issues in government schools.

Outcomes of the Audit:
• Almost 40% of surveyed schools were found to be non-existent, partially constructed, or unused.
• Over 70% did not have running water facilities in the toilets, while 75% were not being maintained hygienically.
• Out of the 1,967 coeducational schools surveyed, 99 schools had no functional toilets while 436 had only one functional toilet.

Background:
• The Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyan was launched by the Human Resource Development Ministry in September 2014.
• The Abhiyan was to meet the Right to Education Act’s mandate that all schools must have separate toilets for boys and girls.
Lack of dedicated funds, poor maintenance and poor water availability in toilets were identified as major challenges.

Central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) were roped in to bridge the gap over a one-year period.

There are 10.8 lakh government schools in the country.

Overall, more than 1.4 lakh toilets were built by 53 CPSEs, with significant support coming from power, coal and oil companies.

4. **Water Heroes Contest**

**Why is it in news?**


**Details:**

- **Aim:** To reach out to people on the important subject of water conservation and management.
- Ministry of Jal Shakti wants to make water conservation a people’s movement and strengthen the water consciousness in the country.
- Though Water Heroes Contest, the Ministry hope to encourage and collect best practices in water conservation from across India.

5. **‘Streets for People’ challenge**

**Why is it in news?**

The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry launched an initiative for making cities more pedestrian-friendly.

It is said to be a response to the need for walkable urban spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry also launched the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework 2.0, which gives cities a roadmap for tackling climate change.

**More about ‘Streets for People Challenge;**

- The challenge is organised by the Smart Cities Mission.
- It would help cities provide safer means of transport with social distancing.
- All cities with a population of over 5 lakh, and capital cities, can apply for the challenge.
- Cities have to submit their proposals by February 11, 2021 and implement their interventions by May 31, 2021.
- The challenge has included the following:
  1. Creation of pedestrian-friendly streets in areas with high footfall.
  2. Re-imagining the spaces under flyovers.
  3. Re-vitalising dead spaces in neighbourhoods.
  4. Creating walking links through parks and institutional areas.

6. **State of Young Child in India Report**

**Why is it in news?**

- The Vice President, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu released ‘The State of Young Child in India’ report.
- The report is a comprehensive account of the challenges related to early child development in India.
- It take into account health, nutrition and cognitive growth of children in the 0-6 years age.
- The report has been prepared by Mobile Creches, a policy advocacy organisation which works with the underprivileged children across India.
1. **Scramjet**

*Why is it in News?*
- DRDO successfully flight tested the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV).

*Details:*
- **HSTDV:**
  1. It is an unmanned scramjet vehicle.
  2. It has a capability to travel at six times the speed of sound.
  3. For testing purpose, Agni missile was used.
- **Scramjet:**
  1. The scramjets are a variant of a category of jet engines called the air breathing engines.
  2. Engines handle airflows of speeds in multiples of speed of sound.
  3. Hypersonic speeds are those which are five times or more than the speed of sound.
- **Significance:**
  1. It is an important step in development of indigenous technology.
  2. It will boost the development of the systems built with hypersonic vehicles at its core.
  3. These can be used for both offensive and defensive hypersonic cruise missile systems.

2. **Graphene Masks**

*Why is it in News?*
- According to new research, graphene mask inactivated over 90 per cent of the virus in five minutes and almost 100 per cent in 10 minutes under sunlight.

*Graphene:*
- It is an allotrope of carbon consisting of a single layer of atoms arranged in two-dimensional honeycomb lattice.
3. **Phosphine gas on the Venus**

**Why is it in News?**
- An international team of researchers have detected traces of phosphine gas in the atmosphere of Venus.

**Phosphine Gas:**
- It is a colourless and smelly gas.
- **Formation:**
  1. It is primarily produced by some bacteria that survive in less or no oxygen environment.
  2. It is also formed by natural geochemical processes such as volcanic or meteorite activities.
- Discovery created hope for existence for extraterrestrial life on Venus.

4. **Solar Cycle 25**

**Why is it in News?**
- NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced the commencement of solar cycle 25.

**Details:**
- **Solar Cycle:**
  1. Like seasons on Earth, the Sun follows a cycle of 11 years.
  2. During cycle, solar activities fluctuate between solar minima and maxima.
  3. Solar maxima is associated with highest number of sunspots while solar minima is associated with lowest number of sunspots.
  4. A new cycle commences when the Sun has reached its lowest possible minima phase.
(5) Every time the cycle changes, the Sun’s magnetic poles reverse.
(7) Being the weakest in a century, solar cycle 24 was the fourth smallest in intensity since 1755.

