Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs
January 2020

By Jawwad Kazi
UPSC

Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs January 2020
(Study Material)

By Jawwad Kazi

https://t.me/jawwadkazicurrentaffairs

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# Contemporary Issues

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<td>Two Coast Guard ships commissioned at Kolkata</td>
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<td>India successfully test-fires 3,500-km range submarine-launched ballistic missile K-4</td>
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# Regulation of Coal Mining in India

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<td>Q. What are the legal provisions dealing with coal mining in India? Discuss briefly the issues involved and suggest suitable remedies for enhancing the Ease of Doing Business in the coal sector.</td>
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<td>Why is it in news?</td>
<td>The Union Cabinet has approved the promulgation of <strong>Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance 2020</strong> which seeks to amend - (1) Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957 (2) Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act 2015. (It provides for the auction and allocation of mines whose allocation was cancelled by the SC in 2014.)</td>
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<td>Objective</td>
<td>(1) Make entry in coal mining sector easier (2) Liberalize rules for mining and selling coal</td>
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<td>Introduction</td>
<td><strong>Earlier position:</strong> Only those entities which are engaged in <strong>power, iron and steel, and coal washery business</strong> could bid for mines and the bidders needed prior experience of mining in India =&gt; limited clique could bid leading to less realisation of value for Govt. <strong>Eligibility for bidding:</strong> The ordinance allows any company having its registered office in India to take part in the bidding process for allocation of coal blocks. <strong>Removal of end user restriction:</strong> The ordinance will allow the successful bidder/allottee to utilise mined coal in for <strong>own consumption, sale or for any other purposes</strong> =&gt; wider participation. <strong>Composite Prospective licence cum mining lease:</strong> The ordinance will offer the unexplored and partially explored coal blocks for mining through <strong>prospecting license-cum-mining Lease (PL-cum-ML)</strong> =&gt; <strong>widening of inventory of coal blocks.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent developments</td>
<td><strong>2018:</strong> Commercial mining was allowed to private entities but <strong>non-coal companies were not eligible</strong> for taking part in the bidding process. <strong>2019:</strong> 100 % FDI under the automatic route in coal mining for open sale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation of coal sector in India</td>
<td><strong>The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957:</strong> It regulates the mining sector in India and specifies the requirement for obtaining and granting mining leases for mining operations. <strong>The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015:</strong> Allocation of coal mines to successful bidders To ensure <strong>continuity</strong> in coal mining operations and production of coal <strong>Ownership of Mineral:</strong> The State Government is the owner of mineral deposits located within the boundary of the State concerned. <strong>Grant of Mineral Concessions</strong> The state governments grant permission for mining which are known as mineral concessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minerals specified in the First Schedule to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957:</strong> approval of the Central Government is necessary.</td>
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<td><strong>Minerals in Schedule I:</strong> Coal and lignite, minerals of the “rare earths” group containing Uranium and Thorium, hydrocarbons, atomic minerals and metallic minerals such as iron ore, bauxite copper ore, lead precious stones, zinc and gold.</td>
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**Significance of the new ordinance**

| Employment generation: The new ordinance seeks to attract private investments in the coal mining sector which will generate opportunities for employment in these industries. |
| Innovations in Mining technology: Infusion of sophisticated mining technology, especially for underground mines, if multinational companies (MNCs) come in. |
| Ending monopoly of Coal India Ltd. (CIL): The move will end the monopoly of Coal India Limited. |
| Picking up demand: set off demand in critical sectors such as mining equipment and heavy commercial vehicles. |
| Companies which do not possess any prior coal mining experience in India but are financially strong and or have mining experience in other minerals or in other countries, can now participate in auction. |
| Allow the implementation of the 100% FDI through automatic route for sale of coal. |

**Challenges in Coal sector**

| High operation and maintenance costs: Coal plants have higher operation and maintenance costs because of strict regulatory issues. |
| Flooding of mines: |
| (1) If the water table is too high, the mine floods with water. |
| (2) Recently there were cases of flooding of coal mines which risks the life of miners. |
| (3) Also, there are no specific set of guidelines with respect to periodic water table surveys to avoid such accidents. |
| Huge imports: |
| (1) India has the fourth largest coal reserves in the world. |
| (2) The country imported 235 million tonnes coal worth Rs 1.75 lakh crore last year out of which around 130 million tonnes could have been substituted by domestic production. |
| Infrastructural bottlenecks: There are bottlenecks in domestic coal transportation and lack of infrastructure such as proper road connectivity due to result major portion of coal mines is transported through railways which consumes greater time. |
| Land Acquisition issue: Obstacles and delays due to land acquisition issues as well as strict rules and regulations of various state governments regarding land acquisition. |

**Way forward**

| Safeguarding interests of CIL: It is a Maharatna PSU and employs about 3 lakh persons in its various facilities. |
| Ensuring transparency in bidding process: Utmost transparency should be ensured by making use of ICT for bidding and allocation of coal blocks. |
| Simplifying leasing and clearance procedures: The procedures for leasing of mines and obtaining clearances needs to be streamlined. |
**Single window clearance system**: A single window clearance system should be established in all states for quick disposal of the pending and fresh mining applications.

**Investments in R&D**: For sustainable as well as safe mining.

**Sources**
The Hindu, Live Mint, Indian Express, PIB

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**2. RBI: Monetary Policy Transmission Challenges**

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<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 3: Indian Economy.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Despite cutting down the repo rates substantially recently, it is not reflecting in the bank's lending rates. Analyze</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why is it in the news?</td>
<td>RBI wants a smooth transmission of cuts in repo rates into lower bank lending rates, especially the long term rates.</td>
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<td>RBI had recently introduced the external benchmark system, where banks have link their lending rates to the policy repo rate of the central bank.</td>
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<td>Recently, RBI undertook a step of simultaneous buying and selling of long term Government Securities, popularly referred to as 'Operation Twist' to influence long term interest rates.</td>
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<td>This is to ensure timely transmission of policy rate cuts for borrowers.</td>
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<td>Industrialists have been demanding the government to ensure the transmission.</td>
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<td>What is Monetary Transmission?</td>
<td>The transmission happens primarily through four different channels: interest rates, credit creation, exchange rates and asset prices.</td>
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<td><em>Ex. The Repo Rate</em> is the rate at which the RBI lends short-term loans/funds to banks to manage their operations.</td>
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<td>In order to stimulate growth, RBI cuts the repo rate to reduce the cost of borrowings.</td>
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<td>Banks get money at a cheaper rate, which is passed on to borrowers. This is said to be a smooth monetary transmission.</td>
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<td>Background and Concepts</td>
<td>As per the theory, at lower interest rates, people borrow and spend more =&gt; greater Liquidity =&gt; greater economic activity.</td>
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<td>However, much depends on how effectively the transmission mechanism works.</td>
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<td><strong>Base Rate</strong>:</td>
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<td>Banks decide their lending rates based on a base rate. It is the bare minimum rate at which a bank can lend.</td>
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<td>The base rate is calculated via an RBI-mandated formula which factors in their administrative costs, cost of funds and profitability.</td>
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<td>It is assumed that when the RBI cuts policy rates, this should lower the cost of funds for banks and subsequently lower the lending rates.</td>
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<td><strong>Marginal Cost of Fund based Lending Rate (MCLR)</strong>:</td>
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- It modified the existing base rate system from April 2016 onwards.
  (1) It was an internal benchmark lending rate, below which the scheduled commercial banks cannot lend to its customers.
  (2) It was brought to facilitates monetary transmission.

**Issues/Challenges**

- **Never a Smooth Transmission:** Banks have always been tardy in passing on the benefit of rate cuts to borrowers.
- **Bankers justify not passing on rate changes on two grounds:**
  - The cost of deposits for banks has not fallen with a cut in the repo rate.
  - The monetary transmission comes with a lag. Hence, even if the RBI cuts lending rates, it is unlikely that banks will pass on the entire benefit to the borrowers.
- **Cost of Funds:**
  - Banks source only a small portion of their funds from the RBI repo window.
  - Public sector banks are mostly depending on public deposit for their business and do not borrow from RBI.
  - Thus, every time the RBI cuts its policy repo rate, the bank's costs are not really coming down.
- **Transmission Gap:** The 1-year median MCLR has declined 49 basis points, as against the cumulative reduction in the policy repo rate by 135 bps during February-October 2019.
- **Small savings interest rates:**
  - Banks offer high-interest rates for small savings scheme (SSS).
  - Banks cannot bring down the deposit rates offered on Fixed Deposits below the small savings rate. It limits the impact of transmission.
- **People's Dependency on Deposits:**
  - People are mostly depending on bank deposits for social security.
  - In developed markets, banks largely depend on market borrowings. In India, about 95% of banking liabilities are in deposits.
  - The majority of the deposits are at a fixed rate, and banks cannot change them at short notice.
  - This scenario makes 100% transmission a challenging task.
- **Other Issues hampering Monetary Transmission:**
  - Deterioration in banks' asset quality.
  - The losses incurred by public sector banks.

**RBI's Initiative**

- **Internal and External Benchmarks:**
  - The RBI has ordered banks to link their interest rates to external benchmarks instead of MCLR.
  - The benchmarking is to be done to one of the following:
    1. Reserve Bank of India policy repo rate
    2. 91-day Treasury Bill yield
    3. 182-day Treasury bill yield
    4. Any other benchmark market interest rate produced by the Financial Benchmarks India.

**Way ahead**

- **Deposit Rates and CRR to be tweaked:**
  - The public sector banks do not borrow from RBI and mostly depend on public deposits for their business.
  - The cut in deposit rates can bring about a change of cheaper lending rates.
  - Impounding of bank money by RBI is too high with 4% CRR. It carries no return
whichever. RBI can tweak CRR to make transmission work.

- **SBI Example:**
  - SBI has done a linking of interest on large savings bank deposits and repo rates.
  - It has linked its cash credit and overdraft rates to the repo rate.
  - SBI has done this to ensure relief to overdraft and cash credit borrowers in a falling rate regime.
  - However, this cannot be extended to term loans and other facilities.

- **Bringing Down Fiscal Deficit:**
  - Overall public sector borrowing has been the highest in many years.
  - If this is brought down effectively, the entire structure of the lending rate in India will come down substantially.

- **Other Important Steps can be taken:**
  - To resolve the banking sector’s non-performing assets (NPAs) issue.
  - To reduce the cost of funds of banks and improving credit quality.

**Source**
The Hindu, ET, Indian Express.

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### 3 Bharat Bond ETF

<table>
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<th><strong>GS 3: Indian Economy:</strong> issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>What are the Bharat Bond ETFs? Discuss how the ETFs are better option over the Fixed Deposits and other small saving schemes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Why is it in the news?**
  - The Union Cabinet approved government’s plan to launch India’s first corporate bond exchange traded fund (ETF)- Bharat Bond ETF.
  - The ETF garnered Rs. 12,400 crore from its maiden offer that had opened for subscription on December 12, 2019.
  - The funds raised would be utilised for capital expenditure of PSUs.

- **Introduction**
  - An ETF or exchange traded fund invests in a basket of securities that mostly tracks a certain underlying assets/index.
  - The ETF would be the first corporate bond ETF issued by state-run companies in the country.
  - **The ETF will comprise a basket of bonds** issued by:
    - Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs)
    - Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)
    - Central Public Financial Institutions (CPFIs)
  - **Aim of ETFs:** To create an additional source of funding for CPSUs, CPSEs and CPFIs.
  - **They are similar to fixed maturity plans** with an added advantage of any time liquidity.

- **How the ETF will work?**
  - Bharat Bond ETFs will mature within a fixed term (Defined maturity).
  - The units will be listed on stock exchanges.
  - The unit value will be capped at Rs 1,000.
The scheme will offer two options, one maturing in three years (by 2023) and the other in 10 years (by 2030).
- It will offer only **growth option and no dividend option**.
- It will hold high-quality AAA securities of PSUs to ensure investor safety.
- Live NAV will be made available on website.
- Transparency of the portfolio will be maintained by daily disclosure on website.

### Significance

- **Liquidity for PSUs:**
  - The ETF will help government entities to raise funds through debt instruments.
  - It will boost alternative sources of funding for firms, even as a series of corporate defaults keep banks and shadow lenders wary.
  - **Developing the Domestic Capital Market and Easy Borrowing:**
    - It will strengthen India's corporate bond market and will reduce the cost of borrowing.
    - This will increase the participation of retail investors who are currently the non-participants in bond markets due to liquidity/accessibility constraints.
  - **Favourable to Investors:** The product addresses the three main concerns:
    1. Assurance of return of capital
    2. Predictability of returns from the investment
    3. Fixed tenure.
  - **Overcome the Shortcomings of Fixed Deposits (FDs):**
    - The bank FDs and small savings schemes are hindered by issues of lower returns, inflexibility and illiquidity.
    - The ETF provides options of liquidity, flexibility and better return prospects.
  - **Safety:**
    - ETFs hold high quality portfolio of AAA securities issued by government entities.
    - Thus it takes care of the safety feature that eliminates credit risk or the risk of default.
  - **Bond ETFs are Tax efficient:**
    - The gains in ETFs will be taxed as long-term capital gains after availing indexation benefits. The interest earned on FDs, are taxed at marginal rate of tax.
    - The benefits of indexation, with the longer investment period, significantly reduces tax incidence.

### Issues/ Risk Factors

- **Vibrancy of Indian Debt Market:**
  - Debt ETFs are common in countries that have vibrant debt markets, which exhibit a reasonable amount of inherent liquidity.
  - This feature is largely absent in the Indian non-government debt market, especially in the longer-term segment.
  - Ex. In the largely illiquid market, bonds issued by PSEs are thought to be relatively liquid. But this liquidity isn’t the same for all CPSE issuers, especially when they face unanticipated changes in either credit quality or the ownership.
- **Uncertainty:**
  - As per the governing rules for the Bharat Bond Index, the index will be tweaked every quarter based on certain parameters.
  - E.g. an issuer will be excluded from the indices if it is downgraded to a rating below “AAA,” or, if the PUS is divested.
  - It may cause a drop in the price of the bond and the investor will be demanding the higher interest rate, thus increasing the yield.
The Bharat ETF may achieve success in raising funds, but its potential and its ability to fulfil the assurances to investors will be undermined by the fact that the bond markets needs attention first.

Source: The Hindu, ET, LiveMint.

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**Syllabus**

**GS 3: Indian Economy: Agriculture.**

**Question**

- Loan waivers are unlikely to help the cause of the distressed farmers or troubled banks over the long run. They may well impair the quality of public spending by states. Critically analyse.

**Why is it in the news?**

- The Maharashtra government formally announced a farm loan waiver up to Rs 2 lakh.
- Earlier several states (UP, Punjab, Karnataka, TN, Telangana, AP) have taken similar measures to alleviate the crisis faced by farmers.
- In FY19, farm loan NPAs jumped to 12.4% or at 1.1 trillion of the ₹8,79,000 crore of total bad loans in the system.
- Various states have cumulatively written off a whopping ₹4.7 trillion of farm loans in the past one decade.

**Background**

- **Banks extend short term credits** to farmers at the start of the cropping cycle, to finance their purchase of seeds, fertilisers etc.
- **Timely repayments** allows farmers to get a 3% and 2% interest subvention from the central and the state governments respectively.
- **The Concessions help farmers** access formal credit.
- **Spate of extreme weather events**, like droughts, floods, hailstorms etc, often results in farmers defaulting on their repayment.

**Significance**

- **Immediate Relief:**
  - Loan waiver may help to solve the fundamental problem of rising costs and falling profitability in agriculture. It is an emergency relief for some farmers.
  - In the absence of long pending reforms in agriculture - contract farming, land leasing, market reforms etc. these measures are justified.
- **Farm loans waiver can be justified on:**
  - Social welfare grounds.
  - Urban-rural divide in growth.
  - Social unrest and distress among farmers.
  - Farmers’ suicides.
  - Several extrinsic factors not under the control of farmers affect their livelihood - monsoon, market policies, infrastructural bottlenecks, trade measures, climate change etc.
- **Rid of probable NPAs for Banks:**
There's a possibility of banks gaining in the short run as their loan book gets lighter and they get rid of some NPAs.

The 2008 loan waiver had not raised the default rate.

**Indebtedness and distress:**

- Majority of agricultural households (Nearly 70%) spend more than they earn on average each month.
- This is the major reason towards debt, which is a primary reason for more than half of all suicides by farmers nationwide.
- **Farmer rights activists** advocates farm loan waiver over corporate loan waivers.

**Issues/Challenges**

- **Damage the Credit Culture:**
  - Farm loan waivers can **discourage further lending** by banks in areas with greater exposure to the debt waiver.
  - Previous waivers have led to banks **reducing credit outlay for small farmers during their next loan cycle**.
  - It affects many honest farmers who had repaid their loans before the government announced the waiver.
  - It harms the farmers over the long run, as it diminish their chances of getting formal loans.

- **Hampers State Finances:**
  - Loan waivers cuts much-needed public investments in agriculture like in irrigation and research.
  - The increased interest burden due to higher debt hits state finances.
  - With states borrowing heavily for the waivers, there is a crowding out of loans affecting availability of credit.

- **Investment is abysmally low and falling:**
  - There is abysmally low and steadily falling investment levels in Agriculture.
  - The public investment in agriculture has remained below 0.4% of GDP between 2011-12 and 2016-17 and private investment has declined from 2.7% to 1.8% of GDP.

- **Non-performing asset:**
  - Agriculture NPA is Rs 1.1 lakh crore or 12.4% of overall NPAs.
  - In recent years, a total of 10 states have announced farm loan waivers totalling Rs 2.4 lakh crore.
  - **Loan Waiver often becomes a political gimmick at the cost of state finances**

- **It doesn't cover informal sources of credit.**

- **It is prone to exclusion of small farmers, especially women.**

- **It doesn't impact the indebtedness of agricultural labourers.**

**Fault Lines**

- **Waivers are mostly conditional:**
  - In Punjab and UP, the waivers were allowed only for small and marginal farmers, who own less than 5 acres.
  - Governments usually set a cut-off date when they implement a waiver.

- **Non-Institutional Debtors:**
  - The loan waiver schemes cater to farmers who have availed of formal loans.
  - As per NABARD study of 2015-16, about 43.5% of farm households took loans that year, 60.4% of which were institutional.
  - Only 15% of the marginal farmers having less than 2 hectares of landholding have access to formal credit.
Landless:
- About 56.41% of total rural households were landless in 2011, as per the Socio Economic and Caste Census.
- As per Agricultural Statistics of 2017, agriculture is now dominated by farm labourers, not cultivators.
- The landless households - the poorest of the poor, does not benefit from farm loan waiver.

Way ahead
- Better alternatives to loan waivers:
  1. Government can spend money for irrigation and warehouses, on rural electrification, and on operation of e-markets.
  2. Increasing productivity outside the green revolution states
  3. Value additions
  4. Crop diversification
  5. Use of technology and innovation
  6. Land reforms, land and labour pooling
  7. Streamlining of subsidies
  8. Improvement of extension services to farmers
- A debt relief commission could help avoid these problems by restructuring and negotiating debts between farmers and lenders.

Final Word
- Given the long-term distress in agrarian economy and its pervasiveness, the solution needs to be long-term and multi-pronged.
- Short cuts or populist measures are unlikely to have a lasting or meaningful impact.

Source
The Hindu, ET, Indian Express, LiveMint, Scroll

5 Railways Restructuring

Syllabus
- GSIII: Infrastructure: Railways.

Question
- Discuss the major reforms undertaken by Railways recently and the need for such reforms.

Why in News?
- The Union Cabinet recently approved an organisational restructuring of the Indian Railways.
  1. Merger of eight Group A services into a single service - Indian Railway Management Service.
  2. This was recommended by several committees - Rakesh Mohan (2001), Sam Pitroda (2012) and Bibek Debroy(2015)
  3. The Railway Board will be revamped along functional lines and its strength pruned to make it a leaner organisation.

What is the Railway Board
- Apex decision-making body, constituted in 1905 to serve the Ministry of Railways.
- Composition: Chairman and 8 Members (one from each department i.e traffic, civil, mechanical, electrical, signal & telecom, stores, personnel, and accounts).
• Each department, is headed by a Secretary level officer (Member) in the Railway Board.

Reforms introduced

- **Reforms Introduced:**
  1. **Indian Railways Management Services (IRMS):** Unification of existing 8 Group A services of the Railways into a Central Service - “Indian Railway Management Service”.
  2. **The merged services include:**
     a. Indian Railway Traffic Service
     b. Indian Railway Personnel Service
     c. Indian Railway Account Service
     d. Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE)
     e. Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME)
     f. Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE)
     g. Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS)
     h. Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSSE)
  3. Recruitment is expected to be done by UPSC through the Civil Services exam.
  4. **Re-organisation of Railway Board on functional lines headed by Chairman Railway Board (CRB) with 4 Members & some Independent Members:**
     a. **Chairman will act as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO),** who shall be a cadre controlling officer responsible for Human resources (HR) assisted by **Directorate General - Human Resources (DG - HR)**
     b. **4 members would be from Infrastructure, Operations & Business Development, Rolling Stock and Finance**
     c. **Independent Members:** Highly distinguished professionals with deep knowledge and 30 years of experience including at the top levels in industry, finance, economics and management fields.
  5. **Renaming:** The existing service of **Indian Railway Medical Service (IRMS)** to be consequently renamed as **Indian Railway Health Service (IRHS).**

Need of Reforms

- **Railway Finances:**
  1. Indian Railways’ finances have been under severe stress for the past 3-4 years.
  2. The railways’ revenue in 2019 is estimated to fall short of its target by more than Rs 20,000 crore.

- **Share in Freight:**
  1. Railways’ share in the national freight basket is constantly contracting.
  2. NITI Aayog said the Railways’ share in the transportation of surface freight has declined from 86.2 per cent in 1950-51 to 33 per cent in 2015.

- **Departmentalism:**
  1. Each department in the Indian Railways is vertically separated from top to bottom.
  2. The intense desire of every organised Group ‘A’ service to have its own **Member in the Railway Board generated a lot of bickering,** much of which came to surface recently in the **‘vande Bharat Express’ episode.**

- **Seniority Clashes:**
  1. Till 2016, UPSC held 3 different examinations to recruit candidates for the eight Group ‘A’ services — **Civil Services Examination, Central Engineering Services Examination & Special Class Railway Apprentices Examination** (discontinued only in 2016).
**Pros**

- **Unification of services:**
  1. It will end 'departmentalism', promote smooth working of Railways, create a coherent vision & promote and expedite rational decision making.
  2. Ensure Railways ambitious programme to modernise and provide the highest standards of safety, speed and services to the passengers.
- **Commercialisation:** It will help organise the working of the Railway Board and its zones along more commercial lines.
- **Equality of Opportunity:** Creation of new service in consultation with DoPT & UPSC will enable Railways to recruit engineers/non-engineers as per need, and offer equality of opportunity to both categories in career progression.
- **Independent experts as board members:** It will infuse fresh strategic energy, thought and action in Indian railways functioning and growth.

**Cons**

- **General Managers to Apex Level:**
  1. Decision that posts of some 27 general managers would be raised to the “apex” level (secretary level) and hence at par with the board members is problematic.
  2. There are serious administrative and financial challenges before the same.
  3. Railway Board is the governing body and the general managers are subordinate to the board. Therefore this step will make the control of the Board over the GMs tenuous. It will also make the Board members dispensable.
- **Basic objective of the policy decision — of ending “departmentalism”:**
  1. Functionally, departments will continue to exist through various technical and non-technical specialisations, so merging them will not end departmentalism per se.
  2. The problem is not departments but the composition of the same, and their role in the Railway organisation.
- **Concept of CEO:** It will bring in authoritarianism.
- **Unscientific Merger:** It proposes to merge two fundamentally distinct entities i.e the civil servants(Non-Technical) & engineers (Technical).
  1. **Managerial Understanding:** merger assumes that while non-technical specialists can’t do technical jobs, technocrats can do both.
  2. **Age Factor:** The average age of non-technical officers at entry via UPSC is 27 years, while those from engineering are between 23-24 years when they come into the service.

