

UPSC and PCS Monthly Current Affairs January 2020

Art and Culture

202nd anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle of 1818

- The Ransthamb or victory pillar in Bhima-Koregaon village (Maharashtra) recently celebrates the 202nd anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle of 1818 on January 1, 2020.
- **About Battle of Koregaon**
- The Battle of Koregaon was fought on 1 January 1818 between the British East India Company and the Peshwa faction of the Maratha Confederacy, at Koregaon Bhima.
- It is also called the Battle of Koregaon Bhima, after the river Bhima that flows close to it.
- The battle was part of the Third Anglo Maratha war, a series of battles that culminated in the defeat of the Maratha Empire (under the Peshwas) and subsequent rule of the British East India Company in nearly all of Western, Central and Southern India.
- There is a "victory pillar" (obelisk) in Koregaon commemorating the battle.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –History

Source- The Hindu

Dhanu Jatra

- The famous 11-day long ‘Dhanu Jatra’, considered as the largest open-air theatre of the world begins at Bargarh in western Odisha.
- **About the Dhanu Jatra**
- The Jatra is based on the mythological story of Lord Krishna and his demon uncle King Kansa. It is about the episode of Krishna and Balaram's visit to Mathura to witness the Dhanu ceremony organized by their (maternal) uncle King Kansa.
- It is also mentioned in the Guinness Book of World Records.
- This is an annual festival came into being in 1947-48 to celebrate Indian's Independence and to symbolize the victory of good over evil.
- The department of Culture of the Government of India has accorded National Festival status to Dhanu Jatra in November 2014

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- PIB

‘Lai Haraoba’ begins in Tripura

- Lai Haraoba, a ritualistic festival observed by Manipuri meitei communities since ancient times, began in Agartala, Tripura.
- Lai Haraoba is celebrated through oral literature, music, dance and rituals.

About Lai Haraoba

- It is one of the main festivals still performed in Manipur which has its roots in the pre-Vaishnavite period.
- Lai Haraoba is the earliest form of dance which forms the basis of all stylised dances in Manipur.
- Literally meaning - the merrymaking of the gods, it is performed as a ceremonial offering of song and dance.
- The principal performers are the maibas and maibis (priests and priestesses) who re-enact the theme of the creation of the world.
- **Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture**
- **Source- AIR + CCRT**

Patola Saree

- Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) recently inaugurated a first Silk Processing Plant at Surendranagar in Gujarat.

About Patola Saree

- It is also known as Patan Patola Saree which is a double-sided saree, usually made from silk from Patan, Gujarat.
- They are made using vegetable dyes.
- The designs are essentially traditional with geometrical, floral, animal and leaf patterns.
- It has been awarded Geographical Indications Tag under the handicraft category.

About Khadi and Village Industries Commission

- It is a statutory body established under the 'Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956'.
- It functions under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.
- Its mandate is to plan, promote, and facilitate the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in rural India.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source-The Hindu

Savitribai Phule

- Prime Minister has recently paid his tributes to Savitribai Phule on her birth anniversary.

About Savitribai Phule (1831 – 1897)

- She was an Indian social reformer, educationalist, and poet from Maharashtra.
- Savitribai Phule was the first female teacher in India and is also known as the mother of feminism in the country.

Work of Savitribai Phule

- Phule and her husband founded the first Indian girls' school in Pune, at Bhide Wada in 1848.
- She established the **Mahila Seva Mandal** to raise awareness for issues concerning women's rights.
- She also worked to abolish the discrimination and unfair treatment of people based on caste.
- She published **Kavya Phule in 1854 and Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar in 1892.**
- She also published a poem entitled "Go, Get Education" in which she encouraged those who are oppressed to free themselves by obtaining an education.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –History (Important Personalities)

Source- The Hindu

Belum Caves Festival

- The Belum Caves Festival has been postponed to January after the dates clashed with Governor Biswa Bhusan Harichandan's visit to the district.

About the Belum Caves

- These are located near Belum Village in Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh.
- It is the second-largest caves on the Indian Subcontinent after the Krem Liat Prah caves in Meghalaya.

Features:

- This cave system is known for its speleothems, such as stalactite and stalagmite formations.
- It has long passages, galleries, spacious caverns with fresh water and siphons.
- The caves consist of black limestone.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- TOI

Tulu

- Recently activists are making efforts to include Tulu in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

About Tulu

- Tulu is a textbook example of linguistic discrimination.
- Tulu is a Dravidian language whose speakers are concentrated in two coastal districts of Karnataka and in Kasaragod district of Kerala.
- The present-day Tulu linguistic majority area is confined to the region of Tulu Nadu, which comprises the districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi in Karnataka and the northern part of Kasaragod district of Kerala up to the river Payaswani, or Chandragiri.
- The cities of Mangaluru, Udupi and Kasaragod are the epicentres of Tulu culture.
- The Census reports 18,46,427 native speakers of Tulu in India.
- The Tulu-speaking people are larger in number than speakers of Manipuri and Sanskrit, which have the Eighth Schedule status.

About Eighth Schedule of the Constitution

- As per Articles 344(1) and 351 of the Indian Constitution the Eighth Schedule to the Indian Constitution contains a list of 22 scheduled languages.
- These are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Sindhi (added by 21st Amendment Act, 1967), Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali (added by 71st Amendment Act, 1992), Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Santal (added by 92nd Amendment 2003).
- The list had originally 14 languages only but subsequently, through amendments 8 new languages were added.
- Article 29 of the Constitution provides that a section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture have the right to conserve the same.

Note:

- Robert Caldwell (1814-1891), in his book, A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Or South-Indian Family of Languages, called Tulu as “one of the most highly developed languages of the Dravidian family”.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- The Hindu

Ashfaqullah Khan

- The Uttar Pradesh government has recently announced it will build a 121-acre zoo in Gorakhpur named after the freedom fighter and revolutionary Shaheed Ashfaqullah Khan.

About Ashfaqullah Khan

- Ashfaq composed poems mostly in Urdu and a few in Hindi, under the pen names Varasi and Hazarat.
- He was associated with Hindustan Socialist Republican Association and Kakori Conspiracy case

About Hindustan Socialist Republican Association

- Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) was a revolutionary organisation, also known as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army.
- It was established in 1928 at Feroz Shah Kotla in New Delhi by Chandrasekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar and Ramprasad Bismil Yogesh Chatterjee.
- Previously it was known as the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA).

The Kakori Conspiracy

- In August 1925, an armed robbery took place on board the Kakori Express, going from Shahjahanpur to Lucknow, carrying money that had been collected at various railway stations and was to be deposited in Lucknow.
- The robbery was carried out by the Hindustan Republic Association in the Kakori town of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) on 9 August 1925.

- The main freedom fighters arrested for their involvement in the Kakori conspiracy case were Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Roshan Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad among others.
- During the trial, Ram Prasad Bismil, Thakur Roshan Singh, Rajendra Nath Lahiri and Ashfaqullah Khan were given death sentences and others were given life imprisonment.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –History

Source- Indian Express

Epiphany festival

- The Epiphany festival was celebrated in parts of India, such as Goa and Kerala.

About Epiphany Festivals

- Epiphany is among the three oldest and major festival days in Christianity, the two others being Christmas and Easter.
- It is celebrated on January 6 by a number of Christian sects, including Roman Catholics, and on January 19 by some Eastern Orthodox churches.
- Epiphany is a feast day, or a day of commemoration, which in Christianity marks the visit of the Magi (meaning the Three Wise Men or Three Kings) to the Infant Jesus (Christ from his nativity until age 12).
- In Goa, the celebration is known by its Portuguese name ‘Festa dos Reis’, and in parts of Kerala by its Syriac name ‘Denha’.
- According to Christian belief, the Magi — Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar (or Casper), the kings of Arabia, Persia, and India, respectively — followed a miraculous guiding star to Bethlehem, where they paid homage to the Infant Jesus.
- The day also commemorates the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River.
- In Kerala, at the St. Mary’s Orthodox Syrian Cathedral in Piravom, ‘Denha’ is an important annual celebration, in which a big congregation takes part.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- PIB

Madhavpur Mela

- The eight states of the Northern Eastern Region will participate in a big way during the Madhavpur Mela of Gujarat due to be held in 2020.

About the Madhavpur Mela

- The Madhavpur Mela of Gujarat shares its connecting to the Mishmi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The Mishmi Tribe traces its ancestry to the legendary King Bhishmak and through him to his daughter Rukmini and Lord Krishna.
- The festival celebrates the immortal journey which Rukmini undertook from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat with Lord Krishna.
- Bhismaknagar, located near Roing in the Lower Dibang Valley district, also finds mention in Kalika Purana.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- AIR

Nepal’s Seke ‘near-extinct’: The six degrees of endangerment of a language

- Recently, The New York Times reported that the “near-extinct” Nepalese language Seke has just 700 speakers around the world.
- The last year, 2019, was the International Year of Indigenous Languages, mandated by the United Nations (UN).

About Nepal’s Seke language

- According to the Endangered Language Alliance (ELA), Seke is one of the over 100 indigenous languages of Nepal.

- It is mainly spoken in the five villages of Chuksang, Chaile, Gyakar, Tangbe and Tetang in the Upper Mustang district.
- In recent years, Seke has been retreating in the face of Nepali, which is Nepal's official language and is considered to be crucial for getting educational and employment opportunities outside villages.

UNESCO has six degrees of endangerment.

These are:

1. **Safe:** Under this category, the languages spoken by all generations and their intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted;
2. **Vulnerable languages:** These are the language which is spoken by most children but may be restricted to certain domains;
3. **Definitely endangered languages:** These are the language which is no longer being learnt by children as their mother tongue.
4. **Severely endangered:** These are the languages spoken by grandparents and older generations, and while the parent generation may understand it, they may not speak it with the children or among themselves.
5. **Critically endangered languages:** languages which belong to those of which the youngest speakers are the grandparents or older family members who may speak the language partially or infrequently and lastly,
6. **Extinct languages:** When no speakers are left of this language.

Note:

- As per the Endangered Languages Project (ELP), there are roughly 201 endangered languages in India and about 70 in Nepal.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- PIB

Classical Language

- The Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan recently demanded that Marathi be given the status of a 'classical language'.

About 'Classical' languages in India,

- Currently, six languages enjoy the 'Classical' status: Tamil (declared in 2004), Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).
- According to information provided by the Ministry of Culture in the Rajya Sabha in February 2014, the guidelines for declaring a language as 'Classical' are:

- o High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years;
- o A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers;
- o The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community;
- o The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

Benefits provided once a language is notified as a Classical language

- Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages
- A Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Languages is set up
- The University Grants Commission is requested to create, to start with at least in the Central Universities, a certain number of Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages so declared.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- PIB

Statue of Unity finds a place in '8 Wonders of SCO'

- Recently External Affairs Minister announced that the 182-meter tall Statue of Unity in Gujarat has been included in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's '8 Wonders of SCO' list.

About the SCO Wonder List

- The Wonders of SCO include archaeological and historical monuments of SCO.

It includes

1. Statue of Unity in India
2. Navruz Palace in Tajikistan
3. Daming Palace in China
4. Mughals Heritage in Pakistan
5. Tamgaly Gorge in Kazakhstan
6. Po-i-Kalan Complex in Uzbekistan
7. The Golden Ring of Russia Lahore
8. Lake Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan

About the 'Statue of Unity'

- The Statue of Unity is the world's tallest statue, is a monumental tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, independent India's first home minister as well as deputy prime minister.
- The statue was inaugurated in October 2018 by Prime Minister on the occasion of Patel's 143rd birth anniversary.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation also known as the Shanghai Pact is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organization which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai.
- The Secretariat of SCO is based in Beijing, China.
- The members of the SCO are China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- Indian Express

29th Saraswati Samman

- Eminent Sindhi writer Vasdev Mohi will be conferred with 29th Saraswati Samman for his short stories collection- Chequebook.

About Vasdev Mohi

- He has authored 25 books of poetry, stories and translations.
- He has also received the Sahitya Akademi Award.

About the Saraswati Samman

- The award is annually given to an outstanding work of an Indian citizen published during the last 10 years in any of the languages mentioned in Schedule 8 of the constitution.
- The award was instituted by KK Birla Foundation in 1991.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- AIR

Vakataka dynasty

- Recent archaeological excavations at Nagardhan in Ramtek taluka, near Nagpur, have provided concrete evidence on the life, religious affiliations and trade practices of the Vakataka dynasty.

About the Vakataka Dynasty

- They belong to a Brahminical dynasty.
- They ruled at some parts of Central and South India between the third and fifth centuries.
- Vindhyashakti was the founder of this dynasty.

- The rock-cut Buddhist viharas and chaityas of Ajanta Caves (were built under the patronage of Vakataka emperor, Harishena.)

Topic- GS Paper 1 –History

Source- TOI

Nagoba Jatara

- Nagoba Jatara festival is being celebrated by the Mesram Raj Gonds and Pardhans in Telangana State.

About Nagoba Jatara

- Nagoba Jatara is a tribal festival held in Keslapur village in Telangana, India.
- It is the second biggest tribal carnival and celebrated by Mesaram clan of Gond tribes.
- Tribal people from Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh belonging to the Mesram clan also offer prayers at the festival.
- The Gusadi Dance performance by dancers from the Gond tribe is a major special attraction of the event.

About Gond Tribe

- They are one of the largest tribal groups in the world.
- They mostly live in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Odisha.
- They majorly speak Gondi which is an unwritten language of the Dravidian family.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- PIB

Madhavpur Mela

- The eight states of the Northern Eastern Region will participate in a big way during the Madhavpur Mela of Gujarat.

About the Madhavpur Mela

- The Mela will integrate the cultures of North-East regions and Gujarat under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.
- The Madhavpur Mela of Gujarat shares it's connecting to the Mishmi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

About Mishmi tribe

- The Mishmi or Deng people of Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh are an ethnic group comprising mainly three tribes Idu Mishmi, Digaro tribe and Miju Mishmi.
- The Mishmi Tribe traces its ancestry to the legendary King Bhishmak and through him to his daughter Rukmini and Lord Krishna.
- The festival celebrates the immortal journey which Rukmini undertook from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat with Lord Krishna.
- The Idu-Mishmi believes that Rukmini belonged to their tribe.
- The plays and dances on 'Rukmini Haran' are conducted by the tribe.

Note:

- Bhismaknagar, located near Roing in the Lower Dibang Valley district, also finds mention in Kalika Purana.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- The Hindu

Nagoba jatara

- Recently a month-long Nagoba jatara concluded in Telangana.

About Nagoba Jatara

- Nagoba Jatara is a tribal festival held in Keslapur village, Indervelli Mandal Adilabad district, Telangana, thus the festival is also known as Keslapur jatara.

- It is a huge religious and cultural event of the Boigutta branch of Mesram clan of the aboriginal Raj Gond and Pardhan tribes.

About Gond Tribe

- Gonds mostly live in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Odisha.
- **Gonds are one of the largest tribal groups in the world.**
- It has been notified as a Scheduled Tribe.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Art and Culture

Source- Indian Express

Polity and Governance

CACS & Training Module of e-BCAS Project

- Ministry of Civil aviation has launched the Biometric enabled Centralised Access Control System (CACS) and 'e-BCAS Project Training Module.
- The aims of these initiations to digitise employee movement process at airports.
- The two projects launched are important milestones to enhance security and ease of doing business at airports.

About the CACS project

- It is a multi-layered security system encompasses the uniqueness of the Airport Entry Permit (AEP) users, biometric authentication in addition to PIN-based identity verification through contactless smart card technology.
- Biometric ID (Biometric enabled Centralised Access Control System having chip embedded smart AEPs) thus issued, is non-duplicable.
- About e-BCAS Project
- The 'e-BCAS' project envisaged achieving a "paperless office" under e-Governance initiative of GoI.
- It's aimed at facilitating external stakeholders to access BCAS system by digital automation of all internal office procedures in 2016.
- The e-BCAS project included Training module, Quality Control and Operational module and Administration etc.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Year-End Review-2019: Ministry of Panchayati Raj

- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is responsible for the work of advocacy, monitoring and implementation of the Constitution 73rd Amendment.
- The role of the MoPR involves strengthening the administrative infrastructure, basic services etc. by leveraging technology and capacity building of the functionaries of Rural Local Body (RLB).

Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)

- The restructured Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) has been operationalized w.e.f. 2018-19 with the primary aim of strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Its main thrust on convergence with Mission Antyodaya and emphasis on strengthening PRIs in 117 Aspirational districts.

Incentivization of Panchayats:

- The Ministry has been incentivizing the Panchayats/ States/ Union Territories (UTs) under the scheme of Incentivization of Panchayats.
- It is one of the central components of the restructured scheme of RGSA, in recognition of their good work for improving the delivery of services & public goods and to encourage a spirit of competition.
- Awards, including financial incentives ranging from Rs.5 lakh to Rs.50 Lakh, are given annually to best performing Panchayats/States/UTs under various categories namely, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar (DDUPSP) for Gram/ Block/ District Panchayats;
- Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (NDRGGSP) for Gram Panchayats;
- Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Award for Gram Panchayats
- Child-friendly Gram Panchayat Award (CFGPA) for Gram Panchayats and e-Panchayat Puraskar for States/UTs.

Gram Manchitra:

- It is a Spatial Planning Application launched Ministry of Panchayati Raj for facilitating and supporting GP users to perform planning at Gram Panchayat level with the use of geospatial technology.
- It provides a single/ unified Geo-Spatial platform to better visualize the various developmental works to be taken up across the 29 sectors and provide a decision support system for GPDP.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

YEAR-END REVIEW: MINISTRY OF JAL SHAKTI

- The Prime Minister dedicated a Swachh Bharat India to the people of India and the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi on 2nd October 2019 which show significantly contributed to the global achievement of SDG 6.

Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS) 2019:

- It is a massive countrywide awareness and mobilization campaign at Mathura, with special focus on ‘plastic waste awareness and management’.
- The launch of SHS was organized jointly by the Central Departments of Animal Husbandry and Dairying and Drinking Water and Sanitation and the Government of Uttar Pradesh.

The first meeting of National Ganga Council:

- Prime Minister chaired the first meeting of the National Ganga Council in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh on 14th December.
- The Council has been given overall responsibility for the superintendence of pollution prevention and rejuvenation of River Ganga Basin, including Ganga and its tributaries.
- The first meeting of the Council was aimed at reinforcing the importance of a ‘Ganga-centric’ approach in all departments of the concerned states as well as relevant Central Ministries.

6th India Water Week – 2019:

- The President of India inaugurated the 6th India Water Week-2019, on September 24, 2019, in New Delhi.
- The theme of the India Water Week-2019 is ‘Water Cooperation – Coping with 21st Century Challenges’

Jal Shakti Abhiyan:

- Jal Shakti Abhiyan, which is a collaborative effort of the Central and State Governments to accelerate progress on water conservation activities in the most water-stressed blocks and districts of India.
- Under this campaign, the entire Government of India machinery of over 1000 senior Central Government officers have joined the States to promote focused interventions for water collection and conservation, including restoration and renovation of traditional water bodies.
- India’s first HAM project in sewerage sector, the 14 MLD STP at Sarai, Haridwar completed before time:
- The Sarai 14 MLD Sewage Treatment Plant is the first STP to be completed under the Hybrid Annuity (HAM) Based Public-Private Partnership Model Plant has been completed before its scheduled timeline.