- **Sunspots:**
  (1) A Sunspot is an area on the Sun that appears dark on the surface and is relatively cooler than surrounding parts.
  (2) These spots are the visible markers of the Sun’s magnetic field.
  (3) Size of Sunspots can be as large as 50,000 km in diameter.
  (4) Photosphere is the outer surface of the Sun which radiates heat and light.
  (5) On the Photosphere, Sunspots are the areas where the star’s magnetic field is the strongest.
  (6) Most Sunspots appear in groups that have their own magnetic field, whose polarity reverses during every solar cycle, which takes around 11 years.
  (7) In every such cycle, the number of Sunspots increases and decreases.
  (8) The current solar cycle, which began in 2008, is in its ‘solar minimum’ phase, when the number of Sunspots and solar flares is at a routine low.

5. **VAIBHAV Summit**

*Why is it in News?*
- Department of Science & Technology and DRDO will be organizing Vaibhav summit.

*Vaibhav:*
- Vaibhav refers ‘Vaishwik Bharatiya Vaigyanik’ summit.
- The VAIBHAV initiative aims to bring out the comprehensive roadmap to leverage the expertise and knowledge of global Indian researcher for solving emerging challenges.
- Kea areas of discussion will be Quantum Technologies, Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning, Electronics and Semi-conductor Technologies, Communication Technologies, Photonics, Data Science and Aerospace Technologies.

6. **Rusting of Moon**

*Why is it in News?*
- Union Minister Jitendra Singh said that images sent by Chandrayaan-1 suggest that the moon may be rusting along the poles.

*Details:*
- Recent study found an oxidised iron mineral called hematite (Fe2O3) at high latitudes on the Moon.
- Lunar hematite is formed through oxidation of the iron on the Moon's surface by the oxygen from Earth’s upper atmosphere.
- Along with the oxygen, water on the lunar surface and heat from interplanetary dust also helped in the oxidation process.
- NASA's ARTEMIS missions can bring some hematite samples, and detailed chemical studies can confirm if the lunar hematite was indeed oxidised by Earth’s oxygen.

7. **Brucellosis**

*Why is it in News?*
- More than 3,000 people have been infected with the Brucellosis disease and no fatalities have
been reported so far.

Brucellosis:
- It mainly infects cattle, swine, goats, sheep and dogs.
- Humans can get infected if they come in direct contact with infected animals or by eating or drinking contaminated animal products or by inhaling airborne agents.
- Symptoms of the disease include fever, sweats, malaise, anorexia, headache and muscle pain.
- Some long term symptoms include recurrent fevers, arthritis, swelling of the testicles and scrotum area, swelling of the heart, neurologic symptoms, chronic fatigue, depression and swelling of the liver or spleen.

8. Cloud computing for better flood inundation mapping

Why is it in News?
- Researchers have developed a tool for a near real-time mapping of flood extent.

Details:
- Flood inundation maps can help in better flood risk preparedness.
- **Synthetic aperture radar (SAR):**
  1. Space-based sensors known as SAR have been used widely for monitoring and mapping of flood-water inundation.
  2. SAR is capable of acquiring data in all-weather condition.
- The data from the satellites was utilised on a cloud-based platform known as Google Earth Engine (GEE) for the rapid processing of big data.
- **Cloud Computing:**
  1. Cloud computing is the delivery of on-demand computing services -- from applications to storage and processing power -- typically over the internet and on a pay-as-you-go basis.
  2. Rather than owning their own computing infrastructure or data centers, companies can rent access to anything from applications to storage from a cloud service provider.
  3. Large clouds, predominant today, often have functions distributed over multiple locations from central servers.

9. Gravitational Lensing

Why is it in News?
- Recently a study finds that even smaller concentrations of matter can show gravitational lensing.

Gravitational Lensing:
- **Concept:**
  1. As the light emitted by distant galaxies passes by massive objects in the universe, the gravitational pull from few objects can distort or bend the light.
  2. That is, mass bends light.
  3. This is called gravitational lensing.
  4. It is an effect of Einstein's theory of general relativity.
• **Nature:**
  1. Strong gravitational lensing can actually result in such strongly bent light that multiple images of the light-emitting galaxy are formed.
  2. Weak gravitational lensing results in galaxies appearing distorted, stretched or magnified.
  3. Analysing the nature of gravitational lensing patterns tells astronomers about the way dark matter is distributed within galaxies and their distance from Earth.