**Way Forward**

- **Implementation:** To make reforms a success, calibrated “implementation task forces are needed” to complete implementation within governments at zonal, divisional, sub-divisional and station levels.
- **Carving out Railway Protection Force** as a separate paramilitary force and providing service to IR on fee-basis. like CISF serving Airports etc.
- **Liberate IR of its medical extension i.e IRMS:**
  1. Medical services officers at more than 5,000 are simply the largest pool of IR officers.
  2. IR’s own hospitals came in a different era, have served their purpose and their marginal utility has substantially gone down.
(3) A well-designed group medical insurance is a much better and cheaper solution to meet the medical cost of the railways’ men and women.

- **Need of Corporate work Culture:** It the govt. controlled department needs to realise its goal of modernisation, have better infrastructure, run as an effective freight carrier, a corporate work culture will need to be introduced like in railway systems across the world.

Source: ORF, PIB, Indian Express

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### Infant deaths in India

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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>What are the major causes behind the infant deaths in India and what challenges the country face while addressing the mortality issue. Discuss in context of recent infant deaths in Gujarat and Rajasthan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Why is it in the news?**

- Over **100 infants died at J K Lon Hospital** in Rajasthan since December 2019.
- According to the official data, more than **600 infants** died in government hospitals in **Rajasthan and Gujarat** since December 2019.
- Earlier similar episodes have been reported from hospitals in Gorakhpur and Muzaffarnagar.

**Background**

- India has an annual birth numbers of approximately 26 million.
- The infant mortality rate (IMR) currently stands at **33 per 1,000 live births in India.**
- India witness an estimated **2,350 infant deaths every day.**
- Gujarat state has annual birth cohort of 1.2 million. In the year 2017, the IMR in the state was 30 per 1,000 live births, means about 36,000 deaths a year.
- Rajasthan has annual birth cohort of an estimated 1.65 million. Here the IMR is 38 per 1000 live births. This means an estimated 62,843 deaths annually.
- States with high IMR-Arunachal Pradesh (42), Madhya Pradesh (47), Assam (44), UP (41), Meghalaya (39) and Odisha (41).

**Causes behind Infant Deaths**

- **Poverty:**
  1. The Socio-economic inequalities in India have left behind many poor sections out of the required health services.
  2. This is the main cause behind the various infectious diseases like diarrhoea & pneumonia, which further increases the risk of death.
  3. The IMR in the poorest 20% of the population is 2.5 times higher than that in the richest 20% of the population.
- **Early marriage and Premature delivery:**
  1. The IMR is highest among mothers under the age of 20.
  2. The IMR is lowest among children born to mothers between the ages of 20-24.
- **Large numbers of Non-Institutional Deliveries:**
(1) In India, about 78.9% births happen in a facility. About **21.1% or 54 lakh births** in a year still happen outside of a facility.

(2) Sometimes the deliveries happen without the help of a trained health workers, along with poor hygiene levels.

- **Low birth weight:**
  (1) It is attributable to several factors including poor maternal nutrition, which is further exacerbated by early marriage and poor maternal education.

- **Poor nutritional status of mother:**
  (1) In India, every third woman is undernourished and every second woman is anaemic (About 53% are anaemic).

- **Lack of Education in Mothers:**
  (1) Children born to mothers with at least 8 years of schooling have 32% and 52% lesser chances of dying in neonatal and in the post-neonatal period respectively, when compared with the illiterate mothers.

### Problems/Challenges

- **Poor Hygiene and Lack of Resources:**
  (1) The spike in infant deaths at a state-run institution is evidence of -
  (a) Poor hygiene
  (b) Shortage of workforce (Doctors as well as other staff).
  (c) Poor infrastructure.
  (d) Compromised quality

- **Lack of Awareness and Age old Tradition:**
  (1) Major chunk of eligible households are not aware of scheme and programs being implemented for them.
  (2) Many households in India still perpetuating with the practice of home-based deliveries.

- **Vaccination Outreach:**
  (1) According to the Health Ministry, the vaccination cover now stands at **87%**.
  (2) This means over **33 lakh children continue to miss** out on some or all vaccinations every year.
  (3) **Vaccine hesitancy** has also been rising in certain areas.

- **Poor Implementation of Policies:**
  (1) Due to poor ground implementation of various schemes and lack of last man outreach, **many eligible are deprived** of the benefits.

### Government Initiatives

- **Special newborn care units (SNCUs):**
  (1) SNCUs was established to provide all type of care for sick newborns except assisted ventilation and major surgeries.
  (2) They are being setup at district hospitals and sub-district hospitals.
  (3) They are managed by adequately trained doctors and support staff to provide 24×7 services.

- **Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Workers:**
  (1) They are trained female community health activist, selected from the community itself.
  (2) They work as an interface between the community and the public health system. ASHAs work for immunisation coverage and new-born care support.

- **Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK):**
  (1) It entitles all pregnant women delivering in public health institutions to absolutely free and no expense delivery.
Janani Suraksha Yojana:
1. This is a safe motherhood intervention under the National Health Mission.
2. Its objective is to reduce maternal and infant mortality by promoting institutional delivery among poor pregnant women by giving them cash incentives.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):
1. It is a Maternity Benefit Programme, which is targeted only at women delivering their first child.
2. A cash amount of Rs. 6,000 is transferred to the bank account of the beneficiary in three instalments.

Poshan Abhiyan:
1. POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
2. It aims to reduce anaemia among young children, adolescents and women each by 3% per year until 2022.

Steps required to prevent/reduce the Infant Deaths:
1. To spread new-born healthcare awareness
2. To strengthen mother and newborn health services, including home-based care by health workers
3. To improve facilities at hospitals and improved resources
4. Promoting early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding for first six months
5. To promote institutional deliveries
6. To use the family planning methods that can minimize the likelihood of pregnancy for teenagers
7. To ensure availability of trained and specialised doctors
8. To use technology which help providing better service. e.g. use of mobile phones (m-Health) to improve the quality of care

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA)
Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act is a consolidating act passed by the Government of India in the year 2010.
| **features** | **Objective:** It seeks to regulate the foreign contributions or donations and hospitality (air travel, hotel accommodation etc) to Indian organizations and individuals and to stop such contributions which might damage the national interest.  
- The FCRA regulates the receipt of funding from sources outside of India to NGOs working in India. It prohibits receipt of foreign contribution “for any activities detrimental to the national interest”.  
- **Under the act**  
  - NGOs require the government’s permission to receive funding from abroad.  
  - The government can refuse permission if it believes that the donation to the NGO will adversely affect “public interest” or the “economic interest of the state”.  
  - The NGO must maintain a separate account book listing the donation received from foreigners.  
  - It must get it audited by a Chartered Accountant and submits it to Home Ministry every year.  
  - The following cannot accept Foreign Contributions:  
    1. **(1) MPs/MLAs**  
    2. **(2) Newspapers and print media:** Correspondent, columnist, cartoonist, editor, owner, printer or publishers of a registered Newspaper.  
    3. **(3) Public Servants:** Judge, government servant or employee of any Corporation or any other body controlled on owned by the Government  
- **Under purview of MHA:** Although FCRA is a law related to financial legislation, it falls into the purview of Home Ministry. |
| **How does it affect Fundamental rights?** | **Right to Freedom:** Restrictions under the act have serious consequences on both the rights to free speech and freedom of association under Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(c) of the Constitution.  
- **Damyanti Naranga v. Union of India, 1971:** The Supreme Court has held that this right includes the right to continued sustenance of the association, without unreasonable restrictions. |
| **Evolution of FCRA** | **2010:** The FCRA Act of 1976 was repealed and a new FCRA Act with strict provisions was enacted in the same year.  
- **FCRA, 2010:**  
  - **License for 5 years:** FCRA registration under the earlier law was permanent, but under the new one, it expired after five years, and had to be renewed afresh.  
  - **Directing the usage of administrative expenses:** The new law put a restriction (50 per cent) on the proportion of foreign funds that could be used for administrative expenses, thus allowing the government to control how a civil society organisation (CSO) spends its money.  
- **Organisations of political nature:**  
  1. While the 1976 law was primarily aimed at political parties, the new law set the stage for shifting the focus to organisations of a political nature.  
  2. The FCRA, 2011 rules clearly enumerate the organisations of political nature making it easier for successive governments to target inconvenient NGOs.  
  3. This list contains trade unions, students’ unions, workers’ unions, youth forums, women’s wing of a political party, farmers’ organisations, youth organisations based on caste, community, religion, language etc. |
Criticism of the act

- **Hampers development**: Foreign donations are necessary for NGOs as only a few get regular funding from government and most of the NGOs are not financially sound.
- **Infringes upon Fundamental Rights**: Right to form and operate co-operative societies, NGOs is a fundamental right in India and FCRA affects this right.
- **Violates Universal Declaration of Human Rights**: Access to resources, particularly foreign funding, is a part of the right to freedom of association – is a part of Universal Declaration of Human rights (Article 20), meaning a violation of this right constitutes a human rights violation
- **Restriction on arbitrary grounds**: The grounds on which NGOs are judged such as “public interest” or the “economic interest of the state” are not defined are too vague and thus government can target any NGOs raising the voice of dissent as against larger “public interest”.

Way ahead

- **Voluntary disclosure mechanisms**: There should be a voluntary disclosure mechanism for NGOs like RTI Act to bring in more transparency.
- **Refining the rules under FCRA Act**: Rules under the FCRA Act could be refined to ensure that the non-profit making and NGOs having positive impact on the society are not harassed.
- **Restrictions based on objectivity**: The terms such as “Public interest” and economic interest should be defined properly and an objective criteria should be set up for granting permissions for foreign funding.
- **Creation of autonomous agency**: National level self-regulating agency like the Bar Council of India can be created that would monitor and accredit Civil Society Organizations.

Sources
The Hindu, Economic Times, Live Mint, India Code

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### 8 Direct Elections to Office of Mayor: Urban Governance

**Syllabus**

- GSII: Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels & challenges therein.

**Question**

- Critically analyse the prospects of directly elected Mayor in the Indian political system.

**Context**

- A study was published in Economic & Political Weekly suggesting the introduction of direct election of mayors could improve efficiency in urban governance.
- American political theorist Benjamin Barber had opined that cities were the political unit best suited for meeting the challenges of the 21st century – so much so, that mayors would soon “rule the world”.

**74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992**

- Did not prescribe the manner of election, tenure or powers of the Mayors/Chairpersons of ULBs.
It was left to the states to decide as “local self-government” is a state subject. 

**Current Status at ULB:**
- The mayor, despite variations in their status and powers, is recognized across India as the first citizen of the city.
- At present, six states – Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu – provide for mayors that are elected directly by the voters for a 5-year term.
- Indian ULBs largely follow the ‘commissioner as chief executive’ (CACE) model instead of Directly Elected Executive Mayor (DEEM) model many developed countries follow.
- The Bombay Municipal Corporation Act 1888, which provides for an appointed bureaucrat as chief executive, continues to remain a popular model.

**Importance of Direct Elected Mayor.**
- **Democracy at Grass-Root Level:** Direct elections of Mayor and vesting the executive powers of the municipality with the Mayor would serve the purpose of the 74th Amendment Act.
- **One Chief Executive Head:**
- The current municipal structure in most cities in India has a municipal commissioner as the executive head appointed by the state govt. and a mayor who serves as the titular head, indirectly elected mostly.
- A single head i.e. the mayor with authority could influence urban development, planning and operation without power tussles with the commissioners.
- **Continuity in Service:** This will allow mayors greater continuity as opposed to state-appointed bureaucrats who can be abruptly transferred at the whim of political leadership at the state level.
- **Long Term Planning for Development of City:** Fixed tenure will ensure long term policies to play a role in the cities development and political & economic landscape.
- **More Stability:** As he/she is not dependent on the elected members of the council or on the local or state level political leadership for sustenance in office.
- **Focus on Entire City:**
- In the current model, councilor elections are held at the ward level and are based on hyper-local issues, which may not resonate with the whole city.
- A directly elected mayor would ensure a focus on the whole city instead of certain wards.
- **Effective leadership:**
- A civic leader to be successful has to work with different groups of stakeholders ranging from political to bureaucratic and other officials.
- Being an elected representative gives them the legitimate right to bring all stakeholders under the umbrella of formal governance and demand cooperation from all.
- **Promotion of local leadership and community empowerment:**
- The current system of electing i.e. indirect election of the mayor encourages a system of best among equals from the elected councillors.
- Elected councillors prefer a leader who doesn’t pose a popularity threat.
- Direct election of the mayor, which promotes strong visible leadership in cities, is an important source of recruitment of talent into public life and leadership development.
| Should not employ | • **Democracy doesn’t necessarily demand a directly elected head:**  
|                  | • In a democracy, executive power should vest with a democratically accountable person or body.  
|                  | • Prime Minister or Chief Minister too is not directly elected. But they still enjoy wide powers & are democratically accountable.  
|                  | • **Powers conferred on Mayors matter more than the type of election:**  
|                  | • Currently, Mayors do not enjoy similar powers not because they are not directly elected, but because State governments exercise enormous control over ULBs.  
|                  | • For responsive urban governance, we need a powerful political executive in the city with more autonomy, whether directly or indirectly elected.  
|                  | • **Little evidence to Showcase that directly elected mayors are better:** States like Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh which introduced directly elected Mayors reversed the decision due to the difficulties posed by such a system  
|                  | • **Conflicting political parties at State Govt. level and at the post of Mayor:**  
|                  | • If a directly elected mayor belongs to a party not friendly with the party at state govt. level, it becomes difficult to get other municipality members on board in taking decisions.  
|                  | • This does not happen currently because Municipal Commissioner is the executive head.  
|                  | • **Conflict between MP/MLA and the Directly Elected Mayor:**  
|                  | • The directly elected mayor would work towards gaining popularity at the expense of the local legislator whose job is to legislate and scrutinize the performance of the executive.  
|                  | • The MP/MLA seeing mayor as a potential future rival hence would try to undercut the mayor’s authority.  
| Way Forward | • **Recommendations of the 2nd ARC:**  
|             | • **Chairman as well as the Executive:** Function of chairing a municipal council & exercising executive powers in ULB’s should be combined in the same functionary i.e. Chairperson or Mayor.  
|             | • **Direct Election:** The Chairperson/Mayor should be directly elected by popular mandate through a city-wide election and he/she will be the chief executive of the municipal body.  
|             | • **Function of Elected Council:** The elected Council should perform the functions of budget approval, oversight and framing of regulations and policies.  
|             | • **Mayor’s Cabinet:** In municipal corporations and metropolitan cities, the Mayor should appoint the Mayor’s ‘Cabinet’.  
|             | • The members of the Cabinet should be chosen by the Mayor from the elected corporators.  
|             | • The Mayor should be the Chief Executive of the municipal body while the Commissioner should perform the functions delegated to him/her.  
|             | • **Simultaneous Elections:** Simultaneous elections for both mayors & councilors will result in democratic decentralization and greater efficiency in urban governance.  
|             | • Creating an empowered and accountable political executive for cities is important, but a directly elected mayor should be a political option, not a constitutional decree.  

Source: The Hindu, Livemint, ORF
Grain Management in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 3: Indian Economy: Issues related to PDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>● What is the potential of Efficient foodgrain management in prevailing slowdown? Also list the problems faced by Food Corporation of India in managing the fooofgrains.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why is it in the news?

- GDP growth rate is down to 4.5%, with the agriculture GDP (GDPA) growth at 2.1% in the second quarter of 2019-2020.
- **Lack of rural demand** is said to be the main cause behind the slowdown.
- At the same time **food inflation is spiking in India**.
- To overcome this problem, government has announced an **investment package for infrastructure** of about Rs 102 lakh crore.
- The main concern however is of **funding resources**.
- Government have a scope to gain resources by addressing the massive **inefficiency in the grain management system**.

Food grain Management in India

- **The major elements of the Government’s food management policy are:**
  1. Procurement
  2. Storage and movement of foodgrains
  3. Public distribution

- **The Process:**
  - Foodgrains for the Central Pool are procured by various agencies such as FCI, State Government Agencies (SGAs) at MSP.
  - Procurement of wheat and paddy is carried out on open ended basis at the declared MSP by the central govt.
  - States/Union Territories (UTs) which are presently under Decentralised Procurement (DCP) scheme also procure foodgrains for the Central Pool.
  - But they directly store and distribute them under Targeted Public Distribution System [TPDS] and Other Welfare Schemes (OWS) based on the allocation made by the GOI.
  - The procured food grains are taken over from State Government Agencies (SGAs) into the Central Pool by FCI.
  - Food is then moved from the procuring states to the consuming states for distribution and for creation of buffer stock.
  - Distribution is carried out by the State Governments through Targeted Public Distribution Scheme [TPDS] and Other Welfare Schemes (OWS) with a network of many Fair Price Shops (FPS).
  - The foodgrains are also disposed off by FCI and State Governments, based on allocation of the GOI through sale under Open Market Sales Scheme.
  - To ensure availability and maintain reasonable levels of buffer stocks, FCI undertakes transportation of foodgrain (wheat and rice) from surplus States to the deficit States. About 90% of all India movement is undertaken by railways.
- **Buffer stock** of food grains in the Central Pool is maintained by the GOI for:
  1. food security
  2. monthly release of food grains
  3. meeting emergency situations
  4. price stabilisation or market intervention
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs fixes the quarterly minimum buffer norms i.e. as on 1st April, 1st July, 1st October and 1st January of every financial year.
- **The National Food Security Act (NFSA):**
  - Under the Act, certain quantities of wheat and rice are given to 67% of the population at Rs 2/kg and Rs 3/kg respectively.
  - The economic cost of these to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) is Rs 25/kg for wheat and Rs 35/kg for rice.
  - This led to a provision of Rs 1.84 lakh crore for food subsidy in the last Union budget.
  - The FCI had pending bills of Rs 1.86 lakh crore that have not been cleared by the government.
  - The grain stocks with the FCI are far more than double the buffer stock norms as on January 1, every year.

### Issues/Problems

- **Inefficiency:**
  - There is massive accumulation of grain stocks. It is a result of a deeply inefficient strategy for food management.
  - The procurement for rice and wheat remains open-ended, but the disbursal of those stocks remains largely restricted to PDS.
- **Poor Storage Facilities:**
  - The poor facilities of storage often leads to degradation damage of foodgrains.
  - According to official data, almost 62,000 tonnes of food grain was damaged in FCI warehouses between 2011 and 2017.
- **Excess Procurement:**
  - The open market operations are much less compared to what is needed to liquidate the excessive stocks.
  - The money locked in these excessive stocks (beyond the buffer norm) is more than Rs 1 lakh crore.
- **Losses in Open Market sale:**
  - The price for Open Market sale is fixed by the Ministry and is often at a loss considering the input costs of FCI.
  - When Procurement is huge, this loss is further augmented.
  - Often private players do not buy from the farmer and instead wait for OMS by FCI because of price advantage.

### Government Initiative

- **Private Entrepreneurs Guarantee (PEG) Scheme:**
  - The PEG scheme was formulated in 2008 for Construction of Godowns in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode.
  - The aim of the scheme was to overcome storage constraints and ensure safe stocking.
- **Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic):**
  - Along with maintaining buffer stocks and meeting the requirement of the Targeted PDS, FCI has instructions to sell wheat and rice in the open market from time to time.
- It is to enhance the supply and to moderate the open market prices.
- **E-Auctions:**
  FCI has switched over to e-auction for sale under Open Market, for transparency in operations.
- The States Union Territories are also allowed to participate in the e-auction, if they require wheat and rice outside.
- **For Safe storage and Preservation of Foodgrains:**
  - The foodgrain procured by the FCI is stored in covered godowns and also in CAP (cover and plinth).
  - Stacks are properly covered with fabricated low-density black polythene (waterproof covers).
  - The periodic inspection of the stocks and godowns are undertaken by qualified and trained staff and the senior officers.

### Shanta Kumar Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procurement</th>
<th>FCI should hand over all procurement operations of wheat, paddy and rice to states that have sufficient experience and reasonable infrastructure for procurement - eg. AP, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, MP, Punjab etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on eastern belt, where farmers do not get minimum support price.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stocking and movement</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Outsource</strong> stocking operations to various agencies such as Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC), State Warehousing Corporation (SWC), Private Sector under Private Entrepreneur Guarantee (PEG) scheme on competitive bidding basis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Movement of grains should be containerized in order to reduce transit losses.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Railways should have faster turn-around-time by having more mechanized facilities.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negotiable Warehouse Instrument</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>It must be scaled up so that</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NFSA</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Restructuring the National Food Security Act (NFSA)</strong>- reducing coverage from 67 per cent of population to about 40 per cent p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End to end computerization</strong></td>
<td>End to end computerization of the entire food management system, starting from procurement from farmers, to stocking, movement and finally distribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clear and transparent liquidation policy</strong> for buffer stock: FCI should be given greater flexibility in doing business; it should offload surplus stock in open market or export, as per need.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deregulate fertiliser sector and provide cash fertiliser subsidy of Rs 7,000 per hectare to farmers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cash transfer systems</strong> must be introduced gradually.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Way ahead

- **To Overcome the Inefficiencies:**
  - Government should conduct an independent and periodic assessment for ensuring the foodgrains are not damaged and the policy decisions taken for safety are implemented well.
  - The first-in-first-out mechanism should be promptly followed.
● The open market sell should be promoted.
● Building more and efficient infrastructure and support system.
● **Use of Technology:**
  ● Government can make use of AI and Data Analytics for better monitoring.
  ● The safe and scientific storage must also be ensured.
● **Bringing in Private Players:**
  ● Government can simply outsource its procurement operations to other efficient agencies.
  ● It will reduce the burden of FCI and help build more infrastructure.
  ● Government has taken a step in this direction under PM-AASHA scheme, through Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS).
  ● Under PPPS, States will have the option to roll out PPSSs in select districts where a private player can procure crops (oilseeds) at MSP when market prices drop below MSP.

**Source**
Indian Express, The Hindu, PIB.

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### 10

**Chief of Defence Staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 3 Security Defence and the Armed Forces of India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Q. What are the salient provisions regarding newly created post of the Chief of Defence Staff? Examine the complexities associated in ensuring smooth coordination between the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is it in news?</td>
<td>Recently the Union Cabinet gave its approval for creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and outgoing Army Chief Gen. Bipin Rawat took over as the first ever CDS of India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>The CDS is a high military office that will oversee and coordinate the working of the three Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single point military adviser:</td>
<td>The CDS will serve as the single-point advice to the government on long-term defence planning and management, including manpower, equipment and strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper age limit raised:</td>
<td>65 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td><strong>First proposed in 2000:</strong> Kargil Review Committee (KRC) constituted in the aftermath of the Kargil War proposed for the creation of the post of CDS for the first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lack of consensus among services:</strong> Resulted in delay in the creation of the post of CDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Permanent COSC (2012):</strong> The Naresh Chandra committee recommended the appointment of a Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) to allay apprehensions over the CDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lt General D.B. Shekatkar (retd) Committee (2016):</strong> The CDS is also one of the 99 recommendations made by the Lt General D.B. Shekatkar (retd) Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Unique Academy

which submitted its report in December 2016 which had 34 recommendations pertaining to the tri-services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salient provisions relating to CDS and DMA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conditions of Service</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The person appointed to the post of CDS will be a <strong>Four-star General</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) He will not be eligible to hold any <strong>Government office</strong> after demitting the office of CDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) He will not be able to engage in private employment without prior approval for a period of five years after demitting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) <strong>As the principal military adviser</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The CDS will act as the principal military adviser to the defence minister on all matters relating to tri-services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) He will be appointed in a four-star rank <strong>at par with the three service chiefs</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Presently, the National Security Adviser advises the government with matters related to military affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) <strong>Chairman of COSC:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The CDS will also serve as the permanent chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC) which comprises the three service chiefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Currently, the position is rotated amongst the senior most of the three Service Chiefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) <strong>Head of tri services agencies:</strong> The tri-service agencies, organisations and commands relating to cyber and space will be under the command of the CDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) <strong>Nuclear Command Authority:</strong> The CDS will also function as the Military Adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) <strong>Head of DMA:</strong> A new Department of Military Affairs has been created in the Ministry of Defence which will be headed by the CDS.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Guidelines related to DMA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The DMA would deal with</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The armed forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) The integrated headquarters of the MoD, comprising the Army, Naval and Air and defence staff headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) The Territorial Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Works relating to the three Services and procurement exclusive to them except capital acquisitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broad Mandate of DMA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing for the Services;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Facilitating restructuring of the military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about a jointness in operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Establishment of joint/theatre commands</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) Promoting use of indigenous equipment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need of CDS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coordination between services:</strong> CDS was much needed to bring more coordination among the three Services in terms of procurement, operational flexibility and training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long-term defence planning:</strong> CDS will ensure that the service chiefs will contribute to long-term defence planning in coordination with the CDS and the Chief of Staffs Committee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Establishment of theatre commands
(1) The CDS is also seen as being vital to the creation of “theatre commands”, integrating tri-service assets and personnel like in the US military.
(2) **Theatre command**: A theatre command is an organisational structure designed to control all military assets in a theatre of war to achieve military effects.