Swachh Mahotsava 2019:

- The Minister of Jal Shakti has launched Swachh Mahotsav 2019 - a campaign to celebrate the successes of the Swachh Bharat Mission and honour the stakeholder who was instrumental in making it happen.
- The Mahotsav was organized by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti and culminated on 2nd October 2019, the 150th birth year anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Jal Shakti Abhiyan for Water Conservation Launched:

- Union Jal Shakti Minister, on 1st July, announced the commencement of the Jal Shakti Abhiyan - a campaign for water conservation and water security.
- The campaign would run through citizen participation during the monsoon season, from 1st July 2019 to 15th September 2019.
- The focus of the campaign will be on water-stressed districts and blocks.

National Launch of 10 Year Rural Sanitation Strategy (2019-2029):

- The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), Ministry of Jal Shakti, GoI launched the 10 Year Rural Sanitation Strategy (2019-2029).
- It will focus on sustaining the sanitation behaviour change that has been achieved under the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G), ensuring that no one is left behind, and increasing access to solid and liquid waste management.
- Ganga Aamantran – a unique initiative to connect with Ganga's Stakeholders Launched:
- The 'Ganga Aamantran Abhiyan' is a pioneering and historic exploratory open-water rafting and kayaking expedition on the Ganga River.
- It was starting at Devprayag and culminating at Ganga Sagar, the expedition will cover the entire stretch of over 2500 kms of the Ganga River.

CGWB signs MoU with Australia's MARVI:

- The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with MARVI (Managing Aquifer Recharge and Sustaining Groundwater Use through Village-level Intervention) Partners of Australia in New Delhi.

MoU for construction of Renukaji multipurpose dam:

- Under the Renukaji Multi-Purpose Dam project, three storage projects are proposed to be constructed on the river Yamuna and two of its tributaries - Tons and Giri in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh of Upper Yamuna Basin.
- These include Lakhwar project on river Yamuna in Uttarakhand, Kishau on river Tons in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and Renukaji on river Giri in Himachal Pradesh.

Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP)

- The Union Cabinet on 7th March approved the "Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP)" for Flood Management Works in the entire country and River Management Activities and works related to Border Areas for the period 2017-18 to 2019-20.

Benefits:

- The FMBAP Scheme will be implemented throughout the country for effective flood management, erosion control and anti-sea erosion.
- The proposal will benefit towns, villages, industrial establishments, communication links, agricultural fields, infrastructure etc. from floods and erosion in the country.
- The catchment area treatment works will help in the reduction of sediment load into rivers.
- **Funding pattern:**
- The funding pattern for FM Component for works in general category States will continue to be 50% (Centre): 50% (State)
- For the North-Eastern States, Sikkim, J&K, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the funding pattern will continue to be 70% (Centre): 30% (State).

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Political Parties Registration Tracking Management System

- The Election Commission has launched a "Political Parties Registration Tracking Management System (PPRTMS)" which enable the applicants to track the status of the application.
- The Commission had amended the guidelines for registration last month.

- An association seeking registration under the said Section has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation, as per the guidelines prescribed by the Commission.
- The applicant will be able to track the progress of his/her application through the Commission's portal and will get a status update through SMS and e-mail.

Related Information

- Registration of political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- The commission has exercised his power conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Swachh Survekshan League 2020

- The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has announced the results of the first and second quarters of the Swachh Survekshan 2020.
- **Key Highlights**
- 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 populations respectively.
- Kolkata remained at the bottom of the ranking of 49 major cities across both quarters as West Bengal did not participate in the nationwide exercise.
- Among cities with a population between 1 lakh and 10 lakh, Jamshedpur in Jharkhand got the top rank in both quarters.
- **Top five cities in the first quarter: Indore, Bhopal, Surat, Nashik, Rajkot,**
- **Top five cities in the second quarter: Indore, Rajkot, Navi Mumbai, Vadodara, Bhopal**

About SS League 2020:

- Swachh Survekshan League 2020 was introduced with the objective of sustaining the on-ground performance of cities along with continuous monitoring of service level performance when it comes to cleanliness.
- It is being conducted in 3 quarters, i.e. April- June, July – September and October-December 2019.
- Ranks have been assigned in two categories

o Cities with a population of one lakh and above (with two sub-categories, i.e. 1-10 lakh and 10 lakhs and above)

o Cities with a population of less than 1 lakh (under the < 1 lakh population category, the rankings are given zone and population-wise).

Note:

- The performance of cities in SS League 2020 is crucial to their ranking in Swachh Survekshan 2020 due to the 25 percent weightage of the quarterly assessments to be included in the annual survey scheduled to commence from January 4 till 31 January 2020.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Mobile Aided Note Identifier

- Reserve Bank of India, RBI has launched a mobile app, MANI, Mobile Aided Note Identifier, to help visually challenged people to identify the denomination of currency notes.

About the MANI Application

- The visually challenged can identify the denomination of a note by using the application, which can also work offline once it is installed.
- The users can also scan the notes using the camera.
- The audio output will give the result in Hindi and English.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Governance (Important application)

Source- AIR

107th Indian Science Congress

- Prime Minister has recently inaugurated India's largest annual gathering of scientific luminaries, the '107th Indian Science Congress', at University of Agricultural Sciences in Bangalore.
- The theme of this India Science Congress is: '**Science & Technology: Rural Development**'.
- The Science Congress is a major focal point for scientists, researchers, and academicians interested in various aspects of scientific discoveries and technologies.
- It aims to bring together science fraternity across the world to discuss scientific innovation and research.

Other events during 107th Indian Science Congress

Farmers Science Congress

- It is also being held for the first time in the history of Indian Science Congress.
- It will be attended by agricultural experts and farmers whose innovative approaches have led to significant contributions.

Women's Science Congress

- The women's science congress aims to provide a single platform for women working in different arena of science and technology to showcase their achievements and experiences.

Rashtriya Kishore Vaigyanik Sammelan (Children's Science Congress)

- It will also be held along with the India Science Congress which provides a unique opportunity for children to view selected projects and interact with eminent scientists and Nobel Laureates.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Krishi Karman Awards

- Prime Minister handed over Krishi Karman Award to 21 states that have recorded good agriculture production in various categories during the previous crop seasons.

About Krishi Karman Awards

- This is a reward Scheme announced by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Government of India, for recognizing the meritorious efforts of the States in food grain production during 2010-11.
- Two sets of Awards were included under the Scheme.
 - o For the total food grain production
 - o For the individual food grain crops of Rice, Wheat, Pulses and Coarse Cereals.
 - There are three categories of awards for total foodgrain production:
 - o **Category 1** is for the States where total foodgrain production exceeds 10 million tons.
 - o **Category 2** is for the States where total food grain production is less than 10 million tons but more than 1 million tons.
 - o **Category 3** is for the States with total foodgrains production less than 1 million tons.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Indian Express

Open Acreage Licensing Programme

- Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has recently signed contracts for 7 blocks, awarded under Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) Bid Round - IV.

About Open Acreage Licensing Programme

- It was introduced in 2016 as part of the new fiscal regime in the exploration sector called Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP).
- It aimed at enabling a faster survey and coverage of the available geographical area which has potential for oil and gas discovery.
- Under OALP, a bidder intending to explore hydrocarbons may apply to the Government seeking exploration of any new block which was not already covered by exploration.
- Successful implementation of OALP requires the building of National Data Repository on geo-scientific data.
- The Government will examine the interest and if it is suitable for an award, then the government will call for competitive bids after obtaining necessary environmental and other clearances.

Implementing Agency:

- Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas

Note:

National Data Repository:

- It is an integrated data repository of Exploration and Production (E&P) data of Indian sedimentary basins.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance (Policies)

Source- PIB

No automatic conviction for abetment of suicide, says SC

- Recently Supreme Court has held in judgment, a person accused of dowry harassment cannot be automatically convicted for abetment of suicide.
- The Court said that even if it is established that the woman concerned had committed suicide within a period of seven years from the date of marriage and that her husband has subjected her to cruelty, the court is not bound to presume that suicide has been abetted by her husband.”

Abetment of Suicide Section 306 of the Indian penal code,

- Abetment of suicide is an offence under section 306 of the Indian penal code, 1860.
- According to this section, a person abetting the suicide of another person shall be punished with imprisonment up to 10 years and shall also be liable to fine.
- Abetting suicide is a non-bailable charge.
- A person is guilty of abetment when:
 - o He instigates someone to commit suicide (or)
 - o He is part of a conspiracy to make a person commit suicide (or)
 - o He intentionally helps the victim to commit suicide by doing an act or by not doing something that he was bound to do.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- The Hindu

Election Commission of India

- The Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora announced the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 8 and the votes will be counted on February 11.

About Election Commission

- Article 324 has been provided by the constitution for the conduct of free and fair elections by the Election Commission.
- Election commission of India is a permanent body entrusted for the following matters:
 - o Election of President
 - o Election of Vice-President
 - o Election of Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha
 - o Elections to State Legislatures as well as Legislative Councils

- o Reservation of Seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures
- o Qualifications of the MPs and MLAs Determination of population for purposes of election
 - Article 324 of The Constitution mentions the provisions to safeguard and ensure the independent and impartial functioning of the Election Commission which is as follows.
- o The chief election commissioner is provided with security of tenure.
- o He cannot be removed from his office except in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.
- o Any other election commissioner or a regional commissioner cannot be removed from office except on the recommendation of the chief election commissioner.

Composition of Election Commission

- Article 324 of the Constitution has made the following provisions with regard to the composition of election commission:
 - o The President appoints the Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners.
 - o When any other EC is so appointed, the CEC acts as the Election Commission's Chairman.
 - o The President can also appoint regional commissioners to assist the Commission, if necessary, after consulting with the Election Commission.
 - o the tenure of office and the conditions of service of all the commissioners shall be determined by the country's President.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Polity

Source- The Hindu

Year-End Review 2019 - Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare

- The major highlights of the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare during the year 2019 are as follows:

Launch of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana (PM-KMY)

- PM-KMY inaugurated by the Prime Minister on 12th September 2019 provides for payment of minimum pension of Rs.3000/- per month to the eligible small and marginal farmers on attaining the age of 60 years.
- It is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme, with an entry age of 18 to 40 years.
- The monthly contribution by farmer ranges between Rs.55 to 200.
- Central Government will contribute an equal amount in the pension scheme.

Launch of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

- PM-KISAN Scheme inaugurated by the Prime Minister on 24th February 2019.
- It provides transfer of an amount of Rs. 6000/- per year in three equal instalments each of Rs. 2000/- directly into the bank account of beneficiary farmer families.
- The Scheme initially covered only small and marginal farmer families with landholding upto 2 hectares as beneficiaries, subject to certain exclusion criteria for higher-income status.
- The Government later extended the scheme with effect from 1st April 2019 to all farmer families irrespective of landholding size, subject to applicable exclusions.
- A new facility has been provided on PM-KISAN Web-portal (www.pmkisan.gov.in) through 'Farmers' Corner' Link to facilitate the farmers for self-registration.

e-NAM –One Nation One Market

- National Agriculture Market or eNAM is an online trading platform for agricultural commodities in India.
- The market facilitates farmers, traders and buyers with online trading in commodities.
- The market is helping in better price discovery and provide facilities for smooth marketing of their produce.

- 421 new mandis have been approved for integration under the e-NAM. Along with these, FPOs have also been on-boarded on the e-NAM portal.

Other Initiatives and Achievements:

- Multi-lingual Mobile App “CHC-Farm Machinery” was launched, which helps the farmers for getting rented farm machinery and implements through Custom Hiring Service Centres (CHC) in their area.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

NCRB annual Crime in India Report 2018

- The National Crime Records Bureau published the annual Crime in India Report 2018 recently.
- It was published with provisional data, as five States – West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Sikkim.

Highlights of the Report

- According to the report, 3,78,277 cases of crime against women were reported in the country, up from 3,59,849 in 2017.
- Uttar Pradesh topped the list followed by Maharashtra and West Bengal.
- The conviction rate in rape-related cases stood at 27.2% even though the rate of filing charge sheets was 85.3% in such cases.
- The crime rate per lakh population, however, came down from 388.6 in 2017 to 383.5 in 2018.
- The NCRB also released the Accidental Death and Suicides in India 2018 report, which highlighted that 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.
- The incidents registered under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes related Acts saw a decline from 2017 to 2018.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- The Hindu

Govt promulgates ordinance for amendment in the laws to ease auction of coal mines

- The government has announced the promulgation of the ordinance for amendment in the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Act, 1957 and the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 in order to ease auction of coal mines.

The amendments in the Acts would enable the following:

- a. Enhancing the ease of doing business
- b. The democratisation of the coal mining sector by opening it up to anyone willing to invest.
- c. The offering of unexplored and partially explored coal blocks for mining through prospecting license-cum-mining Lease (PL- cum-ML).
- d. Promoting Foreign Direct Investment in the coal mining sector by removing the restriction and eligibility criteria for participation.
- e. Allowing the successful bidder/allottee to utilise mined coal in any of the plants of its subsidiary or holding company.
- f. Attracting large investment in the coal mining sector as restrictions of end-use has been dropped.

About Coal

- Coal is also called black gold which is found in sedimentary strata [layers of soil].
- Most of the world’s coal was formed in Carboniferous age [350 million years ago]

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Explained: The ‘presumption of constitutionality’ in the case of the new citizenship law

- The Supreme Court has recently declined urgent hearing on a plea seeking to declare the Citizenship (Amendment) Act as constitutional and said that there was already a “presumption of constitutionality” to a law passed by Parliament.

About the term ‘presumption of constitutionality’

- The term ‘presumption of constitutionality’ is a legal principle that is used by courts during statutory interpretation – the process by which courts interpret and apply a law passed by the legislature, such as Parliament.
- It is the legal principle that the judiciary should presume statutes enacted by the legislature to be constitutional unless the law is clearly unconstitutional or a fundamental right is implicated.
- The presumption is not absolute, however, and does not stand when there is a gross violation of the Constitution.
- Case Related ‘presumption of constitutionality’

o Supreme Court case ‘ML Kamra v New India Assurance

o ‘Githa Hariharan v RBI’ (1999)

o ‘NDMC v State of Punjab’ (1996)

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Polity

Source- Indian Express

23rd National Youth Festival-2020

- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and State Government of Uttar Pradesh are jointly organizing 23rd National Youth Festival (NYF) 2020 at Indira Pratishthan, Lucknow.
- The theme of the 23rd National Youth Festival 2020 is ‘FIT YOUTH FIT INDIA’

About the National Youth Festivals

- The Government has been organizing National Youth Festival (NYF) since 1995.
- It is celebrated to commemorate the birth anniversary of youth icon Swami Vivekananda January 12.
- The objective of NYF is to provide a platform to bring the youth of the country together in an attempt to provide the opportunity to showcase their talents in various activities.
- The NYF 2020 intends to focus on bringing the attention of the Youth towards dialogue and discussions on selected thematic interfaces so that the outcome feeds into a National Level.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance (Important for STATE PCS)

Source- Indian Express

ZBNF: Andhra Pradesh government signs pact with Germany-based KFW

- The Andhra Pradesh government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Germany-based KFW to encourage Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) in the State.

About Zero Budget Natural Farming:

- It is a holistic alternative to the present paradigm of high-cost chemical inputs-based agriculture.
- This type of farming practice believes in the natural growth of crops without adding any fertilizers and pesticides or any other foreign elements.
- The word Zero Budget refers to the zero net cost of production of all crops (intercrops, border crops, multi crops).
- The inputs used for seed treatments and other inoculations are locally available in the form of cow dung and cow urine.
- The states that are practising Zero Budget Natural Farming include AP, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Kerala.

About Rythu Sadhikara Samstha

- The government of Andhra Pradesh is implementing 'Zero-Budget' Natural Farming (APZBNF) Programme through Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS).
- The programme has been initiated in 2015-16 with multiple objectives of enhancing farmers' welfare, consumer welfare and for the conservation of the environment.
- Rythu Sadhikara Samstha is a not-for-profit company fully-owned by the Government of Andhra Pradesh.
- It has pioneered Zero Budget Natural Farming in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Indian Express

Amma Vodi Scheme

- The Andhra Pradesh government has launched the 'Amma Vodi' scheme.
- In this scheme, the mothers and guardians of school-going children from lower-income groups will get financial assistance of Rs 15,000 annually under the scheme.
- Amma Vodi translates to 'mother's lap' in Telugu.

Key points on Amma Vodi scheme:

- a. The scheme will be implemented from January 26, 2020 (Republic Day).
- b. Under Amma Vodi, the mothers of school-going children will receive annual financial assistance of Rs 15,000 per year.
- c. The initiative is meant to support low-income families in educating their children.
- d. Amma Vodi is available to ration cardholders, who fall under the Below Poverty Line and clear a few more criteria related to their economic status.
- e. The scheme was allocated a budget of around Rs 6,455 crore for 2019-20, which is nearly 20 percent of the total education budget of Rs 32,618 crore of Andhra Pradesh.
- f. All the applicants who have registered for this scheme can check the Jaganna Amma Vodi eligibility list now on the official website of AP government.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Indian Express

Social media posting is a fundamental right, rules Tripura High Court

- The Tripura High Court has ordered that social media posting is a fundamental right.

Related Information

- In a landmark order, the High Court of Tripura ordered the police to refrain from prosecuting a man who was earlier arrested over a social media post. Chief Justice Akil Kureshi also barred the police from making any further arrest in connection with the case.
- The Chief Justice in his order broadly remarked that posting on social media was tantamount to a "fundamental right" applicable to all citizens, including government employees.

About Fundamental Rights

- The Fundamental Rights are enshrined in Part III of the Constitution from Articles 12 to 35. In this regard, the framers of the Constitution derived inspiration from the Constitution of the USA (i.e., Bill of Rights).
- Part III of the Constitution is rightly described as the Magna Carta of India which contains a very long and comprehensive list of 'justiciable' Fundamental Rights.
- The Fundamental Rights are named so because they are guaranteed and protected by the Constitution, which is the fundamental law of the land.
- They are 'fundamental' also in the sense that they are most essential for the all-round development (material, intellectual, moral and spiritual) of the individuals.
- Originally, the Constitution provided for seven Fundamental Rights viz,
 - o Right to equality (Articles 14–18)
 - o Right to freedom (Articles 19–22)
 - o Right against exploitation (Articles 23–24)

- o Right to freedom of religion (Articles 25–28)
- o Cultural and educational rights (Articles 29–30)
- o Right to property (Article 31)
- o Right to constitutional remedies (Article 32)
 - However, the right to property was deleted from the list of Fundamental Rights by the 44th Amendment Act, 1978. It is made a legal right under Article 300-A in Part XII of the Constitution.
 - So at present, there are only six Fundamental Rights.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Polity

Source- The Hindu

5th Edition of Raisina Dialogue

- India's flagship global conference on geopolitics and geo-economics, Raisina Dialogue got underway in New Delhi.
- **The theme this year is 'Navigating the alpha century'.**

About Raisina Dialogue

- The fifth edition of the prestigious event is being jointly organized by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Observer Research Foundation.
- The three-day conference will see the participation of 12 Foreign Ministers, including from Russia, Iran, Australia, Maldives, South Africa, Denmark, Uzbekistan and the EU.

Note:

- The conference is named after, "Raisina Hills", which is the seat of Government of India and Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- The dialogue was designed on the lines of Shangri-La dialogue.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Govt launches road accident database

- The government has recently launched a central accident database management system.
- It will help in analysing causes of road crashes and in devising safety interventions to reduce such accidents in the country.

Highest fatalities

- The system will be first piloted in the six States with highest fatalities from road crashes — Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.
- The IRAD will be improved on the basis of the learnings from the trial, following which it will be rolled out across the country.

How it works

- The IRAD mobile application will enable police personnel to enter details about a road accident, along with photos and videos, following which a unique ID will be created for the incident.
- Subsequently, an engineer from the Public Works Department or the local body will receive an alert on his mobile device.
- He or she will then visit the accident site, examine it, and feed the required details, such as the road design.
- Data thus collected will be analysed by a team at IIT-M, which will then suggest if corrective measures in road design need to be taken.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- The Hindu

Explained: What is a police Commissionerate system?