• **Dark matter:**
  1. Dark matter is invisible, but it does have mass.
  2. It is around 85% of the mass of the Universe.
  3. This means that light rays coming towards us from distant galaxies will pass through the gravitational field of dark matter.
  4. Hence light will be bent by the lensing effect.

### 10. Outbreak of Scrub Typhus

**Why is it in News?**
- Five people in Nagaland’s Noklak district died due to outbreak of Scrub Typhus disease.

**Scrub Typhus:**
- It is a bacterial disease and caused by a bacteria called Orientia tsutsugamushi.
- It is also known as bush typhus.
- It spreads to people through bites of larval mites.
- Its symptoms include fever, headache, body ache, and sometimes rash.
- Scrub typhus should be treated with the antibiotic doxycycline. Doxycycline can be used in persons of any age.
- No vaccine is available to prevent scrub typhus.

### 11. Cyanobacteria

**Why is it in News?**
- Toxins in water produced by Cyanobacteria killed 330 elephants in Botswana.

**Details:**
- Cyanobacteria are microscopic organisms.
- They found in water and sometimes in soil.
- Sometimes, they produce toxins due to increasing temperatures in the background of climate change.
1. **JIMEX 2020**

**Why is it in news?**
- The 4th edition of the biennial India and Japan naval exercise JIMEX 200 has started in Arabian Sea.

**Details:**
- This is the first exercise following the conclusion of the mutual logistics support agreement.
- JIMEX-20 shows high degree of inter-operability and joint operational skills through conduct of a multitude of advanced exercises, across the spectrum of maritime operations.

2. **National Investigation Agency**

**Why is it in news?**
- The government has empowered the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to investigate offences under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

**Details:**
- After this, the agency need not rely on local police to unravel drug trade ties that emerge during counter-terrorism operations.
- As per the notification, NIA officers of inspector rank and above have been vested with the same powers as an officer in charge of a police station under the 1985 NDPS law.

**About NIA:**
- NIA is established under NIA act 2008, enacted after Mumbai terror attack.
- It functions as the Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in India.
- **Scheduled offences:** The schedule to the Act specifies a list of offences which are to be investigated and prosecuted by the NIA.
  1. These include offences under Acts such as the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967.
  2. 2019 amendment to NIA act 2008 added the following offences (i) human trafficking, (ii) offences related to counterfeit currency or bank notes, (iii) manufacture or sale of prohibited arms, (iv) cyber-terrorism, and (v) offences under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908.
- **Jurisdiction of the NIA:**
  1. The officers of the NIA have the same powers as other police officers in relation to investigation of above mentioned offences, across India.
  2. 2019 amendment increased the jurisdiction scheduled offences committed outside India, subject to international treaties and domestic laws of other countries.
  3. The Special Court in New Delhi will have jurisdiction over these cases.

3. **National Security Plan for Cyberspace**
Why is it in news?
- National Security Advisor announced that the central government is coming with National Security Plan for Cyberspace.

Details:
- The proposed cyber security plan aimed at bringing together all cyber security agencies for securing, strengthening and synergizing cyber system ecosystem.
- It will closely associate with business and citizens.
- Need for Such plan:
  (1) 500% increase in incidents of cybercrimes.
  (2) Financial frauds are increasing due digitization.

4. Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)

Why is it in news?
- Home Ministry has cancelled the licenses of six NGOs under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).

About FCRA
- FCRA is a law enacted by Parliament to regulate foreign contribution (especially monetary donation) provided by certain individuals or associations to NGOs and others within India.
- The act, in its consolidating form, was originally passed in 1976 and majorly modified in 2010.
- The government has used the act over the years to freeze bank accounts of certain NGOs who it found were affecting India’s national interest for wrong purposes.

8

Culture

1. Ranati Chola inscription

Why is it in News?
- Inscription of Renati Chola has been discovered.

Details:
- Inscription:
  (1) It belongs to the 8th Century A.D.
  (2) It is written in Telugu language.
- Renati Cholas:
  (1) Telugu Cholas of Renadu were called as Renati Cholas.
  (2) They ruled over Renadu region (Present Andhra Pradesh's Kadapa district) in Rayalaseema between 6th-8th century.
  (3) The earliest of this family was Nandivarman (500 AD).
  (4) He claimed descent from the family of Karikala Cholas.
  (5) They were later defeated by Eastern Chalukyas.
  (6) They were the first to use Telugu in administration and inscriptions instead of Sanskrit.
2. **Kakati Devi Temple**

**Why is it in News?**
- Conservation efforts of Kakati Devi Temple built by emperor Ganapati Deva, a mighty ruler of Kakatiya dynasty, has been neglected.