Concerns
- **Apprehensions among service chiefs**: Air Force and the Navy still have some fear that the CDS will be dominated by the Indian Army which is by far the largest military force in India.
- **Keeping loyalty to parent service aside**: It will be a challenge for government to ensure that the person appointed to the post of CDS keeps broader national interest over the loyalty to his parent service.
- **Erosion of civilian supremacy**
- **Outranking of the other 3 chiefs**

Way forward
- **CDS to act as a bridge between military and bureaucracy**: CDS will have to act as a bridge joining the service chiefs and the Defence Secretary to ensure harmonious relations between them.
- **Control on decision making**: To achieve the goals of ensuring jointness in operations, training and procurements, CDS will have to keep control on decision making on key matters.
- **Establishing theatre commands**: Theatre commands of the three services should be created in near future so as to achieve desired military effects in case of any contingency.

Sources
The Hindu, Indian Express, Wikipedia, Live Mint, ORF

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### Regulation of Drones in India

**Syllabus**
GS 3 Science and Technology Drones, their regulation and applications

**Question**
Q. The government needs to create the right ecosystem for drone operations to add to the economy’s automation dividend. Comment

**Why is it in news?**
- Security experts have been worried about misuse of drones in India on the lines of recent events in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.
- The **Digital Sky Platform**, a registration platform for operators and manufacturers, is planning to introduce more restrictions.
- These are based on the recent guidelines put in place by FAA in USA.
- The Ministry of Civil Aviation, has initiated a census of drones in India to get the larger picture of ownership of different kinds of drones across the country.
- Union Minister of Civil Aviation, Jayant Sinha had released the draft Drone Policy 2.0 on 15th January, 2019.

**Introduction**
- What is a drone?
A drone is an aircraft that operates without a pilot on board and is referred to as an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV).

- **Regulatory body**: Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, is responsible for regulating air transport and ensuring compliance to civil aviation requirements, air safety, and airworthiness standard.

**Salient features of the Drone Policy 2.0 unveiled last year**

- **Beyond VLOS operation**: Expanding operations to beyond the Visual Line of Sight (VLOS) which is currently restricted at 400 feet above ground level.
- **Permits autonomous operations**: Proposes to allow autonomous aircraft i.e., the use of algorithms for piloting of drones subject to privacy, security and safety requirements.
- **Establishment of Drone Directorate**: Establishing a Drone Directorate within the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).
- **Permits 100% FDI under automatic route**: 100% FDI under the automatic route has been proposed in UAVs and Remotely Piloted Aircraft System-based commercial civil aviation services, in line with the objectives of the ‘Make in India’ initiative.
- **Ensuring airworthiness**: A maximum life cycle for each drone type and operators must apply for re-certification at the end of a drone’s life cycle.

**Drone Regulations 1.0**

- **Classification of drones**: Remotely piloted aircraft have been divided into five categories-
  1. **Nano**: Less than or equal to 250 grams.
  2. **Micro**: From 250 grams to 2kg.
  3. **Small**: From 2 kg to 25kg.
  4. **Medium**: From 25kg to 150kg.
  5. **Large**: Greater than 150kg.
- **No-permission No take-off (NPNT)**: Any pilot willing to fly a drone must ask for permission on the Digital Sky mobile app without which the aircraft is unable to fly.
- **Digital Sky platform**: The Digital Sky platform facilitates registration and licensing of drones and operators in addition to giving instant (online) clearances to operators for every flight.
- **Day time operation**: All drones are permitted to be flown during day time only and flying drones at night is prohibited.
- **Partition of Air space**: The airspace is partitioned into Red Zone (flying not permitted), Yellow Zone (controlled airspace), and Green Zone (automatic permission).
- **Flying in controlled airspace**: Permission to fly in controlled airspace can be obtained by filing a flight plan and obtaining a unique Air Defense Clearance (ADC)/Flight Information Center (FIC) number.
- **Instruments needed with drone**: Every drone except under the Nano category should have
  1. GPS
  2. Return-to-home (RTH) system
  3. Anti-collision light
### Applications of drones

- **Urban planning**: Used worldwide for effective urban planning and identification of land acquisition sites for better assessment, compensation and rehabilitation of affected people.
- **Disaster management**: To assess the situation and provide valuable insights in the rescue operations.
- **Agriculture**: To gather real-time data about the spraying of insecticides, insect invasion etc. Insurance companies are using it to measure the spread of disasters for computing claims.
- **Irrigation surveys**: Drones can be used to survey of dams, canals etc so as to minimise the cost involved in physical inspection of these structures.
- **Mining**: Volumetric data of ore, rock and minerals storage can be collected and analysed using drones.
- **Recreation and sports**
- **Logistics**: Amazon has used it for delivery till last mile.

### Concerns

- **Security Concerns**: Several terrorist organizations are known to have used drones for malevolent activities.
- **Unscientific classification**: Currently drones are classified based on their weight which is unscientific and neglects the operational capabilities of the drone which might pose a security risk.
- **High cost of auxiliary equipment**: The equipment mandated to be present in the drone under the existing policy are expensive and thus increases the overall cost of a drone.
- **Compliance of existing drones**: Compliance of existing drones with the new policy cannot be ensured since there is very little possibility in altering structure of drones which are purchased earlier.
- **Aviation safety**: Drones flying too close to commercial aircraft has called for regulations.
- **Privacy**: Drones have been used by the paparazzi to take the images of individuals breaching their privacy.

### Way ahead

- **Training courses for drone pilots**: DGCA should launch short training courses for the pilots in cooperation with the manufacturers to better equip the pilots for responsible and safe flying of drones.
- **Creating Drone-ports**: Drone-ports are proposed to be designated areas dedicated to facilitate take-off and landing of the UAVs.
- **Using drones for last mile delivery**: Recently the Telangana government has adopted a framework to use drones for last-mile delivery of essential medical supplies.
- Essential supplies such as blood and medical samples can be delivered to remote places using drones.

### Sources

Indian Express, Live Mint, PIB, ELP Law
Syllabus
- **GS3**: Environment Conservation.

Question
- In the context of Australia's bushfire, discuss what are the lessons India should learn. Suggest measures to avoid & control forest fires of such a level.

Context
- Australia has witnessed largest ever bushfires in last decade.
- Also Indian State of Forest Report (ISFR), 2019, highlighted that “about 21.40% of forest cover in India is prone to fires, with forests in the north-eastern region & central India being the most vulnerable.”

Forest fire in India as per ISFR
- **% Vulnerability**: About 21.40% of forest cover in India is highly to extremely fire prone.
- **Vulnerable Areas**: North-eastern region and Central India.
- **Forest Fire Prone Classes**
  - **Extremely prone to fire**: ~4% of the country’s forest cover.
  - **Very highly fire prone**: ~6% of forest cover.
  - **Prone to frequent forest fires**: More than 36% of the country’s forest cover.
  - **Vulnerability in India is more**: India is a third the size of the U.S. but has two-thirds the number of fires. And with four times the population, Indians are more at risk from wildfires.

Lessons India should learn?
- **Climate Change and Global Warming**: India & Australia both are facing the magnified effects of global warming. Ex: Both are victims of El Nino and El Nina, when the monsoons are intense in India; they tend to be weak in Australia, and vice-a-versa.
- **Indian Forest fires**: The forest fire incidents in India have almost doubled since 2015—from 15,937 incidences in 2015 to 29,547 in 2019.
- **Crown Fires and Eucalyptus Plantations**:
  - Crowning is when a bushfire moves from **treetop to treetop**, burning above the ground.
  - Eucalyptus trees depend on fire to release their seeds & have been singled-out for crown fires.
  - Eucalyptus forests are common in Australia and India has been promoting eucalyptus plantations across the country.
- **Dealing with Invasive Species like Lantana common to both countries**.
- **Failure of Technological Might**: The firestorm in Australia showcases inability of technology to deal with such large-scale extreme events.
- **Older ways of containing forest fires will become obsolete**.
  - Australia’s forest fire management rules are considered the best in the world but, they failed to control the fires.
  - For example, in Australia, the fire lines or fire breaks didn’t work because the fire was of the ‘Crown Fire’ type.
  - India too depends mostly on fire lines (a fire line, clears vegetation to prevent fire from jumping into the forest) to avoid fires from intensifying.
- **Conserving flora and Fauna:**
  - Australia is home to animals like koalas and kangaroos that are not found elsewhere.
  - India too has many *endemic species which are already endangered and vulnerable* like Asiatic lion, Blackbuck, nilgiri Tahr etc.

| Measures to avoid and Control | Need to develop new methods for firefighting: | We can employ Air tankers, Short and long-term retardants like foam, robots, drones, IoT, Virtual Reality, etc..<br>Mass awareness and local level participation: | More than 90% of forest fires are anthropogenic and are linked to socio-economic and livelihood issues.<br>Their prevention can be addressed only by mass awareness and participation of local people. For ex: making people aware about the burning issues in shifting cultivation practice.<br>Providing LPG in remote tribal corners: ISFR highlights the dependency of indigenous tribes living near forest areas on fuelwood. | Use of Technology: | Technology such as satellite remote sensing based forest fire detection in near real time is of critical help in controlling forest fires but they have constraints too.<br>Employing drones, robots and IoT can address the constraints presented by remote sensing technology. | National Action Plan on Forest Fires, 2018: Finalising and implementing the NAPFF which aims to is to minimize forest fires from taking place by informing, enabling and empowering forest fringe communities and may be incentivizing them to work in tandem with the forest departments. | Fire danger rating in India: | FSI has recently started to work on a system similar to Fire Weather Index (FWI) of Canada but it is still on a pilot basis.<br>It can be used as a basis for resource allocation for the forest control activities both at the Central and State levels. | Eucalyptus Plantations: | Eucalyptus is a source of medicinal oils, paper and pulp industry, wood availability, livelihood generation and carbon sequestration hence the promotion by govt.<br>However, it is also a dangerous source of fire therefore our forestry practices will have to change drastically. | Dealing with Side Effects of Forest Fires: Such as increasing spread of weeds, soil erosion, loss of regeneration, landslides, habitat degradation, loss of forest produce etc.<br>Learn to Live with Forest fires & design fire management accordingly. | Need to zone our forests: Based on propensity for fire design management systems accordingly like. Assessing forest areas carefully for fire management systems. | Fragmented Forests: | India is not likely to see contiguous forest fires as Australia on account of fragmented forests.<br>Still, intense forest fires, like in Tehri and Bandipur in 2019, could become relatively widespread. |
**Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs January - 2020 (Study Material)**

*The Unique Academy*

- **Best Way to Prevent is contain Global Warming:**
  - The long-term climate-change trends will increasingly interact disastrously with short-term climate phenomena in a way that catalyses and exacerbates extreme weather events.
  - Contain global warming within 1.5°C. is the only chance to avoid large-scale death and destruction.

*Source: Economic Times,*

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### Good Governance Index

<table>
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<th>● GSII: Important aspects of governance.</th>
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<td>Question</td>
<td>● What is meant by Good Governance? Highlight the key findings of the Good Governance Index (GGI) report recently released by the government. Discuss the significance and the limitation of GGI.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>● Minister of State for Personnel launched the <strong>Good Governance Index (GGI)</strong> on Dec 25, the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, which was declared <strong>Good Governance Day</strong> by PM Narendra Modi in 2014.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| About the Good Governance Index 2019 and key findings | ● **What is Meant by Good Governance?**
  - **The World Bank definition of Governance:** It is the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised.
  - **Good Governance:** The positive qualities of governance, while decision making and implementation processes, like **transparency, accountability, Rule of law, equality and inclusiveness** etc., are referred to as ‘Good Governance’.
  - **Good Governance Index Report 2019**
  - **Comparative Picture of State of Governance:** It is a comprehensive index to assess the State of Governance in all States & UTs enabling ranking of States/Districts and present a comparative picture.
  - **Developers of the Index:** Department of Administrative Reform & Public Grievances (DARPG) and Centre for Good Governance (CGG), Hyderabad (as technical partner).
  - **Ten Identified sectors:** agriculture & allied sectors, commerce & industries, human resource development, public health, public infrastructure & utilities, economic governance, social welfare & development, judicial & public security, environment, and citizen-centric governance.
  - **Citizen centric governance Sector:** It has not been included for scoring and ranking purpose as at present only one indicator is identified as part of the sector.
  - **Categorisation of states:** To account for the variations in size and diversity of the states, they have been categorised into 3 groups:
    1. NorthEast and Hill States (11 in number),
    2. Union Territories (7 in number), and
    3. Remaining(Big) States (18 in number).
## Key Highlights:

- **GGI in Big States Category:**
  - **Good Performers:** Tamil Nadu topped followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh & Andhra Pradesh.
  - **Poor Performers:** Odisha, Bihar, Goa and Uttar Pradesh. Jharkhand (18th position) was ranked last.
- **North East and hill states category:** Himachal Pradesh was ranked first and Arunachal Pradesh was ranked last.
- **Union Territories:** Puducherry was ranked first, followed by Chandigarh & Delhi and Lakshadweep was ranked last.
- **Some Sector-wise Ranking:**
  - **Agricultural and allied sectors:** Best performers were Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram and Daman and Diu.
  - **Commerce and Industries:** Delhi, Uttarakhand & Jharkhand were the top performers.
  - **Environment:** West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir & Chandigarh topped in their respective categories.
  - **Public Health:** Kerala, Manipur and Puducherry topped.

## Significance

- **First Uniform Index:** This is the first time a uniform and scientifically designed tool has been introduced to objectively assess the impact of interventions undertaken by governments across all states & UTs.
- **Valuable and quantifiable data:**
  - It provides useful information to Ministries/Departments enabling them to formulate and implement suitable strategies for improving living standards of the citizen.
  - It would lead to healthy and more informed policy discussions.
- **Shift in Approach:** A shift to a data driven approach to result oriented approaches and management and promote healthy competition among States.
- **Progress of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The identified sectors & indicators are directly linked to some of the critical SDG indicators from overall governance point of view, therefore contributing in tracking the progress of SDGs.
- **Recognising Agriculture and allied sectors:** It usually does not find place in other indices that are in vogue like State of Governance Report (SoGR) developed in 2008 by DARPG.
- **Defining Benchmarks for Future Indexes:**
  - The data generated during the initial year of implementation of this index would be helpful in refining the index as well as assigning weights in the future.
  - It might also be useful for defining benchmarks taking the exercise away from minimum and maximum values for arriving at the normalised score at least for some of the indicators.

## Limitations

- **Limitations of Existing Data in providing a comprehensive picture of governance:**
  - **Authenticity:** it’s a huge challenge & also data captured by private agencies at respective districts/states may not be considered unless authenticated at the Central Ministry level.
  - **Data Source:** The present GGI takes into consideration only data which is available with the Ministry and which has a time series measurement.
Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs January - 2020 (Study Material)

The Unique Academy

Unavailability of secondary data, constrained the inclusion of some key indicators, like farmers’ income.

**Agriculture and Allied Sector:** farmers’ income, prevalence of micro irrigation or water conservation systems, inflow of industrial investment, quality seeds distributed per hectare, tenancy reforms etc have been left out.

**Commerce and Industries:** The “ease of doing business” indicator has been given disproportionate weight in the sector to the virtual exclusion of growth rate of major and micro, small and medium enterprises.

**Environment:** Addressing climate change related issues is a high priority yet not enough indicators have been used for assessing it in states.

**Human Resource Development:** Infrastructure, process and policy-based parameters play a significant role in defining this sector but have not been included.

**Conclusion**

- **Limitations can be overcome:** The limitations of data, can be overcome with time as data becomes available from authentic and reliable government sources.
- **Structure of index is flexible and incremental in nature:** many additional indicators were designed which may find a place in next GGI.
- **Good governance is the pillar of an efficient democracy:** What is required is transparent, accountable and intelligible governance system free from bias and prejudices.

**Source**

https://darpg.gov.in/, Indian Express

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**Sustainable Manufacturing**

**Syllabus**

GS 3: Indian Economy, Technology and Environment.

**Question**

Sustainable Manufacturing has become a necessity, more than a reality. Discuss with reference to the recent Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy 2019.

**Why is it in the news?**

- Government has released the **Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy 2019** recently.
- A growing number of firms have begun working towards implementation of **Green Manufacturing** to come up with strategies and innovations to stay afloat.
- There are heightened concerns around **increase in pollution, depletion of natural resources and global warming.**

**Introduction**

- The traditionally known **linear economy model** continues to fall short of being able to **meet the sustainability challenges** of world.
- All the countries concurrently requires sustained economic growth, environmental protection, and societal wellbeing.
- **Linear Model:**
  - The current growth rate of the world’s consumption is predominantly a Linear economy model of **creating, using and then disposing** the products.
It does not consider the **environmental, societal and economic impacts** and its consequences.

This is a **flawed manufacturing approach**, which is unsustainable.

**Circular Model:**
An approach, where all products at the end of their primary use are **recovered, reused, remanufactured, or recycled** for multiple generations.

### Need of Sustainable Manufacturing

- **Depletion of Natural Resources:**
  - The rising population and rapid urbanization in India taking toll on critical natural resources.
  - India’s **resource extraction rate** of 1580 tonnes/acre is much higher than the world average of 450 tonnes/acre.

- **High Material Consumption and Low Material Productivity:**
  - India has increased its material consumption to six times, from 1.18 billion tonnes in 1970 to seven billion tonnes in 2015.
  - India has low material productivity compared to the global average.

- **Material productivity** means the ratio of output achieved compared to the inputs (resources) used.

- **Low Recycling Rate:**
  - The country’s recycling rate is just about 20-25%.
  - The recycling rate is 70% in most of the developing countries in Europe.

- **Import Dependency:**
  - Level of import dependency is very high for critical inputs -
    1. Lithium, copper and cobalt - 100%
    2. Coking coal - 85%
    3. Oil 80%

### Government Initiatives

- **Zero Defect and Zero Effect Policy (ZED):** Objective of ZED:
  - To Develop an Ecosystem for Zero Defect Manufacturing, especially in MSMEs.
  - To Promote adaptation of **Quality tools/systems** and Energy Efficient manufacturing.
  - Drive manufacturing without impacting the environment.

- **Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy 2019:**
  - **Vision:** A future with environmentally sustainable and equitable economic growth.
  - **Aim:** To enable reuse of waste and double recycling rate of key materials to 50% in 5 years.
  - It will create a National Resource Efficiency Authority.

- **The draft proposes a three-year action plan and implementation strategy across seven major sectors – automotive, plastic packaging, building and construction, electrical and electronic equipment, solar photovoltaic, steel and aluminium.**

- **Reuse and Recycle:** It is at the core of the draft policy, which lays focus on adequate waste management practices.

- **Setting up Material Recovery Facilities, green loans to SMEs, Tax benefits, soft loans** for creating waste disposal facilities etc.

### Way ahead

- **The 6R methodology:**
  - **Reduce:** Reduced use of energy, materials and other resources during manufacturing, and the reduction of emissions and waste during the use stage.
- **Reuse**: Reuse of the product as a whole, or its components, after its first life-cycle, for subsequent life-cycles, to reduce the usage of virgin materials to produce newer products and components.
- **Recycle**: Converting material that would otherwise be considered waste, into new materials or products.
- **Recover**: Collecting products at the end of the use stage, disassembling, sorting and cleaning for utilization in subsequent life-cycles of the product.
- **Redesign**: Act of redesigning of next generation products, which would use components, materials and resources recovered from the previous life-cycle, or previous generation of products.
- **Remanufacture**: Re-processing of already used products for restoration to their original state or a like-new form through the reuse of as many parts as possible without loss of functionality.

- **Developing Circular Economy with Technological Elements:**
  - In order to develop the circular economy with the inclusion of the 6R elements, there must be mechanisms to drive sustainable value creation.
  - To mitigate the technological gap, there is need of product/process innovation, quality education and training.

- **Economic Benefits (As per UN report - 2018):**
  - Commitments against the damaging effects of climate change, could result in **$26 trillion in economic benefits worldwide.**
  - It will also help create 65 million new ‘low-carbon jobs’ by 2030.

**Source**: The Hindu, Science Direct, Economic Times, ToI.
# U.S.- Iran Tensions

**Syllabus** | **GS 2 International Relations** India’s relations with U.S. and Iran.
---|---
**Question** | Q. What has led to the recent escalation of tensions between US and Iran? How will the ongoing tensions hurt India’s interests in the entire Gulf region?

**Why is it in news?**
- **US Military recently killed** Iranian Quds Force commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani in an air strike on airport in Baghdad, Iraq.

**Recent developments**
- **Killing of a US contractor:**
  1. December 27: A rocket attack on an Iraqi military base in Kirkuk killed a US contractor and wounded several US service members and Iraqi personnel.
  2. US officials blamed Kataib Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militia.
- **Attack on US embassy in Baghdad:** December 31-Members of Pro-Iranian groups in Iraq broke into the US embassy compound in Baghdad and set the reception of embassy on fire.
- **Killing of Qassem Soleimani: January 3:** The US killed Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran’s elite Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iran-backed militias known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces, or PMF.
- **Iran launches attacks on US forces:** Jan 8: Iran launched a series of missile attacks on two US bases in Iraq - Ain Al Assad and Erbil air base.

**What has led to tensions after the 2015 Nuclear deal?**
- **US pull-out from the deal:**
  1. On May 08, 2018, President Trump announced the decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, accusing the Iranian government of pursuing a regional agenda of harming core US interests in the Middle East.
  2. The US withdrawal from JCPOA had created serious doubts about its sustainability and have raised tensions between the US and Iran.
- **Sanctions on Iran:** Although the International Atomic Energy Association certified Iran’s compliance to the 2015 deal, US imposed sanctions on Iran.
- **Iran re-starts its nuclear enrichment program:** Iran which was abiding to the conditions imposed by the 2015 deal, after sanctions decided to move away from its earlier position and announced to restart its uranium enrichment program.

**What is the Iran Nuclear deal or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)?**
- It is an agreement signed on July 14, 2015 between Iran, U.S., China, France, Russia, the U.K., Germany and the European Union.
- **Under this deal, Iran agreed**
  1. Not to build any heavy water facilities.
  2. Eliminate its stockpile or medium-enriched uranium.
  3. Cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium, and reduce the number of its gas centrifuges.
  4. Other nuclear facilities in Iran would have to be converted into non-nuclear facilities.
In return, US and the European Union lifted almost all sanctions imposed upon Iran prior to the nuclear deal.

### Challenges ahead

- **For the world**
  - **Denuclearization**: Iran is expected to further expedite nuclear enrichment programs which will effectively fail the denuclearization programs initiated by P5 countries.
  - **Strait of Hormuz**: Iran may block the Strait of Hormuz which connects the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Gulf which would adversely affect global trade.
  - **Aviation industry**: US had earlier cancelled flights that go to India passing over Iran and the aircrafts are compelled to take a longer route which will hurt the air passengers as well as airlines.