- The Uttar Pradesh Cabinet has approved the commissionerate system of policing for state capital Lucknow, and Noida.
- The system gives more responsibilities, including magisterial powers, to IPS officers of Inspector General of Police (IG) rank posted as commissioners.
- Depending on its success here, the policing system may gradually be implemented in other districts as well.

About police commissionerate system

- Under the 7th Schedule of the Constitution, 'Police' is under the State list, meaning individual states typically legislate and exercise control over this subject.
- In the arrangement in force at the district level, a 'dual system' of control exists, in which the Superintendent of Police (SP) has to work with the District Magistrate (DM) for supervising police administration.
- At the metropolitan level, many states have replaced the dual system with the commissionerate system, as it is supposed to allow for faster decision-making to solve complex urban-centric issues.
- In the commissionerate system, the Commissioner of Police (CP) is the head of a unified police command structure, is responsible for the force in the city, and is accountable to the state government.
- The office also has magisterial powers, including those related to regulation, control, and licensing.
- The CP is drawn from the Deputy Inspector General rank or above and is assisted by Special/Joint/Additional/Deputy Commissioners.

How many states have it?

- Almost all states barring Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, UT of J&K, and some Northeastern states have a commissionerate system.

History

- The British brought the system first in Kolkata and followed it in Mumbai and Chennai presidencies. Delhi turned into a commissionerate during the Morarji Desai regime.
- In 1978, an initiative to introduce the system in UP, beginning with Kanpur, never materialised.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Live Mint

Govt publishes policy for treatment of rare diseases

- The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare have published a national policy for treatment of rare diseases, listing 450 diseases as rare but not providing a detailed roadmap on treatment.

About the Policy:

- The latest policy creates three categories of rare diseases
 - diseases requiring one-time curative treatment
 - diseases which need long-term treatment but the cost is low
 - diseases that require life-long treatment and the cost is high.
- The policy states that the Centre will provide assistance of Rs 15 lakh to patients suffering from rare diseases that require one-time curative treatment under the Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi scheme.
- The treatment is limited to beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- Some diseases in this category are osteopetrosis, immune deficiency disorders and Lysosomal Storage Disorders.

About the Rare Diseases

- A rare disease is a health condition of low prevalence that affects a small number of people compared with other prevalent diseases in the general population.

- In India, Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, Sickle cell anaemia and Primary Immuno Deficiency in children, auto-immune diseases, Lysosomal storage disorders such as Pompe disease and Gaucher's disease are in the rare diseases list.

The various committees appointed by the government to make recommendations for framing a policy on rare diseases.

- A committee under Professor V.K. Paul, Head, Department of Pediatrics, AIIMS, New Delhi – 'Prioritisation of Therapy for Rare Genetic Disorders'.
- Sub-committee on rare diseases in India, under Prof. I.C. Verma, Director, Institute of Medical Genetics Genomics, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital – 'Guidelines for Therapy and Management'
- A high powered interdisciplinary Committee on rare diseases under the Chairpersonship of Dr. Deepak K. Tempe, Dean, Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC), New Delhi

Note:

Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi scheme

- The scheme provides financial assistance to patients, living below the poverty line and who are suffering from major life-threatening diseases, to receive medical treatment.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Kerala govt challenges Citizenship Act in SC

- Kerala became the first state to challenge the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) before the Supreme Court.
- The plea, filed under Article 131 of the Constitution on disputes between the Centre and states, said the Act violates the right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution of India, right to life under Article 21, and freedom to practise religion under Article 25.

About Article 131

- The Supreme Court has three kinds of jurisdictions:
 - o Original
 - o Appellate
 - o Advisory
- Under its advisory jurisdiction, the President has the power to seek an opinion from the apex court under Article 143 of the Constitution.
- Under its appellate jurisdiction, the Supreme Court hears appeals from lower courts.
- In its extraordinary original jurisdiction, the Supreme Court has exclusive power to adjudicate upon disputes involving elections of the President and the Vice President, those that involve states and the Centre, and cases involving the violation of fundamental rights.
- Under Article 131 of the Constitution, the provision under which the Supreme Court has original jurisdiction to deal with any dispute between
 - o the Centre and a state
 - o the Centre and a state on the one side and another state on the other side
 - o two or more states.
- Article 131 cannot be used to settle political differences between state and central governments headed by different parties.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Governance

Source- Indian Express

Union Petroleum minister to launch 'Saksham'

- Union Petroleum minister is set to launch 'Saksham', an annual one-month long people-centric fuel conservation mega campaign of PCRA.
- **About Saksham**

- It is a people-centric fuel conservation mega campaign of Petroleum Conservation Research Association under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- The campaign aims at creating focused attention on fuel conservation through people-centric activities.
- It also aims to intensify efforts for making citizens aware of conservation and effective utilization of petroleum products leading to better health and environment.

About Petroleum Conservation Research Association

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

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Governance

Source- Indian Express

Henley Passport Index 2020

- The annual Henley Passport Index has been released recently in which Japan has the world’s strongest passport; Afghanistan, at rank 107, the weakest.

About Henley Passport Index

- The Henley Passport Index is a global ranking of countries according to the travel freedom for their citizens.
- It started in 2006 as Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index and was modified and renamed in January 2018.
- The ranking is based on data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), a trade association of some 290 airlines, including all major carriers.
- The index includes 199 different passports and 227 different travel destinations. The data are updated in real-time as and when visa policy changes come into effect.
- The strength of a passport is defined as the countries to which holders are eligible to travel without a visa.
- This implies that passport holders can obtain a visa on arrival, an electronic travel authority, or a visitor’s permit when entering the destination country.

Global scenario

- Japan has been topping the Index for three straight years; according to the 2020 index, its citizens are able to access 191 destinations without having to obtain a visa in advance.
- Singapore, in second place (same as in 2019), has a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 190. Germany is No. 3 (same position as in 2019), with access to 189 destinations
- The US and the UK have been falling consistently over successive Indices.
- Both countries are in eighth place in 2020; a significant decline from the No. 1 spot they jointly held in 2015.

MOST POWERFUL PASSPORTS, 2020

Passport	Henley rank	Access to destinations
Japan	1	191
Singapore	2	190
SKorea	3	189
Germany	3	189
Italy	4	188
Finland	4	188
Spain	5	187
Luxembourg	5	187
Denmark	5	187

All information: Henley Passport Index 2020 and earlier editions

Source: Indian Express

India's scenario:

- The Indian passport's 2020 ranking of 84th translates into visa-free access to 58 destinations, including 33 which give Indians visas on arrival.
- Since the index began in 2006, the Indian passport has ranked in a band of 71st to 88th.
- The Indian passport ranked higher in both 2019 (82, with visa-free access to 59 destinations) and 2018 (81, with visa-free access to 60 destinations).

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Governance

Source- Indian Express

Bru refugees

- Union Home Minister has presided over the signing of a quadripartite pact of the MHA with the State governments of Tripura, Mizoram and leaders of Bru community to permanently settle to internally displaced Bru people in Tripura.

About the Bru people

- The Brus community is also known as Reangs.
- These people are scattered across the states of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.
- In the state of Mizoram, they inhabit small pockets of Mamit, Lunglei and Lawngtlai districts.
- However, the biggest chunk is in Mamit bordering North Tripura district of Tripura.

What is the conflict between the Mizos and the Brus?

- A conflict with the majority Mizos in 1995 made influential organisations like the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (students' union) demand that the Brus, labelled a non-indigenous tribe, be deleted from Mizoram's electoral rolls.
- This led to an armed movement by the extremist Bru National Liberation Front, which killed a Mizo forest official on October 21, 1997.
- Many Bru villages were burnt down and allegedly raped and killed.
- Thousands of Brus fled to North Tripura where they were given shelter in six relief camps, three each in the Kanchanpur and Panisagar subdivisions.
- Most of the refugees were from Mamit and a few from Kolasib and Lunglei.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- The Hindu

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

- Recently the 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 2020.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

- It was founded in June 2001 by China, Russia, and the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- It aimed to cooperate against non-traditional security challenges, in particular fighting the so-called "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism.
- Unsurprisingly, the decision to accept both India and Pakistan as full member states in 2017 was received with scepticism by experts both inside and outside the region.
- The fact that the SCO also strives to strengthen mutual trust and good neighbourly relations between its member states.
- Since becoming a full-time member of the SCO in 2017, both India and Pakistan have participated in multiple meetings of SCO and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) despite hostilities and tension in Kashmir.
- The official working languages of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation are **Chinese and Russian**.

About Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure

- It is a permanent organ of the SCO which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- It's headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan,
- The Head of RATS is elected to a three-year term. Each member state also sends a permanent representative to RATS.

Note:

- The 2019 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to be held at Bishkek (Kyrgyz Republic) on 21-22 May 2019.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Rojgaar Sangi app

- Recently, the Chhattisgarh State Skill Development Authority has launched a mobile phone app - 'Rojgaar Sangi'.

About Rojgaar Sangi application

- It is a mobile application aims to connect trained candidates with the jobs.
- It will also help start-up companies to hire office staff.
- The app has been developed with the help of National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- It will increase accessibility for skilled and trained candidates which in turn will increase job opportunities.

About the National Informatics Centre

- The National Informatics Centre is an institute set up by the Indian government in 1976 to drive its technology and e-governance initiatives in the country.
- The institute is part of the Indian Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's Department.
- NIC has been an active catalyst and facilitator in "informatics-led-development" programme of the government (could also be termed as an e-Government programme, an e-Governance Programme).

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Central Adoption Resource Authority

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) celebrated its 5th Annual Day in New Delhi.

About Central Adoption Resource Authority

- It is an apex body of Government of India for promoting and facilitating In-country Adoption and is the designated Central Authority for regulating Inter-country Adoption.
- It also deals with the adoption of orphan, abandoned and surrendered children through its associated /recognised adoption agencies.
- It is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993 ratified by the Government of India in 2003.

About Hague Convention

- The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption is a multilateral treaty developed by the Hague Conference on Private International Law.
- The convention was concluded in 1993 and adopted in the year 1995.
- The Convention applies to children aged less than 16 years.
- The convention protects children and their families against the risks of illegal, irregular, premature or ill-prepared adoptions abroad.
- It also puts safeguards in place to make sure that all intercountry adoptions are in the best interests of the child and respects their human rights.

- It also ensures cooperation among countries to guarantee that these safeguards are respected and to prevent the abduction of, sale of, or traffic in children.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Business Standard

Explained: What is Punjab’s new Right to Business Bill?

- The Punjab Cabinet has given its approval to a Punjab Right to Business Bill, 2020.

About the Bill

- The Right to Business Act is aimed at easing the regulatory burden on newly incorporated MSMEs by providing enabling provision of self-declaration and also exempting them from certain approvals and inspections for establishment and operations of MSMEs in the state.
- The Act would encompass various regulatory services, including sanction of building plans, issuance of completion/occupation certificate for buildings, registration of new trade license under the Punjab Municipal Act, 1911 and the Punjab Municipal Corporation Act 1976.

Other decision

- The cabinet also decided to recommend to the Governor to summon the 10th Session of the 15th Punjab Vidhan Sabha as per the Article 174 (1) of the Constitution of India, for two days on January 16 and 17.
- It also gave go-ahead for placing resolution to ratify the Constitutional (126th Amendment) Bill.
- The Constitution (126th Amendment) Bill, 2019 seeks to extend the reservation for scheduled castes in Punjab for another ten years with effect from January 25, 2020.
- The cabinet also approved the enactment of the Punjab Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2019, with the relevant Bill.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Indian Express

Centre for tougher law against sexual harassment at work

- The Group of Ministers headed by Home Minister Amit Shah, which was constituted to strengthen the legal framework to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace, has finalised its recommendations.
- The recommendations, which include the addition of new provisions to the Indian Penal Code, will be put up for comments from the public.

About the Committee

- The GoM was constituted first in October 2018 in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement after many women shared their ordeal on social media.
- It was reconstituted in July 2019 under Mr Shah.
- Other members were Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal and Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani.

About Sexual Harassment of Women and Workplace Act, 2013

- The Women and Child Development Ministry had steered the Sexual Harassment of Women and Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act in 2013.
- This act will be applicable to government offices, the private sector, NGOs and the unorganised sector.
- The proposed amendments would be largely based on the Vishaka Guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997, on which the 2013 Act was based.
- It made the employer responsible to prevent or deter acts of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- The Act provided for the establishment of Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) at each and every office or branches of the organization employing 10 or more

employees, in order to provide a forum for filing complaints to facilitate fast redressal of the grievances pertaining to sexual harassment.

- It also provided for the establishment of local complaints committee (LCC) at the district level by the Government to investigate and redress complaints of sexual harassment of the unorganized sector or from those establishments where the ICC has not been constituted for the reason being, it having less than 10 employees.

Note:

- The central government has launched an online complaint management system called “**Sexual Harassment Electronic-Box (SHe-Box)**” for registering complaints related to **sexual harassment at the workplace.**

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance and Women Empowerment

Source- The Hindu

Surya Prakash Committee

- The merger of Rajya Sabha Television (RSTV) and Lok Sabha Television (LSTV) is in the final stages, with a six-member committee expected to submit a report by this month-end to Upper House Chairman and Lok Sabha Speaker.

About the Committee

- The committee constituted in November 2019, is headed by Prasar Bharati Chairman Surya Prakash.
- Its mandate is “to work out the modalities and prepare the guidelines for pooling resources, manpower and technology for the merger of the two channels”.

According to sources, the Committee is weighing between two options.

- The first is to have a single channel and, during the Parliament sessions, to have a “variant” to broadcast the live debate of both the houses.
- The second option, according to sources, is to continue with the two channels but under an “integrated management” with a common pool of technical and human resources.
- The Parliament is in session for close to 100 days in a year and for the remaining period, we don’t really need two channels.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Pulse Polio Programme

- The Union health ministry has launched the campaign to check the disease that affects children at a young age.

About the Polio

- The World Health Organization (WHO) defines polio or poliomyelitis as “a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children.

Transmission

- The virus is transmitted by person-to-person, spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.
- **Initial symptoms of polio include** fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs. In a small proportion of cases, the disease causes paralysis, which is often permanent.
- There is no cure for polio, it can only be prevented by immunization.

India’s Pulse Polio Programme

- India launched the Pulse Polio immunisation programme in 1995 after a resolution for a global initiative of polio eradication was adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 1988.
- Children in the age group of 0-5 years are administered polio drops during national and sub-national immunisation rounds (in high-risk areas) every year.

- According to the Ministry of Health, the last polio case in the country was reported from Howrah district of West Bengal in January 2011.
- The WHO on February 24, 2012, removed India from the list of countries with active endemic wild poliovirus transmission.

State and UT initiative

- Under the Pulse Polio Programme, all states and Union Territories have developed Rapid Response Teams (RRT) to respond to any polio outbreak in the country.
- Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans (EPRP) have also been developed by states, indicating steps to be undertaken in case of detection of a polio case.
- To prevent the virus from coming to India, the government has since March 2014 made the Oral Polio Vaccination (OPV) mandatory for those travelling between India and polio-affected countries, such as Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Syria and Cameroon.

Note:

- Rashtrapati Bhavan became the site of a polio vaccination drive, to mark the beginning of this year's Pulse Polio Programme

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source-Indian Express

Reciprocating territory

- The Ministry of Law and Justice issued an Extraordinary Gazette Notification, declaring the United Arab Emirates to be a “reciprocating territory” under Section 44A of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908.
- The notification also declared a list of courts in the UAE to be “superior Courts” under the same section.

Section 44 of the CPC

- Section 44A, titled “Execution of decrees passed by Courts in the reciprocating territory”, provides the law on the subject of execution of decrees of Courts in India by foreign Courts and vice versa.

Why is the move significant?

- The decision is believed to help bring down the time required for executing decrees between the two countries.
- Indian expatriates in the UAE would no longer be able to seek safe haven in their home country if they are convicted in a civil case in the UAE.

Note:

- Apart from Dubai, the other countries declared to be “reciprocating territories” are United Kingdom, Singapore, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Trinidad & Tobago, New Zealand, the Cook Islands (including Niue) and the Trust Territories of Western Samoa, Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Aden.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Indian Express

Bhashan Char Island: The house of 100,000 Rohingya refugees

- The Bangladesh Government has planned to accommodate 100,000 Rohingya refugees in its Bhashan Char Island.

About Bhashan Char Island

- The Bhashan Char is an uninhabited island around 30 kilometres east of Hatiya Island in South East Bangladesh.
- Bhashan Char Island has formed about two decades ago on the mouth of river Meghna.
- The Bhashan Char falls in an ecologically fragile area prone to floods, erosion and cyclone.
- Though the Bangladesh government has built a three-metre-high embankment along its perimeter to keep out tidal surges during cyclones

About Rohingya

- Rohingyas are indigenous to Rakhine state (also known as Arakan) in Myanmar settled since the 15th century.
- They are also the ethnic group largely comprising Muslims.
- In Myanmar, they are classified as resident foreigners or as associate citizens.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- AIR

Online Youth Parliament Programme

- Ministry of HRD and Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs are partnering together for Online Youth Parliament Programme to commemorate 70 years of Constitution.

About National Youth Parliament Scheme

- It was launched in 1966 in Schools under the Directorate of Education, Government of NCT of Delhi and NDMC, Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Universities/ Colleges.
- The scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs.
- The scheme encompasses conducting the National Youth Parliament Competition every year.
- The salient features of the web-portal are:-
 - o All recognised educational institutions of the country are eligible to participate in this programme.
 - o E-training modules, videos, photographs and scripts are available on the portal for online self-learning of the participants.
 - o Each student taking part in the sitting will get a Digital ‘Certificate of Participation’ and Teachers-in-charge and Head of Institution will get a ‘Certificate of Appreciation’ through the web portal.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Indian Express

Youth Co: Lab

- Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) hosted a three day long Youth Co: Lab -national innovation challenge in New Delhi.

About Youth Co: Lab

- It is co-created in 2017 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Citi Foundation.
- It aims at fostering technology, promoting youth leadership and social entrepreneurship in India.
- It aims to establish a common agenda for Asia-Pacific countries to invest in and empower youth to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship.

About Atal innovation mission (AIM)

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) was set up by NITI Aayog in 2016.
- It aims to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- It seeks to create institutions and programs that enhance innovation in schools, colleges, and entrepreneurs in general.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- The Hindu

SC asks Parliament to review powers of Lok Sabha Speakers, Assemblies to disqualify members

- In a path-breaking ruling, the Supreme Court said that Parliament should have 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.

- The Apex Court said Parliament may seriously consider amending the Constitution to substitute Speaker of Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies as an arbiter of disqualification issues with a Permanent Tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court Judge or a retired Chief Justice of a High Court or some other mechanism to ensure swift and impartial decisions.
- A bench headed by Justice R F Nariman took note of the role played by Speakers and inordinate delays in deciding pleas for disqualification of lawmakers and asked the Manipur Assembly Speaker to decide within four weeks the plea of a Congress leader seeking disqualification of BJP lawmaker and Manipur Forest Minister Th Shyamkumar.
- The bench added, in case no decision is forthcoming even after a period of four weeks, it will be open to any party to the proceedings to apply to this court for further directions/ reliefs in the matter.
- The top court was hearing the appeal of Congress leader Keisham Meghachandra Singh against the Manipur High Court order.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Polity

Source- AIR

Government sets up National Startup Advisory Council

- The government has set up a National Startup Advisory Council to advise the Centre on measures needed to build a strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation and start-ups in the country.