**Details:**
- **Kakati devi temple:**
  1. It is a 13th century temple.
  2. Its ceiling bears decorations of lotus medallions and has no sikhara on its top.
  3. **Goddess idol:**
     - (a) She is seated in Padmasana with eight hands.
     - (b) Her facial features are oval, distinguished with slender cheeks, wide open eyes, an elongated nose and closed tender pair of lips.
     - (c) She has eight hands and poses eight different special attributes.
     - (d) Her lower right hand is benevolently blessing the devotees.
- **Ganapati Deva:**
  1. He annexed the Andhra Region to his kingdom.
  2. He made matrimonial alliances with Kota chiefs of Dharanikota region by giving his daughter Ganapamba in marriage to Kota Beta Raja.
  3. Ganapati Deva is the first king who introduced the worship of Kakati Devi into the coastal region of Andhra.

3. **Origin of Indian Culture Panel**

**Why is it in News?**
- Union Ministry considering the reconstitution of ‘Origin of Indian Culture Panel’ due to failure of submission of report till date.

**Origin of Indian Culture Panel**
- It was formed in 2016.
- It has objective of ‘holistic study of origin and evolution of Indian culture since 12000 years ago’.
- **Criticism:**
  1. It has been criticized since inception due to its composition which lacks diverse background members.
  2. It didn’t have members from Dalit and minorities.
  3. It also didn’t have woman member.

4. **Jnanpith Award**

**Why is it in News?**
- Jnanpith Award was given to Malayalam poet Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri.

**Details:**
- **Akkitham:**
  1. He became the sixth writer to bring Jnanpith Award to Malayalam literature.
  2. He is the only living poet being called Mahakavi (great poet) in Malayalam.
  3. His famous works are Pathalathinte Muzhakkam, Irupatham Noottandinte Ithihasam, and Balidarshanam.
  4. He was awarded Padmashri in 2017.
**Jnanpith award:**
(1) It is presented annually by the Bharatiya Jnanpith to an author for their "outstanding contribution towards literature".
(2) It was instituted in 1961.
(3) The award is bestowed only on Indian writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India and English.
(4) It is not a posthumous conferral.

---

**PIB GIST**

1. **Indian Power Market goes Green**

**Why is it in News?**
- Union Power Minister launches Pan-India Green Term Ahead Market (GTAM) in electricity.

**Details:**
- **GTAM features:**
  (1) Transactions through GTAM will be bilateral in nature with clear identification of corresponding buyers and sellers.
  (2) GTAM contracts will be segregated into Solar RPO & Non-Solar RPO as RPO targets are also segregated.
  (3) Price discovery will take place on a continuous basis i.e. price time priority basis.

- **Impact:**
  (1) The introduction of GTAM platform would lessen the burden on RE-rich States and incentivize them to develop RE capacity.
  (2) GTAM platform will lead to increase in number of participants in renewable energy sector.
  (3) It will benefit buyers of RE through competitive prices and transparent and flexible procurement.
  (4) It will also benefit RE sellers by providing access to pan-India market.

2. **US-India 2020 Summit of US-ISPF**

**Why is it in News?**
- Prime Minister of India delivered the Special Key Note Address at the US-India 2020 Summit through video conference.

**Details:**
- The Theme of the 5-day Summit is “US-India Navigating New Challenges”.
- **ISPF:**
  (1) ISPF stands for India Strategic Partnership Forum.
  (2) The US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) is a non-profit organization that works for the partnership between India and the U.S.
  (3) It was established in 2017.
  (4) It aims at strengthening economic & commercial ties between USA and India.
3. Start-Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme

Why is it in News?
- Start-Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) is propelling enterprises in rural areas and building rural entrepreneurs.

More about the Programme:
- SVEP is implemented by Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Ministry of Rural Development, as a sub-scheme since 2016.
- SVEP focusses on providing self-employment opportunities with financial assistance and training in business management and soft skills.
- It is creating local community cadres for promotion of enterprises.
- SVEP addresses three major pillars of rural start-ups namely - finances, incubation and skill ecosystems.
- SVEP promotes both individual and group enterprises, set-up and promote enterprises majorly on manufacturing, trading and service sectors.