- **For India**
  - **Energy security**: India is heavily dependent on the import of crude oil from Gulf countries. Conflicts in the region affect the price as well as availability of oil for India.
  - **Chabahar Port**:
    1. India has invested a hefty amount of money on the Chabahar port to get access to Central Asia through Iran.
    2. Instability in the gulf region would keep the progress and operation of the Chabahar at risk.
  - **Indians working in the Gulf region**: About 8 million Indians work in various sectors in the Gulf countries. Thus, peace and stability in the area is must for India.

### Way forward

- **Ensuring maximum restraint by US and Iran**: P5 countries especially European countries must ensure that maximum restraint is observed by US as well as Iran to avoid any war-like scenario.
- **Stopping Iran from further enrichment**: Iran must be compelled to stop further enrichment of Uranium at its various facilities to achieve complete denuclearization.
- **Upkeeping the nuclear deal**: France, Russia, Britain, Germany must work in close cooperation with each other to upkeen the nuclear deal as none of the other signatories has pulled out of the deal.

### Sources

The Hindu, IDSA, Indian Express, ORF

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The Unique Academy
## Syllabus
- GSII: Indian Constitution.

## Question
- Discuss the challenges encountered by non-scheduled languages and the constitutional safeguards for conserving a language. What are the advantages the eighth schedule languages have over the rest of the languages?

## Context
- The Tulu-speaking population of the country has been urging the govt. to expedite the steps to list Tulu under schedule eight of the constitution.
- It is spoken in two coastal districts of Karnataka and Kasaragod district of Kerala with as many as 18,46,427 speakers.

## Constitutional Safeguards
- **Eighth Schedule to the Constitution lists the official languages of India:** As per Articles 344(1) and 351 of the Indian Constitution, the eighth schedule includes the recognition of 22 languages.
  - **Article 29:** A section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture have the right to conserve the same.
  - **Article 30:** Right for the linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
  - **Article 350A:** The State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.
  - **Article 347:** It is a special provision relating to the language spoken by a section of the population of a State.
  - The President is given the power to recognize any language in a State if the substantial proportion of the population desires the use of their language to be recognized officially.

## Challenges for Non-Scheduled Languages
- **Preserving the Languages:**
- **Lack of Funds:** Govt usually transfers funds for preserving languages which it recognizes. This leaves out many indigenous and minority languages without funds.
- **Little utility:** Millions of speakers of non-scheduled languages feel that their mother tongues have little utility in modern life.
- **Deprived of any institutional support.**
- **Recognition of Language by Govt:** Gol doesn’t recognize any language with less than 10,000 speakers.
- **Definition of a language:** Gol currently defines a language as one that is marked by a script, effectively neutering oral languages and dialects.
- **No clear rules to recognize a language in eight Schedule**: For Example, Sanskrit has only 24,821 speakers (2011 Census). Manipuri has 17,61,079 speakers, still they are recognised in the 8th Schedule while many unscheduled languages have a sizeable number of speakers: Bhili/Bhilodi-1,04,13,637; Gondi has 29,84,453 speakers; Garo has 11,45,323; Oraon, 19,88,350, Tulu 18,46,427.
- **Problem at School Level**: Constitution provides for primary education in the mother tongue, it does not provide anything for the next level of education i.e secondary level.
- **Extinction of Languages**: Languages like Ahom, Andro, Rangkas, Sengmai, Tolcha -- all spoken in the Himalayan belt are already extinct.
- The UNESCO-World Atlas of Languages in Danger for India lists 172 languages in danger, out of which 101 are classified as severely, critically or definitely endangered and 71 "vulnerable".

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of Scheduled Languages</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Language in Parliament</strong>: Any member of parliament can speak in parliament in his/ her mother tongue, but if he/she speaks in one of the recognized languages (Eighth Schedule) simultaneous translation facilities are provided.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Artists recognised</strong>: All India Radio and Doordarshan encourage artists and broadcast programs in the languages of the Eighth Schedule.</td>
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<td><strong>Awards</strong>: There are awards separately for writings in Scheduled languages like Jnanpith Award.</td>
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<td><strong>Education at School and University Level</strong>: Efforts by state and central Govt for the teaching of the language in primary and high school.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Patronization</strong>: Scheduled languages are patronized by agencies like Sahitya Akademi, the national academy of letters resulting in many cultural incentives.</td>
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<td>The books of the language will be translated into other languages recognized in India.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mandate on the govt</strong>: It will become mandatory for the govt. to develop the scheduled language so that it grows and evolves into an effective means of communication.</td>
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<td><strong>Official Status</strong>: A scheduled language will come to be considered as an official language of the nation.</td>
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<td><strong>Employment Opportunities</strong>: Candidates will be able to write competitive exams like Civil Services Exams conducted in the All India level in a scheduled language.</td>
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<td><strong>Equal Status and Opportunity</strong>: Will place it on equal footing with other social languages which will provide equal status and opportunity.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Way Forward</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Defining Linguistic Minority</strong>: India's multifaceted linguistic landscape needs a clear definition of &quot;linguistic minority&quot; that has to be defined very carefully.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coherent Principle to Recognise Languages</strong>: Coherent regulations of the adoption of State official or co-official languages are missing.</td>
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<td><strong>Equal Responsibility</strong>: Both the state and the citizens have an equal responsibility to conserve the distinct language, script, and culture of a people.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recognition to Scriptless languages</strong>: Methodologies should be reformed, granting greater recognition to oral traditions and dialects in different languages.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Development of Schools: A proven method to ensure the survival of languages is the development of schools that teach in them, enabling the new speakers to preserve and enrich the language.

Digital Preservation: A vast digital project for preserving and growing India’s endangered languages must be launched.

Source: The Hindu, Deccan Herald, Shodhganga

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**Agrobiodiversity and India’s Food Security**

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<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>GS 3 Agriculture and Food Security</th>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Q. Define agrobiodiversity. How is it going to help achieve food and nutritional security in India?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why is it in news?</td>
<td>Recently, the Ministry of Human Resources Development brought out school ‘Nutrition Garden’ guidelines, encouraging students to identify fruits and vegetables best suited to topography, soil and climate. It has also released the Poshan Atlas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Agrobiodiversity and its significance | **Definition:** Agrobiodiversity is the result of the interaction between the environment, genetic resources and management systems and practices used by culturally diverse people.  
**What comprises agrobiodiversity?**  
(1) It comprises the diversity of genetic resources (varieties, breeds) and species used for food, fodder, fibre, fuel and pharmaceuticals.  
(2) It also includes the diversity of non-harvested species that support production, and those in the wider environment that support agro-ecosystems as well as the diversity of the agro-ecosystem.  
**Merits of Agrobiodiversity**  
(1) Gives due importance to indigenous crop varieties.  
(2) Helps promote sustainable farming methods.  
(3) Contributes to effective pest control and crop disease management.  
(4) Conserves ecosystem structure and stability of species diversity.  
(5) Diversify products and income opportunities.  
**Significance of Agrobiodiversity**  
(1) Agrobiodiversity is crucial in food security, nutrition, health and essential in agricultural landscapes.  
(2) Genetic diversity is fundamental to improve crop varieties and livestock breeds.  
(3) Important to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and the Aichi Biodiversity Target (focuses on countries conserving the genetic diversity of plants, farm livestock and wild relatives). |
### What is food security?

**Definition:** Food security means that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

- It is combination of three major factors
  - (1) **Availability of food:** Available in sufficient **quantities** and on a **consistent** basis.
  - (2) **Access to food:** People must be able to regularly acquire adequate quantities of food, through purchase, home production, barter, gifts, borrowing or food aid.
  - (3) **Effective utilization of food:** Consumed food must have a positive nutritional impact on people which includes cooking, storage and hygiene practices, water and sanitations, feeding and sharing practices etc.

### Co-relation between agrobiodiversity and food security

- **Variety of crops:** Agrobiodiversity can provide with crop varieties and animal breeds with the rich genetic pool that would help to provide nutrition.
- **Nutrition sensitive farming:**
  - (1) Agrobiodiversity helps promote nutrition-sensitive farming and bio-fortified foods.
  - (2) E.g. moringa (drumstick) has micro nutrients and sweet potato is rich in Vitamin A. There are varieties of pearl millet and sorghum rich in iron and zinc.
- **Reduces need of fertilizers:** Planting a mixture of species can increase soil nitrogen, reducing the need for inorganic fertilisers which will provide fertilizers free foods and help promote organic farming.

### Challenges to agrobiodiversity

- **Widespread use of HYV:**
  - (1) Since the Green Revolution, new rice varieties have been introduced in India which are slowly replacing the traditionally grown rice varieties.
  - (2) It is leading monoculture which can be a major factor for agricultural disasters, threatening food security.
- **High output breeds:**
  - (1) Concerns are raised on high output breeds for production of meat, milk and eggs.
  - (2) Crossbreeding of foreign breeds with indigenous breeds leads to erosion of genetically diverse pool.
- **Loss of genetic resources:** Adopting new crop varieties without conserving traditional varieties has led to loss of genetic resources of India.
- **Minimum Support Prices:** Farmers sow crops which have high MSPs.
- **Climate Change:** Traditional crops are not tolerant to increasing greenhouse gases.

### Steps taken by government

- **Poshan Abhiyaan:**
  - (1) Set up under- Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD).
  - (2) At the agricultural level, it aims to amalgamate knowledge of regional food systems
- **Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh**
  - (1) It is a repository of diverse crops across 128 agro-climatic zones in India.
  - (2) It will be prepared by Harvard Chan School of Public Health through its India Research Center and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
The Unique Academy

● **Poshan Atlas**
  (1) **Developed by**: Ministry of WCD to keep all the food-data at one place.
  (2) The atlas will create a repository of traditional foods/crops and cultural practices associated with them.
  (3) These tools will help in developing closer ties between the agricultural and nutrition sectors.

**Way forward**

● The Centre for Biodiversity Policy and Law (CEBPOL), a policy making unit of the National Biodiversity Authority, has given following recommendations to increase India’s agrobiodiversity in 2019:
  (1) **Ecological agriculture**: A comprehensive policy on ‘ecological agriculture’ to enhance native pest and pollinator population providing ecosystem services for the agricultural landscape must be formulated.
  (2) **Preserving wild relatives of crops**: Focus must be on conserving crop wild relatives of cereals, millets, oilseeds, fibres, forages, fruits and nuts, vegetables, spices etc. for crop genetic diversity healthier food.
  (3) **Setting up seed banks**: The community seed banks in each Agro-climatic zone should be encouraged so that regional biotic properties are saved and used by new generation farmers.
  (4) **Agrobiodiversity Index**: An agrobiodiversity index should be prepared, documenting traditional practices through People’s Biodiversity Registers, identifying Biodiversity Heritage Sites under provisions of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
  (5) **Policy on invasive alien species**: Developing a national level invasive alien species policy is required to identify pathways, mapping, monitoring, managing, controlling and eradicating the invasive species and prioritising problematic species based on risk assessment studies.
  (6) **Providing incentives to farmers**: State governments should provide incentives to farmers who cultivate native varieties and conserve indigenous breeds of live-stock.

**Sources**

The Hindu, NBA website, Indian Express
### Syllabus
- GSIII: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

### Question
- Forest Survey of India (FSI) recently released ISFR 2019. What are the key findings in the report? What are the challenges highlighted by this report and how can we address these challenges?

### Context
- Recently, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change, (MoEFCC) released “India State of Forest Report (ISFR), 2019”.

### Forest Cover Classification and their status:
- **Very Dense Forest:**
  1. All lands with tree canopy density of 70% and above
  2. It increased in 2019 compared to 2017
  3. Steadily increasing since 2011.
- **Moderately Dense Forest:**
  1. All lands with tree canopy density of 40% and more but less than 70%
  2. Slightly increased in 2019 compared to 2017
  3. Steadily decreased between 2011 and 2017, and slightly increased in 2019
- **Open Forest:**
  1. All lands with tree canopy density of 10% and more but less than 40%
  2. Increased in 2019 compared to 2017
  3. Steadily increasing since 2011

### About ISFR & Key Findings
- **Biennial Report, Published by Forest Survey of India (FSI),** an organization under MoEFCC.
- **ISFR 2019** is the 16th report in the series.
- **Methodology Used:** The calculations are largely based on satellite data. It includes information on forest cover, tree cover, mangrove cover, growing stock inside and outside the forest areas, carbon stock in India’s forests, forest types and biodiversity, forest fire monitoring and forest cover in different slopes and altitudes.
- **Key Findings:**
  - Increase in Forest & Tree Cover as compared to ISFR 2017:
    1. **Total Forest and Tree cover:** 8,07,276 sq km which is **24.56% of the geographical area** of the country.
    2. **Forest cover:** Increased by 3,976 sq km (0.56%),
    3. **Tree cover:** Increased by 1,212 sq km (1.29%).
  - **Decrease in Forest Cover within Recorded Forest Areas (RFA):** Forest cover within RFA has shown a slight decrease of 330 sq km (0.05%) whereas there is an increase of 4,306 sq km of forest cover outside RFA when compared to assessment of 2017.
  - **Data on Forest and Tree cover in States:**
    1. **Top 5 states in terms of Increase:** Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir & Himachal Pradesh.
(2) States with large areas under forest covers: Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha & Maharashtra.

(3) States Forest cover as a % of their total geographical area: Mizoram (85.41 percent), Arunachal Pradesh (79.63 percent), Meghalaya (76.33 percent), Manipur (75.46 percent) and Nagaland (75.31 percent)

- Wetlands:
  (1) There are 62,466 wetlands in the country.
  (2) Gujarat has the largest area of wetlands (within the RFA) in the country followed by West Bengal.

- Mangrove Cover:
  (1) Overall Increase: The mangrove cover in the country has increased by 54 sq. km. as compared to the previous assessment.
  (2) Increase of mangrove cover: Gujarat recorded maximum increase followed by Maharashtra and Odisha.
  (3) Decrease of mangrove cover: Tamil Nadu, West Bengal & Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

- Total bamboo bearing area: Increase of 3,229 sq km in bamboo bearing area.

- Fire Vulnerability: 21.40% of the forest cover of the country is highly to extremely fire prone.

### Challenges

- **Open Forest (OF) at the cost of Moderately dense Forest(MDF):**
  - While the area under “OF” increased by 5.7% this decade, the area under “MDF” decreased by 3.8%
  - The consistent increase in the area under the OF category, which includes commercial plantations seems to be happening at the cost of the MDF category, which is normally the area close to human habitations.

- **Area under Very Dense Forest:**
  - Just 3% of India’s geographical area is home to VDFs. This has increased by a mere 1.14 per cent between 2017 and 2019.
  - It absorbs maximum CO2. The forests under this category had increased dramatically by around 14 per cent between 2015 and 2017.

- **North East Forests:**
  - Decrease in Forest Cover.
  - N.E forest more important because these are very old forests, and have greater carbon sequestration capacity.

- **Problem with the definition of Forest Cover:**
  - **Definition:** As per the report, “forest cover” includes all tree patches which have canopy density more than 10 percent and area of one hectare or more in size, irrespective of their legal status and species composition.
  - It doesn’t differentiate between natural forests, plantations, orchards, or even palm groves.
  - Growth includes Commercial Plantations like eucalyptus that are favoured in compensatory afforestation programs.

- **Faulty Remote Sensing Techniques:**
  - Better imaging used: FSI used satellite imagery with a 1:50,000 scale, compared to the 1:250,000 scale earlier.

- **Problem:**
(1) With current resolution, any area, as small as 0.01 sq km, **with a canopy density of more than 10% is captured as a forest**; which, the earlier resolution (0.25 sq km) didn’t capture as forest.

(2) The land that did not get **recorded as forest earlier because it fell below the 0.25 sq km threshold now figures in the ISFR as a “gain” in forest cover.**

**Addressing the challenges**

- **Counting Natural Forest:** An exclusive study is needed for natural forest which does not include plantations and invasive species like ISFR, 2019.
- **Ujjawala Yojana:**
  - Report highlights, there is still dependency on fuelwood.
  - This call for increased coverage of this scheme especially covering forest dwellers and tribal communities.
- **Minimizing the use of Forest Resources:** Efficient use of and alternatives for, forest resources can minimize the pressure on forests.
- **Conservation of Native Species** and elimination the foreign invasive species.

**Way Forward**

- **Quality instead of Quantity:** It is important for the ISFR to look at a good forest with aspects like water security, biodiversity and livelihoods at the center of understanding the state of forests rather than merely the canopy cover.
- **Progress but Goal is still Far away:** Even though progress has been made in increasing the green cover, India is still far from achieving its target of 33% of the total geographical area by 2030.
- **Climate Action Commitments:** Forests or, more precisely, carbon-stock conservation and renewable energy are the two pillars of India’s climate-action commitments.

**Source**
The Hindu, down to earth, the wire, MoEFCC
Cabinet nod for raising abortion limit to 24 weeks

Why in news?
- The Union Cabinet recently approved the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020, to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971. The Bill will be introduced in the coming session of Parliament.

More in news
- Amendments
  1. Increasing the Gestation Limit: According to a release, the proposed amendment seeks to enhance the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women.
  2. Special Categories of Women: it will be defined in the amendments to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Rules and will include “vulnerable women including survivors of rape, victims of incest” and others like differently abled women and minors.
  3. Exceptions: Also, the upper gestation limit will not apply to cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by the Medical Board.
  4. Details of the Women: Name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed except to a person authorised in any law for the time being in force.

Sources: The Hindu

Govt. opens window for registration of drones

Why in news?
- To facilitate identification of civil drones and operators that do not meet regulatory norms, the government has launched a one-time opportunity to voluntarily register them.

More in news
- Timeline for Registrations: It began on January 14, will be open for a fortnight.
- Reasons for the Exercise:
  1. Drones as new product: The drone policy did not first account for all the drones existing in the Indian market considering them as a new product.
  2. No Retrofitting: Since one cannot retrofit the drones in the market to comply with the rules, it was decided to hold a one-time voluntary registration.
  3. Picture of Drone Types: The exercise will give a picture of who owns what kind of drone in which part of the country.
  4. Data will help in Policy decisions:
     (a) This data will help in making policy decisions and should ideally become the base for understanding the scale of drone operations in India.
     (b) It will provide an accurate number of drones in India, estimated to be between 4 lakh and 6 lakh.
  5. Drones in Legal Framework:
     (a) This is a way to get existing drones in the legal framework and only if you register then in the future probably you will be considered, and some sort of a structure will be formed in which you can fly.
(b) This may enable flying of drones easily in the future while maintaining high standards of safety, security and accountability.

- Registratin Procedure:
  1. All drone operators are required to register on the Digital Sky portal: [http://digitalsky.dgca.gov.in](http://digitalsky.dgca.gov.in).
  2. They will be issued an Operator Acknowledgement Number (OAN) and a Drone Acknowledgement Number (DAN) for each drone registered under the operator’s profile.
  3. However, possessing a DAN or OAN does not confer any right to operate drones in India if it does not fulfil the provisions given in the civil aviation requirements (CAR).
  4. After the January 31 deadline, ownership of a drone without a valid DAN or OAN shall invite penal action under sections of the Indian Penal Code.

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<th>Sources</th>
<th>The Hindu</th>
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"It is up to States to provide 10% quota"

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<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>The Centre recently informed SC that it would be the States’ prerogative to provide 10% economic reservation in government jobs and admission to education institutions.</th>
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<tr>
<th>More in news</th>
<th>Writ Petition was Filed in SC mentioned: Economic reservation law was not being implemented in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.</th>
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- Centre’s Response to the Petition:
  1. “Whether or not to provide reservation to the economically weaker section in appointment to State government jobs and admission to State government educational institutions, as per provisions of the newly inserted Articles 15(6) and 16(6) of the Constitution, is to be decided by the State government concerned,” the Centre said in an affidavit.
  2. Department of Social Justice and Empowerment “has no role in deciding the reservation policy of any State government”.

- Who belong to Economically Weaker Section:
  1. As per the notification issued by the Department of Personnel and Training on Jan 19, 2019, persons whose family has a gross annual income below Rs 8 lakh are identified as those belonging to the economically weaker section.
  2. It said the 10% reservation law was enacted to promote the welfare of the poor not covered by the 50% reservation policy for SC’s/ST’s and the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes.

- It has been nearly six months since a Bench, led by Justice Sharad A. Bobde, now CJI, has reserved orders on the preliminary question that whether a bunch of writ petitions challenging the economic reservation law should be referred to a Constitution Bench.
- The court had refused to pass any interim order to stay or hamper the implementation of the Constitution (103rd Amendment) Act, which provides for the 10% reservation.
- Article 15(6): Nothing in this article or sub-clause (g) of clause (1) of Article 19 or clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent State from making:
  1. any special provision for the advancement of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the classes mentioned in clauses (4) and (5); and
(2) Any special provision for the advancement of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the clauses mentioned in clauses (4) and (5) insofar as such special provisions relate to their admissions to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of Article 30, which in the case of reservation would be in addition to the existing reservations and subject to a maximum of ten per cent of the total seats in each category.

Sources

The Hindu

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**Judiciary**

**Time limit on advance bail violates personal liberty: SC**

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<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>● The protection of anticipatory or pre-arrest bail cannot be limited to any time frame or “fixed period” as denial of bail amounts to deprivation of the fundamental right to personal liberty in a free and democratic country, a Constitution Bench of the SC ruled recently.</th>
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<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td>● Judgement from five-judge Bench</td>
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<td>(1) <strong>Section 438 (anticipatory bail)</strong> of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc): It protects people from the ignominy of detention in jail for days on end and disgrace to their reputation.</td>
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<td>(2) It acknowledged that anticipatory bail helps thwart influential powers from implicating their rivals in false cases.</td>
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<td>(3) <strong>Term of Anticipatory bail:</strong> Life or duration of an anticipatory bail order does not normally end at the time and stage when the accused is summoned by the court, or when charges are framed, but can continue till the end of the trial.</td>
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<td>(3) <strong>Favourable to accuse:</strong> The court held that protection against arrest should inure in favour of the accused. Restricting the protection would prove unfavourable for the accused.</td>
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<td>(4) <strong>Conditions depending on the Offence:</strong></td>
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<td>(a) It is open for a court to impose appropriate conditions for grant of anticipatory bail if the specific facts or the features of the offence involved demands it.</td>
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<td>(b) Courts have to consider the nature of the offence, the role of the person, the likelihood of his influencing the course of investigation or tampering of evidence, including intimidating witnesses and fleeing justice.</td>
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<td>(5) <strong>Restrain from Blanket Practice:</strong> The grant of protection should not be “blanket” but confined to specific offence or incident for which relief from arrest is sought. It is open for the police to move court for arrest of the accused if there is any violation of bail conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bail Plea before FIR:</td>
<td>A plea for anticipatory bail can be filed even before the registration of FIR as long as there is reasonable basis for apprehension of arrest and clarity of facts. Nothing in Section 438 of CrPC compels or obliges courts to impose conditions limiting the relief in terms of time or upon filing of FIR or recording of statement of witnesses by the police during investigation or inquiry. Courts, depending on the seriousness of the threat of arrest, need not wait to hear the prosecution's version before granting anticipatory bail.</td>
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<td>Sources</td>
<td>The Hindu</td>
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### Muslim personal law a cultural issue: AIMPLB

#### Why in news?
- The Muslim personal law, which allows practices like polygamy and nikah halala, is a “cultural issue” and inextricably interwoven with the religion of Islam. The Constitution allows the continuance of the different practices of various religions until the state succeeds in its endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the All Indian Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) explained to the Supreme Court recently.