Composition of the Council

- It will be chaired by the commerce minister.
- It will also consist of non-official members to be nominated by the Centre, founders of successful start-ups, veterans who have grown and scaled companies in India, persons capable to represent interests of investors into start-ups.
- The term of the non-official members will be for a period of two years.
- The ministry added that the nominees of the ministries, departments and organisations concerned not below the rank of joint secretary will be ex-officio members.

Mandates of the Advisory Council

- It helps startups in the country to drive sustainable economic growth and generate large scale employment opportunities.
- It will also suggest measures to facilitate public organisations
 - o to assimilate innovation
 - o promote creation
 - o protection and commercialisation of intellectual property rights
 - o makes it easier to start, operate, grow and exit businesses by reducing regulatory compliances and costs.
- It will also suggest ways to promote ease of access to capital for start-ups, incentivise domestic capital for investments, mobilise global capital for investments, and keep control of start-ups with original promoters.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Governance

Source- Indian Express

Cabinet Approves Merger of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu

- The Cabinet has approved the designation of Daman as the headquarters of the merged Union Territories of Daman & Diu, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- The Dadra and Nagar Haveli Value Added Tax Regulation, 2005 is to be amended as Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu Value Added Tax (Amendments) Regulation, 2020.

- These amendments will lead to ‘Minimum Government, Maximum Governance’ by way of having common taxation authorities:
 - o better delivery of services to the citizens by reducing duplication of work and improving administrative efficiency
 - o It will also help in bringing more uniformity in Laws relating to GST, VAT and State Excise.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Democracy Index 2019

- The Economist Intelligence Unit has recently released the Democracy Index.

About the Democracy Index

- It is prepared by Economist Intelligence Unit, the research and analysis division of The Economist Group.
- It provides a snapshot of the state of democracy worldwide in 165 independent states and two territories.
- It is based on the electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties.

Highlights of the Index

- The Democracy Index described 2019 as a “tumultuous year” for Asian democracies.
- Norway topped the index, with a score of 9.87, while North Korea was at the bottom of the global rankings, with a score of 1.08.
- China’s score fell to 2.26, and it is now ranked 153rd, close to the bottom of the rankings.
- Three countries - Chile, France and Portugal - moved from the “flawed democracy” category to the “full democracy” category
- Malta moved in the opposite direction, falling out of “full democracy” to become a “flawed democracy”.

India and Index

- India dropped 10 places in the Democracy Index’s global ranking to 51st place.

Reason behind slip

- The survey describing the erosion of civil liberties in the country as the primary cause of democratic regression.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- The Hindu

Shri Dharmendra Pradhan launches SAIL SERVICE scheme

- Steel Minister has launched a voluntary SAIL Employees Rendering Volunteerism & Initiatives for Community Engagement (SERVICE) scheme for the SAIL employees.

About the Scheme

- The scheme called “SAIL Employee Rendering Voluntarism and Initiatives for Community Engagement (SERVICE)” will promote and facilitate philanthropist activities by the employees in a structured manner.
- It will be operational from January 24 which is the foundation day of the PSU.
- Under it, the employees of the PSU would contribute in the areas of education, health, women empowerment and nutrition, among others.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Business Standard

Commission constitution to examine the issue of sub-categorization within Other Backward Classes in the Central List

- The Union Cabinet has approved the extension of the term of the Commission to examine the issue of Sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes, by six months that is up to 31.7.2020.

Impact:

- The Communities in the existing list of OBCs which have not been able to get any major benefit of the scheme of reservation for OBCs for appointment in Central Government posts & for admission in Central Government Educational Institutions are expected to be benefitted upon implementation of the recommendations of the Commission.
- The Commission is likely to make recommendations for benefit of such marginalized communities in the Central List of OBCs.

Financial Implications:

- The expenditure involved is related to the establishment and administration costs of the Commission, which would continue to be borne by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Benefits:

- All persons belonging to the castes/communities which are included in the Central List of SEBCs but which have not been able to get any major benefit of the existing scheme of reservation for OBCs in Central Government posts & for admission in Central Government Educational Institutions would be benefitted.

Background:

- The Commission was constituted under article 340 of the Constitution with the approval of President on 2nd October 2017.
- The Commission, headed by Justice (Retd.) Smt. G. Rohini commenced functioning on 11th October 2017 and has since interacted with all the States/UTs which have subcategorized OBCs, and the State Backward Classes Commissions.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

National Data and Analytics Platform

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

About the National Data and Analytics Platform

- The platform aims to democratize access to publicly available government data.
- It will host the latest datasets from various government websites, present them coherently, and provide tools for analytics and visualization.
- The first version of the platform is expected to be launched in 2021.
- The process will follow a user-centric approach and will incorporate feedback received from various users and stakeholders throughout the course of its development.
- NDAP will spearhead the standardization of formats in which data is presented across sectors and will cater to a wide audience of policymakers, researchers, innovators, data scientists, journalists and citizens.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Economics Times

GATI Web Portal

- Union Minister has launched an online web portal 'GATI' on the pattern of 'PRAGATI', the portal used by the Prime Ministers' Officer for monitoring projects.

About the GATI Portal

- The Portal has been created by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) on the lines of PRAGATI.

- The portal 'GATI' can be accessed from NHAI's website, and contractors and concessionaires can raise any project-related issues on the platform.
- The issues raised on 'GATI' will be daily monitored by a team of NHAI officers and will be constantly reviewed by the senior officers of the National Highways Authority of India and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- This will bring transparency and speed up decision making in highway construction.

About the PRAGATI Platform

- PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance And Timely Implementation) is a multi-purpose and multi-modal platform.
- The platform is aimed at addressing common man's grievances and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Communication Resource Unit created to provide support to national flagship programmes

- Recently the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) have joined hands with UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) to establish a 'communication resource unit.

About Communication Resource Unit

- It acts as an institutional mechanism for providing strategic communication support to national flagship programmes.
- The Unit provides social and behavioural change communications (SBCC) to state governments as well as to central government schemes such as POSHAN Abhiyaan, National Health Mission and Swachh Bharath Mission among others.
- It is currently operating in three states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka.
- The aim is to cater to the strategic communication needs of different government department through consultations, technical support and, capacity building.

About NIRDPR

- The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj is an autonomous organisation under the Union Ministry of Rural Development.
- It is a premier national centre of excellence in rural development and Panchayati Raj.
- It is located at Hyderabad, Telangana.

About UNICEF:

- United Nations Children's Fund, formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946.
- It is headquartered in New York, USA.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source-The Hindu

Tribal Affairs Ministry proposes 6th Schedule Area status to Ladakh

- Union Tribal Affairs Ministry has proposed 6th Schedule Area status to Union Territory of Ladakh.

About Sixth Schedule

- According to Article 244 of the Indian Constitution, the Sixth Schedule consists of provisions for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- It seeks to safeguard the rights of the tribal population through the formation of Autonomous District Councils.
- It also provides for separate Regional Councils for each area constituted as an autonomous region.

- The Governors of these four states are empowered to declare some tribal-dominated districts/areas of these states as autonomous districts and autonomous regions.

About Autonomous District Councils

- These are the administrative bodies constituted in accordance with Sixth Schedule, Article 244 (2) & Article 275(1) of the Indian Constitution.

Note:

About Fifth Schedule

- It deals with the administration and control of Scheduled Areas as well as of Scheduled Tribes residing in any State other than the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Polity

Source- AIR

Sagarmatha Dialogue

- 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.
- It will be attended by many global figures apart from the leaders of the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
- The theme of the 2020 Sagarmatha Sambaad is: ‘**Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity**’.

About Sagarmatha Sambaad

- It is a multi-stakeholder, permanent global dialogue forum with headquarters at Kathmandu, Nepal.
- It is a joint collaborative initiative of Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Institute of Foreign Affairs and the Policy Research Institute.
- The dialogue aims to deliberate on the most prominent issues of global, regional and national significance.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Governance

Source- Live mint

Chairs named after eminent women to be set up in universities

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development will, on the occasion of National Girl Child Day set up 10 Chairs in different fields with an aim to carry out research activities to encourage women.

About the Establishment of Chairs in the Universities in the name of eminent women

- It envisages setting up of 10 Chairs across different universities after eminent women administrators, artists, scientists and literature.
- It aims to encourage women to pursue higher education and excel in their chosen fields.
- The tenure of each Chair per year will be for ₹50 lakh and established for a period of 5 years.
- Academic functions of the Chairs will be to engage in research and, in turn, contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the area of the study.
- It also helps in strengthening the role of university/academics in public policymaking and to design and execute short-term capacity-building programmes for teachers in higher education.
- The chairs proposed by UGC and approved by the Ministry are:
 - o Administration - Devi Ahilyabai Holkar (proposed name of chair)
 - o Literature - Mahadevi Varma
 - o Freedom Fighter (North East) - Rani Gaidinliu
 - o Medicine & Health - Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi
 - o Performing Art - Madurai Shanmukhavadiyu Subbulakshmi
 - o Forest/Wildlife Conservation - Amrita Devi (Beniwal)

- o Mathematics - Lilavati
- o Science - Kamala Sohonie
- o Poetry & Mysticism - Lal Ded
- o Educational Reforms - Hansa Mehta

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Women Empowerment

Source- Indian Express

National Voters' Day celebrated on 25th Jan

- The 10th National Voters' Day has been celebrated on 25th January.
- The theme this year is '**Electoral Literacy for Stronger Democracy**'.

About the National Voters Day

- This day is celebrated since 2011 to mark the Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on 25th January 1950.
- President Ram Nath Kovind was the Chief Guest at the 10th National Voters' Day function organized by Election Commission.

Note:

- In Ladakh, the biggest Celebration of the 10th Voters Day was held at **Drass in Kargil, the second coldest inhabited Place in the world.**

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- AIR

Central Adoption Resource Authority

- The Central Adoption Resource Authority has begun a nationwide capacity building programme for social workers who help assess the suitability of the adoptive family and prepare a child for a new home.

About Central Adoption Resource Authority

- It is the nodal body for adoption of Indian children which is an autonomous body of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- It regulates in-country and inter-country adoptions (in accordance with the provisions of The Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption, 1993, ratified by Government of India in 2003).
- The mandatory registration of Child Care Institutions (CCIs) and linking to CARA has been provided in Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Important Organization

Source- The Hindu

'Bharat Parv 2020' begins at Red Fort to celebrate the spirit of India

- Bharat Parv 2020, a festival to celebrate the spirit of India has begun at Red Fort Ground in New Delhi. It will continue till 31st of this month.
- The objective of Bharat Parv is to encourage people to visit different tourist places of the country and to inculcate the spirit of 'Dekho Apna Desh'.
- Bharat Parv has many attractions for the public including the display of Tableaux of the Republic Day parade, performance by armed forces bands and cultural performances from different regions of the country.
- The theme of this year's Bharat Parv is 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' and 'Celebrating 150 Years of Mahatma Gandhi.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- AIR

Mercy Petition

- Supreme Court has recently said that the scope of a judicial review of the President's decision to reject a mercy petition is "very limited".

Provisions under Indian Law

- Article 72 of the Indian Constitution deals with the power of President to grant pardons, to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.
 - Under this article, President alone has the sole authority to grant mercy petition in criminal cases on the aid and advice of the council of ministers.
- o in all cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court-martial;
- o in all cases where the punishment or sentence for an offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the Union extends;
- o in all cases where the sentence is a sentence of death.
- The pardoning power of the President is independent of the Judiciary which is executive power.
 - The object of conferring this power on the President is two-fold:
 - o to keep the door open for correcting any judicial errors in the operation of law
 - o to afford relief from a sentence, which the President regards as unduly harsh.

The pardoning power of the President includes the following:

1. **Pardon:** The president can totally absolve/acquit the person for the offence and let him go free like a normal citizen.
2. **Commute:** To reduce the type of punishment into a less harsh one. For example Rigorous imprisonment to simple imprisonment.
3. **Remission:** To reduce the punishment without changing the nature of the punishment. For example 20 years rigorous imprisonment to 10 years rigorous imprisonment.
4. **Reprieve:** A delay is allowed in the execution of a sentence, usually a death sentence for a guilty person to prove his innocence.
5. **Respite:** Reduce the degree of punishment looking at specific grounds like pregnancy, old age etc.
 - Also, Article 161 of the Indian Constitution grants power to the Governor to grant pardons, to suspend or remit or commute sentences of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends.

Note:

- A Court-martial is a trial in a military court of a member of the armed forces who are charged with breaking military law.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Polity

Source- The Hindu

Palestinians threaten to quit Oslo peace accord

- Palestinian officials threatened recently to withdraw from key provisions of the Oslo Accords.

About the Oslo Accords

- The Oslo Accords were a landmark moment in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East.
- Actually a set of two separate agreements signed by the government of Israel and the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization —the militant organization established in 1964 to create a Palestinian state in the region.
- The Oslo Accords were ratified in Washington, D.C., in 1993 (Oslo I) and in Taba, Egypt, in 1995 (Oslo II).
- While provisions drafted during the talks remain in effect today, the relationship between the two sides continues to be marred by conflict.
- Although the Oslo Accords were noteworthy in that the PLO agreed to formally recognize the state of Israel and that Israel, in turn, allowed the Palestinians some form of limited self-governance in Gaza and the West Bank (the so-called Occupied Territories).
- However, the Oslo Accords have yet to result in any lasting peace—and their overall impact remains up for debate.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Governance

Source- The Times of Israel

Andhra Pradesh cabinet gives the nod to abolish Legislative Council

- The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet has cleared the decks for the abolition of the Legislative Council.

About Legislative Council

- India has a bicameral system i.e. two Houses of Parliament.
- At the state level, the equivalent of the Lok Sabha is the Vidhan Sabha or Legislative Assembly and that of the Rajya Sabha is the Vidhan Parishad or Legislative Council.

Constitutional Provision

- The Constitution provides for the abolition or creation of legislative councils in states.
- Accordingly, the Parliament can abolish a legislative council (where it already exists) or create it (where it does not exist), if the legislative assembly of the concerned state passes a resolution to that effect.
- Such a specific resolution must be passed by the state assembly by a special majority i.e. majority of the total membership of the assembly and a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the assembly present and voting

Creation of Legislative Council

- Under Article 169 of the constitution, Parliament may by law create or abolish the second chamber in a state if the Legislative Assembly of that state passes a resolution to that effect by a special majority.

Strength of Legislative Council

- As per article 171 clause (1), the total number of members in the legislative council must not have more than a third of the total membership of the Assembly of that state and in no case fewer than 40 members.

Election of Legislative Council

- 1/3rd of members are elected by the members of the Assembly.
- 1/3rd by electorates consisting of members of municipalities, district boards and other local authorities in the state.
- 1/12th by an electorate consisting of teachers.
- 1/12th by registered graduates.
- The remaining members are nominated by the Governor from among those who have distinguished themselves in literature, science, art, the cooperative movement, and social service.

Background

- Andhra Pradesh got the legislative council created in 1957 and got the same abolished in 1985.
- The Legislative Council in Andhra Pradesh was again revived in 2007, after the enactment of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council Act, 2005.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – Polity

Source- Indian Express

Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971

- The Union Cabinet has approved an amendment to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971 which will increase the upper limit for termination of a pregnancy from 20 weeks to 24 weeks.

About the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971

- It provides for termination of pregnancy only up to 20 weeks.
- If an unwanted pregnancy has proceeded beyond 20 weeks, women have to approach a medical board and Courts to seek permission for termination.
- According to Section 3 (2) of the MTP Act, 1971 a pregnancy may be terminated by a registered medical practitioner.
- Where the length of the pregnancy does not exceed twelve weeks, or where the length of the pregnancy exceeds twelve weeks but does not exceed twenty weeks.

Provisions of Proposed Bill:

- The requirement of the opinion of one registered medical practitioner (instead of two or more) for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation.
- The requirement of the opinion of two registered medical practitioners for termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks.
- Increase the upper gestation limit (for abortion) from 20 to 24 weeks for
 - o survivors of rape
 - o victims of incest (human sexual activity between family members or close relatives)
 - o other vulnerable women, including minor girls.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Health issue

Source- The Hindu

Government allots 30% North-Eastern Council funds for deprived regions

- The Union Cabinet has approved the allocation of 30% of the NEC's allocation for new projects for focused development of deprived areas, neglected sections of society and emerging priority sectors.
- The balance allocation shall be bifurcated in the existing two components (State component-60% and Central component-40%)/
- The projects under the existing "Schemes of NEC" will accrue socio-economic benefits to the marginalized and vulnerable groups of people in backward and neglected areas of the North Eastern States.
- It will lead to faster decision making and quick implementation of the projects.

North Eastern Council

- North Eastern Council (NEC) is a statutory advisory body constituted under the NEC Act 1971.
- The eight states of Northeast India viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim, are members of the council, with their respective Chief Ministers and Governors representing them.
- Sikkim was added to the council in the year 2002.
- The headquarters of the council is situated in Shillong and functions under the ministry of home affairs of the Government of India.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- PIB

Bhuvan Panchayat V 3.0 Web portal

- The Union ministry of Atomic and Space has launched Bhuvan Panchayat V 3.0 web portal in Bengaluru.

About the Bhuvan Panchayat

- Bhuvan Panchayat is part of ISRO's Space-based Information Support for Decentralized Planning Update project.
- The aim of the portal for better planning and monitoring of government projects.
- For the first time, a thematic database on a 1:10, 00 scales for the entire country is available with integrated high-resolution satellite data for planning.
- The third version of the portal will provide database visualization and services for the benefit of panchayat members, among others.
- The project is meant to provide geospatial services to aid the gram panchayat development planning process of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- The targeted audience for this portal is Public, PRIs and different stakeholders belonging to the gram panchayats.

Topic- GS Paper 2 Governance

Source- PIB

Karnataka Anti-superstition Bill

- The Karnataka Cabinet has cleared the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017, popularly known as the anti-superstition Bill.

Key features of the act:

- The practice of Vaastu, astrology, pradakshina or circumambulation of holy places, yatras, parikramas performed at religious places were kept out of the purview of the law.
- Following are the irrational practices that have been banned under the 2017 law:
 - o barring menstruating women from entering houses of worship and their homes
 - o coercing people to take part in fire-walks
 - o beating up people by declaring them evil
- Made Snana, the practice of having Dalits rollover leftover food has now been modified to be voluntary and not involving leftover food.
- A total of 16 practices have been banned under the law.

Punishment

- The law stipulates “imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than one year but which may extend to seven years and with fine which shall not be less than five thousand rupees.
- The fine may be extending to fifty thousand rupees”, as punishment for violations.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Indian Express

NITI Aayog’s Aspirational district ranking December

- NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India), a policy think-tank of the Government of India, released the ranking of Aspirational Districts of the country for the month of December 2019.

Highlights

- Chandauli district in Uttar Pradesh has topped the list of aspirational districts ranked by the government think tank Niti Aayog in December.
- Belangir (Odisha) and YSR (Andhra Pradesh) have been placed at the second and third positions, respectively.
- Sahibganj (Jharkhand) has been ranked at the fourth spot and Hailakandi (Assam) at the fifth place.

About the Aspirational district ranking

- Aspirational districts programme launched in January 2018.
- Its aim to transform districts that have shown relatively lesser progress in key social areas and have emerged as pockets of under-development.
- **The ranking of aspirational districts is done every month.**
- The delta rankings took into account incremental progress made by over 112 aspirational districts across six developmental areas in December 2019.
- These developmental areas are:
 - o Health and nutrition
 - o Education
 - o Agriculture and water resources
 - o Financial inclusion
 - o Skill development
 - o Basic infrastructure

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Governance

Source- Business Standard

International Matters

Commander Qasem Soleimani killing: Iran vows revenge

- A furious Iran threatened to avenge a U.S. strike that killed a top Iranian commander at Baghdad’s international airport on Friday, raising fears of a wider regional conflict between the arch-foes.
- The Pentagon said U.S. President Donald Trump had ordered Qasem Soleimani’s “killing” after a pro-Iran mob this week laid siege to the U.S. Embassy in the Iraqi capital.