4. Australia-India-Japan Economic Ministers’ Joint Statement on Supply Chains Resilience

Why is it in News?
- Joint Ministerial Statement adopted during the Trilateral Ministerial Meeting on supply chain resilience held.

Details:
- The Ministers underscored the necessity and potential to enhance the resiliency of supply chains in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Reasons cited for enhancement are the COVID-19 crisis and the global-scale changes in the economic and technological areas.
- The Ministers shared their intention to work toward the launch of a new initiative to achieve the objective through cooperation.
- The Ministers called for other countries in the region, which share the afore-mentioned views, to participate in the initiative.

5. ADB & India Sign $500 Million Loan

Why is it in News?
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India today signed a $500 million loan for Delhi-Meerut RRTS Corridor.

Details:
- It is the first tranche of a total $1 billion facility.
- It is to build a modern, high-speed 82-kilometer Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor.
- It will improve regional connectivity and mobility in India’s national capital region (NCR).

6. ARISE-ANIC Initiative

Why is it in News?
- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) launched the Aatmanirbhar Bharat ARISE-Atal New India Challenges,
to spur applied research and innovation in Indian MSMEs and startups.

Details:
- The programme will be driven by ISRO, four ministries—Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Food Processing Industries; Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs—and associated industries.
- It will facilitate innovative solutions to sectoral problems.
- It will support deserving applied research-based innovations by providing funding support of up to Rs 50 lakh for speedy development of the proposed technology solution.

7. **PM Matsya Sampada Yojana**

Why is it in News?
- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched PM Matsya Sampada Yojana.

Details:
- It is being launched in 21 States of the country with an investment of Rs 20,000 Crores which would be spent in the next 4-5 Years.
- Scheme provides for new infrastructure, modern equipment and access to new markets to the fish producers.
- It will provide increased opportunities for through farming as well as other means.
- The goal is to double fish exports in the coming 3-4 years.

8. **Shikshak Parv Initiative**

Why is it in News?
- Ministry of Education organized a webinar on Reimagining Vocational Education under Shikshak Parv Initiative.

Shikshak Parv initiative:
- It celebrated from 8th-25th September 2020.
- It aims at felicitation of the teachers and to implement New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 effectively.

9. **New All India Institute of Medical Sciences**

Why is it in News?
- The Union Cabinet has approved establishment of a new All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) at Darbhanga, Bihar.

Details:
- It will be established under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY).
- Establishment of new AIIMS involves creation of Hospital, Teaching Block for medical & nursing courses, residential complex and allied facilities/services, broadly on the pattern of AIIMS, New Delhi.
- The objective is to establish the new AIIMS as Institution of National Importance for providing quality tertiary healthcare, medical education, nursing education and research in the Region.

10. **Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda Bill 2020**

Why is it in News?
- Parliament passes the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda Bill 2020.
Details:

- It paves the way to establish a state-of-the-art Ayurvedic institution called the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA) at Jamnagar, Gujarat.
- **This is a cluster of highly reputed institutions:**
  1. Institute for Post Graduate Teaching and Research in Ayurveda.
  2. Shree GulabKunverba Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya.
  3. Institute of Ayurvedic Pharmaceutical sciences.
  4. MaharshiPatanjali Institute for Yoga Naturopathy Education & Research.
- ITRA will be the first institution with INI status in the AYUSH Sector.
- This will enable the institution to be independent and innovative in the matter deciding course content and pedagogy.

11. Global Initiative to reduce Land Degradation and Coral Reef program

**Why is it in News?**

- Global Initiative to reduce Land Degradation and Coral Reef program launched at G20 Environment Ministers Meet.

**Details:**

- It aims to strengthen the implementation of existing frameworks to prevent, halt, and reverse land degradation within G20 member states and globally.
- The Global Coral Reef R&D Accelerator Platform is an innovative action-oriented initiative aimed at creating a global research and development (R&D) program.

12. Swamih Investment Fund

**Why is it in News?**

- Special Window for Completion of Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (Swamih Investment Fund) Created.

**Details:**

- It will provide Last Mile Funding to Stressed Affordable and Middle-Income Housing Project.
- **It has been created for funding stalled projects that are:**
  1. Net-worth positive, including those projects that have been declared as Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).
  2. Pending proceedings before the National Company Law Tribunal under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.