#### More in news
- The arguments were made in an application filed by the Board seeking impleadment in a writ petition filed in SC for a judicial declaration that polygamy and nikah halala (bar against remarriage with divorced husband without an intervening marriage with another man) were unconstitutional.
- Petition Against Polygamy and Nikah Halala:
  1. The petition wants the court to declare Section 2 of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, violative of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution, insofar as it seeks to recognise and validate polygamy and nikah halala.
  2. A “ban on polygamy and nikah halala has been the need of the hour to secure basic rights and in the interest of public order, morality and health”.
  3. Both practices were a cause of injury to women.
  4. The petition had referred to how the Supreme Court had held the instant talaq unconstitutional in August 2017.
- Arguments by AIMPLB
  1. Sources of Personal Law:
     a. AIMPLB, said personal laws did not derive their validity from legislature or any other competent authority.
     b. Their sources are the scriptural texts of their respective religions
  2. Definition and Validity under Constitution:
     a. The personal law does not fall within the definition of ‘laws’ under Article 13 of the Constitution.
     b. The validity of a personal law cannot be challenged on the basis of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.
  3. Petition is a push for a judicial pronouncement to bring the UCC:
     a. It argued that even Article 44 of the Constitution only says the state should try for bringing UCC.
     b. Article 44, by necessary implication, recognises the plurality of faiths and permits their continuance.
### Ahmedabad Women Action Group case:
(a) The application points out that the top court, in its 1997 judgment had already refused to examine whether polygamy in Muslim personal law is illegal and an act of cruelty.
(b) The court had said the issue should be dealt with by the legislature and not the courts.

### Rights of Muslim Women:
The rights of Muslim women were already secure under the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act of 1986.

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### Centre seeks guidelines on execution of convicts

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<th>Why in news?</th>
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| • Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) recently moved SC to frame guidelines to execute death penalty of condemned prisoners within seven days of rejection of their mercy petitions.  
• Chief Justice of India (CJI) replied that a condemned person cannot fight the death penalty endlessly and it was important for the capital punishment to reach its finality. |

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<th>More in news</th>
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| • CJI’s Reply:  
(1) The CJI said it was not for a judge to forgive a crime.  
(2) The cardinal duty of a judge was to see if the punishment was proportionate to the crime.  
(3) The law applied whether the criminal was a first-timer or a hardened one.  
• Application Filed by MHA:  
(1) To seek “appropriate clarification/modification and directions” in the 2014 Shatrughan Singh Chauhan and another vs Union of India judgment that defined the procedure to be adopted in cases of prisoners on death row.  
(2) Accused-centric rules Guidelines:  
(b) The existing guidelines, are “accused-centric” as they do not take into account an irreparable mental trauma, agony, upheaval and derangement of the victims and their family members, the collective conscience of the nation and the deterrent effect which the capital punishment intends to make.  
(b) It is found several years before and after the judgment in the Shatrughan case that convicts of even such heinous crimes under the garb of Article 21 take the judicial process for a ride,” the MHA said.  
(3) Direction From Court Requested:  
(a) If the convict of death sentence wants to file a mercy petition, it would be mandatory for a convict of death sentence to do so only within a period of 7 days from the date of receipt of death warrant issued by the competent court”.  
(b) The court should “mandate all the competent courts, State governments, prison authorities in the country to issue death warrant of a convict within 7 days of the rejection of his mercy petition and to execute death sentence within seven days thereafter irrespective of the stage of review petition/curative petition/mercy petition of his co-convicts.  
(c) It would be permissible for the death convicts to file curative petition after rejection of review petition only within a time to be stipulated by this court. |
Why was the Request Filed by MHA:
(1) The move comes amid various pleas filed by convicts in the 2012 Nirbhaya gang-rape case that has delayed their hanging.
(2) The four convicts are on death row since 2013 after a trial court ruled against them.
(3) Multiple curative petitions and mercy pleas filed before the President of India have been rejected.

2014 guidelines
(1) The 2014 verdict had issued guidelines, which primarily held that an unexplained delay in carrying out an execution would lead to commutation of the death penalty to life imprisonment.
(2) In its application, the government asked the court to set short deadlines for death row convicts to seek legal remedies.
(3) It wanted the court to limit the time for filing curative petitions.
(4) A mercy plea should be filed within a week of issuance of death warrant.

SC for curbs on powers of Speakers

Why in news?
SC recently asked Parliament to amend the Constitution to strip Legislative Assembly Speakers of their exclusive power to decide whether legislators should be disqualified under anti-defection law.

More in news
The Petition: Appeal was filed by a Congress legislator against the Manipur Assembly Speaker for the disqualification of a Minister, who after contesting in the Congress ticket, switched sides to favour the BJP.

Judgement stated that:
(1) Speaker as final arbitrator: Why a Speaker, who is a member of a particular political party and an insider in the House, should be the “sole and final arbiter” in the disqualification of a political defector.
(2) Tribunal Needed to Decide Disqualification: An independent tribunal ought to be appointed instead to determine the fate of an MP or an MLA who has switched sides for money and power.

Other Remarks by the SC:
(1) Time to Rethink: It is time Parliament had a rethink on whether disqualification petitions ought to be entrusted to a Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto.
(2) For ‘outside’ authority:
   (a) Why disqualification proceedings under the Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) should be kept in-house and not be given to an “outside” authority.
   (b) Even the final authority for removal of a judge is outside the judiciary and in Parliament, it reasoned

Second time in Second Month:
(1) This is second time in as many months that the court has highlighted the issue of taking away the disqualification power under the Tenth Schedule from Speakers.
(2) Karnataka MLA Disqualification case: In a 109-page judgment by a three-judge Bench, in the Karnataka MLAs’ disqualification case, the court had held
that a Speaker who cannot stay aloof from the pressures and wishes of his political party does not deserve to occupy his chair.

(3) Strengthening the 10th Schedule: This judgment of Nov last, also urged Parliament to “reconsider strengthening certain aspects of the Tenth Schedule, so that such undemocratic practices are discouraged”.

Sources The Hindu

### Plea in Supreme Court against welfare schemes for minorities

**Why in news?**
- The SC recently asked the government to respond to a petition filed by six Uttar Pradesh residents that the government is discriminating against Hindus by providing religious minorities with welfare schemes worth thousands of crores.

**More in news**
- Plea filed claimed:
  1. Hindus were discriminated against on the ground of religion, as schemes worth Rs. 4,700 crore were initiated in favour of only some religious minorities.
  2. It also challenged the validity of the establishment of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM).
  3. Parliament cannot make any law for the benefit of any religion maybe, for minority religious groups.
- SC Bench issued notice on the petition mentioning
  1. Welfare schemes cannot be based on religion.
  2. The government and Parliament cannot promote minoritism and cannot show inclination towards them and allure them to flourish by initiating beneficial programs for them.
  3. Such an action will be detrimental to the sovereignty and integrity of India and give rise to separatists and may create a situation for another division of the nation.
  4. The government cannot be invested with the power to declare any community as a ‘minority community’.

Sources The Hindu

### SC asks for response to homebuyer’s plea

**Why in news?**
- SC recently asked the government to respond to a petition challenging the newly promulgated Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Ordinance of 2019, which retrospectively prohibits individual homebuyers from initiating insolvency proceedings against builders.

**More in news**
- Notice to Govt.:
  1. SC Bench issued notice to the government and ordered status quo in the case of insolvency applications already filed by homebuyers in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).
- Section 3 of the ordinance:
  1. It prescribes a minimum threshold for initiating insolvency proceedings before the NCLT.
  2. It required that NCLT need to take cognisance only if it receives an application for insolvency process jointly filed by 10% or 100 in number of the total allottees/homebuyers, whichever is less, from the same project.

Sources The Hindu
Private property is a fundamental right: SC

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<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
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<td>● A citizen’s right to own private property is a fundamental right. The State cannot take possession of it without following due procedure and authority of law, the Supreme Court held in a judgment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Plea Filed in Supreme Court:</td>
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<td>(1) Plea in Himachal Pradesh(H.P) Court: H.P Govt. in 1967, had taken over the four acres of land of an illiterate widow woman, who approached the Himachal Pradesh High Court in 2010 first.</td>
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<td>(2) Moved to SC: When the HC asked her to file a civil suit in the lower court, she moved the Supreme Court.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Judgement Pronounced on 8 Jan 2020:</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) State as an Encroacher: The State cannot trespass into the private property of a citizen and then claim ownership of the land in the name of ‘adverse possession’, and that grabbing private land and then claiming it as its own makes the State an encroacher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Right to Property is a Fundamental right: In a welfare state, right to property is a human right.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) Adverse Possession not Permitted: A welfare state cannot be permitted to take the plea of adverse possession, which allows a trespasser i.e. a person guilty of a tort, or even a crime, to gain legal title over such property for over 12 years.</td>
</tr>
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<td>● Authority of law</td>
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<td>(1) Compensation: Ordering the state to pay her Rs1 crore in compensation, the SC noted that in 1967, ‘right to private property was still a fundamental right’ under Article 31 of the Constitution.</td>
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<td>(2) 44th Constitution Amendment: Property ceased to be a fundamental right with the 44th Constitution Amendment in 1978.</td>
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<td>(3) Article 300A: Article 300A required the State to follow due procedure and authority of law to deprive a person of his or her private property, SC reminded the government.</td>
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Sources: The Hindu

SC to hear pleas challenging Delhi HC order on ultrasonography

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<th>Why in news?</th>
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<td>● Supreme Court recently agreed to hear, in detail, pleas challenging a Delhi High Court decision removing the mandatory six-month training required under law for performing ultrasonography.</td>
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<th>More in news</th>
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<tr>
<td>● Stay on HC Verdicts:</td>
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<td>(1) In March 2018, SC had passed an interim order staying the operation of the High Court’s February 17, 2016 order.</td>
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<td>● HC verdict transgressed into an area of legislative policy.</td>
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<td>(1) “The Training Rules 2014 were made by the Central government in exercise of the power conferred by Parliament.</td>
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<td>(2) Prima facie, the Rules are neither ultra vires the parent legislation nor do they suffer from manifest arbitrariness,” the court had observed in its interim order.</td>
</tr>
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<td>● HC Impinged SC Judgement:</td>
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(1) The Supreme court had also observed that the High Court had “squarely impinged” on its November 2016 judgment in the Voluntary Health Association of Punjab case, which called for the strict implementation of the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) (Six Months Training) Rules, 2014, to bring to an end the social evil of female foeticide.

- A Bench led by CJI scheduled the case for hearing on April 8.

Sources The Hindu

**CJI urges government to provide exclusive CISF team to secure courts**

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<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>CJI revealed in open court that the government has been asked to provide a “separate and dedicated cadre” of Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) for security cover to court complexes across the country.</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| More in news | Reasons for a dedicated cadre:  
(1) Tis Hazari Incident: such a force would thwart sudden spurts of violence like the one recently seen at the Tis Hazari court complex between lawyers and the police.  
(2) Writ Petition in 2015:  
(1) Installing CCTV’s: The development came while it was hearing a writ petition filed in 2015 to improve security in courts and tribunals by installing closed-circuit television cameras.  
(2) Directions to Install:  
(a) In March 2017, the top court had directed that CCTV cameras be installed in courts and important locations of court complexes in at least two districts in every State and Union Territory.  
(b) The monitor of these cameras should be placed in the chamber of the district and sessions judge concerned.  
(c) The SC had, in its order, made it clear that footage from the cameras would not be made available to the public under the Right to Information Act or without the permission of the High Court concerned.  
(d) Court had also considered the issue of CCTV cameras in tribunals.  
(e) It had directed the installation of cameras in subordinate courts in a phased manner. |
| Sources | The Hindu |

**SC bats for children left out of NRC list**

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<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>SC recently ordered that children excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam but whose parents/guardians/caregivers were part of the final list, should not be sent to detention camps or separated from their loved ones at any cost.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in news | Undertaking: Appearing before a Bench led by CJI Sharad A. Bobde, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal was required to record an undertaking before the court in a petition filed by the NGO Citizens for Justice and Peace.  
Petition Filed mentioned:  
(1) Documents Shown: All their documents were shown. Despite this, their names were not found in the final NRC list. Their parents’ names are there in the list. Will these children be sent to detention camps |
| Sources | The Hindu |

60 ▶ Contemporary Issues & Current Affairs January - 2020 (Study Material)
- Challenging the CAA’s Religious bias and Section 3(1):
  (1) Besides challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, for discrimination in granting citizenship on the basis of religion, the petition filed by Association for Protection of Civil Rights, an NGO, challenged the validity of Section 3 (1) of the original Citizenship Act, 1955.
  (2) Section 3(1) creates three scenarios.
    (a) It mandates that children born in India on or after January 26, 1950, but before July 1, 1987, are entitled to citizenship by birth.
    (b) It says children born in India on or after July 1, 1987, but before December 3, 2004, would be entitled to Indian citizenship by birth only if either of his parents is an Indian citizen.
    (c) It provides that children born in India on or after December 3, 2004, would be entitled to Indian citizenship by birth only if both of parents are citizens or one of the parents is a citizen and the other is not an illegal migrant.
  (3) Stateless Children:
    (a) While there are conditions for children born between 1950 and 1987, children born in the second and third time-frame may end up stateless.
    (b) Children of Illegal Immigrants: “Those children who were born in India on or after July 1, 1987, but before December 3, 2004, whose parents were illegal migrants would not be granted Indian citizenship but would not even be considered illegal migrants within Section 3(2) (b) of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
    (c) Similarly, those children who were born in India on or after December 3, 2004, either of whose parents was an illegal migrant, would again not be granted Indian citizenship.”.
- Clarification by Attorney General:
  (1) “Children excluded from NRC but whose parents have been given citizenship, will not be sent to detention centres in Assam.”
  (2) The NGO submitted that the NRC had identified “specific categories of already marginalised persons”, who had been excluded, these included
    (a) children excluded from the NRC final list even as their parents and relatives were included;
    (b) orphaned children excluded from the NRC who did not reside in State orphanages or homes;
    (c) children excluded from the NRC who were from disconnected families and stayed with close or distant relatives; and
    (d) parents excluded from the NRC when children were included.
- Over 19 lakh people in Assam have been excluded from the final list was published on August 31 last. Its preparation was monitored by the Supreme Court.

Sources: The Hindu

State can regulate minority institutions: SC

| Why in news?       | The Supreme Court recently held that the State is well within its rights to introduce a regulatory regime in the “national interest” to provide minority educational institutions with well-qualified teachers in order for them to “achieve excellence in education.” |

| Sources       | The Hindu |
### Cannot Ignore Article 30:

1. The managements of minority institutions cannot ignore such a legal regime by saying that it is their **fundamental right under Article 30 of the Constitution** to establish and administer their educational institutions according to their choice.

2. **Balancing the Objectives**: The regulatory law should balance the dual objectives of ensuring standard of excellence as well as preserving the **right of minorities to establish and administer their educational institutions**.

3. Regulations that embrace and reconcile the two objectives were reasonable.

#### West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act of 2008

1. The judgment came on a challenge to the **validity** of the West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act of 2008.

2. The State Act mandated that the **process of appointment** of teachers in aided madrasahs, recognised as minority institutions, would be done by a Commission, whose decision would be binding.

### No automatic conviction for abetment of suicide

#### Why in news?

- A person accused of dowry harassment cannot be automatically convicted for **abetment of suicide**, the Supreme Court has held in a judgment.

#### Judgement:

1. Merely because an accused is found **guilty** of an offence punishable under Section 498A of the IPC and the death has occurred within a period of seven years of the marriage, the accused cannot be automatically held guilty for the offence punishable under **Section 306 (abetment of suicide)** of the IPC by employing the presumption under Section 113A of the Evidence Act.

2. Unless the prosecution establishes that some act or illegal omission by the accused has driven the deceased to commit the suicide, the conviction under Section 306 would not be tenable.

3. The court is required to **take into consideration all other circumstances of the case**.

- **In present case**: The apex court set aside the conviction of the husband for abetment of suicide of his wife but upheld the case of dowry harassment against him.

### Supreme Court bats against transfer of community resources

#### Why in news?

- Government has no right to transfer **“invaluable” community resources like village water ponds** to a few powerful people and industrialists for commercialisation of the property, SC held recently.

#### Highlights of the judgement

1. The State cannot divest villagers of their existing source of water even if it promises to provide them an alternative site where the water body can be replicated.

2. Such an attitude would display “a mechanical application of environmental protection.”

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Sources: The Hindu
(3) There is no guarantee that the adverse effect of destroying the existing water body would be offset and people would be compelled to travel miles to access the alternative site.

- **Protection of common areas is a fundamental right**
- Protection of such village commons is essential to safeguard the fundamental right guaranteed by Article 21 of our Constitution.
- These **common areas are the lifeline of village communities**, and often sustain various chores and provide resources necessary for life

- **More about the case**
- The judgment came on a plea by activist-lawyer Jitendra Singh against the transfer of village ponds’ sites of Saini Village in the National Capital Region to some private industrialists by the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority.
- **NGT order:** The National Green Tribunal had refused to intervene on Mr. Singh’s plea that excavators and other heavy machinery were attempting to take over a common pond used by the villagers for a century.

**Sources**
The Hindu

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**Miscellaneous**

**India slips 2 places on corruption perception index**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>India’s ranking in the <a href="https://www.transparency.org/en">Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI-2019)</a> of Transparency International has slipped from 78 to 80 compared to the previous year, questioning the “unfair and opaque political financing” in the country. Its score of 41 out of 100 remains the same.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in news | **CPI-2019:**
(1) 2019 CPI draws on 13 surveys and expert assessments to measure public sector corruption in 180 countries and territories, giving each a score from zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).
(2) **Top ranked countries:** New Zealand and Denmark, with scores of 87 each, followed by Finland (86), Singapore (85), Sweden (85) and Switzerland (85).
(3) **Bottom Ranked Countries:** The countries ranked at the bottom of the list are Somalia, South Sudan and Syria with scores of 9, 12 and 13, closely followed by Yemen (15), Venezuela (16), Sudan (16), Equatorial Guinea (16) & Afghanistan (16).
(4) **Improvers:** In the last 8 years, only 22 countries significantly improved their CPI scores, including Greece, Guyana & Estonia.
(5) **Fall in Scores:** In the same period, among the 21 countries that saw a significantly fall in their scores are Canada, Australia and Nicaragua.
(6) In the remaining 137 countries, the levels of corruption show little to no change.
- **Score of Asia Pacific:**
(1) In the Asia Pacific region, the average score is 45, after many consecutive years of an average score of 44, which “illustrates general stagnation” across the region.
The Unique Academy

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Page 595.3x793.7</th>
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<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemporar y Issues &amp; Current Affairs January - 2020 (Study Material)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) China has improved its position from <strong>87 to 80</strong> with a score of 41 out of 100, a two-point jump.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Despite the presence of high performers like New Zealand (87), Singapore (85), Australia (77), Hong Kong (76) and Japan (73), the Asia Pacific region hasn’t witnessed substantial progress in anti-corruption efforts or results.</td>
</tr>
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<td>(4) In addition, low performers like Afghanistan (16), North Korea (17) and Cambodia (20) continue to highlight serious challenges in the region.</td>
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<td>(5) According to Transparency International, while often seen as an engine of the global economy, in terms of political integrity and governance, the region performs only marginally better than the global average.</td>
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<td>(6) Many countries see economic openness as a way forward, however, governments across the region, from China to Cambodia to Vietnam, continue to restrict participation in public affairs, silence dissenting voices and keep decision-making out of public scrutiny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Given these issues, it comes as no surprise that vibrant economic powers like China (41), Indonesia (40), Vietnam (37), the Philippines (34) and others continue to struggle to tackle corruption, according to the report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Details in the Report:

(1) **Control of Corruption:** In democracies such as India & Australia, unfair and opaque political financing, undue influence in decision-making and lobbying by powerful corporate interest groups have resulted in stagnation or a decline in the control of corruption.

(2) **Little or No Improvement:** The report has revealed that a majority of countries are showing little to no improvement in tackling corruption.

(3) **Big Money Flow:** Analysis also shows corruption is more pervasive in countries where big money can flow freely into electoral campaigns and where governments listen only to the voices of wealthy or well-connected individuals.

**Sources**
The Hindu

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## India drops 10 ranks in Democracy Index

<table>
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<th>Why in news?</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The world’s biggest democracy slipped <strong>10 places ranking to 51st place</strong> in the latest edition of Democracy Index, mentioning the primary cause of “democratic regression” as “an erosion of civil liberties in the country”.</td>
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<th>More in news</th>
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<td>• <strong>About Democracy Index, 2019:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) <strong>Title of the Report:</strong> “A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest”</td>
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<td>(2) <strong>Report by:</strong> The Economist Intelligence Unit — the research and analysis division of The Economist Group, which is the sister company to The Economist newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) It records <strong>how global democracy fared</strong>, analysing <strong>165 independent states and two territories.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(5) Index is based on 60 indicators grouped in 5 different categories, <strong>measuring pluralism, civil liberties and political culture.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(6) In addition to a <strong>numeric score and a ranking</strong>, the index categorises each country in one of four regime types: <strong>full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Global Scenario as per the Report:
(1) **Average global score recorded its worst value ever:** down from 5.48 in 2018 to 5.44,
(2) It was driven by a sharp regression in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, a lesser one in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and by stagnation in the remaining regions that were covered.
(3) According to the report, there are only 22 “full democracies” as compared to 54 “authoritarian regimes” and as many “flawed democracies,” that include the U.S.

Details About India in the Report:
(1) **India’s overall score fell:** from 7.23 to 6.9, on a scale of 0-10, within a year (2018-2019), the country’s lowest since the Index began in 2006.
(2) **Other parameters on which India was graded:** electoral process and pluralism (8.67), functioning of government (6.79), political participation (6.67), political culture (5.63) & civil liberties (6.76).
(3) **Flawed Democracy:**
   (a) Index categorises India under “flawed democracies”
   (b) These countries that hold free and fair elections & where basic civil liberties are respected, but have significant weaknesses in aspects of democracy, such as problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation
(4) **Revocation of Jammu and Kashmir’s special status:**
   (1) The report talks about the repeal of both Article 370 and Article 35A and how ahead of the move, “the government deployed a large number of troops in J&K, imposed various other security measures and placed local leaders under house arrest, including those with pro-India credentials.
   (b) The govt. also restricted Internet access in the State.
(5) **NRC Exercise:**
   (a) It says the NRC exercise in Assam excluded 1.9 million people from the final list, and that “the vast majority of people excluded from the NRC are Muslims.”
   (b) While the ruling BJP says that most of the people excluded from the list are immigrants from Bangladesh, the government of that country “denies this”.
(6) **Constitutional Amendment Act(CAA):** The new citizenship law has enraged the large Muslim population, stoked communal tensions and generated large protests in major cities.
(7) **Ranking in Asia & Australasia region:** India ranks 8th, behind Taiwan and Timor-Leste.

Sources The Hindu

Another extension for OBC sub-categorisation panel

Why in news? • Union Cabinet recently approved a 6-month extension in the tenure of the commission to examine sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBC) i.e till July 31, which was appointed in 2017 with 12 weeks time frame.

More in news • Other Approval By the Cabinet:
(1) Addition to the commission’s terms of reference.
The commission will now also “study the various entries in the Central list of OBCs and recommend correction of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of spelling or transcription.

- About the Commission:
  - **Headed by**: G. Rohini, former Chief Justice of Delhi HC.
  - **Aim**: Look into the existing list of OBCs & categorise castes that have not benefited from reservation in govt jobs & education.
  - **(3)** It is also expected to give recommendations to ensure that these marginalised communities get the benefits of various schemes.