How was the operation carried out?



- Drones were used in the strike that hit two vehicles on a road leading to the Baghdad international airport
- Soleimani was travelling in one of the vehicles
- Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy

chief of the Iraqi paramilitary force Hashed al-Shaabi, was also killed

- The method used is more similar to the modus operandi of the Israeli Army than U.S. forces, which carry out targeted assassinations of its enemies

- Angry Iranians took to the streets of Tehran chanting “Death to America” and holding up posters of Soleimani, who was widely admired in the Islamic Republic.
- The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad urged all American citizens to leave Iraq “immediately” and U.S. nationals working at southern oil fields were being evacuated, Iraq’s Petrol Ministry informed.
- Some 5,200 U.S. troops are stationed across the country, and a U.S. defence official told AFP that some additional forces had arrived in recent hours to boost security at the American Embassy.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –International Affairs
Source-The Hindu

Iran will no longer abide by nuclear deal limits

- Iran announced recently that it would no longer limit itself to the restrictions contained in the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA.
- The deal was implemented in 2016, freezing Iran's nuclear program in return for a progressive lifting of international sanctions.

About Iran Nuclear Deal

- The Iran nuclear deal (or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)) was signed between Iran and the P5, plus Germany and the EU in 2015.
- P5 is the 5 permanent members of the UNSC (US, China, France, Russia, and the UK).
- The deal aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear programme.

Under the deal:

- most of Iran’s enriched uranium was shipped out of the country
- a heavy water facility was rendered inoperable
- operational nuclear facilities were brought under international inspection
- In return, the deal involved the lifting of international sanctions on Iran.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –International Relation
Source- Business Standard

Explained: What is JUS COGENS?

- Recently, the term 'JUS COGENS' was invoked by Iran after the threats were given by the US President to target Iran's cultural sites.

About JUS COGENS

- JUS COGENS or ius cogens, meaning “compelling law” in Latin, are rules in international law that are peremptory or authoritative, and from which states cannot deviate.
- Today, most states and international organisations accept the principle of jus cogens, which dates back to Roman times.

Background

- The jus cogens rules have been sanctioned by the Vienna Conventions on the Law of Treaties of 1969 and 1986. According to both Conventions, a treaty is void if it breaches jus cogens rules.
- o Article 53 of the 1969 Convention (“Treaties conflicting with a peremptory norm of general international law (“jus cogens”)”).
- o Article 64 of the 1986 Convention, “Emergence of a new peremptory norm of general international law (jus cogens)” said that if a new peremptory norm of general international law emerges, any existing treaty which is in conflict with that norm becomes void and terminates.”

Topic- GS Paper 2 –International News

Source-Indian Express

50th World Economic Forum

- The 50th World Economic Forum began at Davos in Switzerland
- The theme of this year's WEF is '**Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World**'.
- It emphasizes Forum Founder Klaus Schwab's idea that managers have a duty to customers, suppliers and the wider economy, not just dividend-hungry shareholders.

About the World Economic Forum

- The World Economic Forum (WEF), based in Cologny-Geneva, Switzerland, is an NGO, founded in 1971.
- The WEF's mission is cited as "committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas".
- It is a membership-based organization, and membership is made up of the world's largest corporations.

Important Report published by WEF.

- Global Information Technology Report
- Global Gender Gap Report
- Global Risks Report
- Financial Development Report
- Global Enabling Trade Report
- Global Competitiveness Report
- Global Travel and Tourism Report

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Important Organisation

Source- The Hindu

World Employment and Social Outlook 2020

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) released a new report titled the World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 (WESO).

About the annual World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO) Trends report

- It is released by International Labour Organization (ILO).
- It has published its report after analyses key labour market issues like
 - o unemployment,
 - o labour underutilization
 - o working poverty
 - o income inequality
 - o labour income share and factors that exclude people from decent work.

Highlights of the report:

- Global Unemployment is projected to increase by around 2.5 million in 2020 due to slowing global economic growth.
- At the global level, income inequality is higher than previously thought, especially in developing countries.
- Worldwide, the share of national income going to labour (rather than to other factors of production) declined substantially between 2004 and 2017, from 54 % to 51 %.

International Labour Organization

- India is a founder member of the International Labour Organization, which came into existence in 1919.
- At present, the ILO has 186 Members.
- A unique feature of the ILO is its tripartite character.

The three organs of the ILO are:

1. International Labour Conferences: - General Assembly of the ILO – Meets every year in the month of June.
2. Governing Body: - Executive Council of the ILO. Meets three times in a year in the months of March, June and November.
3. International Labour Office: - A permanent secretariat.

The eight Core Conventions of the ILO (also called fundamental/human rights conventions) are:

1. Forced Labour Convention
2. Abolition of Forced Labour Convention
3. Equal Remuneration Convention
4. Discrimination (Employment Occupation) Convention
5. Minimum Age Convention
6. Worst forms of Child Labour Convention
7. Freedom of Association and Protection of Right to Organised Convention
8. Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention

Note: India has ratified first 6 of above-mentioned convention while the last two has not been ratified by India.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Important Report

Source- Indian Express

Nature Risk Rising Report

- World Economic Forum has released Nature Risk Rising Report.

About Nature Risk Rising Report

- It has produced by WEF in collaboration with PwC and the first report in a series of New Nature Economy reports.
- It explains how nature-related risks matter to business, why they must be urgently mainstreamed into risk management strategies

Highlights of the Report

- The report said, over half the world's total GDP is moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services and, as a result, exposed to risks from nature loss.
- China, the European Union and the US have the highest absolute economic value in nature-dependent industries
- Construction, agriculture & food and beverages are the three largest industries that depend most on nature.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –International Institution

Source- Indian Express

Blue Corner notice

- Interpol has issued a Blue Corner notice to help locate fugitive self-styled godman Nithyananda; weeks after the Gujarat Police sought the agency's intervention for this.

About the Interpol notices

- According to the Interpol website, "Notices are international requests for cooperation or alerts allowing police in member countries to share critical crime-related information.
- There are seven types of notices — Red Notice, Yellow Notice, Blue Notice, Black Notice, Green Notice, Orange Notice, and Purple Notice.

Different types of Notices

- **Red Notice:** To seek the location and arrest of wanted persons with a view to extradition or similar lawful action.
- **Blue Notice:** To collect additional information about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime.
- **Green Notice:** To provide warnings and intelligence about persons who have committed criminal offences and are likely to repeat these crimes in other countries.
- **Interpol-Un Security Council Special Notice:** Issued for groups and individuals who are the targets of CIN Security Council sanctions committees.
- **Yellow Notice:** To locate missing persons, often minors, or to help identify persons who are unable to identify themselves.
- **Black Notice:** To seek information on unidentified bodies.
- **Orange Notice:** To warn of an event, a person, an object or a process representing a serious and imminent threat to public safety.
- **Purple Notice:** To seek or provide information on modus operandi, objects, devices and concealment methods used by criminals.

About Interpol (International Police)

- The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) is an intergovernmental organization established in 1923.
- It is headquartered at Lyon, France.
- It facilitates worldwide police cooperation and crime control in around 194 countries.
- Each of the member countries hosts an INTERPOL National Central Bureau (NCB).
- This connects their national law enforcement with other countries and with the General Secretariat of Interpol.
- **The Central Bureau of Investigation** is designated as the National Central Bureau of India.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –International Institution

Source- Indian Express

Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property

- Khadi Village Industries Corporation is eyeing international trademark for 'khadi' under the Paris Convention for protection of industrial property to prevent any product from masquerading as 'khadi' nationally or globally.

About Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property

- It was adopted in 1883.
- The Paris Convention applies to industrial property in the widest sense, including
 - o Patents
 - o Trademarks
 - o Industrial designs
 - o Utility models (a kind of "small-scale patent" provided for by the laws of some countries),
 - o Service marks
 - o Trade names (designations under which industrial or commercial activity is carried out)

- o Geographical indications (indications of source and appellations of origin)
- o The repression of unfair competition.
 - This international agreement was the first major step taken to help creators ensure that their intellectual works were protected in other countries.
 - Article 6 of the Paris Convention of 1883 protects armorial bearings, flags and other State symbols of the States party to the convention, including official signs, and hallmarks indicating control and warrant.
 - It is administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

About World Intellectual Property Organization

- It is the global forum for intellectual property (IP) services, policy, information and cooperation.
- Its mandate governing bodies and procedures are set out in the WIPO Convention which had established WIPO in 1967.
- Its aim is to lead the development of a balanced and effective international IP system that enables innovation and creativity for the benefit of all.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Intellectual Property Right

Source- TOI

Global corruption perception index

- Corruption Perceptions Index 2019 has been released by Transparency International.

About the Corruption Perceptions Index

- It ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, according to experts and business people.
- It uses a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)

Highlights of the Corruption Perceptions Index 2019

- The global average score for 2019 is 43.
- The top-ranked countries are New Zealand and Denmark, with scores of 87 each, followed by Finland (86), Singapore (85), Sweden (85) and Switzerland (85).
- The countries ranked at the bottom of the list are Somalia, South Sudan and Syria

India and Index

- India's ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI-2019) has slipped from 78 to 80 compared to 2018.
- Its score of 41 out of 100 remains the same.

About Transparency International

- It is an international non-governmental organization which is based in Berlin, Germany, and was founded in 1993.
- Its nonprofit purpose is to take action to combat global corruption with civil societal anti-corruption measures and to prevent criminal activities arising from corruption.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –International Institution

Source- Indian Express

Global talent index 2020

- The 2020 Global Talent Competitiveness Index report compiled by INSEAD in collaboration with human resource firm Addeco and Google was released in Davos, Switzerland.

About Global talent index

- It was launched for the first time in 2013.
- It is an annual benchmarking report that measures the ability of countries to compete for talent.

Highlights of the index

- India has climbed eight places to 72nd rank in the 2020 Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI), which was topped by Switzerland, the US and Singapore.

- In the BRICS grouping, China was ranked 42nd, Russia (48th), South Africa (70th) and Brazil at 80th position.

Topic- GS Paper 3 – Important Index

Source- Indian Express

Ganga-Volga Dialogue

- The Ganga-Volga Dialogue was held between India and Russia in New Delhi which was organised by the Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with Dr.Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation.

About Ganga-Volga Dialogue

- The Ganga Volga Dialogue was conceptualized during 2018 India Russia Summit between Russian President and Indian Prime Minister.
- The objective of the dialogue was to provide a platform for enhancing the special and privileged strategic partnership between India and Russia.
- The theme of the dialogue: **Connectivity**

Topic- GS Paper 2 – International Relation

Source- AIR

Government approves pact with foreign countries for seafarers' competency certificate

- The government has approved a model pact with foreign countries for recognition of seafarers' competency certificates.
- This will pave the way for mutual recognition of maritime education and training of seafarers by the countries involved.
- The pact will facilitate unilateral recognition certificates issued by the Directorate General of Shipping to Indian seafarers by another country, without seeking similar acknowledgement by India of the certificates issued by that country.
- Under the pact, Indian seafarers will be eligible to be placed on ships under the flag of that country for employment, thus leading to increased employment opportunities.

About STCW Convention 1978

- Under the STCW Convention, all seafarers need to meet minimum standards of competence, age, medical fitness, and approved sea-going service.
- These standards are set by each national administration, but as a minimum, they should reflect STCW standards and STCW Code.
- The certificates you are required to hold depending on your rank, responsibilities you are assigned on board, and the type of vessel you are serving on.

Topic- GS Paper 2 – International Institution

Source- Financial Express

WHO declares International Emergency following the outbreak of novel coronavirus from China

- World Health Organization has declared an international emergency over the novel coronavirus from China.
- It is a rarely used designation that could lead to improved international coordination in tackling the disease.

About the Coronavirus

- Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that cause diseases predominantly in mammals.
- In humans, Coronaviruses cause respiratory infections – which are typically mild.
- However, these infections can turn lethal in some rare cases.
- Coronaviruses can also cause pneumonia and bronchitis.

About the Novel Coronavirus

- It is also known as the Wuhan Pneumonia or the Wuhan Coronavirus.
- It is the virus that is responsible for the 2019-20 outbreaks in Wuhan, China.

Note:

- In India, Kerala student is India's first confirmed case of coronavirus.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Health issue

Source- AIR

Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO

- Union Human Resource Development has recently chaired the meeting of the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO (INCCU) in New Delhi.

About Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO

- It is a governmental body formed by the Government of India which functions under the Department of Secondary and Higher Education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- The objective of the commission is to advise the Government in matters relating to the UNESCO.

Structure of the Commission

- The membership of the National Commission consists of members of five Sub Commissions namely, Sub Commission for
 - o Education
 - o Natural Sciences
 - o Social Sciences
 - o Communication
 - o Culture
- The President of the commission is the Minister of Human Resource Development, and the Secretary-General of the commission is the Secretary of the Department of Higher Education.

Topic- GS Paper 2–Important Organization

Source- Indian Express

Economy and Social Development

National Infrastructure Pipeline

- Finance Minister has recently released a report of the Task Force on National Infrastructure Pipeline-NIP for 2019-2025.
- The minister also unveiled 102 lakh crore rupees infrastructure projects that will be implemented in the next five years as part of the government's spending push in the infrastructure sector.
- The projects identified are in sectors including power, railways, urban, irrigation, education and health.
- Task Force was constituted to draw up the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) for each of the years from financial years 2019-20 to 2024-25.

About National Infrastructure Pipeline

- It will enable a forward outlook on infrastructure projects which will create jobs, improve ease of living, and provide equitable access to infrastructure for all, thereby making growth more inclusive.
- It includes economic and social infrastructure projects.
- During the fiscals 2020 to 2025, sectors such as Energy (24%), Roads (19%), Urban (16%), and Railways (13%) amount to around 70% of the projected capital expenditure in infrastructure in India.
- Union Finance Minister has outlined plans to invest more than ₹102 lakh crore on infrastructure projects by 2024-25, with the Centre, States and the private sector to share the capital expenditure in a 39:39:22 formula.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics (Infrastructure)

Source- The Hindu

Mukhyamantri Nirman Shramik Mrityu Evam Divyang Sahayta Yojana

- Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh has recently launched a scheme called **Mukhyamantri Nirman Shramik Mrityu Evam Divyang Sahayta Yojana**.
- It is a financial scheme for the labourers of the state in which on the death of a registered labourer at work, financial aid of Rs 1 lakh will be provided to the family members.
- The aim is to help the labourers of the state.
- Financial aid of Rs 50,000 will be provided in case of disability caused to a registered labourer due to an accident at work.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Important Scheme (Yojana)

Source- AIR

BLCS (type A & B) : New wagon to boost cargo capacity

- The Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India, Ltd. (DFCCIL) has begun testing a new wagon that will help boost the cargo carrying capacity by four times.
- It is done by :

o increased length of the train
o use of double-stack containers
o more payload carrying capability.

About BLCS

- The new wagon — called BLCS (type A & B) — is currently a prototype.
- A total of three such wagons have been manufactured.
- The wagon — used for hauling freight — have been tested by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) and are manufactured at the Golden Rock Railway Workshop in Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu.

About the Corridor

- The corridor, touted as one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the country, will cover a 3,360-km stretch consisting of eastern and western corridors.

- The 1,504-km western freight corridor begins at Dadri, Uttar Pradesh, and goes up to India's largest container port, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, near Mumbai, passing via Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- The 1,856-km eastern corridor will run from Ludhiana in Punjab to Dankuni near Kolkata, traversing Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Transport

Source- The Hindu

Shivalik, first urban cooperative bank to convert into SFB

- Shivalik Mercantile Co-operative Bank Limited has become the first urban cooperative bank (UCB) that has been granted 'in-principle' permission to convert into a **small finance bank** by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- The 'in-principle' approval will be valid for 18 months, within which Shivalik Mercantile Co-operative Bank had to comply with the norms of an SFB.

About Small Finance Bank

- They are niche banks that focus and serve the needs of a certain demographic segment of the population.
- The objectives of setting up of small finance banks will be to further financial inclusion by

- o the provision of savings vehicles
- o supply of credit to small business units
- o small and marginal farmers
- o micro and small industries

- It was recommended by the **NachiketMor committee** on financial inclusion.

Criteria for setting up SFBs

- Individuals/professions with 10 years of experience in finance, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), microfinance companies, local area banks are eligible to set up SFBs.
- The minimum paid-up equity capital for small finance banks shall be Rs. 100 crore.
- The promoter's minimum initial contribution to the paid-up equity capital of such small finance bank shall at least be 40 per cent and gradually brought down to 26 per cent within 12 years from the date of commencement of business of the bank.
- The foreign shareholding in the small finance bank would be as per the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy for private sector banks as amended from time to time.
- The small finance banks will be required to extend 75 per cent of its Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) to the sectors eligible for classification as priority sector lending (PSL) by the Reserve Bank.
- **SFBs have to maintain Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) and Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) as per RBI norms.**

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Banking and Reforms

Source- The Hindu

First Advance Estimates of National Income, 2019-20

- The National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has released the First Advance Estimates of National Income at both Constant (2011-12) and Current Prices.
- It is for the financial year 2019-20 along with the corresponding estimates of expenditure components of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- First advance estimates pegs GDP growth at 5 per cent for FY20.
- The approach for compiling the Advance Estimates is based on Benchmark-Indicator method.

Gross Domestic Product:

- The growth in real GDP during 2019-20 is estimated at 5.0 per cent as compared to the growth rate of 6.8 per cent in 2018-19.
- **Gross Value Added (GVA) at Basic Prices:**
- Estimated growth of real GVA in 2019-20 is 4.9 per cent as against 6.6 per cent in 2018-19.
- **National Income:**
- In terms of growth rates, the National Income registered a growth rate of 7.6 per cent in 2019-20 as against the previous year's growth rate of 11.3 per cent.
- **Per Capita Net National Income during 2019-20**
- It is estimated to be ₹1, 35,050 showing a rise of 6.8 per cent as compared to ₹1, 26,406 during 2018-19 with the growth rate of 10.0 per cent.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics

Source- The Hindu

PM Fasal Bima Yojana

- Maharashtra is the first state in the country to seamlessly integrate its land records with the web portal of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).
- This integration has been rolled out during the 2019-20 Rabi seasons, with farmers accessing their land details online at the enrollment centres.
- Maharashtra is also among the top five states in the country in terms of payment of claims under this scheme.

About Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

- It was launched in 2016 which will replace the existing two schemes National Agricultural Insurance Scheme as well as the Modified NAIS.
- PMFBY aims to provide a comprehensive insurance cover against the failure of the crop thus helping in stabilising the income of the farmers
- The scheme is administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

Features of the scheme:

- The scheme envisages a uniform premium of 2% to be paid by farmers for Kharif crops and 1.5% for Rabi crops.
- The premium for annual commercial and horticultural crops will be 5%.
- The scheme is mandatory for farmers who have taken institutional loans from banks.
- It's optional for farmers who have not taken institutional credit.

Farmers to be covered

- All farmers growing notified crops in a notified area during the season who have an insurable interest in the crop are eligible.

Compulsory coverage

- The enrolment under the scheme, subject to possession of insurable interest on the cultivation of the notified crop in the notified area, shall be compulsory for following categories of farmers:
- Farmers in the notified area who possess a Crop Loan account/KCC account (called as Loanee Farmers) to whom credit limit is sanctioned/renewed for the notified crop during the crop season.