**Why is it in News?**


**Details:**

- It aims at reduction of adverse consequences of drug abuse through a multi-pronged strategy involving education, de-addiction and rehabilitation of affected individuals and their families.
- **The activities under the NAPDDR include:**
  1. Awareness generation programmes in schools/colleges/Universities.
  2. Workshops/ seminars/ with parents.
14. Strengthening Clinical Trial Research Capacity in Neighbouring Countries

Why is it in News?
- Department of Biotechnology launches Programme for “Strengthening Clinical Trial Research Capacity in Neighbouring Countries”.

Details:
- The programme will help neighbouring countries and LMICs to build capacities for Covid-19 vaccine trials.
- The Department of Biotechnology, Government of India aims to strengthen the development of vaccines and associated competencies/technologies for the diseases of epidemic potential in India.
- It is being done through the Ind-CEPI mission (India Centric Epidemic Preparedness) for Rapid Vaccine Development and Supporting Indian Vaccine Development which is aligned with the Global Initiative of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI).

15. India - Denmark MoU

Why is it in News?
- India, Denmark signed MoU on Intellectual Property cooperation.

Details:
- The MoU aims at increasing IP co-operation through:
  1. Exchange of best practices, experiences and knowledge on IP awareness.
  2. Collaboration in training programmes, exchange of experts, technical exchanges and outreach activities.
  3. Exchange of information and best practices on processes for disposal of applications for patents, trademarks, industrial designs and Geographical Indications, as also the protection, enforcement and use of IP rights.
  4. Cooperation to understand how Traditional Knowledge is protected; including the use of traditional knowledge related databases and awareness raising of existing IP systems.

16. 20 years of Himalayan Chandra Telescope

Why is it in News?
- Himalayan Chandra Telescope (HCT) at the Indian Astronomical Observatory (IAO) in Ladakh has completed 20 years.

Details:
- It is the 2-m diameter optical-infrared telescope.
- It has been scanning the night sky in search of stellar explosions, comets, asteroids, and exoplanets.
- The telescope remotely operated using a dedicated satellite communication link from the Centre for Research & Education in Science & Technology (CREST), Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA).
- Thrust research areas are study of:
  1. Comets, asteroids.
1. **Global Innovation Index (GII)**

**Why is it in news?**
- As per the latest report, India jumps 4 places, ranks among top 50 countries for first time ever in Global Innovation Index.
- India ranked 48th in 2020.
- Switzerland, Sweden, the US, the UK and the Netherlands are top 5 countries.
- Top 10 positions are dominated by high-income countries.
- The theme of this year's GII - Who Will Finance Innovation?

**About the Index:**
- Global Innovation Index (GII) is released jointly by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Cornell University and INSEAD Business School.
- WIPO is the global forum for intellectual property (IP) services, policy, information and cooperation. It is a self-funding agency of the United Nations, with 193 member states.
- GII provides detailed metrics about the innovation performance of 131 countries and economies around the world.
- GII has 80 indicators. It explore a broad vision of innovation, including political environment, education, infrastructure and business sophistication.

2. **World Solar Technology Summit**

**Why is it in news?**
- The first ever World Solar Technology Summit (WSTS) is being organised by the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

**Details:**
- More than 26,000 participants from 149 countries have registered to join the virtual summit.
- New and Renewable Energy Minister R K Singh, who is president of the ISA Assembly will be joined by the vice presidents of ISA from Africa, Asia Pacific during the inaugural address.
- **Objective:** To bring the spotlight on accelerating affordable and sustainable clean energy by showcasing and deliberating on innovative next generation technologies in solar power.

**About International Solar Alliance (ISA):**
- ISA is an intergovernmental organisation launched in November 2015 during the 21st session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP-21) in Paris, France.

---

(2) The study of star formation processes and young stellar objects.

(3) Study of open and globular clusters and variable stars in them.

(4) Abundance analysis of elements in the atmosphere of evolved stars.

(5) Star formation in external galaxies.

(6) Active Galactic Nuclei, stellar explosions like novae, supernovae, gamma-ray bursts etc.
• It was jointly launched by India and France.
• It aims to contribute to the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through rapid and massive deployment of solar energy.
• Initially it was conceived as a coalition of solar-resource-rich countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
• However, the ISA Framework Agreement was amended later to allow all the members of the United Nations to join ISA.
• Till date (July 31, 2020), a total of 87 countries have signed the framework agreement of the ISA.
• The Headquarter of ISA is in Gurugram in Haryana, India.