### Sources
The Hindu

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### 2 Environment

**‘Rising CO2 levels may double floods’**

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<th>Why in news?</th>
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<td>- The risk of extreme floods or storms could <strong>double every 13 years at the rate carbon-dioxide concentrations are building up in the atmosphere.</strong> This could spell a “catastrophe” for India, scientists have warned in a study.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Report Title</strong>: “Impacts of Carbon Dioxide Emissions on Global Intense Hydro-meteorological Disasters”</td>
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<td>- <strong>Published in</strong>: January issue of Climate, Disaster &amp; Development Journal.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| - **Other Findings in the Report:**  
  - **(1)** **Hydro-Meteorological Disasters**: The number of intense “hydro-meteorological” disasters could **increase by 5.4% annually for an “average” country facing annually nearly one “extreme disaster”** (defined as one that causes 100 or more fatalities and/or affects 1,000 or more people).  
  - **(2)** India faces 5-10 times as many extreme events as the average country.  
  - **(3)** **Straining the Ability to Cope**: One more extreme event in India [such as the Kerala floods of 2018 that killed at least 400] would strain the ability of the country to cope; **a doubling of the numbers in 13 years, using the above estimation, would be catastrophic**, warned the study. |
| - **Econometric Modelling**: The authors of the study relied on econometric modelling which, they say, complements the traditional approach of climate modelling to explore the factors that have contributed to the increase in the frequency of flood and storm events. |

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<td>The Hindu</td>
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**Crocodile population on the rise in Odisha’s Ghodahada reservoir**

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<th>Why in news?</th>
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<td>- 21 mugger crocodiles live in 10 village ponds adjoining Ghodahada reservoir of Odisha’s Ganjam district that houses 44 of these reptiles.</td>
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<th>More in news</th>
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</table>
| - **Crocodile Census on 11 Jan:**  
  - **(1)** **Number of Crocodiles Increased:** |
As per the census, the number of mature crocodiles in Ghodahada reservoir and its adjoining area has increased from 58 in January 2019 to 65 in 2020.

In 2019, there were 43 muggers in the reservoir, while 15 were living in the nearby village ponds,” said Berhampur Divisional Forest Officer Amlan Nayak.

(2) **Peaceful coexistence**: Census highlights the peaceful coexistence of humans and crocodiles in the Dighapahandi forest range under Berhampur forest division.

(3) **Humans were never harmed**: The crocodiles of the Ghodahada reservoir and its adjoining village ponds have never harmed any villagers or domestic animals.

- **Mugger Less Ferocious**: According to zoologists, muggers are less ferocious than other crocodile breeds and they seem to be satisfied with fish in the reservoir and its adjoining ponds.
- **Pisciculture and Conservation**: Villagers are fishermen and involved in pisciculture in the reservoir and conservation of crocodiles.

**Kaziranga has one of the highest number of wetland birds**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>Kaziranga recorded 96 species of wetland birds — one of the highest for wildlife reserves in India, according to the second wetland bird count conducted on January 9-10.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**More in news**

- Data as per Wetland Bird Survey:
  1. **96 Species under 80 Families**: The survey registered a total of 19,225 birds belonging to 96 species under 80 families.
  2. First census: The first waterfowl census in 2018 had yielded 10,412 birds covering 80 species, belonging to 21 families.
  3. **Bar-Headed Goose Led**: With 6,181 individuals, the bar-headed goose led the species count, followed by the common teal at 1,557 and northern pintail at 1,359. All three belong to the family anatidae.
  4. **Other species with sizeable numbers include**: gadwall, common coot, lesser whistling duck, Indian spot-billed duck, little cormorant, ferruginous duck, tufted duck, Eurasian wigeon, Asian openbill, northern lapwing, ruddy shelduck & spot-billed pelican.
  5. **Four Ranges Covered**: The survey covered four ranges of the park — Agoratoli, Bagori, Kohora and Burapahar.
  6. **Most recorded in Agoratoli Range**:
     - More than half the birds (9,924) and 85 of the 96 species were recorded in Agoratoli Range.
     - This was because **Sohola, the largest of Kaziranga's 92 perennial wetlands, is in this range**.
- The first wetland bird survey in Kaziranga, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985, was conducted in 2018.
- **Importance of Avian Data**:
  1. Data on avian wealth is important because the wetlands nourish Kaziranga's ecosystem.
  2. Increase or decrease in the number of birds is indicative of the park's health.

**Sources**
The Hindu
‘2019 was 7th warmest year since 1901’

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>● Though the rise in average temperatures over India in 2019 was the lowest since 2016, according to a report from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the year that went by was the 7th warmest, since record-keeping commenced in 1901.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in news | ● **Title of the IMD Report:** ‘Climate Summary’
● **Other Mentions in the Report:**
(1) **Annual mean surface air temperature:** During the year, it was +0.36°C above average (mean temperature from 1980-2010).
(2) **Temperature in India:** Highest warming observed was during 2016, 0.71°C above the mean, while 2018 was the 6th warmest in India with 0.41°C above the mean, 2017 was 0.55°C warmer.
(3) **WMO Observation:** According to the World Meteorological Organisation, the rise in global mean surface temperature during 2019 (January to October) was +1.10°C.
(4) **Main contributors:** The main contributors to the warming this year were temperatures in the pre-monsoon (March-May) and monsoon seasons (June-September).
(5) **No declining trend:** The only pattern is that global warming is raising average temperatures globally, as well as in India.
(6) **High Rainfall in 2019:** it was 9% over what is normal for a year due to the monsoon rains (June-Sept) being 10% over its normal, and the northeast monsoon rains being 9% over its normal. |

Sources: The Hindu

India records less than 100 tiger deaths for the first time in three years

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>● For the first time in the past 3 years, the number of tiger deaths in a year in the country has been less than 100. According to data from the Ministry of Forest Environment and Climate Change (MoEFCC), there were 84 cases of tiger deaths in the country and 11 cases of seizures (in which a tiger is presumed dead on the basis of body parts seized by authorities). Both put together, the number of tiger deaths in 2019 is 95.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in news | ● **Data on tiger Deaths in previous years:**
(1) **2018,** number of tiger deaths recorded was 100 (93 mortalities and seven seizures).
(2) **2017,** it was 115 (98 mortalities and 17 seizures),
(3) **2016,** it was 122 (101 mortalities and 21 seizures).
● **Growing numbers:** 2019 tiger census report: placed the number of tigers in India at 2,967, up by a third when compared with the numbers reported in 2014.
● **Reasons for reduced Mortalities:**
(1) **Surveillance, good management** of Tiger Reserves and awareness and education programmes on tiger conservation.
(2) **Using technology to maintain surveillance on tigers,** an added advantage.
● **Reasons for Deaths in 2019:**
(1) Data on tiger mortality also confirms **22 cases of poaching in the country and one case of tiger poisoning in 2019.** |
An analysis shows that 16 out of 22 poaching incidents have been reported outside Tiger Reserves.

Deaths due to natural causes: 17

Deaths because of unknown reasons: 56

- State-wise split of Deaths in 2019:
  1. Madhya Pradesh, which has the highest number of tigers in the country (526, as per the last census), recorded the most number of cases (31) of tiger deaths.
  2. Followed by Maharashtra (18 deaths), Karnataka (12 deaths), Uttarakhand (10 deaths) and Tamil Nadu (seven cases).
  3. Deaths were also recorded from non-tiger bearing States like Gujarat, where a tiger had strayed into the State and died.

- With the increase in tiger numbers, more areas in the country need to be declared Tiger Reserves.
- Currently, we have 50 Tiger Reserves with an area of about 73,000 sq. km. With tigers coming out of Reserves and covering long distances, we need more Tiger Reserves.

### Sources
The Hindu

## Waterbird census to start in Godavari mangroves

### Why in news?
- Annual bird census will commence in Corniga Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) and surrounding wetlands in the Godavari mangrove cover on the east coast soon.

### More in news
- **Aim:** The census aims at documentation of migratory and resident birds to be able to prepare a better management plan of the complex ecosystem that supports the waterbird species.
- **Utility of the census:** It will give us a picture of its present state and results of the conservation being done in the wildlife sanctuary and outside.
- **Indian Skimmer:**
  1. Indian skimmer, a waterbird species, has started visiting the Godavari mangrove for three years.
  2. The species can be sighted only in three places in the country, including the Chambal river in Central India.
  3. The census will document such incredible findings of the avian life surviving in the Godavari mangroves.
- **IUCN status:** The conservation status of Indian Skimmer is ‘vulnerable’, according to the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

### Sources
The Hindu

## Miscellaneous

### African cheetahs to prowl Indian forests

### Why in news?
- SC recently lifted its 7-year stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More in news</th>
<th>Plan to revive the Indian cheetah population was stalled in 2012:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) <strong>Fear of Conflict:</strong> In May 2012, the top court had stalled the plan to initiate the foreign cheetahs into the Palpur Kuno sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh fearing they may come into conflict with a parallel and a much-delayed project to reintroduce lions into the same sanctuary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) <strong>Favourable Clime:</strong> The court was also worried whether the African cheetahs would find the sanctuary a favourable clime as far as abundance of prey is concerned.</td>
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<td>Bench Lifted the Stay in 2020</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1) Bench allowed the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to go ahead with its plans to bring the African cat to India.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) <strong>Committee Formed:</strong> It set up a three-member committee, comprising former Director of Wildlife of India Ranjit Singh, DG of Wildlife of India Dhananjay Mohan, and DIG, Wildlife, Ministry of Environment and Forests, to ‘guide’ the NTCA and make sure that the right precautions are taken.</td>
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<td>(3) <strong>Progress report:</strong> Bench, directed the committee to file a progress report every four months.</td>
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<td>Survey Needed:</td>
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<td>(1) The Supreme Court made it clear that a proper survey should be done to identify the best possible habitat for the cheetahs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Every effort should be taken to ensure that they adapt to the Indian conditions.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(3) The committee would help, advise and monitor the NTCA on these issues.</td>
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<td>(4) The action of the introduction of the animal would be left to the NTCA’s discretion.</td>
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<td>NTCA Statement:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1) Cheetah does not breed well in captivity and requires vast stretches of grassland, and access to adequate prey to thrive.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) There are eight to nine identified sites in India but the best one is in the Kuno Palpur sanctuary.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(3) The purported gains from introducing the cheetah would include tourism, improvement of grasslands and global recognition for successfully reviving the animal in India.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources**  The Hindu

10 more wetlands in India declared as Ramsar sites

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why in news?</th>
<th>India has added 10 more wetlands to sites protected by the Ramsar Convention, Union Environment Minister recently announced.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td><strong>New Wetlands:</strong></td>
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<td>(1) The 10 new ones are Nandur Madhameshwar, a first for Maharashtra; Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal in Punjab; and Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and Sarsai Nawar in Uttar Pradesh.</td>
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<td>(2) Other Ramsar sites are in Rajasthan, Kerala, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Jammu &amp; Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu &amp; Tripura.</td>
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<td>(3) With this, a total of 37 sites in the country have been recognised under the international treaty.</td>
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</table>
The Unique Academy

| Sources | The Hindu |

**Wetlands declared as Ramsar sites are protected under strict guidelines.**

1. The Convention, signed in **1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar**, is one of the **oldest inter-governmental accord for preserving the ecological character of wetlands**.

2. It is also known as the **Convention on Wetlands**.

**Lone, rare migratory eagle sighted in Andhra Pradesh**

**Why in news?**
- A lone endangered steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) has been sighted by a group of birdwatchers in a paddy field near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh.
- This is the second time that steppe eagle has been sighted in the State in the past two decades.

**More in news**
- **Exploration Need**: The sighting of the endangered species highlights the need for exploration of the diversity of avian life in the State.
- **Threat**: Conversion of open habitats for aquaculture, pesticides and various effluents pose threat to the species.
- **Avian Surveys**: The find emphasises the need for extensive avian surveys in the landscapes within and outside the protected areas in the State.
- **About the Steppe Eagle**:
  1. **Conservation status**: Endangered
  2. The call of the steppe eagle sounds like a crow barking, but it is rather a silent bird.
  3. The steppe eagle's diet is largely fresh carrion of all kinds, but it will kill rodents and other small mammals up to the size of a hare, and birds up to the size of partridges. It will also steal food from other raptors.
  4. Like other species, the steppe eagle has a crop in its throat allowing it to store food for several hours before being moved to the stomach.
  5. Steppe eagle is believed to be the second-largest migratory eagle species to India.
  6. In winter, steppe eagle breeds in Russia, Kazakhstan, & Mongolia.
  7. The Steppe Eagle appears on the flag of Kazakhstan. It is also the National bird (animal) of Egypt and appears on its flag.

**Sources**
- The Hindu

**146 endangered Irrawaddy dolphins sighted in Chilika**

**Why in news?**
- Odisha Forest Department officials, wildlife experts & researchers recently sighted **146 endangered Irrawaddy dolphins in Chilika Lake, which boasts of the highest single lagoon population of the aquatic mammal in the world**.

**More in news**
- **Dolphin Census**:
  1. The dolphin census was simultaneously taken up in Chilika and off Odisha coast.
  2. Counting of Dolphins estimated using Hydrophones.
  3. **Dolphins population Stabilise**: The Chilika Development Authority (CDA) is elated as the direct sighting of 146 dolphins meant that its population in the lake would stabilise well above 150.
  4. **Last year count**: According to last year’s census, the Irrawaddy dolphin population in Chilika was 151.
(5) **Migration of Dolphins:**
(a) Dolphins are colonising new areas, which had been freed from encroachments by prawn farming gheries.
(b) Population is likely to increase in the next couple of years as there are enough signs of dolphins migrating from the Satpada side to other areas.
(c) According to hydrophone monitoring carried out round the year in Chilika, the highest number of Irrawaddy dolphins (20-25) was moving around Rajhans, followed by the Magarmukh and Malatikuda areas.

- **About Irrawaddy Dolphin:**
  1. The Irrawaddy dolphin (Orcaella brevirostris) is a euryhaline species of oceanic dolphin found in discontinuous subpopulations near sea coasts and in estuaries and rivers in parts of the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia.
  2. IUCN Status: Endangered
  3. **Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS):** It is listed on both Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on the CMS.
     (a) It is listed on Appendix I as this species has been categorized as being in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant proportion of their range and CMS Parties strive towards strictly protecting these animals, conserving or restoring the places where they live, mitigating obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them.
     (b) Appendix II: as it has an unfavorable conservation status or would benefit significantly from international co-operation organized by tailored agreements.

**Sources**
The Hindu

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**CRZ rules eased for ‘Blue Flag’ beaches**

| Why in news? | ● The Environment Ministry has **relaxed Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules** that restrict construction near beaches to help States construct infrastructure and enable them to receive ‘Blue Flag’ certification. |
| **More in news** | ● Gazette notification:
   (1) Via an order on Jan 9, the Environment Ministry eased restrictions for the “purposes of Blue Flag certification”
   (2) It mentioned that the following activities and facilities shall be permitted in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), including Islands, subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from HTL (High Tide Line).
   ● 13 Beaches for Blue Flag:
      (1) Last year, the Ministry selected **13 beaches in India to vie for the certificate**.
      (2) The earmarked beaches are — Ghoghala beach (Diu), Shivrajpur beach (Gujarat), Bhogave beach (Maharashtra), Padubidri and Kasarkod beaches (Karnataka), Kappad beach (Kerala), Kovalam beach (Tamil Nadu), Eden beach (Puducherry), Rushikonda beach (Andhra Pradesh), Miramar beach (Goa), Golden beach (Odisha), Radhanagar beach (Andaman & Nicobar Islands) and Bangaram beach (Lakshadweep)
      (3) This is an international recognition conferred on **beaches that meet certain criteria of cleanliness and environmental propriety.**
   ● Blue Flag certification Criteria contradicts CRZ Laws:
(1) It requires beaches to create certain infrastructure — portable toilet blocks, grey water treatment plants, a solar power plant, seating facilities, CCTV surveillance and the like. 
(2) However, India’s CRZ laws don’t allow the construction of such infrastructure on beaches and islands.

- **About Blue Flag Certification**: The certification is accorded by the Denmark-based Foundation for Environment Education, with 33 stringent criteria under four major heads for the beaches:
  - Environmental Education and Information
  - Bathing Water Quality
  - Environment Management and Conservation
  - Safety and Services.

- **Eco-tourism**: The ‘Blue Flag’ beach is an ‘eco-tourism model’ and marks out beaches as providing tourists and beachgoers clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities/amenities, a safe and healthy environment, and sustainable development of the area.

  The Blue Flag Programme started in France in 1985 and has been implemented in Europe since 1987, and in areas outside Europe since 2001, when South Africa joined.

Sources The Hindu

### Arunachal to start red listing of orchids

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<th>Why in news?</th>
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| * Arunachal Pradesh has signed an agreement with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to **prepare a Red List Assessment of all orchids in the State.**  
* The pact makes Arunachal Pradesh the first State in India to initiate IUCN’s “red listing” at the State level, officials said. |

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<th>More in news</th>
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| * About Orchids:  
1. Orchids in Arunachal Pradesh can be classified into 3 species found in different forest types.  
   a. **Terrestrial orchids** - 140 species.  
   b. **Saprophytes** - 15 species  
   c. **Epiphytes** - 340 species.  
2. Orchids are an **endangered plant group**. Hence, orchid trade is regulated under the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).**  
3. Since India is signatory to this convention, **Orchid trade attracts the Wild Life Protection Act (1972) of government of India amended in 1992.**  
4. Accordingly, Orchids have been brought under **Schedule VI of Wild Life Protection Act** and the trade is regulated as per Rule. |

Sources The Hindu

### Panel approves scheme to ‘trade’ in forests

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<th>Why in news?</th>
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| * The Forest Advisory Committee, an apex body tasked with adjudicating requests by the industry to raze forest land for commercial ends, **has approved a scheme that could allow “forests” to be traded as a commodity.**  
* If implemented, it allows the Forest Department to outsource one of its responsibilities of reforestation to non-government agencies. |

Sources The Hindu
More in news

- **Current System:**
  1. **Make good the loss of forest:** Industry needs to make good the loss of forest by finding appropriate non-forest land equal to that which would be razed.
  2. **Pay Net Present Value:** It also must pay the State Forest Department the current economic equivalent — called Net Present Value — of the forest land.
  3. **Responsibility of Department then:** It’s then the department’s responsibility to grow appropriate vegetation that, over time, would grow into forests.

- **Complaints by the Industry: Hard to acquire non-forest land:** Industries have often complained that they find it hard to acquire appropriate non-forest land, which has to be contiguous to existing forest.

- **Funds lying unspent:**
  1. **States not regrowing trees:** Nearly Rs. 50,000 crore had been collected by the Centre over decades, but the funds were lying unspent because States were not spending the money on regrowing forests.
  2. **SC Intervention:** The Supreme Court intervened, a new law came about with rules for how this fund was to be administered.
  3. **Bare Rejuvenation:** About Rs. 47,000 crore had been disbursed to States until August, but it has barely led to any rejuvenation of forests.

- **Proposed ‘Green Credit Scheme’**
  1. It allows agencies — they could be private companies, village forest communities — to identify land and begin growing plantations.
  2. After three years, they would be eligible to be considered as compensatory forest land if they met the Department’s criteria.

**Sources**
The Hindu
India, Sri Lanka FM’s meet, discuss skill development projects

**Why is it in news?**
- India and Sri Lanka on Thursday discussed the “entire gamut of bilateral ties”, during talks between visiting Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Relations, Skills Development, Employment and Labour Relations, Dinesh Gunawardena and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in New Delhi on Thursday.

**More in news**
- **Timing of the visit:** The visit by the Sri Lankan Minister, his first visit abroad after taking charge, comes after the visit by Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in November as “a follow up” to his discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- **No discussion on Infra and ETCA:** The officials declined to comment on whether the new Sri Lankan Foreign Minister had discussed taking forward some of the commitments made by the previous Sri Lankan government on infrastructure projects in Trincomalee and Colombo as well as the Northern region, or about taking forward the Economic and Technical Cooperation (ETCA) preferential trade agreement.
- **What is ETCA?**
  1. The Economic and Technology Co-operation Agreement (ETCA) is a proposed diplomatic arrangement that seeks to add to the existing free trade agreement between India and Sri Lanka.
  2. It is formulated to deal with *trade-in services and the service sector and it seeks to emulate freedom-of-movement system and a single market.*
  3. Once the ETCA comes into effect, Indian investments will flow into Sri Lanka to make the island’s production facilities part of the Indian and international value chain.

**Source**
The Hindu

Time to resolve ‘pending issues’ with India: Oli

**Why is it in news?**
- Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli on Tuesday said bilateral disputes with India should be dealt with dialogue by the majority governments of both countries.

**More in news**
- **On Kalapani issue:** The Kalapani issue was reignited after India published a new political map in November 2019 that displayed its continued position over the territory as part of Uttarakhand.
- **What is the Kalapani issue?**
  1. The Kalapani territory is an area disputed between India and Nepal, but under Indian administration as part of Pithoragarh district in the Uttarakhand state.
  2. According to Nepal’s claim, it lies in Darchula district, Sudurpashchim Pradesh of Nepal.
- **Integrated check post:** Mr. Oli made this remarks at Inauguration of the Integrated Check Post at Jogbani-Biratnagar that has been built with Indian assistance.
India, Brazil to sign Strategic Action Plan

Why is it in news?
- India and Brazil will upgrade their strategic partnership with an “action plan” and sign a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) when Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro visits as the chief guest of the Republic Day celebrations from January 24 to 27.

More in news
- **Social Security Agreement**: Brazil and India will also exchange a Social Security Agreement (SSA, to allow investments in each other’s pension funds, to help business processes and encourage the flow of investment.
- **Investments and trade between India and Brazil**: In 2018, Indian investments in Brazil were around $6 billion and Brazilian investments in India are estimated at $1 billion and bilateral trade stands at about $8 billion.
- **What is Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)?**
  A bilateral investment treaty (BIT) is an agreement establishing the terms and conditions for private investment by nationals and companies of one state in another state.

Source The Hindu

Cabinet approves pact with Brazil on criminal cooperation

Why is it in news?
- The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved an agreement on bilateral legal and criminal cooperation to be sealed during the coming visit of President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil.

More in news
- **Chief Guest at Republic Day**: President Bolsonaro is scheduled to arrive in New Delhi on January 24 to be the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations.
- **Objective of the agreement**: To enhance effectiveness of both the countries in investigation and prosecution of crime through cooperation and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.
- **Three other MoUs approved**: three other pacts, covering research in minerals and mining, child behaviour and energy cooperation, were also approved by the Cabinet.
- **MoU in energy sector**: The MoU in the energy sector will allow for joint exploration in the petroleum and natural gas segment.

Source The Hindu

India helps Maldives tackle measles outbreak

Why is it in news?
- India has stepped in to help the Maldives tackle a recent outbreak of measles, identified at a government hospital about three weeks ago.

More in news
- **30,000 units handed over**: The Indian Embassy in Male on Thursday handed over 30,000 doses of measles and rubella (MR) vaccine to the Maldivian Health Ministry.
- **MoU on health**: The Indian initiative comes even as the two countries implement the Memorandum of Understanding on Health cooperation which was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Male in June 2019.
- **Cancer hospital being built by India**: India is also helping build a 100-bed Cancer Hospital in Hulhumale as part of its $800 million Line of Credit to the island nation.
- **Positive shift in ties**: India’s bilateral ties with Male witnessed a significant shift after President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was elected to office in 2018.
India, France to partner to develop museums

Why is it in news?
- India and France will work together in the field of museums, cultural spaces and research, and a joint working group will be established for this purpose, the Ministry of Culture said on Tuesday.

More in news
- **Joint Working Group:**
  1. The working group would explore partnership between the National Museum in Delhi and a French counterpart to be designated by the French government.
  2. The first meeting of this group would be held before April 30.

Source: The Hindu

Air India flight waiting for nod from Beijing to evacuate Indians

Why is it in news?
- India has begun the process to evacuate nationals from the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak, Hubei province of China.

More in news
- **Preparations on the way**
  1. The government was planning to send a plane to Wuhan and a special Air India flight had got the go-ahead from aviation regulator, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).
  2. The aircraft will fly Mumbai-Wuhan-Delhi as per requirement for passenger evacuation.
  3. The 423-seater double-decker aircraft, with a 12-member crew, will fly as soon as China grants the required permissions.
- **Two weeks quarantine:**
  1. The Health Ministry is working to ensure that the Indians in China after their return will be kept in quarantine for two weeks even if they display no symptoms.
  2. This is to ensure that they are not carriers of the virus.