Voluntary coverage

- Voluntary coverage may be obtained by all farmers not covered above, including Crop KCC/Crop Loan Account holders whose credit limit is not renewed.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Important Scheme

Source- PIB

NSE arm launches AI-powered 'knowledge hub' to serve the financial sector

- Union Commerce & Industry and Railways Minister have inaugurated the 'NSE Knowledge Hub'.

About the NSE Knowledge Hub

- The 'NSE Knowledge Hub' has been developed by NSE Academy, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the National Stock Exchange (NSE)
- This platform seeks to assist the banking, financial, securities and insurance (BFSI) sector in enhancing skills for their employees.
- It also helps academic institutions in preparing future-ready talent skilled for the financial services industry.
- India is recognised as the world's second-biggest fin-tech hub today this initiative should take us the number one spot.

About National Stock Exchange of India Limited

- It is the leading stock exchange of India, located in Mumbai.
- The NSE was established in 1992 as the first demutualized electronic exchange in the country.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics

Source- The Hindu

Prompt corrective action

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to impose restrictions on urban cooperative banks (UCBs) for deterioration of financial position, in line with the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework that is imposed on commercial banks.
- Under this revised Supervisory Action Framework (SAF), UCBs will face restrictions for worsening of three parameters:

o when net non-performing assets exceed 6% of net advances

o when they incur losses for two consecutive financial years or have accumulated losses on their balance sheets

o if capital adequacy ratio falls below 9%.

For breach of such risk thresholds

- UCBs will be asked to submit a board-approved action plan to correct the situation like reducing net NPAs below 6%.
- The board of the UCB will be asked to review the progress under the action plan on a quarterly/monthly basis and submit the post-review progress report to the RBI.
- The RBI may also seek a board-approved proposal for merging the UCB with another bank or converting itself into a credit society if CAR falls below 9%.
- It can impose restrictions on declaration or payment of dividend or donation without prior approval if any one of the risk thresholds is breached.
- Some of the other curbs include restricting fresh loans and advances carrying risk-weights more than 100% on incurring capital expenditure beyond a specified limit and on the expansion of the balance sheet.

About Prompt corrective action

- Prompt Corrective Action or PCA is a framework under which banks with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the RBI.
- The PCA framework deems banks as risky if they slip below certain norms on three parameters

o capital ratios

o asset quality

o profitability

- It has three risk threshold levels (1 being the lowest and 3 the highest) based on where a bank stands on these ratios.
- Banks with capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR) of less than 10.25 per cent but more than 7.75 per cent fall under threshold 1.
- Those with CRAR of more than 6.25 per cent but less than 7.75 per cent fall in the second threshold.
- In case a bank's common equity Tier 1 (the bare minimum capital under CRAR) falls below 3.625 per cent, it gets categorised under the third threshold level.

- Banks that have a net NPA of 6 per cent or more but less than 9 per cent fall under threshold 1, and those with 12 per cent or more fall under the third threshold level.
- On profitability, banks with a negative return on assets for two, three and four consecutive years fall under threshold 1, threshold 2 and threshold 3, respectively.

Why is it important?

- PCA is intended to help alert the regulator as well as investors and depositors if a bank is heading for trouble.
- The idea is to head off problems before they attain crisis proportions.
- Essentially PCA helps RBI monitor key performance indicators of banks, and taking corrective measures, to restore the financial health of a bank.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Banking

Source-TOI

SBI launches 'guarantee' plan for home buyers

- The Country's largest public sector bank, State Bank of India has announced 'residential builder finance with buyer guarantee' (RBBG) scheme.
- It aims at giving a push to residential sales and improves homebuyers' confidence.
- Under this scheme, the SBI will issue a guarantee for completion of select residential projects to customers who have availed home loans from it.
- The scheme will focus on affordable housing projects priced up to 2.50 crore rupees in 10 cities initially. Under RBBG, the guarantee would be given by the bank until the project gets the occupation certificate (OC).
- The guarantee will be available for RERA registered projects and a project will be considered stuck after it crosses the RERA deadline.

About the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016

- The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 is an Act of the Parliament of India which seeks to protect home-buyers as well as help boost investments in the real estate industry.
- The Act establishes the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) in each state for regulation of the real estate sector and also acts as an adjudicating body for speedy dispute resolution.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics (Important Schemes)

Source- AIR

Purvodaya: Accelerated development of Eastern India through an Integrated Steel Hub

- Ministry of steel in partnership with CII and JPC is organising the launch of Purvodaya-Accelerated Development of Eastern Region through an Integrated Steel hub for focused development of the Eastern States.

Background

- The Eastern region of India, though extremely rich in resources, lags behind other states in terms of development.
- Eastern states of India (Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Northern Andhra Pradesh) collectively hold ~80% of the country's iron ore, ~100% of coking coal and a significant portion of chromite, bauxite and dolomite reserves.
- There is a presence of major ports such as Paradip, Haldia, Vizag, Kolkata etc. with >30% of India's major port capacity, 3 major National Waterways as well as strong road, rail connectivity to most parts of the country.

About Integrated Steel Hub

- The initiative aims at developing the eastern states through an integrated steel hub.
- The proposed Integrated Steel Hub would encompass the states of Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Northern Andhra Pradesh.
- The hub would enable swift capacity addition and improve the overall competitiveness of steel producers both in terms of cost and quality.

- The Integrated Steel Hub would focus on 3 key elements namely:
 - o Capacity addition through easing the setup of greenfield steel plants
 - o Development of steel clusters near integrated steel plants as well as demand centres
 - o Transformation of logistics and utility infrastructure which would change the socio-economic landscape in the East.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics

Source- Indian Express

State Energy Efficiency Index 2019

- Union Government released the State Energy Efficiency Index 2019.

About the Index

- The index is developed by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) in association with Alliance for an Energy-Efficient Economy (AEEE).
- The index tracks the progress of Energy Efficiency Initiatives in 36 States and Union Territories based on 97 significant indicators.
- The first such Index was launched in August 2018.
- The index this year incorporates qualitative, quantitative and outcome-based indicators to assess energy efficiency initiatives, programs and outcomes in five distinct sectors – buildings, industry, municipalities, transport, agriculture, and DISCOMs.
- New indicators for this year include the adoption of Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) 2017, energy efficiency in MSME clusters, etc.
- The State Energy Efficiency Index categorises states as based on their efforts and achievements towards energy efficiency implementation.
 - a. Front Runner
 - b. Achiever
 - c. Contender
 - d. Aspirant

Highlight of the Index

- The top-performing states in the State EE Index 2019 - Haryana, Kerala and Karnataka - are in the 'Achiever' category.
- There isn't any 'front runner' state.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Energy (Important Index)

Source- Indian Express

India's under-5 mortality of girls exceeds that of boys, unlike global trend, says report

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

Highlights of the report

Global Scenario

- Globally, 85% of deaths among children and young adolescents in 2018 occurred in the first five years of life.
- The global report states that in 2018 fewer countries showed gender disparities in child mortality, and across the world, on average, boys are expected to have a higher probability of dying before reaching age-5 than girls.
- In some countries, the risk of dying before age 5 for girls is significantly higher than what would be expected based on global patterns.
- These countries are primarily located in Southern Asia and Western Asia.

- According to the report, half of all under-5 deaths in 2018 occurred in five countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia. India and Nigeria alone account for about a third.

India Scenario

- According to India's 2017 Sample Registration System (SRS) the States with the highest burden of neonatal mortality are Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh, with 32, 33 and 30 neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively.
- India's neonatal mortality rate is 23 per 1,000 live births.
- Also States and Union Territories, Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttarakhand showed the largest gender gaps in under-5 mortality.
- According to United Nations Children's Fund Uttar Pradesh is the state with the highest number of estimated newborn deaths in India, both because of the high neonatal mortality rate and because of the large cohort of births that occur every year in the State.

Note:

- The burden of child mortality is determined both by the mortality rate (the proportion of children who die) and by the estimated population of any given State (total number of annual births).

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Health (Important Report)

Source- PIB

Sufal Bangla scheme

- Recently West Bengal Government has implemented the Sufal Bangla Scheme which has protected consumers from the spike in food inflation.

About the Sufal Bangla Scheme

- The scheme was initiated in 2014 which involves fair-price stalls and counters across the city, allows people to procure vegetables at affordable prices.
- The scheme is being run with the assistance of Safal (National Dairy Development Board, New Delhi), and the financial support of Rashtriya Krishi Vikash Yojana, the implementing agency being Paschimbanga Agri Marketing Corporation Ltd.

Basic objectives scheme are

- a. to help the farmers get a premium price and have a rational share in consumer's price
- b. to supply quality products at less retail price and have a rational share in consumer's price
- c. Make fruit and vegetable producer's retail market competitive.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Important Scheme

Source- Indian Express + WB gov.in

Hallmarking made must for gold jewellery

- Consumer Affairs Minister Ramvilas Paswan announced recently that, no jeweller will be allowed to sell gold jewellery or artefacts without hallmark from the Bureau of Indian Standards from January 15, 2021, onwards.

About Gold Hallmarking

- It is a purity certification which will protect the public against lower caratage and ensure consumers do not get cheated while buying gold ornaments.
- Consumers have to watch out for four marks on hallmarked gold jewellery:

o BIS mark

o Purity in carat

o Assay centre's name

o Jewellers' identification mark.

According to new rule

- If jewellery or artefacts made of 14, 18 and 22-carat gold are sold without a BIS hallmark, then the jeweller could be charged penalty five times the cost of the object or even given imprisonment up to one year.

About Bureau of Indian Standards

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the national Standards Body of India working under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India.
- It is established by the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986 which came into effect on 23 December 1986.
- The Minister in charge of the Ministry or Department having administrative control of the BIS is the ex-officio President of the BIS.
- The BIS Act 2016 has enabling provisions under Section 14 & Section 16 for mandatory hallmarking of Gold jewellery & artefacts by the Central Government.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics

Source- PIB

Explained: A new controversy on India's fiscal deficit

- Recently in his blog, S C Garg, former Economic Affairs secretary, has claimed that the actual fiscal deficit for the last financial year and the current one is more than a full percentage point higher than the official data.

Reason for the Controversy

- Some of the government's expenditure was funded by the so-called "off-budget" items.
- As a result, while this extra expenditure did not figure in the official calculations, it did mean that the true fiscal deficit or borrowing by the public sector was higher than the level presented in the Budget.
- In his blog, he said that the true fiscal deficit for 2018-19 is 4.7% – more than a full percentage point than the number claimed by Finance Minister Budget in July.

About fiscal deficit

- Fiscal Deficit is the difference between the Revenue Receipts plus Non-debt Capital Receipts (NDCR) and the total expenditure".
- In other words, the fiscal deficit is "reflective of the total borrowing requirements of Government".

What is the significance of fiscal deficit?

- In the economy, there is a limited pool of investible savings.
- These savings are used by financial institutions like banks to lend to private businesses (both big and small) and the governments (Centre and state).
- The significance of fiscal deficit is that if this ratio is too high, it implies that there is a lesser amount of money left in the market for private entrepreneurs and businesses to borrow.
- The lesser amount of this money, in turn, leads to higher rates of interest charged on such lending.
- So, simply put, a higher fiscal deficit means higher borrowing by the government, which, in turn, means higher interest rates in the economy.

What is the acceptable level of the fiscal deficit?

- There is no set universal level of fiscal deficit that is considered good.
- Typically, for a developing economy, where private enterprises may be weak and governments may be in a better state to invest, the fiscal deficit could be higher than in a developed economy.
- In developing economies, governments also have to invest in both social and physical infrastructure upfront without having adequate avenues for raising revenues.

Note:

- In India, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act require the central government to reduce its fiscal deficit to 3 per cent of GDP.
- India has been struggling to achieve this mark.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics

Source- TOI

Women Business and the Law (WBL) 2020 index

- World Bank has recently released Women Business and the Law (WBL) 2020 index which measures economic empowerment of women.

About the Women Business and the Law index

- The Index is based on the countries' formal laws and regulations that have a bearing on women's economic participation, covering eight areas (eg, parenthood, equality of pay).
- It uses 8 indicators to measure legal differences between men and women as they transition through different stages of working life.
- The indicators are:

o Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension.

Highlights of the index

- **Only eight economies scored a perfect 100 – Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Sweden.**
- These countries have ensured equal legal standing to men and women on all the eight indicators of the index.
- **The economies that improved the most are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Nepal, and South Sudan.**
- No economy in 'East Asia and the Pacific', 'Europe and Central Asia', or 'Latin America and the Caribbean' were among top reformers, the report claimed.

India's performance

- India scored 74.4 and ranked 117th among 190 countries.
- It scored 74.4 on a par with Benin and Gambia and way below least developed countries like Rwanda and Lesotho.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Women Empowerment

Source- The Hindu

APNA UREA – SonaUgle

- The Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers launched the "APNA UREA - SonaUgle" brand of Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited (HURL).

About Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited

- It is a Joint Venture Company promoted by the three Maharatna Companies i.e. Coal India Limited (CIL), NTPC Limited (NTPC) and Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) as the lead promoters with FCIL and HFCL as other two partners.
- It was established in 2016.
- In 2016, Government of India had approved the revival of three sick Urea plants located at Gorakhpur, Sindri and Barauni, which have been undertaken by HURL.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics

Source- TOI

Must run' status, no power curtailment for renewable energy plants

- An expert group reviewing the Indian Electricity Grid Code (IEGC) has asserted that renewable energy power plants shall be treated as "must-run" and electricity from these plants shall not be curtailed for any commercial reasons.

About the Must Run Status

- A 'must run' status means that the concerned power plant has to supply electricity to the grid under all conditions.
- Wind, solar, wind-solar hybrid and hydro plants (in case of excess water leading to spillage) shall be treated as MUST RUN power plants and shall not be subjected to curtailment on account of merit order despatch or any other commercial consideration

Background

- Renewable players have raised concerns in recent months about rising instances of state power distribution companies unplugging their generating capacity from the grid and delaying payments.
- The unplugging, also called backing-down, stems from the poor financial status of Discoms, because of which a number of them have started going back on their PPA commitments with solar and wind power producers.
- The renewable sector was previously accorded a ‘must run’ status in the 2010 IEGC, despite which states like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have curtailed electricity from such sources

Note:

- In March 2019, the Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission (TNERC), in a case against TANGEDCO, TNSLDC, TANTRANSCO and MNRE, It had observed that Tamil Nadu had “failed” to provide data showing that its decision to back down or issue curtailment instructions to solar projects was due to grid security or safety of equipment or personnel.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Energy Sector

Source- The Hindu

Global Social Mobility report

- The World Economic Forum has come out with its first-ever Global Social Mobility Report, which has ranked India a lowly 72 out of the 82 countries profiled.
- The WEF’s Global Social Mobility Index assesses the 82 economies on “10 pillars” spread across the following five key dimensions of social mobility:

o Health

o Access to Education

o Quality and Equity in Education

o Lifelong learning

o Access to Technology

o Work Opportunities

o Fair Wage Distribution

o Working Conditions

o Social Protection

o Inclusive Institutions

About Social mobility

The concept of social mobility encompasses several concerns such as:

- **Intragenerational mobility:** The ability of an individual to move between socioeconomic classes within their own lifetime.
- **Intergenerational mobility:** The ability for a family group to move up or down the socio-economic ladder across the span of one or more generations.
- **Absolute income mobility:** The ability for an individual to earn, in real terms, as much as or more than their parents at the same age.
- **Absolute educational mobility:** The ability of an individual to attain higher education levels than their parents.
- **Relative income mobility:** How much of an individual’s income is determined by their parents’ income.
- **Relative educational mobility:** How much of an individual’s educational attainment is determined by their parents’ educational attainment.

India’s Position

- India’s overall ranking is a poor 76 out of the 82 countries considered. Thus it should not come as any surprise that India ranks lowly in individual parameters as well.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Important Report

Source- Indian Express

United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2020

- United Nations has recently released its World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2020.

About WESP Report 2020

- The World Economic Situation and Prospects is an annual UN flagship publication on the state of the world economy, viewed through the lens of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- It is a joint product of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Conference on Trade and Development and the five UN regional commissions.

Report on Global Economy

- The global economy suffered its lowest growth in a decade slipping to 2.3 per cent in 2019 due to prolonged trade disputes.
- The report forecast a modest acceleration in global growth, reaching 2.5% in 2020 and 2.7% in 2021.
- But a flareup of trade tensions, financial turmoil or an escalation of geopolitical tensions could slow down the growth to 1.8% in 2020.
- East Asia remains the world's fastest-growing region and the largest contributor to global growth.

Report on India's Growth:

- The report lowered its GDP growth estimate for India to 5.7% from 7.6% in the financial year 2019-20.
- However, the UN has projected India's GDP growth to accelerate to 6.6 per cent in 2020-21.
- Further, the report has also forecasted a growth rate of 6.3% for the fiscal beginning in 2021.
- The report has also said that one in five countries will see per capita income stagnate or decline this year.
- But India will be among the few countries where the per capita GDP growth rate could exceed 4% level in 2020.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics (Important Report)

Source- The New York Times

IMF lowers India's growth forecast to 4.8%

- According to the International Monetary Fund, global growth is projected to rise from an estimated 2.9% in 2019 to 3.3% in 2020 and 3.4% for 2021.

Projections for India

- The IMF has lowered India's economic growth estimate for the current fiscal to 4.8%.
- This marks a lowering of its own estimate of 6.1% made in October 2019.
- The latest trend in global growth is a downward revision of 10 basis points for 2019 and 2020 and 20 basis points for 2021 compared to the forecast in the IMF's October 2019 World Economic Outlook (WEO).

Projections for global growth:

- The IMF's new projections estimate that global growth would be 2.9% in 2019, and would increase to 3.3% in 2020 and 3.4% in 2021.
- However, compared to the October 2019 WEO forecast, the estimate for 2019 and the projection for 2020 represent 0.1 percentage point reduction for each year while that for 2021 is 0.2 percentage point lower.
- This is partly from an improvement in the auto sector and diminished fears of a no-deal Brexit.
- A no-deal Brexit means the UK would leave the European Union (EU) and there would be no agreements in place about what the relationship between the UK and the EU will be like in the future.

- Also, a US-China Phase I deal (to ease tensions related to trade between the two nations), if durable, is expected to reduce the cumulative negative impact of trade tensions on global GDP by end 2020-from 0.8% to 0.5%.
- Collective growth in the 19 countries that use the euro currency is expected to gradually pick up from 1.2% in 2019 to 1.3% in 2020 and 1.4% in 2021.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics

Source- Indian Express

Paradip Port

- An inter-ministerial panel has approved a Ministry of Shipping proposal for deepening and optimisation of inner harbour facilities of the Paradip Port Trust.

About Paradip Port

- Paradip Port is a natural, deep-water port on the East coast of India in Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha.
- It is situated at the confluence of the Mahanadi River and the Bay of Bengal.
- The port is administered by the Paradip Port Trust (PPT), an autonomous corporation wholly owned by the Government of India.
- Note:
- India's 95% of trading is done through maritime transport.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Important Ports

Source- The Hindu

Related Party Transaction

- Recently a panel appointed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India has proposed changes to strengthen the regulatory framework for 'Related-party transactions.'

About Related party transaction

- It is a transaction that takes place between two parties who hold a pre-existing connection prior to the transaction.
- It recommended broadening the definition of RPTs to include transactions which are undertaken, whether directly or indirectly, with the intention of benefitting related parties.
- The panel has proposed that any entity related to the promoter or promoter group should be considered a related party.
- It also proposed that an audit committee approval must be made mandatory for transactions between a listed entity and its subsidiary with its related party.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Economics

Source- Economics Times

Science and Technology

Palau is the first country to ban 'reef toxic' sun cream

- The Pacific nation of Palau has become the first country to ban sun cream that is harmful to corals and sea life.
- The sun cream that includes common ingredients, including oxybenzone, is not allowed to be worn or sold in the country.
- The ban - which was announced in 2018 - prohibits sun cream containing any of 10 ingredients.
- The list includes oxybenzone and octinoxate, which absorb ultraviolet light.