3. Singapore Convention on Mediation

Why is it in news?
• The Singapore Convention on Mediation came into force on 12 September 2020.

Details:
• Singapore Convention is the first UN treaty to be named after Singapore.
• It is also known as the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation.
• The convention provide a more effective way for enforcing mediated settlements of corporate disputes involving businesses.
• It will facilitate international trade and commerce by enabling disputing parties to easily enforce and invoke settlement agreements across borders.
• India has signed the convention.
• It would help boost India’s ‘ease of doing business’ credentials.

4. Body to monitor net neutrality

Why is it in news?
• The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommended the creation of a multi-stakeholder body (MSB) to ensure that Internet access providers adhere to the provisions of net neutrality.

More From TRAI:
• The MSB could include telecom service providers, Internet service providers, content providers, researchers, academic and technical community, civil society organisations, and the government.
• It should be set up as a non-profit entity.
• The role of the MSB shall be to provide advice and support to DoT in the monitoring and enforcement of net neutrality principles.
• The MSB may also be required to investigate complaints regarding the violation of net neutrality.
• MSB should help DoT in maintenance of a repository of reasonable traffic management practices.

How Net neutrality works?
• When a web user connects to a website or web service, he or she gets the same speed.
• Data rate for Youtube videos and Facebook photos is theoretically same.
• Users can access any legal website or web service without any interference from an ISP (Internet Service Provider).
• Web users are free to connect to whatever website or service they want. ISPs do not bother with what kind of content is flowing from their servers.
Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI):

- Established in 1997 by an Act of parliament to regulate telecom services. An independent regulator.
- Its mandate is to deliver a fair and transparent environment for fair competition in telecom market.
- TRAI also fixes or revises the tariffs for telecom services in India.

5. Cess Receipts

Why is it in news?

- As per the CAG report, the Centre retained in the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) more than ₹1.1 lakh crore out of the almost ₹2.75 lakh crore collected in 2018-19 through various cesses.
- Government retained it instead of transferring the receipts to the specified Reserve Funds that Parliament had approved for such levies.

More from CAG:

- The Union Government collected ₹2,74,592 crore from 35 cesses and levies in 2018-19.
- Under the scheme, such cesses and levies are required to be first transferred to designated Reserve Funds and utilised for the specific purposes intended by Parliament.
- However, only ₹1,64,322 crore was transferred to Reserve Funds/Boards and the rest was retained in the Consolidated Fund.
- The GST Compensation Cess, was also ‘short-credited’ to the relevant reserve fund to the extent of ₹40,806 crore in 2018-19.

Integrated GST (IGST):

- Flawed IGST accounting led to States receiving less funds from the Centre.
- A sum of ₹15,001 crore collected as IGST was erroneously transferred and accounted as States’ share of net proceeds of IGST instead of being apportioned between Centre and States.
- A balance of ₹13,944 crore was also left ‘unapportioned’ and retained in the CFI.

6. CAG on GST and PSU stake sale

Why is it in news?

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has mooted an investigation against the Central government’s accounting officials.
- The accounting officials has incorrectly recorded ₹10,250 crore of cess receipts from additional excise duties on petrol and diesel, as non-tax receipts for the exchequer in 2018-19.

Details:

- Cess collections from petrol and diesel are to be routed to the Central Road Fund (CRF).
- CRF was created by the Parliament as a dedicated non-lapsable Reserve Fund to be used only for designated purposes.
- The CRF was replaced with a Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) through amendments introduced in the Union Budget for 2018-19.

PSU stake sale:

- The strategic sale of four public sector units to other public sector entities was done in 2018-19 by the Central government.
- According to CAG, such disinvestments only resulted in transfer of resources already with the public sector to the government.
The stake sale did not lead to any change in the stake of the public sector / government in the disinvested PSU.

7. **Dismantling of INS Viraat set**

**Why is it in News?**
- The world's longest serving warship, INS Viraat will be dismantled at Alang.

**Details:**
- It holds the Guinness record for the world's longest-serving warship.
- Alang is the world’s largest ship breaking yard.
- **Environmental risks of ship breaking:**
  1. Large amounts of carcinogens and toxic substances (PCBs, PVCs, PAHs, TBT, mercury, lead, isocyanates, sulfuric acid) not only intoxicate workers but are also dumped into the soil and coastal waters.
  2. Ecologically-important mangrove forests have been cut down to provide space for water-craft disassembly.
  3. India passes the planned "Recycling of Ships Act, 2019" which ratifies the Hong Kong International Convention for the safe and environmentally sound recycling of ships.