Source: The Hindu

International Event

PM Modi calls up South Asian leaders

Why is it in news?
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi called up leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka on Wednesday and conveyed India’s commitment to the principle of “neighbourhood first”.

More in news
- **Highlights of the talks**
  1. During the talks, Mr. Modi conveyed his greetings to the leaders and discussed the upcoming regional interactions.
  2. The talks hint at India’s pursuit of a regional arrangement without the participation of Pakistan.
  3. Mr. Modi told his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina that India’s ties with Dhaka were a “priority” for his government.
- **Engagement with Bhutan**
  1. In his talk with Bhutan’s king Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, Mr. Modi discussed the visit of the ruler to India in 2020.
Mr. Modi visited Bhutan soon after being sworn in for the second stint.

The phone calls were in keeping with India’s recent attempts to create a regional grouping without Pakistan.

Source: The Hindu

Iraqi parliament passes resolution to end foreign troop presence

Why is it in news?
- The Iraqi parliament passed a resolution calling on the government to work to end all foreign troop presence, reflecting the concern of many in Iraq that the strike could engulf them in a major war between two bigger powers long at odds in Iraq and across the region.

More in news
- Not binding on the government: Parliamentary resolutions, unlike laws, are non-binding to the government but this one is likely to be heeded.
- Passed by majority: The resolution was passed by overwhelmingly Shi’ite lawmakers, as the special session was boycotted by most Sunni Muslim and Kurdish lawmakers.
- Timing of the resolution: The resolution was passed after Iranian Quds Force Commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani was killed on Friday in a U.S. drone strike on his convoy at Baghdad airport.

Source: The Hindu

Foreign envoys’ team on a fact-finding visit to Jammu and Kashmir

Why is it in news?
- A 15-member foreign envoys’ delegation arrived in Srinagar on a two-day visit to J&K and met over 100 people, including senior Valley-based politicians, top newspaper editors and grassroots representatives.

More in news
- Purpose of visit: The visiting envoys are seeking a feedback on the ground situation post the revocation of the State’s special status, Pakistan’s attempts at interference and immediate demands of the people.
- Closed-door meetings: The foreign envoys, mainly invited from South America, Africa and Asia, held a closed-door interaction with a group of prominent politicians led by Altaf Bukhari, who is fast emerging as the face of the non-National Conference (NC) and non-Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) third front.
- Briefing by Army: The Army hosted the envoys at its headquarters in Badamibagh and apprised them of the current security scenario, including the issue of terrorism, and Pakistan’s attempts to “destabilise the situation on the Line of Control (LoC) and the mainland in the Union Territory.”

Source: The Hindu

India to invite Imran Khan for SCO meet

Why is it in news?
- Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan will be invited to participate in the Heads of Government Council meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that will be hosted in India this year, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

More in news
- MEA statement: As per the established practice and procedure within SCO, all eight members of the SCO, four observer states, and other international dialogue partners will be invited to attend the meeting.
- India and Pakistan at SCO:
(1) India and Pakistan became full-time member of the SCO in 2017.
(2) Both India and Pakistan have participated in multiple meetings of SCO and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) despite hostilities and tension in Kashmir.

- More about Shanghai Cooperation Organization
  (1) The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai.
  (2) Present members: India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan
  (3) Objectives of SCO
    (a) Strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states.
    (b) Promoting effective cooperation in -politics, trade & economy, research & technology and culture.
    (c) Enhancing ties in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, etc.
    (d) Maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region.
    (e) Establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political & economic order.

Sources: The Hindu

Pak. seeks UN, U.S. help to resolve conflict with India

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why is it in news?</th>
<th>Pakistan PM Imran Khan on Wednesday urged the international powers, including the UN and the U.S., to help de-escalate tensions with India.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td><strong>On Citizenship and Kashmir:</strong> Pak. PM said that India might attempt to raise tensions at the border in order to divert attention from domestic protests against the new citizenship law and the Kashmir issue.</td>
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<td><strong>Demand for UN military group:</strong> Mr. Khan also demanded that UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) be allowed along the Line of Control.</td>
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<td><strong>Indian stand:</strong> India maintains that the UNMOGIP has outlived its utility and is irrelevant after the Shimla Agreement and the consequent establishment of the LoC.</td>
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<td><strong>UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP):</strong> The United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was created on 14 March 1950 to supervise the cease-fire between India and Pakistan in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: The Hindu

India again rejects Trump offer on Kashmir

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<tr>
<th>Why is it in news?</th>
<th>India rejected comments by U.S. President Donald Trump offering to mediate between India and Pakistan.</th>
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<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td><strong>Latest offer by Trump:</strong> The U.S. President’s latest offer was made at a joint press appearance with Pakistan PM Imran Khan at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland.</td>
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<td><strong>Fourth such offer:</strong> The offer is the U.S. President’s fourth offer of mediation to help resolve the Kashmir issue since withdrawal of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**MEA statement:**

1. There is no role for any third party in the matter. If at all there are any bilateral issues between India and Pakistan to be discussed, it should be done bilaterally.

2. The onus is on Pakistan to create a conducive atmosphere free from terror and violence.

Source: The Hindu

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**Nepal invites Modi, Imran for Sagarmatha Dialogue**

- **Why is it in news?** Nepal has invited the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan along with several other heads of government and heads of state for the Sagarmatha Sambaad.

- **More in news**
  - More about the event: The first ever multi-stakeholder dialogue event is expected to be the biggest diplomatic initiative in Nepal’s recent history that will be attended by many global figures apart from the leaders of the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
  - What is Sagarmatha Sambaad?
    1. Sagarmatha Sambaad is a multi-stakeholder, permanent global dialogue forum initiated by the Government of Nepal.
    2. The first episode of the Sambaad is scheduled to be held from 2 to 4 April 2020 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Nepal), in collaboration with the Institute for Foreign Affairs, Nepal and Policy Research Institute.

Source: The Hindu

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**CAA, NRC raised during Congressional hearing on global human rights**

- **Why is it in news?** The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register for Citizens (NRC) found mention again in a hearing at the U.S. House of Representatives, which heard witnesses testify on religious persecution across the world.

- **More in news**
  - More about the hearing
    1. Organised by: Foreign Affairs Committee’s Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights Subcommittee and the Oversight and Reform Committee’s Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Subcommittee.
    2. The hearing dealt with experiences in a range of countries and topics including Nigeria, Uganda, Egypt, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh and the United States. India was also specifically mentioned.
    3. Mr. Bencosme, who specialises on advocacy in the Asia Pacific region, told lawmakers about India that
      - “The country this past year tops the world in the number of internet shutdowns”
      - The CAA was “completely oblivious to the nature and scale of persecution faced by minorities”
      - On the NRC, he said the process “stands to create the biggest statelessness crisis in the world, causing immense human suffering.”

Source: The Hindu
Swachh 2020 table

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
<th>The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) announced the results of the first and second quarters of the Swachh Survekshan 2020.</th>
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<td>More in the news</td>
<td>The rankings were conducted in a league format for the first time.</td>
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<td>They were split into three quarters (April to June, July to September and October to December 2019) and different categories based on the population of the city.</td>
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<td><strong>Findings:</strong></td>
<td>(1) Indore and Jamshedpur have topped the cleanliness charts for two consecutive quarters among cities with over 10 lakh population and with 1 lakh to 10 lakh population respectively.</td>
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<td>(2) Bhopal, which came in second in the first quarter, was replaced by Rajkot in Gujarat in the second quarter.</td>
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<td>(3) Surat was at number three in the first quarter, but Navi Mumbai made it to the third spot in the second quarter rankings.</td>
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<td>(4) New Delhi fell from second position in the first quarter to sixth position in the second quarter and was replaced by Chandrapur in Maharashtra at second place.</td>
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<td>(5) A national-level survey of cleanliness of cities will begin from January 4, leading to the final Swachh Survekshan 2020 rankings.</td>
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Source: The Hindu.

Don’t punish a child for marrying a female adult: SC

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
<th>The Supreme Court held in a recent judgment that anti-child marriage law does not intend to punish a male aged between 18 and 21 years for marrying a “female adult”.</th>
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<tr>
<td>More in the news</td>
<td>Section 9 of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 says: Whoever, being a male adult above 18 years of age, contracts a child marriage shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment which may extend to two years or with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees or with both.</td>
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<td>As per the SC, neither does the provision punish a child for marrying a woman nor a woman for marrying a male child. Its sole objective is to punish a man for marrying a minor girl.</td>
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<td><strong>The Case:</strong></td>
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<td>(1) The case at hand concerned a boy who married a 21-year-old woman when he was 17 years old.</td>
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<td>(2) The Punjab and Haryana High Court had set aside its own order providing protection to the couple, and initiated prosecution against the boy for contracting a child marriage.</td>
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<td>(3) The Supreme Court set aside the HC order, saying the law was not to punish a child for contracting a child marriage.</td>
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National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report for 2018

Why is it in the news?
- Data for crime has been in public domain with the release of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report for 2018.

More in the news
- **Overall Crime:**
  1. Overall crime in India increased 1.3% in 2018 compared to 2017, with more than 50 lakh cognisable crimes getting registered.
  2. However, crime rate per lakh population was down to 383.5 in 2018 from 388.6 the year before.

- **Crime against Women:**
  1. As per the report, 3,78,277 cases of crime against women were reported in the country, up from 3,59,849 cases reported in 2017.
  2. Uttar Pradesh topped the list with 59,445 cases, followed by Maharashtra.
  3. Majority of cases under crimes against women were registered under ‘Cruelty by Husband or his Relatives’ (31.9%) followed by ‘Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty’ (27.6%).’
  4. The conviction rate in rapierlated cases stood at 27.2%.

- **Accidental Death and Suicides:**
  1. About 10,349 people working in the farm sector ended their lives in 2018, accounting for 7.7 % of the total number of suicides in the country.
  2. The total number of people who committed suicide in 2018 was 1,34,516, an increase of 3.6% from 2017.
  3. The highest number of suicide victims were daily wagers- 26,589, comprising 22.4% of such deaths.

India’s under-5 girls face high mortality

Why is it in the news?
- According to the 'Levels and Trends in Child Mortality' report by the United Nations (UN) inter-agency group for child mortality, India is among the few countries in the world where, in 2018, the mortality for girls under 5 years of age exceeded that of boys.

More in the news
- **Findings of the Report:**
  1. In 2018, fewer countries showed gender disparities in child mortality.
  2. Across the world, boys are expected to have a higher probability of dying before reaching age 5 than girls. But this trend was not reflected in India.
  3. The risk of dying before age 5 for girls is significantly higher in countries that are located in Southern Asia and Western Asia.
  4. Half of all under-5 deaths in 2018 occurred in five countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia.
  5. India and Nigeria alone account for about a third.
  6. Despite advancements made over the past two decades, a child or a young adolescent died every five seconds in 2018.

- **Major Causes of Neonatal Mortality:**
  1. Pre-term birth
  2. Intrapartum related events
  3. Neonatal infection.
What is needed?
(1) Providing high quality antenatal care
(2) Skilled care at birth
(3) Postnatal care for mothers and their babies
(4) Care of small and sick newborns.

Other Basic Services: The following becomes matters of life and death when children and young adolescents do not have access to them.
(1) Vaccination.
(2) Timely and proper medical treatment
(3) Adequate nutrition
(4) Clean water and sanitation

About the Report:
(1) The United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) produces estimates of child and young adolescent mortality annually.
(2) It reconciles the differences across data sources and taking into account the systematic biases associated with the various types of data on child and adolescent mortality.
(3) This report presents estimates of neonatal, infant and under-five mortality as well as mortality among children aged 5–14 years.
(4) It assesses progress in the reduction of child and young adolescent mortality at the country, regional and global levels.

Source: The Hindu.

ASER Report

Why is it in the news?
- ASER surveyors visited almost 37,000 children between 4 and 8 years in 26 rural districts across 24 States.
- The ASER reports are well known for data on basic reading and arithmetic levels for children in the elementary school age group.

Findings of the ASER Report

Data:
(1) Only 16% of children in Class 1 in 26 surveyed rural districts can read text at the prescribed level.
(2) Almost 40% cannot even recognise letters.
(3) Only 41% of these children could recognise two digit numbers.

Cognitive Skills:
(1) Among Class 1 children who could correctly do none or only one of the tasks requiring cognitive skills, about 14% could read words, while 19% could do single digit addition.
(2) However, among children who could correctly do all three cognitive tasks, 52% could read words, and 63% could solve the math problem.

Underage Issues:
(1) More than a quarter of Class 1 students in government schools are only 4 or 5 years old, younger than the recommended age.
(2) The ASER data shows that these younger children struggle more than others in all skills.
(3) Permitting underage children into primary grades puts them at a learning disadvantage which is difficult to overcome.
Quality Determining Factors:
(1) Child’s home background
(2) Mother’s education level
(3) Type of school
(4) Child’s age in Class 1.

Private schools ahead:
(1) Of six-year olds in Class 1, 41.5% of those in private schools could read words in comparison to only 19% from government schools.
(2) Similarly, 28% of those in government schools could do simple addition as against 47% in private schools.
(3) This gap is further exacerbated by a gender divide.

Suggestion:
(1) A focus on cognitive skills rather than subject learning in the early years can make a big difference to basic literacy and numeracy abilities.

Source: The Hindu.

Women politicians trolled more: Amnesty India

Why is it in the news?
- According to a recent study by Amnesty India, Twitter is a toxic space for Indian women politicians.
- Study of 95 politicians carried out by Amnesty India during the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

More in the news
- Higher Abuse:
  (1) Indian women politician face substantially higher abuse on the social media platform than their counterparts in the U.S. and the U.K.
  (2) One out of every seven tweets mentioning them is problematic or abusive.
  (3) Many women targeted by a relentless flow of threats and sexist, religious, racist and casteist slurs.
- Muslim women targeted:
  (1) While all women are targeted, Muslim women politicians faced 55% more abuse than others.
  (2) Many women do not enter politics because the price of constant online harassment and trolling was too high.
- Marginalised Sections:
  (1) Women from marginalised castes, unmarried women, and those from non-BJP parties faced a disproportionate share of abuse.

Source: The Hindu.

Manual Scavengers and Issues of Death and Compensation

Why is it in the news?
- As per the data from the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK), of the 926 deaths inside sewers in the country, from 1993 till December 31, 2019, families of 172 victims were yet to receive compensation.

More in the news
- Other Findings:
  (1) Gujarat having the highest number of cases where the amount was not paid or the payment was unconfirmed (48).
  (2) Tamil Nadu, which had the highest number of such deaths, had paid compensation in all but seven of the 234 cases.
  (3) According to the NCSK, a total of 53,598 people, of which 29,923 were in Uttar
Pradesh alone, had been identified as engaged in manual scavenging after surveys in 2013 and 2018.

### National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK)
- With the lapsing of the “The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993” in 2004, the Commission is acting as a Non-Statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment whose tenure is extended from time to time through Government Resolutions.

#### Functions of NCSK:
1. Recommend to the Central Government specific programmes of action towards elimination of inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities for Safai Karamcharis.
2. Study and evaluate the implementation of the programmes and schemes relating to the social and economic rehabilitation of Safai Karamcharis; and scavengers, in particular.

Source: The Hindu.

### Certification Issue of Transgender

#### Why is it in the news?
- The Supreme Court issued notice to the Centre on a petition filed by a transgender activist challenging the constitutional validity of Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

#### More in the news
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India issued formal notice to the government on the petition filed by Swati Bidhan Baruah.
- **The petitioner:**
  1. The method state-identification is a disproportionate invasion into the right to privacy of trans persons and is manifestly arbitrary.
  2. Right to self-identification forms part of right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

#### Some Key Provisions of the Transgender Persons Act, 2019:
1. **Definition of Transgenders:** A person as one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth.
2. **Right to be recognized as transgender:** Every person of the transgender community has right to be recognized as transgender and obtain a certificate for the same.
3. **Procedure for obtaining certificate of recognition:**
   1. A person willing to be identified as transgender is needed to apply before the District Magistrate to get a certificate.
   2. The certificate will be issued by the District Magistrate on the recommendation of District Screening Committee.

Source: The Hindu.
Operation Twist

Why is it in the news?
- According to the RBI Governor, the market's response to the central bank's 'Operation Twist', is on expected lines.
- The objective of the programme announced last month is to moderate high long-term interest rates in the market by changing the yield curve.

More in the news
- **Operation Twist?**
  1. It refers to purchase and sale of government securities under Open Market Operations (OMOs) for Rs 10,000 crore each.
  2. Operation Twist is the name given to a US Federal Reserve monetary policy operation, which involves the purchase and sale of government securities to boost the economy by bringing down long-term interest rates.

- **Open Market Operations?**
  1. OMOs are the market operations conducted by the RBI by way of sale and purchase of G-Secs to and from the market.
  2. Its objective is to adjust the rupee liquidity conditions in the market on a durable basis.
  3. When the RBI feels that there is excess liquidity in the market, it resorts to sale of securities thereby sucking out the rupee liquidity.
  4. When the liquidity conditions are tight, the RBI may buy securities from the market, thereby releasing liquidity into the market.

Source: The Hindu.

Financial inclusion strategy

Why is it in the news?
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has chalked out an ambitious strategy for financial inclusion till 2024.
- Wider acceptance and adoption of digital payments will play a key role towards financial inclusion.

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

- **Objective:** Increasing outreach of banking outlets of to provide banking access to every village within a 5-km radius or a hamlet of 500 households in hilly areas by March 2020.

- **Key Point of RBI Report:** Along with traditional banking outlets, payments banks, small finance banks, co-operative banks and other non-bank entities such as...
fertilizer shops, fair price shops, should also promote efficiency and transparency through digital transactions.

Source The Hindu.

Offer ‘enable’, ‘disable’ options in cards: RBI

Why is it in the news?
- The Central Bank of India has asked issuers of credit and debit cards as well to provide the option of disabling and enabling cards.
- RBI has also asked the same to non-bank prepaid payment instrument.

More in the news
- The move aimed at customer convenience.
- Issuers of cards have been asked to provide cardholders a facility for enabling:
  1. Card not present (domestic and international) transactions
  2. Card present (international) transactions
  3. Contactless transactions
- Facilities to Customers:
  1. RBI said the customers should have the facility to switch on or off and set or modify transaction limits for all types of transactions.
  2. Prepaid gift cards and those used at mass transit systems have been kept out of this new rule.

Source The Hindu.

RBI reopens scheme for FPI investments in debt

Why is it in the news?
- RBI has decided to reopen allotment of the investment limit under the revised Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) for debt investments by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) from January 24.

More in the news
- The investment limit under VRR has been increased to Rs. 1,50,000 crore from the Rs. 75,000 crore of the earlier scheme.
- It has a minimum retention period of three years.
- Discretion: FPIs that have been allotted investment limits under VRR may, at their discretion, transfer their investments made under the General Investment Limit to VRR.
- Voluntary Retention Route:
  1. In March 2019, the RBI introduced a separate channel, the ‘Voluntary Retention Route’ to enable FPIs to invest in debt markets in India.
  2. The RBI said ₹54,300 crore had already been invested under the previous scheme.
  3. Investment limits will be available on tap and allotted on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Previous Rules:
  1. Prior to the announcement, short-term investments by an FPI could not exceed 20% of the total investment of that FPI in either central government security (including treasury bills) or State development loans.
  2. The same was applicable on investments in corporate bonds. This limit has now been raised from 20% to 30% in both the cases.

Source The Hindu.
# Government Policies and Taxation

## National Infrastructure Plan

**Why is it in the news?**
- Finance Minister unveiled a Rs. 102 lakh crore national infrastructure pipeline.
- The plan is in accordance with the government’s vision to make India a $5 trillion economy by 2024-25.

**More in the news**
- **Under the plan**, the Centre, the States and the private sector sharing the capital expenditure in a 39:39:22 formula.
- **This will be a significant increase** over the last six years, when the Centre and the States together spent Rs. 51 lakh crore on infrastructure.
- **Distribution:**
  1. A task force of senior bureaucrats, had identified Rs. 102 lakh crore worth of projects in 18 States as part of a National Infrastructure Pipeline.
  2. Another Rs. 3 lakh crore worth of projects are likely to be added soon.
  3. Certain States were yet to put forward their pipelines.
- **Funds:** The funds would come from budgetary and extra-budgetary resources, as well as those raised from the market and the internal accruals of the relevant state-owned companies.
- **Focus Areas:**
  1. Almost a quarter of the capital expenditure is going to the energy sector, with Rs. 24.5 lakh crore expected to be invested in power, renewable energy, atomic energy and petroleum and natural gas.
  2. This is also the sector where the private sector has expressed the most interest.
  3. The other major focus areas are roads (19%) and railways (13%), urban (16%) and rural (8%) infrastructure, and irrigation (8%).

**Source** The Hindu.

## New forms for filing income tax returns

**Why is it in the news?**
- The government, which usually notifies forms for filing returns by individuals in April every year notified tax return forms for assessment year 2020-21.

**More in the news**
- **As per the notification,**
  1. Returns in ITR-1 Sahaj can be filed by an ordinary resident individual whose total income does not exceed Rs. 50 lakh.
  2. ITR-4 Sugam is meant for resident individuals, HUFs and firms (other than LLP) having a total income of up to Rs. 50 lakh and having presumptive income from business and profession.
- **New Changes:**
  1. An individual taxpayer cannot file return either in ITR-1 Sahaj or ITR-4 if he is a joint-owner in house property.
  2. The ITR-1 form is not valid for those individuals who have deposited more than Rs. 1 crore in bank account or have incurred Rs. 2 lakh or Rs. 1 lakh on foreign travel or electricity respectively.
  3. Such taxpayers will have to use different forms, which will be notified in due course.
## Cabinet nod for FDI in coal mining

**Why is it in the news?**
- Government has opened up the coal sector completely for commercial mining for all local and global firms.
- It eases restrictions on end-use.

**More in the news**
- The Union Cabinet approved promulgation of two laws:
- The decision is said to boost the ease of doing business and increase growth avenues for coal mining.
- **End to Captive Auctions:**
  1. The ordinance puts an end to captive coal block auctions in future.
  2. It will have to be adopted in the upcoming Budget session once it is cleared by the President.
- **Commercial Mining:**
  1. The government proposes to kick-start commercial coal mining auction process.
  2. It releases bid rules and consultations with stakeholders.
- **Need of Private Players:**
  1. Coal India has been tasked to produce one billion tonnes by 2023-24.
  2. However, production will still fall short of demand and there is a need to introduce private players in coal mining.
  3. The amendment will help attract more participation in coal block auctions.

## Fund crunch hits MGNREGA scheme

**Why is it in the news?**
- The union government is on the verge of running out of funds for the crucial Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme.

**More in the news**
- **Pending Dues:** More than 96% of the allocated money has already been spent or is needed to pay pending dues, with less than Rs. 2,500 crore left to sustain the scheme for the next two months.
- **Shortage in Critical Times:**
  1. January, February and March are months with little agricultural activity, when rural workers desperately need employment.
  2. However, the scheme is running out of money, and will enter next year with pending liabilities.
- **Liquidity essential for growth revival:**
  1. Number of economists have recommended that putting money into the hands of rural consumers via MGNREGA is key to kickstart the economy.
  2. However, this year’s budget allocation was Rs. 60,000 crore, lower than the amount spent in the previous year.

**About MGNREGA**
- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), guarantees 100 days of unskilled manual work to all rural households in India.
- **Aim:** To enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas.
- **Applying for a job card:**
(1) In order to get work under MGNREGA, a household has to apply for a MGNREGA job card from their Gram Panchayat (elected village council).
(2) Each household is entitled to one job card. However, each card can have any number of names on it from that household.
(3) Once a household has a card, they can request MGNREGA work from the Gram Panchayat and work should be provided within 15 days of a request being made.
(4) If a Gram Panchayat cannot provide work, an unemployment allowance should be given.