About Palau

- It is located in the east of the Philippines and north of Indonesia, is home to 21,000 people and has an economy that relies on tourism and fishing.
- It has a compact of free association with the U.S.
- A lagoon in Palau's Rock Islands is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and technology

Source- Down to Earth

ISRO to set up second launch port in Thoothukodi

- Indian Space Research Organisation will establish a second launch port in Thoothukodi district in Tamilnadu exclusively to launch small satellite launch vehicles.

About Small satellite launch vehicles

- It is being developed by the ISRO with payload capacity to deliver 500 kg to Low Earth orbit (500 km) or 300 kg to Sun-synchronous orbit (500 km) for launching small satellites.
- The SSLV is expected to reduce launch time as well as cost less to launch small satellites, which are much in demand.
- ISRO currently piggybacks smaller satellites on Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle abbreviated (GSLV) along with bigger satellites

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- AIR

Extraocular Vision: the ability to 'see' without eyes

- Recently researchers have shown that a species of brittle stars, which are relatives of starfish, can see even though it does not have eyes.
- The red brittle star (*Ophiocoma wendtii*), which lives in the coral reefs of the Caribbean Sea, becomes only the second creature, after a sea urchin species, known to have this ability (barring freak cases in other species).

About Extraocular Vision

- The ability to see without eyes is known as extraocular vision.
- The researchers suggest that a brittle star sees with the help of light-sensing cells that cover its entire body.
- These light-sensing cells give the brittle star visual stimuli, allowing it to recognise coarse structures such as rocks, the research suggests.
- Another peculiar feature of the red brittle star is its signature colour change.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science & Technology

Source- Indian Express

Indian Data Relay Satellite System: A new satellites will help Gaganyaan crew

- 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).

Scaling new heights

The Indian Data Relay Satellite System (IDRSS) is a set of satellites that will track, send and receive information from other Indian satellites

- The project will aid the crew of Gaganyaan mission helping them in maintaining contact with the mission control throughout
- Work on two IDRSS satellites has already begun
- First satellite will be launched by 2020-end and the second one by 2021



About the IDRSS

- 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.
- It will also be useful in monitoring launches, according to K. Sivan, ISRO Chairman.
- 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.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- The Hindu

NetSCoFAN (Network for Scientific Co-operation for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition)

- The Health Minister has recently launched Network for Scientific Co-operation for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

About NetSCoFAN

- It is a network of research & academic institutions working in the area of food & nutrition which is provided by FSSAI.
- The NetSCoFAN would comprise of eight groups of institutions working in different areas viz.

- o Biological
- o Chemical
- o nutrition & labeling
- o food of animal origin
- o food of plant origin
- o water & beverages
- o food testing
- o and safer & sustainable packaging.

About FSSAI

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is an autonomous body established under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India.
- The FSSAI has been established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which is a consolidating statute related to food safety and regulation in India.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Health

Source- PIB

ISRO's Human Space Flight Centre to Come up at Challakere

- India's world-class facility for training astronauts will come up in the three years at Challakere, a shrubby, arid oilseeds town on the Bengaluru-Pune NH4 in Chitradurga district of Karnataka.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has proposed a ₹ 2,700-crore master plan to create a top infrastructure that will house its young Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC).

About Human Space Flight Centre

- The Human Space Flight Centre is a body under Indian Space Research Organisation to coordinate Indian Human Spaceflight Programme.
- The agency will be responsible for the implementation of the Gaganyaan project.
- The first crewed flight is planned for December 2021 on a home-grown GSLV-III rocket.

Note:

- **Challakere** is also called the **Science City**; 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.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- The Hindu

Neon : the world's first 'Artificial Human

- Recently Samsung backed Star Labs at CES 2020 introduced the World's first 'Artificial Human' known as Neon which is the latest entry in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) world.

About Neon

- The Neon or rather Neons can converse and sympathise like real human beings.
- It is not like regular bots or commercial AIs like Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa which tell users weather updates or play music.
- Artificial Intelligence also understands Hindi, Spanish and other languages.
- It runs on a proprietary technology platform, Core R3, where R3 stands for Reality, Realtime, and Responsiveness.

About Artificial Intelligence

- Artificial Intelligence is intelligence exhibited by machines.
- It is a branch of computer science which deals with creating computers or machines as intelligent as human beings.
- It is a simulation of human intelligence processes such as learning (the acquisition of information and rules for using the information), reasoning (using the rules to reach approximate or definite conclusions), and self-correction by machines, especially computer systems.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- HT

TOI 700 d Planet

- Recently NASA reported the discovery of an Earth-size planet, named TOI 700 d, orbiting its star in the "habitable zone".
- The Planet was found by NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) mission, which it launched in 2018.

About the TOI700 d planet

- It measures 20% larger than Earth.
- It orbits its star once every 37 days and receives an amount of energy that is equivalent to 86% of the energy that the Sun provides to Earth.

- The star, TOI 700, is an “M dwarf” located just over 100 light-years away in the southern constellation Dorado, is roughly 40% of our Sun’s mass and size, and has about half its surface temperature.
- TOI 700 d is the outermost planet and the only one in the star’s habitable zone.

Note:

About Goldilocks zone

- A habitable zone, also called the “Goldilocks zone”, is the area around a star where it is not too hot and not too cold for liquid water to exist on the surface of surrounding planets.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Indian Express

H9N2 virus

- Indian scientists of the National Institute of Virology have detected the country’s first case of infection with a rare variant of the virus (H9N2) that causes avian influenza, or bird flu.

About the H9N2 virus

- H9N2 is a subtype of the influenza A virus, which causes human influenza as well as bird flu.
- The H9N2 subtype was isolated for the first time in Wisconsin, US in 1966 from turkey flocks.
- According to the US National Centre for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), H9N2 viruses are found worldwide in wild birds and are endemic in poultry in many areas.
- H9N2 virus infections in humans are rare, but likely under-reported due to typically mild symptoms of the infections.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Indian Express

Coronavirus

- Recently a new virus called **Coronavirus** identified by Chinese researchers.

About the Coronaviruses

- These are a specific family of viruses, with some of them causing less-severe damage, such as the common cold, and others causing respiratory and intestinal diseases.
- A coronavirus has many “regularly arranged” protrusions on its surface, because of which the entire virus particle looks like an emperor’s crown, hence the name “coronavirus”.
- Apart from human beings, coronaviruses can affect mammals including pigs, cattle, cats, dogs, martens, camels, hedgehogs and some birds.
- So far, there are four known disease-causing coronaviruses, among which the best known are the SARS coronavirus and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) coronavirus, both of which can cause severe respiratory diseases.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- TOI

‘Shopper’ malware affects over 14% Indians: Kaspersky report

- According to researchers from global cybersecurity and anti-virus brand Kaspersky, a new Trojan called ‘Shopper malware’ is increasing its presence among smartphone users.

About the Shopper Malware

- The Trojan, dubbed ‘Shopper’, first drew the attention of researchers following its extensive obfuscation and use of the Google Accessibility Service.
- The Malware is targeting retail applications.
- Around 14 percent of Indians have been affected by this malware.

- As the Trojan gains permission, it interacts with the system interfaces and captures every data being featured in the screen.
- It is also capable of reading data being entered on the screen.

List of Common Malware types:

- Adware, Spyware, Virus, Spam, Worm, Trojan, Backdoors, Rootkit, Keyloggers, Ransomware
- The recent case of Malware attack: WannaCry

o In 2017 May, there was a massive global ransomware attack. The attack infected more than 230,000 computers in 150 countries including India, demanding ransom payments in bitcoin in 28 languages.

About WannaCry

- WannaCry is Encrypting Ransomware or Crypto Locker type of ransomware that is programmed to attack Microsoft Windows software.

Some Initiatives by Government of India:

National Cyber Security Policy 2013

- The National Cyber Security Policy document outlines a roadmap to create a framework for a comprehensive, collaborative and collective response to deal with the issue of cybersecurity at all levels within the country.

Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)

- It has been designated to act as a nodal agency for coordination of crisis management efforts.
- CERT-In will also act as an umbrella organisation for coordination actions and operationalization of sectoral CERTs.
- CERT-in will also issue early warnings.

Cyber Swachhta Kendra

- The “Cyber Swachhta Kendra” is a Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre (BCMAC), operated by the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In).
- It is a part of the Government of India’s Digital India initiative under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- Its goal is to create secure cyberspace by detecting botnet infections in India and to notify, enable cleaning and securing systems of end-users so as to prevent further infections.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- The Hindu

NASA’s Artemis mission

- NASA wants to send the first woman and the next man to the Moon by the year 2024, which it plans on doing through the Artemis lunar exploration program.

About Artemis Mission

- In 2011, NASA began the ARTEMIS (Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence, and Electrodynamics of the Moon’s Interaction with the Sun) mission using a pair of repurposed spacecraft.
- For the Artemis program, NASA’s new rocket called the Space Launch System (SLS) will send astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft a quarter of a million miles away from Earth to the lunar orbit.
- Once astronauts dock Orion at the Gateway — which is a small spaceship in orbit around the moon — the astronauts will be able to live and work around the Moon.

About the Spacesuits

- The astronauts going for the Artemis program will wear newly designed spacesuits, called Exploration Extravehicular Mobility Unit, or xEMU.
- These spacesuits feature advanced mobility and communications and interchangeable parts that can be configured for spacewalks in microgravity or on a planetary surface.

Note:

- Apart from the US, the European Space Agency, Japan, China, and India have sent missions to explore the Moon.
- China landed two rovers on the surface, which includes the first-ever landing on the Moon's far side in 2019.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently announced India's third lunar mission Chandrayaan-3, which will comprise a lander and a rover.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Business Standard

Indian Oil Corporation Launches Special NATO Class Diesel for Indian Navy

- Recently Vice Admiral G S Pabby launched the Upgraded High Flash High-Speed Diesel (HFHSD- IN 512)

About Upgraded High Flash High-Speed Diesel (HFHSD- IN 512)

- It has been developed by Indian Oil Corp (IOC).
- It is being supplied from Haldia and Paradip refinery.
- It has a unique combination of low pour and Cold filter plugging point (CFPP) and High Flash Point.
- It has the highest cetane number amongst all marine diesel fuel.
- The Fuel possess following characteristics
 - o It has the best rheological and detergent characteristics
 - o It also has a lesser environmental impact due to low Sulphur content
 - o It provide fuel of better quality than that mandated to all foreign navies under bilateral/ multi-national logistics support pacts

Note:

About Cetane number

- Cetane number (cetane rating) is an indicator of the combustion speed of diesel fuel and compression needed for ignition.
- It plays a similar role for diesel as octane rating does for gasoline.
- The CN is an important factor in determining the quality of diesel fuel.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Indian Express

Yada Yada Virus: A new pathogen discovery

- Researchers have reported the discovery of a new virus called named “Yada Yada virus’

About Yada Yada virus

- It is an alphavirus, a group of viruses that the researchers described as “small, single-stranded positive-sense RNA viruses (that) include species important to human and animal health.
- These are transmitted primarily by mosquitoes and (are) pathogenic in their vertebrate hosts.
- Unlike some other alphaviruses, Yada Yada does not pose a threat to human beings.
- The virus was detected in mosquitoes trapped as part of the Victorian Arbovirus Disease Control Programme in Encephalitis Virus Surveillance traps set up overnight in three locations in Victoria, Australia.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- TOI

Centre of Excellence in Blockchain Technology

- National Informatics Centre (NIC) has set up the Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Blockchain Technology in Bengaluru, Karnataka.
- The aim of this centre to provide Blockchain as a service and allowing all stakeholders to benefit from shared learning, experiences and resources.

About Blockchain technology

- Blockchain technology is upcoming & niche technology and adoption of the same in sectors such as health, finance, agriculture and various other sectors would aid the government in implementing various programmes and provide trust and immutability to the assets.
- The applications of Blockchain in the Government are expected to enhance transparency, traceability and trust in e-governance systems.

About the National Informatics Centre

- The National Informatics Centre is an institute set up by the Indian government in 1976 to drive its technology and e-governance initiatives in the country.
- The institute is part of the Indian Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's Department.
- NIC has been an active catalyst and facilitator in “informatics-led-development” programme of the government (could also be termed as an e-Government programme, an e-Governance Programme).

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- PIB

Coronaviruses

- Recently six deaths were reported in China due to the Novel Coronavirus.
- This is a new strain of Coronaviruses and has not been previously seen in humans.

About Coronaviruses

- It forms a large family of viruses and the illness they cause can range from the common cold to more severe diseases such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV).
- These viruses are zoonotic, which means they are transmitted between animals and people.
- Other strains of coronaviruses have previously been seen to be transmitted from civet cats to humans (in the case of SARS-CoV) and from dromedary camels to humans (in the case of MERS-CoV).
- There is limited information on the exact range of illness the virus can cause, its effects can range from cough and fever to kidney failure and even death.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- The Hindu

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine

- The government is planning for the nationwide rollout of Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) under Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).
- It is the costliest vaccine in the UIP basket which was first brought into the UIP basket in 2017.
- It currently covers only about 50 per cent of the 26 million birth cohort in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan

About the vaccine

- The vaccine is a mix of several bacteria of the pneumococci family, which are known to cause pneumonia – hence ‘conjugate’ in the name.
- Pneumonia caused by the pneumococcus bacteria is supposed to be the most common.
- **Concern about the Vaccine**
- As per the government data, a countrywide rollout of PCV would require about 50% of the budget of UIP (minus shared costs such as staff salary, establishment costs, etc).
- The cost challenge for India’s immunisation programme is set to mount further as Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI) is set to withdraw its support for India from 2022.

About Universal Immunization Programme:

- It was launched in 1985, to prevent mortality and morbidity in children and pregnant women against 12 vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Under UIP free of cost vaccination is provided against twelve vaccine-preventable diseases.
- These are Tuberculosis, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Rubella, Japanese Encephalitis (JE), Tetanus, Polio, Hepatitis B, Pneumonia and Meningitis due to Haemophilus Influenzae type b (Hib), Measles and Rotavirus diarrhoea.
- UIP has been able to fully immunize only 65% of children under 1 year of age.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Health Issue

Source- Indian Express

Living Robots : Xenobot

- Scientists in the United States have created the world’s first “living machines” Xenobots.

About Xenobots

- It is tiny robots built from the cells of the African clawed frog that can move around on their own.
- They have named the millimetre-wide robots “xenobots” — after the species of aquatic frog found across sub-Saharan Africa from Nigeria and Sudan to South Africa, *Xenopus laevis*.

Significance

- The xenobots “can move toward a target, perhaps pick up a payload (like medicine that needs to be carried to a specific place inside a patient) — and heal themselves after being cut.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Down to Earth

Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b: The most potent ozone-depleting chemical

- India has successfully achieved the complete phase-out of Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b.

About the Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b

- It is a chemical used by foam manufacturing enterprises and one of the most potent ozone-depleting chemicals after Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).
- It is used mainly as a blowing agent in the production of rigid polyurethane (PU) foams.

Benefits

• The phase-out of HCFC-141b from the country has twin environmental benefits viz
o assisting the healing of the stratospheric ozone layer
o towards the climate change mitigation due to transitioning of foam manufacturing enterprises at this scale under HPMP to low global warming potential alternative technologies.

About Ozone-depleting substances

- Ozone-depleting substances are man-made gases that destroy ozone once they reach the ozone layer. The ozone layer sits in the upper atmosphere (Stratosphere) and reduces the amount of harmful ultraviolet radiation that reaches Earth from the sun.
- Ultraviolet radiation can have detrimental effects on both humans and the environment such as inducing skin cancer and cataracts, distorting plant growth and damaging the marine environment.

Ozone-depleting substances include:

- chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)
- hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs)
- hydrobromofluorocarbons (HBFCs)
- halons

- methyl bromide
- carbon tetrachloride
- methyl chloroform.

Note:

- The government prohibited HCFC-141b from 1st January 2020 under Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control) Amendment Rules, 2019 issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The use of HCFC-141 b by foam manufacturing industry has also been closed as on 1st January 2020 under the Ozone Depleting Substances (Regulation and Control) Amendment Rules, 2014.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Indian Express

Vyom Mitra: Lady Robot for Gaganyaan

- The Indian Space Research Organisation has unveiled a human-robot, named Vyommitra, which will be sent to space as part of the Gaganyaan mission.

About Vyommitra

- Vyommitra is a half-humanoid who can mimic human actions and her body stops at the torso and has no legs.

Role of Vyommitra in Gaganyaan mission

- She is capable of switching panel operations, performing Environment Control and Life Support Systems functions, conversations with the astronauts, recognising them and solving their queries.
- The humanoid can detect and give out warnings if the environment changes within the cabin.
- This humanoid will simulate the human functions required for space before real astronauts take off before August 2022.
- She will be sent in a space capsule around the end of 2020 or early 2021 to study how astronauts respond to living outside earth in controlled zero-gravity conditions.
- She has been developed by the ISRO Inertial Systems Unit, Thiruvananthapuram.

Other Robots in Space

- a. Robonaut 2: NASA, USA
- b. Fedor (Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research): Russia
- c. Kirobo: Japan

About Gaganyaan Mission

- It is India's first Human Space Flight Programme to be launched by Indian Space Research Organisation by 2022.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- The Hindu

Country's first Super Fab Lab inaugurated in Kerala

- India's first Super Fab Lab was launched at the Integrated Startup Complex of the Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM).
- It will function in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

About Fab Labs

- These labs are fabrication laboratories offering digital fabrication and computation which was the brainchild of inventor and scientist Professor Neil Gershenfeld.
- It seeks to enable entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into new products and prototypes by giving access to advanced digital manufacturing technology.
- Established in 2002, Vigyan Ashram in Pune, India was the first fab lab to be set up outside MIT.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Economics Times

Presolar grains: Oldest solid material on the Earth

- Scientists have discovered the oldest solid material ever found on the Earth, in the form of stardust trapped inside a meteorite that crashed into Australia 50 years ago.

Related Information

- This stardust provides evidence for a ‘baby boom’ of new stars that formed 7 billion years ago.
- These are the oldest solid materials ever found, and they tell us about how stars formed in our galaxy.
- The materials the researchers examined are called presolar grains-minerals formed before the Sun was born.
- These bits of stardust became trapped in meteorites where they remained unchanged for billions of years, making them capsules of the cosmic time before the solar system.
- However, presolar grains are very tiny and rare, found only in about five per cent of meteorites that have fallen to the Earth.

About Presolar grains

- They are interstellar solid matter in the form of tiny solid grains that originated at a time before the Sun was formed.
- Presolar stardust grains formed within outflowing and cooling gases from earlier presolar stars.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Indian Express

NASA’s Spitzer Space Telescope

- NASA’s Spitzer Mission, which studied the universe in infrared light for more than 16 years, will come to an end since it is low on fuel.
- NASA will decommission the Spitzer aircraft, after which it will cease to conduct science operations.

About the Spitzer Space

- It was launched into a solar orbit on August 25, 2003.
- The Spitzer Space Telescope is a space-borne observatory, one of the elements of NASA’s Great Observatories that include the Hubble Space Telescope and the Chandra X-Ray.
- Using different infrared wavelengths, Spitzer was able to see and reveal features of the universe including objects that were too cold to emit visible light.