**The Basel Convention on the Control of Trans-boundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal of 1989:**
- It aims to stop the transportation of dangerous substances to less developed countries.

8. **Digital Literacy Services**

**Why is it in News?**
- WhatsApp partners with Common Services Center to deliver Digital Literacy Services via Chatbot.

**Details:**
- It will enable citizens to receive digital literacy services and resources.
- It also aims to “bridge the digital divide and push rural entrepreneurship”.
- **Common Service Centres:**
  1. It offers web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas.
  2. **Services provided:**
     - Agriculture Services (Agriculture, Horticulture, Sericulture, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries, Veterinary).
     - Education & Training Services (School, College, Vocational Education, Employment, etc.)
     - Health Services (Telemedicine, Health Check-ups, Medicines).
     - Rural Banking & Insurance Services (Micro-credit, Loans, Insurance).
     - Entertainment Services (Movies, Television).
     - Utility Services (Bill Payments, Online bookings).
     - Commercial Services (DTP, Printing, Internet Browsing, Village level BPO).

9. **Indra 2020**

- India and Russia are scheduled to hold the bilateral naval exercise, Indra 2020, in the Andaman Sea, close to the strategic Strait of Malacca.
- The event comes amid high operational alert by the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) due to the ongoing stand-off with China in Ladakh.
10. Karnataka to seek nod for Mekedatu project

Why is it in News?
• Karnataka may send delegation to take centre’s approval for construction of Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir.

Details:
• Reservoir is proposed to store water for drinking purposes.
• Project is located in the midst of the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary.

Image: Indian Express

• History:
(1) It was approved by State government in 2017.
(2) It was also approved by Union Water Resources Ministry.
(3) It is awaiting the approval of Environment ministry as Tamil Nadu approached Supreme Court against project.
• One of the counterarguments is 63% of the forest area of the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary will be submerged.
• Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary:
(1) The Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary is a protected area located in the Mandya, Chamarajanagar and Ramanagar districts of Karnataka, India.
(2) The sanctuary mainly consists of dry deciduous forest, southern tropical dry thorn and riverine forests.
(3) The dominant species of trees found in this sanctuary are Terminalia arjuna and jambul.
(4) It is home to mammals like tiger, elephant, wild boar, leopard, dhole, spotted deer, barking deer, sambar, four-horned antelope, black-naped hare.
(5) It is home to grizzled giant squirrel which is under the highly endangered category in the state of Karnataka (but under IUCN Red List as near threatened).

11. Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP)

Why is it in News?
• NZP authorities are worried over death of 2 sloth bears.

NZP:
• It is a zoo and botanical garden in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.
• It was established in 1960 and opened to the public in 1979.
• It became the first zoo in India to join World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) in 2009.
• Nandankanan, literally meaning The Garden of Heaven.
To help involve the general public in animal conservation and raise money, the zoo started the Adopt-an-Animal programme in 2008 for all of its animals.

12. Restoration of Grasslands in Rajasthan

Why is it in News?
• A special drive to uproot the invasive lantana bushes in Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary.

Details:
• Lantana:
  (1) It is a thicket forming shrub.
  (2) Its expansion had stopped the natural growth of grass and other shrubs.
  (3) The toxic substance in its foliage and ripe berries affected animals.
• Sajjangarh wildlife sanctuary:
  (1) It is located in Udaipur district of Rajasthan.
  (2) The area was made a wildlife sanctuary in 1987.
  (3) In 2017, sanctuary was declared to be an Eco-Sensitive Zone by the Government of India.

13. Vodafone wins $2 bn tax case

Why is it in News?
• The Vodafone Group Plc won an international arbitration case against the Indian government, involving a $2 billion tax claim.

Details:
• An international arbitration tribunal in The Hague ruled that India’s imposition of a tax liability on Vodafone, as well as interest and penalties, were in a breach of an investment treaty agreement between India and the Netherlands.
• Timeline:
  (1) 2007: Vodafone, in a $11 billion deal, buys the Indian mobile assets from Hutchison Whampoa.
  (2) India claims $3.79 billion, including about $2 billion in tax, as well as interest and penalties.
  (3) Telecom company contests the decision.
  (4) 2012: Supreme Court rules in favour of the telecom services provider.
  (5) Government changes rules to enable it to tax deals that had already been concluded.
  (6) 2014: Vodafone initiates arbitration proceedings against India at The Hague.