**Work under MGNREGA:**
(1) Under the Act every Gram Panchayat (village council) should have an annual MGNREGA plan that includes a list of all the projects that need to be carried out in the community along with project plans.
(2) The types of unskilled work which households are eligible to undertake under the MGNREGA could include constructing roads, dams, wells, plantations or developing land.
(3) Work should be within 5km of a worker’s residence. If it is over 5km away, a 10% increase in wage is given.

**Source** The Hindu.

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**Government seeks to sell 100% in Air India**

**Why is it in the news?**
- The government of India announced the 100% stake sell in the national carrier-Air India.
- The move is to make debt-ridden Air India more attractive for buyers.
- The deadline for submitting Expression of Interest (EoI) is March 17.

**More in the news**
- **The Deal:** The government seeking to sell 100% of its equity share capital, including Air India’s shareholding interest of 100% in AI Express Limited and 50% in Air India SATS Airport Services Private Limited.
- **About Debt and Liabilities:**
  (1) The government would absorb 30% more in debt and liabilities, than in the previous year.
  (2) Thus, the government will pass on Rs 23,286.50 crore to the new owner, while absorbing a huge chunk of the current liabilities.
  (3) Of around Rs 22,000 crore of liabilities, the new owner will have to absorb only those which are backed by assets.
- **Conditions:**
  (1) Those interested in bidding for Air India must have a net worth of ₹3,500 crore.
  (2) The bidders must agree to assume the debt apart from other liabilities, and that debt worth Rs 23,286.5 crore.
  (3) Management control of the airline would also be transferred to the successful bidder.
- **Grabs:**
  (1) The new buyer will get a total of 146 aircraft, 56% of which are owned by the airline group, while the remaining are on lease.
  (2) It will also benefit from as much as 50% of the international market share held by Indian airlines as well as the airline’s 4,400 airport slots at airports in the country and 3,300 slots in 42 countries.
  (3) These slots will be available at least for six months after the sale is complete.
### India faces a year of tough trade talks

**Why is it in the news?**
- The government said it would renegotiate its existing free trade agreements (FTA) and redouble its efforts to conclude other trade negotiations.
- The task is likely to swamp negotiators of both the Commerce and Industries and External Affairs Ministries in 2020.

**More in the news**
- **Recent Story:**
  1. India had walked out of negotiations on the 16-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement.
  2. The RCEP walkout is not cast in stone yet, as the other 15 countries, including 10 ASEAN members will complete legal reviews by June and are only expected to sign the deal in November 2020.
  3. In the interim, many countries, most notably Japan, Australia and even China, are keen to work with India.
- **Pending Issues:**
  1. India’s long-pending negotiations with Australia for a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).
  2. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal’s plans to reopen the existing FTAs with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea will has taken a back seat.

### Slower GDP growth projected

**Why is it in the news?**
- As per the estimates released by the government, India’s economy is forecast to grow 5% this fiscal (2019-2020).
- The estimate is in line with projections made by the Reserve Bank of India.
- The growth was reported 6.8% in the previous year.

**More in the news**
- **The 5% growth would be slowest** pace in 11 years.
- **Major Attributes:**
  1. Private consumption is likely to grow at 5.8% this fiscal, down from 10% in the previous year.
  2. Gross fixed capital formation is estimated to rise less than 1% in FY20, a collapse from near 10% rise in FY19.
  3. Manufacturing growth was seen at 2% year on year, which is a 15-year low, as against 6.9% growth in FY19.
  4. Services sector is projected to slow to 6.9% in FY20 from 7.5% in FY19 and 8.1% in FY18.
- The government has already announced a number of measures to prop up the economy, such as:
  1. A sharp cut in corporate tax rate
  2. Support for stalled housing projects
  3. Rs 102 lakh crore plan for infrastructure
- The experts have asked for more in the upcoming budget.
Govt. may cut spending to curb deficit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
<th><strong>According to government sources, government is likely to cut spending for the current fiscal by as much as Rs. 2 trillion as it faces one of the biggest tax shortfalls in recent years.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in the news      | **Negative Impact:**  
(1) Indian Economy is growing at its slowest pace in over six years because of lack of private investment.  
(2) The cuts in spending could hurt the economy further if the government cuts spending.  

**Revenue Shortfall:**  
(1) With a revenue shortfall of about Rs. 2.5 trillion, the government has little choice to keep its deficit within “acceptable limits”.  
(2) The Centre has spent about 65% of the total expenditure target of Rs. 27.86 trillion till November but reduced the pace of spending in October and November.  

**Targeting Deficit:**  
(1) Government is likely to keep fiscal deficit under 3.8% of GDP.  
(2) It is likely to announce additional borrowing of Rs. 300-500 billion for the current year to match the revised fiscal deficit. |

Source: The Hindu.

Antitrust probe ordered against Amazon, Flipkart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in the news?</th>
<th><strong>India’s competition watchdog ordered an investigation into alleged competition law violations by Amazon.com Inc. and Walmart’s Flipkart.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in the news      | **The Competition Commission of India** said it “is of the opinion that there exists a prima facie case which requires an investigation”.  
**The antitrust body directed its director-general, who investigates such cases, to submit its report within 60 days.**  

**About Competition Commission of India (CCI):**  
(1) It is a statutory body of the Government of India responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002 throughout India.  
(2) The following are the objectives of the Commission.  
(a) To prevent practices having adverse effect on competition  
(b) To promote and sustain competition in markets  
(c) To protect the interests of consumers  
(d) To ensure freedom of trade |

Source: The Hindu.

Telcos AGR Issue

| Why is it in the news? | **The Supreme Court Bench dismissed petitions filed by telecom companies, including Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, for a review of its October 2019 judgment.  
**The recovery by the government was based on adjusted gross revenue of about Rs 92,000 crore.** |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Source: The Hindu.
**More in the news**

- In October 2019, Supreme Court had upheld the Department of Telecom’s move to recover adjusted gross revenue (AGR) of about Rs. 92,000 crore from telcos.

- **What is AGR Issue?**
  1. Telecom operators are required to pay licence fee and spectrum charges in the form of ‘revenue share’ to the Centre.
  2. The revenue amount used to calculate this revenue share is termed as the AGR.
  3. According to government, the calculations should incorporate all revenues earned by a telecom company.
  4. All revenues including from non-telecom sources such as deposit interests and sale of assets.
  5. 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.
  6. Finally, the Supreme Court upheld the government’s definition of adjusted gross revenue (AGR) in October judgment.

- **The Judgment to hit Digital India:**
  1. Industry and experts said that the decision would hit the fund-raising and investment capability of service providers.
  2. Expressing disappointment over the decision, Bharti Airtel said that the money required to pay the interest and penalties on the pending dues, could instead be used for serving the ‘Digital India’ initiative.
  3. The sector is currently reeling under a debt of Rs. 4 lakh crore, is a key contributor to the Indian economy.

Source: The Hindu.

**PF benefits should extend to contractual employees: SC**

**Why is it in the news?**

- The Supreme Court in its judgment held that benefits of the provident fund should be extended to contractual employees.
- The contractual employees have been seeking parity with the regular employees.

**More in the news**

- Employees who draw wages or salaries directly or indirectly from a company are entitled to provident fund benefits under the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) Act.
- Under the Employees’ Provident Fund Act 1952, an EPF account is mandatory for all employees earning up to Rs 15,000 per month in firms employing more than 20 workers.
- Of India’s 47.41 crore workforce, 90% is in the unorganised sector and the EPF benefits are practically restricted to this sector.

Source: The Hindu.

**Study on National Gas Grid**

**Why is it in the news?**

- A study to facilitate the development of a national gas grid is to be undertaken soon by a U.S. entity for the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB).

**More in the news**

1. The study is a push to promote use of natural gas, the study by ICF Resources LLC will take a look at various aspects- from demand analysis to a review of regulatory regimes.
(2) The study will aim at developing an economic basis for building India’s Natural Gas Grid (NGG).

(3) **Why Natural Gas?**

(4) **Safe and Cheaper:**
   (a) Natural gas is a superior fuel as compared with coal and other liquid fuels being an environment friendly and cheaper fuel.
   (b) Natural Gas (as CNG) is cheaper by 60% as compared with petrol and 45% with respect to Diesel.
   (c) Similarly, Natural Gas (as PNG) is cheaper by 40% as compared with market price LPG.

- **Efficient:** Natural Gas is supplied through pipelines, as there is no need to store cylinders in the kitchen and thus saves space.
- **Reduces Carbon Emission:**
   (1) Large number of industries consume polluting fuels like pet coke and furnace oil which emit polluting CO2.
   (2) Shifting to Natural gas will help reducing the amount of carbon emission by replacing carbon intensive fuels.

**IMF lowers India’s growth forecast to 4.8%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Why is it in the news?</strong></th>
<th>International Monetary Fund (IMF) has lowered India’s growth forecast for 2019 to 4.8% from 6.1%.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>More in the news</strong></td>
<td><strong>Causes behind Low forecast:</strong> The low forecast came on the back of:</td>
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<td>(1) Sharp decline in consumer/rural demand</td>
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<td>(2) Stress in the NBFC sector</td>
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<td>(3) Sluggish credit growth</td>
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<td><strong>Global Growth:</strong></td>
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<td>(1) The global growth is projected to rise from an estimated 2.9% in 2019 to 3.3% in 2020 and 3.4% for 2021.</td>
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<td>(2) There is a downward revision of 10 basis points for 2019 and 2020 and 20 basis points for 2021 compared to the earlier forecast.</td>
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<td><strong>About IMF:</strong></td>
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<td>(1) It was conceived at a UN conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, United States, in July 1944.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) The IMF’s primary purpose is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system.</td>
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<td>(3) IMF is headquartered in Washington, D.C.</td>
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<td><strong>Objectives of IMF:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Working to foster global monetary cooperation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(2) Secure financial stability</td>
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<td>(3) Promote high employment and sustainable economic growth</td>
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<td>(4) Reduce poverty around the world</td>
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</table>

**Source** The Hindu.
Science and Technology

Contrasting water-wetting behaviour used for anti-counterfeiting measure

| Why is it in news? | ● Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati have developed a new approach to anti-counterfeiting measures.  
|                   | ● They have developed a smart interface embedded with two different water wettabilities — extremely water repelling (superhydrophobic) and extremely water loving (superhydrophilic) — which can hide information or make it visible under certain definite conditions. |
| More in news      | ● Reactive coating  
|                   | (1) The coating is not only hydrophobic but is also reactive.  
|                   | (2) Taking advantage of the reactive surface of the coating, the researchers used a chemical (glucamine) to write letters on the coated surface.  
|                   | (3) **Mechanism**: The glucamine-treated region becomes selectively and extremely water-loving (superhydrophilic) and hence becomes visible to the naked eyes when dipped in water or when moist air is blown.  
|                   | ● Use of micropatterns  
|                   | (1) Initially, the researchers use a pen containing glucamine chemical to write letters on the coated surface.  
|                   | (2) The team found the patterned coating to be physically durable even when exposed to a very high (100 degree C) and very low temperature (10 degree C). |
| Source            | The Hindu |

Challakere in Karnataka to be ISRO’s astronaut training hub

| Why is it in news? | ● India’s world-class facility for training astronauts will come up in three years at Challakere, a shrubby, and oilseeds town on the Bengaluru-Pune NH4 in Chitradurga district of Karnataka. |
| More in news       | ● **2700 crores master plan**: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has proposed a Rs. 2,700-crore master plan to create top infrastructure that will house its young Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC).  
|                   | ● **Amount over and above the Gaganyaan project**: The amount sought for the HSFC is over and above the ₹10,000-crore approved budget of Gaganyaan.  
|                   | ● **Challakere a Science City**  
|                   | (1) Challakere, is also where premier scientific establishments have set up adjoining and interactive campuses on some 10,000 acres.  
|                   | (2) It houses **facilities of the ISRO, the Defence Research & Development Organisation’s Advanced Aeronautical Test Range, the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and the Indian Institute of Science.** |
| Source             | The Hindu |
New data relay satellites to keep Gaganyaan crew in touch with Earth

Why is it in news?
- India plans to ring in its own era of space-to-space tracking and communication of its space assets this year by putting up a new satellite series called the Indian Data Relay Satellite System (IDRSS).

More in news
- What is IDRSS?
- The Indian Data Relay Satellite System (IDRSS) is a set of satellites that will track, send and receive information from other Indian satellites.
- **Aim:** The IDRSS is planned to track and be constantly in touch with Indian satellites, in particular those in low-earth orbits which have limited coverage of earth.
- **First beneficiary of IDRSS:** The first beneficiary would be the prospective crew members of the Gaganyaan mission of 2022 who can be fully and continuously in touch with mission control throughout their travel.
- **Utility of IDRSS:** In the coming years, it will be vital to Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), in advanced LEO missions such as space docking, space station, as well as distant expeditions to moon, Mars and Venus.

Source: The Hindu

IIT-M designs room temperature sodium sulphur battery

Why is it in news?
- Researchers at the Indian Institute of technology (IIT) Madras have designed a new sodium sulphur battery that can be operated at room temperature.
- Conventional sodium sulphur batteries require very high temperature (300 degree C) for operation.

More in news
- Storage capacity
  - (1) The battery designed by the IIT Madras team was able to achieve as much as 1,034 mAh per gram at a current density of 50 mA per gram.
  - (2) Conventional high temperature sodium sulphur batteries have charge storage capacity of about 558 mAh per gram.
- Novel electrolyte
  - (1) Conventionally, sodium sulphur batteries use a solid electrolyte (sodium beta alumina), which by default reduces the diffusion of sodium ions from the anode to the cathode at room temperature.
  - (2) In place of a solid electrolyte the researchers used a glass fibre separator soaked in ether-based electrolyte that allows the battery to be operated at room temperature.

Source: The Hindu

ISRO’s GSAT-30 satellite launched, to replace ageing INSAT-4A

Why is it in news?
- The nation's latest communication satellite, GSAT-30, was launched into the space from the Guiana Space Centre in Kourou.

More in news
- **Purpose of GSAT-30:** GSAT-30 will provide DTH (direct to home) television services, connectivity to ATMs, stock exchange, television up-linking and teleport services, digital satellite news gathering and e-governance applications.
- **Launched by Ariane-5:** European Ariane-5 space vehicle VA-251 released GSAT-30 in an initial elliptical geosynchronous orbit.
- **Reason for foreign launch:** SRO hired a foreign launcher as GSAT-30 is much heavier than the 2,000-kg lifting capacity of its geostationary launch vehicle GSLV-MkII.
More about INSAT 4A
(1) INSAT-4A, first in INSAT-4 Satellites series provides services in Ku and C-band frequency bands.
(2) The Ku transponders cover the Indian main land and C-Band transponders cover an extended area.
(3) It has twelve Ku transponders and twelve C-band transponders.

Source: The Hindu

Internal Security

Army to sign MoU for AK-203 assault rifles in a month

Why is it in news?
● The Army is likely to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in a month for the procurement of over 7.5 lakh AK-203 assault rifles.

More in news
● Joint venture between India and Russia
  (1) The rifles will be manufactured by the Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL) at Korwa in Uttar Pradesh.
  (2) The facility is being set up between the Ordnance Factories Board (OFB) from the Indian side, and Rosoboron Exports and Kalashnikov on the Russian side.
  (3) The OFB owns 50.5% equity and Russian side holds the remaining 49.5%.
  (4) The JV was formed following the Inter-governmental Agreement between India and Russia in February 2019.
● Other small arms from US
  (1) The Army recently began inducting the first batch of 10,000 SIG-716 assault rifles.
  (2) Troops engaged in counter insurgency operations in the Army’s Northern Command have started receiving these rifles.
  (3) The rifles are being procured under a contract signed in February 2019 with Sig Sauer of the U.S. for 72,400 SIG-716 assault rifles worth over Rs. 700 crore.

Source: The Hindu

Army gets working on Government Owned Contractor Operated model to improve efficiency

Why is it in news?
● The Army has initiated the process of identifying potential industry partners to implement the Government Owned Contractor Operated (GOCO) model for its base workshops and ordnance depots intended to improve operational efficiency.

More in news
● More about the GOCO model
  (1) In GOCO model, the assets owned by government will be operated by the private industries.
  (2) The GOCO model was one of the recommendations of the Lt. Gen. DB Shekatkar (Retd.) committee to “enhance combat capability and re-balancing defence expenditure.”

Source: The Hindu
Based on the recommendations, the government has “decided to disband two advance base workshops, one static workshop and four ordnance depots” and eight Army Base Workshops (ABWs) are recommended to be corporatized on GOCO model.

Source: The Hindu

Home Minister new facility for tackling cybercrime

Why is it in news?
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) on Friday.

More in news
- **7-pronged system:** The I4C is a seven-pronged system, which includes
  1. a cybercrime reporting portal,
  2. analysis of threats,
  3. capacity building,
  4. research and innovation,
  5. creating an ecosystem for cybercrime management and
  6. a joint cybercrime investigation platform for law enforcement agencies.

- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal:**
  1. On August 30, the MHA had unveiled its National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.
  2. **Purpose:** The portal enables filing of all cybercrimes with specific focus on crimes against women, children, particularly child pornography, child sex abuse material, online content pertaining to rapes/gang rapes.
  3. Citizens can report any kind of cyber-crime irrespective of the place where it has occurred through the website.

Source: The Hindu

Two Coast Guard ships commissioned at Kolkata

Why is it in news?
- Two Indian Coast Guard Ships (ICGS) — Annie Besant and Amrit Kaur — were commissioned by Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar at Kolkata on Sunday.

More in news
- **More about the ships**
  1. I.C.G.S. Annie Besant will be based at Chennai and I.C.G.S. Amrit Kaur will be based at Haldia.
  2. The ships are fitted with state-of-the-art technology, navigation and communication equipment, along with Bofors 40/60 guns and 12.7 mm Stabilised Remote-Controlled Guns for enhancing the fighting efficiency.

- **Indian Coast Guards**
  1. The Indian Coast Guard was formally established on 18 August 1978 by the Coast Guard Act, 1978 as an independent Armed force of India.
  2. It operates under the Ministry of Defence.
  3. It protects India’s maritime interests and enforces maritime law, with jurisdiction over the territorial waters of India, including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.

Source: The Hindu

India successfully test-fires 3,500-km range submarine-launched ballistic missile K-4
### Why is it in news?
- India on Sunday successfully test-fired the 3,500-km range submarine-launched ballistic missile, K-4.
- The test was carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) from a submerged pontoon off the Visakhapatnam coast.

### More in news
- **K-4**: K-4 is a nuclear capable Intermediate-range submarine-launched ballistic missile developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation to arm the Arihant-class submarines.
- **INS Arihant**:
  1. INS Arihant is India’s first indigenously developed nuclear powered submarine.
  2. INS Arihant has four vertical launch tubes, which can carry 12 smaller K-15 missiles or four larger K-4 missiles.
- **Significance of the missile**: These missiles will be the mainstay of the Arihant class of indigenous ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBN) and will give India the stand-off capability to launch nuclear weapons submerged in Indian waters.
- **Low Circular Error Probability**: The Circular Error Probability (CEP) of K-4 is much more sophisticated than Chinese missiles.
- **What is CEP**?
  1. The CEP determines the accuracy of a missile.
  2. The lower the CEP, the more accurate the missile is.

### Source
The Hindu

### IAF positions BrahMos-armed SU-30MKIs at Thanjavur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in news?</th>
<th>The Indian Air Force inducted a squadron of Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter planes, with the capability to carry BrahMos missiles, at its Thanjavur airbase on Monday.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td><strong>Fleet at Thanjavur</strong>: Five to six SU-30MKI fighter planes with the capability to carry BrahMos Air Launched Cruise Missile would be positioned at the Air Force Station, Thanjavur.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Significance of the development</strong>: The IAF would get more air power to strike from long stand-off ranges on any target at sea or on land with accuracy by day or night and in all weather conditions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | **Sukhoi-30 MKI**
  1. The Sukhoi Su-30MKI is a twinjet multirole air superiority fighter developed by Russia’s Sukhoi.
  2. It is built under licence by India’s Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Indian Air Force (IAF). |
| | (3) IAF currently has around 260 Sukhoi-30 MKIs. |
| Source | The Hindu |

### MDL, L&T on submarine project list

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Why is it in news?</th>
<th>The meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister cleared Mazgaon Docks Ltd. (MDL) and Larsen &amp; Toubro (L&amp;T) as the Indian partners in the Navy’s tender for six advanced submarines under Project-75I worth over Rs. 45,000 crore.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>More in news</td>
<td><strong>Deals worth Rs 5000 crore</strong>: The DAC also approved deals worth Rs. 5,100 crore, which includes electronic warfare systems for the Army to be developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and manufactured by Indian industry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Source
The Hindu
Project 75I
1. The Project 75I-class submarine is a follow-on of the Project 75 Kalvari-class submarines for the Indian Navy.
2. Under this project, the Indian Navy intends to acquire six diesel-electric submarines.
3. These submarines will feature advanced air-independent propulsion systems to enable them to stay submerged for longer duration and substantially increase their operational range.

Source The Hindu

Govt signs accord with NDFB, ABSU to resolve Bodo issue

Why is it in news?
1. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Assam government and the Bodo groups on Monday signed an agreement to redraw and rename the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) in Assam, currently spread over four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri.

More in news
1. Renaming of territory: The Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) will be renamed as Bodoland Territorial Region. (BTR)
2. Modalities of the agreement
   (1) As per the agreement, villages dominated by Bodos that were presently outside the BTAD would be included and those with non-Bodo population would be excluded.
   (2) Bodos living in the hills would be conferred a Scheduled Hill Tribe status.
   (3) Around 1500 cadres of NDFB(P), NDFB(RD) and NDFB(S) will be rehabilitated by Centre and Assam Government. They will be assimilated in the mainstream and will surrender on January 30.
   (4) Criminal cases registered against members of the NDFB factions for “non-heinous” crimes shall be withdrawn by the Assam government and in cases of heinous crimes it will be reviewed.
   (5) Bodo with Devnagri script would be the associate official language for the entire Assam.
3. First Bodo accord: The first Bodo accord was signed with the ABSU in 1993, leading to the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council with limited political powers.
4. What is the Bodoland issue?
   (1) 1966-67: Demand for a separate state called Bodoland was raised under the banner of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), a political outfit.
   (2) 1987: All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) renewed the demand.
   (3) “Divide Assam fifty-fifty”, was a call given by the ABSU’s then leader, Upendra Nath Brahma.
   (4) The unrest was a fallout of the Assam Movement (1979-85), whose culmination — the Assam Accord — addressed the demands of protection and safeguards for the “Assamese people”.
   (5) The Assam Accord thus lead the Bodos to launch a movement to protect their own identity.

Source The Hindu
## India showcases A-SAT missile prowess

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it in news?</th>
<th>• India on Sunday showcased its anti-satellite (A-SAT) missile capability to the world as the weapon, rolled out on the Rajpath during the 71st Republic Day parade.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| More in news      | • **ADTCR**: A DRDO marching contingent displayed the A-SAT missile along with a second equipment, the Air Defence Tactical Control Radar (ADTCR).  
|                   | • **More about ADTCR**  
|                   | (1) Developed by- DRDO  
|                   | (2) **Purpose**: The ADTCR is used for volumetric surveillance, detection, tracking and friend/foe identification of aerial targets of different types and transmission of prioritised target data to multiple command posts and weapon systems.  
|                   | (3) The radar is capable of detecting very small targets and low flying targets.  
|                   | (4) **Versatile in deployment**: The Radar can be deployed in plain lands, deserts and in the mountain regions for the purpose of tactical early warning for Ground based Weapon Systems.  
|                   | • **A-SAT missile**  
|                   | (1) Developed by- DRDO under Mission Shakti  
|                   | (2) On March 27, 2019 the DRDO shot down a live satellite in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) of 300 km using a modified interceptor of the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system in ‘hit to kill’ mode with 10-cm accuracy.  
|                   | (3) The test made India the fourth country after the US, Russia and China to have tested an ASAT weapon. |

**Source** The Hindu