Achievement

- NASA’s Spitzer Space Telescope had revealed the first known exoplanet system called TRAPPIST-1, named for The Transiting Planets and Planetesimals Small Telescope (TRAPPIST) in Chile.
- Hubble and Spitzer in 2016 identified and studied the most distant galaxy ever observed.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Indian Express

Polycrack plant

- Indian Railways has commissioned the country’s first governmental waste to energy plant in Mancheswar Carriage Repair workshop at Bhubaneswar under the East Coast Railway zone.
- This Waste to Energy Plant, a patented technology called POLYCRACK, is first-of-its-kind in Indian Railways and fourth in India.

About the Polycrack Plant

- It is the world’s first patented heterogeneous catalytic process which converts multiple feedstocks into hydrocarbon liquid fuels, gas, carbon and water.

- Polycrack plant can be fed with all types of plastic, petroleum sludge, un-segregated MSW (Municipal Solid Waste) with moisture up to 50 per cent, e-waste, organic waste including bamboo, garden waste, etc.
- The process is a closed-loop system and does not emit any hazardous pollutants into the atmosphere.
- The combustible, non-condensed gases are re-used for providing energy to the entire system and thus, the only emission comes from the combustion of gaseous fuels.
- The emissions from the combustion are found to be much less than prescribed environmental norms.
- This process will produce energy in the form of Light Diesel Oil which is used to light furnaces.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- Business World

Ecology and Environment

India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2019

- According to the India State of Forest Biennial Report (ISFR) 2019, the forest-and-tree cover in India has risen by 5,188 square kilometres in the last two years.

Highlights of the report

- The report revealed that the total tree-and-forest cover in the country includes an increase of 3,976 sq. km (0.56 per cent) of forest cover and 1,212 sq. km (1.29 per cent) of tree cover, compared to the 2017 report.
- The total tree and forest cover is around 25 per cent of the geographical area of the country.
- Karnataka tops the list of states followed by Andhra Pradesh and Kerala in terms of increase in forest cover.
- "Forest cover in the hill districts of the country is 2, 84,006 sq. km, which is 40.30% of the total geographical area of these districts.
- The current assessment shows an increase of 544 sq. km (0.19 per cent) in 140 hill districts of the country.
- Except Assam and Tripura, all states in the region show a decrease in the forest cover.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- The Hindu

Year-End Review: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

- Some of the major highlights of the Ministry in the year 2019 are outlined below:

Environment:

National Clean Air Programme

- It was launched on 10th January 2019 which provides a time-bound national-level strategy for pan India implementation to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner.

Third Indo-German Environment Forum

- The forum was held in New Delhi with the theme "Cleaner Air, Greener Economy"
- It focused on challenges, solutions and necessary framework conditions of air pollution control, waste management and circular economy as well as the implementation of NDCs and SDGs based on Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 of UN respectively.
- India piloted resolutions on two important global environmental issues relating to Single-use Plastics and Sustainable Nitrogen management at the fourth session of United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) which was held in Nairobi.
- UNEA adopted both the resolutions with consensus.

India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)

- It was launched in 2019.
- India is one of the first countries in the world to develop a comprehensive Cooling Action plan which has a long term vision to address the cooling requirement across sectors and lists out actions which can help reduce the cooling demand.
- Cooling requirement is cross-sectoral and an essential part for economic growth and is required across different sectors of the economy such as residential and commercial buildings, cold-chain, refrigeration, transport and industries.

#SelfiewithSapling

- On World Environment Day, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change launched a people's campaign #SelfiewithSapling urging all to join and plant a sapling and post the selfie with the sapling on social media.

India Hosts COP14

- India hosted the 14th Conference of Parties (COP14) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in September 2019 at Greater Noida.

- During the Conference, the Prime Minister announced: “India would raise its ambition of the total area that would be restored from its land degradation status, from twenty-one million hectares to twenty-six million hectares between now and 2030”.

Bharat Standard VI

- The country has leapfrogged from Bharat Standard IV to Bharat Standard VI for vehicle emission norms and from 1st April 2020, vehicles will be BS-VI compliant.
- There is also a strong push for use of e-vehicles by introducing multiple policy interventions and incentives.

Forest & Wildlife:

Asiatic Lion Conservation Project

- A dedicated “Asiatic Lion Conservation Project” launched by Central Government.
- The Asiatic Lion endemic to Gir landscape of Gujarat is one of the 21 critically endangered species identified by the Ministry for taking up recovery programmes.

‘Not all animals migrate by choice’

- It is a campaign launched to raise awareness on illegal wildlife trade.
- Tigers count in India rise to 2967, in 2018
- On the occasion of International Tiger Day, Prime Minister released the results of the fourth cycle of All India Tiger Estimation - 2018 in New Delhi on July 29th, 2019.
- The count of tigers in India has risen to 2967, in 2018, according to this census.

Total Forest and Tree Cover

- It rises to 24.56 percent of the total geographical area of the Country.
- According to the biennial “India State of Forest Report (ISFR)” the total forest and tree cover of the country is 80.73 million hectare which is 24.56 percent of the geographical area of the country.
- As compared to the assessment of 2017, there is an increase of 5,188 sq. km in the total forest and tree cover of the
- India to increase the share of non-fossil fuels to 175 GW by 2022 and further take it to 450 GW
- During the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Climate Action Summit at New York Prime Minister announced that India is going to increase the share of non-fossil fuels to 175 GW by 2022, and will further take it to 450 GW.
- The Global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure was also launched.

India at COP 25, Calls upon more countries to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- The 25th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 25) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held under the Presidency of Chile in Madrid, Spain in December 2019.
- Article 6 under the Paris Agreement, Enhanced Transparency Framework (Monitoring, Reporting and Verification), Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation related matters.

Other Key initiatives/activities undertaken by the Ministry

- Brazil, South Africa, India and China, BASIC countries held its 28th Ministerial meeting on Climate Change from 14th to 16th August in Sao Paulo, Brazil, wherein India participated.
- The proposal was approved for setting-up of a New Regional Centre of the GB Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development at Ladakh.

“Swachh – Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan”

- The Ministry undertook a mass cleanliness-cum-awareness drive in 50 identified beaches under the “Swachh – Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan”.
- The identified beaches were in 10 coastal States/Union Territories (UTs) namely Gujarat, Daman & Diu, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha.

- The beaches were identified after the consultation with the States/UTs.
- The Ministry in November gave Environment Clearance to Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) to set up new 2G Ethanol plant at Panipat.
- It is also pertinent to highlight that it was declared that no separate environmental clearance was required to produce additional ethanol from B-heavy molasses as it does not contribute to the pollution load, giving further benefits to farmers and the sugar industry.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment
Source- PIB

Senna Spectabilis: An alien species in NBR

- The Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department is gearing up to adopt comprehensive steps to arrest the rampant growth of invasive alien plants, especially tree species like ‘Senna Spectabilis’, in the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR).
- Senna Spectabilis is posing a major threat to the forest areas of the reserve, owing to its quick growth and coppicing character.

About the Invasive Alien Species

- These are the plant/animals also referred to as exotic, introduced, foreign, non-indigenous or non-native, are one that has been introduced by humans intentionally or otherwise through human agency or accidentally from one region to another.

Common invasive species traits include the following:

- Fast growth
- Rapid reproduction
- High dispersal ability
- Phenotype plasticity (the ability to alter growth form to suit current conditions)
- Tolerance of a wide range of environmental conditions (Ecological competence)
- Ability to live off of a wide range of food types
- Association with humans
- Prior successful invasions

Some of the alien species found in India

- **African Apple Snail** – found in Andaman and Nicobar Island, now spread across the whole country
- **Papaya Mealy Bug** – massively affected papaya crop in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.
- **Cotton Mealy Bug** – the threat to cotton crops in Deccan
- **Amazon sailfin catfish** – responsible for destroying the fish population in wetlands
- **Orange Cup-Coral** - It is originated in Indo- East Pacific, now also found in Andaman and Nicobar Island, Gulf of Kutch, Kerala and Lakshadweep.
- **Primrose Willow** -It is an aquatic plant native to Central and South America.
 - It was first seen in Karbi Anglong district of Assam and is now spreading in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and West Bengal.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment
Source- The Hindu

Climate Change Performance Index 2020

- India for the first time ranks among the top ten in the Climate Change Performance Index with rank 9th.
- In this year's index, Sweden leads the ranking on rank 4, followed by Denmark (5) and Morocco (6).
- The bottom five in this year's CCPI are Islamic Republic of Iran (57), Republic of Korea (58), Chinese Taipei (59), Saudi Arabia (60) and the United States (61), rated low or very low across almost all categories.

- The CCPI 2020 results illustrate the main regional differences in climate protection and performance within the 57 evaluated countries and the EU.
- No country performs well enough in all index categories to achieve an overall very high rating in the index so once again the first three ranks remain empty.

About Climate Change Performance Index

- It is an independent monitoring tool for countries' climate protection performance.
- It aims to enhance transparency in international climate politics and enables the comparability of climate protection efforts and progress made by individual countries.
- The ranking results are defined by a country's aggregated performance in 14 indicators within the four categories
 - o GHG Emissions – 40% weighting
 - o Renewable Energy – 20% weighting
 - o Energy Use – 20% weighting
 - o Climate Policy – 20% weighting

Government of India's efforts:

- Air pollution is one of the biggest global environmental challenges of today.
- A time-bound national-level strategy for pan India implementation to tackle the increasing air pollution problem in a comprehensive manner in the form of the National Clean Air Programme was launched last year.
- India is among the few countries in the world where forest cover is consistently increasing.
- The total forest and tree cover rise to over 24 percent of the total geographical area of the Country.
- The government aims to increase the share of non-fossil fuels to 175 GigaWatt by 2022 and further take it to 450 GW.
- Government is taking all possible steps to protect the tiger.
- According to the latest tiger census data -2018, the total tiger in India has risen to around three thousand.
- In a major boost towards promoting afforestation and achieving green objectives of the country, the government handed over 47 thousand crore rupees of Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority, CAMPA funds to various states in August last year.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- AIR

Asiatic Lion Census

- Recently Government has decided to use around 8,000-10,000 cameras to carry out the 2020 lion census in Gujarat.
- Wildlife Institute of India (WII) will be perused in the census, scheduled to take place in May 2020.
- The Gujarat forest department conducts lion census every five years in Asiatic Lion Landscape, which includes Gir National Park and Sanctuary.
- The 2015 lion census had counted 523 lions in the state.

About Asiatic Lion:

- It is listed as '**Endangered**' under the IUCN Red List.
- It is listed in **Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act**,
- The African Lion is listed as Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List.

Canine Distemper Virus:

- Recently a deadly combination of canine distemper virus and babesiosis, a disease caused by tick-borne parasites, is killing Asiatic lions in the Gir forest sanctuary in Gujarat.
- Canine distemper is a contagious viral disease that affects a wide variety of animal species, including dogs, coyotes, foxes, pandas and wolves.

- It attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous systems of animals.

About Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary:

- It is situated in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat which was established in 1965.
- It is part of the Kathiawar-Gir dry deciduous forests Ecoregion
- The major perennial rivers of the Gir region are Datardi, Shingoda, Hiran, Shetrunji, Machhundri, Godavari and Raval.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- Business Standard

Assam state zoo first to breed endangered Hargila

- The Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden and Aaranyak have jointly attained a landmark achievement by successfully hatching a pair of Greater Adjutant chicks in an artificial platform within the zoo enclosure; in the first-ever experiment of its kind.

About Hargila

- This rarest of storks, the Hargila is currently on the brink of extinction due to habitat loss -stemming from indiscriminate felling of big trees and dwindling wetlands.
- The Endangered Greater Adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) is one of the rarest species of Storks out of twenty species of Storks in the world.
- In India, eight species of residential storks are found, out of which Greater Adjutant is one of them.

Habitat

- Once abundantly distributed in Southeast Asia, this stork is now restricted to a few isolated pockets in Assam and Bihar in India and PrekToal in Cambodia.

Note:

- Biologist Dr Purnima Devi Barman, who leads the Greater Adjutant Conservation Project of Aaranyak, won the Whitley Award or the 'Green Oscars' in 2017, for this remarkable community-led conservation work.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment and Biodiversity

Source- AIR

Explained: What carbon numbers mean for climate target

- The State of Forest Report (SFR) 2019, while showing an increase in the carbon stock trapped in Indian forests in the last two years.
- India, as part of its contribution to the global fight against climate change, has committed itself to create an “additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent” by 2030.

Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) under Paris Agreement

Background of Intended nationally determined contributions

- Intended nationally determined contributions (INDC) are (intended) reductions in greenhouse gas emissions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- All countries that signed the UNFCCC were asked to publish their INDCs at the 2013 United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Warsaw, Poland, in November 2013.
- The intended contributions were determined without prejudice to the legal nature of the contributions.

India's intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) under Paris Agreement

- It would reduce its emissions intensity (emissions per unit of GDP) by 33% to 35% by 2030 compared to 2005.
- It has also promised to ensure that at least 40% of its cumulative electricity generation in 2030 would be done through renewable energy.
- It also creates additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tons through additional forest and tree cover.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- TOI

Global meet on marine ecosystems

- The third international conference on marine ecosystems – challenges and opportunities (MECOS-3) will be held in Kochi, Kerala.

About the conference on marine ecosystems

- The Conference is organized by the Marine Biological Association of India.
- The conference is aimed at reviewing the concerns involved in the marine ecosystem and formulating strategies for the better and sustainable utilisation of marine wealth by enhancing livelihood options.
- It will also serve as a platform for discussions on a range of topics, including the impact of the climate crisis on marine ecosystems and unusual warming of the Arabian Sea.
- The conference would focus on the Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations, SDG-14.
- **Goal 14: Life Below Water:** The world's oceans – their temperature, chemistry, currents and life – drive global systems that make the Earth habitable for humankind

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- AIR

Bhitarkanika census

- The population of the saltwater or estuarine crocodile has increased in the water bodies of Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park and its nearby areas in Kendrapara district.

About Bhitarkanika National Park

- It is located in the northeast Kendrapara district in Odisha in eastern India.
- It was designated on 16 September 1998 and obtained the status of a Ramsar site on 19 August 2002.
- The area is also been designated as the second Ramsar site of the State after the Chilika Lake.
- The national park and wildlife sanctuary is inundated by the rivers Brahmani, Baitarani, Dhamra, Pathsala.
- It hosts many mangrove species and is the second-largest mangrove ecosystem in India.

About the Crocodile species

- Odisha is the only state in India having all three species of crocodile— gharial, mugger and saltwater crocodile.

According to IUCN the status of these various species are

- Mugger is listed as the **Vulnerable**
- Saltwater Crocodile is listed as the **Least concern**
- Gharial is listed as **Critically Endangered**.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- Down to Earth

Great Indian Bustard

- After barely 150 of Great Indian Bustard birds are estimated to be surviving now globally, a major conservation effort launched about four years ago is bringing a ray of hope.
- Last year, nine GIB eggs collected from the Desert National Park in Jaisalmer where a conservation centre has been set up have hatched, and the chicks are reported to be doing well.
- This is the largest number of hatchings reported within a six-month frame by any GIB conservation programme in the world.

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, are working to save the GIB.

About Great Indian Bustard

- The scientific name of these birds is *Ardeotis nigriceps*.
- It is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent.
- Its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. A small population also occurs in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- It is the state bird of Rajasthan.

Conservation status:

- It is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.
- It is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972,
- It is listed in Appendix I of CITES,

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- Indian Express

2019 7th warmest year recorded in country since 1901: IMD

- According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), 2019 was recorded as the seventh warmest year since 1901, but the heating was substantially lower than the highest warming observed in 2016,

Highlights of the report

- Bihar was the most adversely affected state during the year, which reported about 650 lives due to heavy rain and floods, heatwave, lightning, thunderstorm and hailstorm.
- The report said the year saw eight cyclonic storms formed over the Indian seas.
- The Arabian Sea contributed five out of these eight cyclones against the normal of one per year, which equals the previous record of 1902 for the highest frequency of cyclones over the Arabian Sea.
- The five warmest years on record are 2016 (0.71 degree Celsius), 2009 (0.541 degree Celsius), 2017 (0.539 degree Celsius), 2010 (0.54 degree Celsius) and 2015 (0.42 degree Celsius).
- During the year, annual mean surface air temperature, averaged over the country, was 0.36 degree Celsius above (1981-2010 period) average.
- The annual rainfall in 2019 over the country as a whole was 109 per cent of its long-period average (LPA) value for the period 1961-2010.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Science and Technology

Source- HT

Chinese paddlefish

- The Chinese paddlefish (*Psephurus gladius*), native to the Yangtze, Asia's longest river, and one of the world's largest freshwater species has been declared extinct by Chinese scientists.
- The last confirmed sighting of the fish was in 2003.
- The last individuals of the species are thought to have died between 2005 and 2010.

About the Chinese paddlefish

- These were also known as Chinese swordfish which was one of the world's largest freshwater fish species.
- It inhabits the Yangtze River basin.
- It has been listed on the IUCN's Red List as critically endangered since 1996.
- However, Scientists have now declared it as an extinct species.
- The Chinese Paddlefish along with American Paddlefish were the only two extant members of a relict lineage that were most diverse and widespread 34-75 million years ago.

About American paddlefish

- It is a native of the Mississippi River.
- The IUCN status of this fish is **Vulnerable**.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source-Live mint

Centre notifies new Wetland Conservation Rules

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified the new Wetland Conservation Rules which prohibit setting up or expansion of industries and disposal of construction and demolition waste within the wetlands.
- The Ministry has said that each state and Union Territory will have to set up an authority that will define strategies for conservation and wise use of wetlands within their jurisdiction.
- The Authority will prepare a list of all wetlands of the State or UT within three months from the date of publication of these rules.
- It will develop a comprehensive list of activities to be regulated and permitted within the notified wetlands and their zone of influence.
- It will also recommend mechanisms for maintenance of ecological character through promotional activities for land within the boundary of notified wetlands.

Note:

- A wetland is a land area that is saturated with water, either permanently or seasonally, and it takes on the characteristics of a distinct ecosystem.
- The highest number of wetlands are **in Uttar Pradesh (16) followed by Madhya Pradesh (13), Jammu & Kashmir (12), Gujarat (8), Karnataka (7) and West Bengal (6)**.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source-AIR

Kaziranga records 96 species of wetland birds

- According to the second wetland bird count, conducted by officials of the Kaziranga National Park, the park has 96 species of wetland birds.

About Kaziranga National Park

- It is located in Assam.
- Brahmaputra, Diphlu, Mora Diphlu and Mora Dhansiri are the major rivers pass through this national park.
- It was declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006.
- In the year 1985, the park was declared as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO
- It is recognized as an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International for the conservation of avifaunal species.
- It houses the world's largest population of Great One-horned Rhinoceros which is listed **as Vulnerable in IUCN list**.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source-The Hindu

Taal volcano: A Complex Volcano

- In the Philippines, a volcano called Taal on the island of Luzon; 50 km from Manila, recently erupted, spewing lava on the ground, and ash and smoke into the sky.

About Volcanoes

- A volcano is an opening in the earth's crust through which gases, molten rocks materials (lava), ash, steam etc. are emitted outward in the course of an eruption.
- Volcanic activity is an example of the endogenic process.

Types of Volcanoes

- Volcanoes are classified on the basis of nature of eruption and the form developed at the surface.

Complex volcano

- Taal is classified as a “complex” volcano by the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS).
- A complex volcano, also called a compound volcano, is defined as one that consists of a complex of two or more vents, or a volcano that has an associated volcanic dome, either in its crater or on its flanks.

Examples include Vesuvius, besides Taal.

- These volcanoes are commonly experiencing in the USA especially Mt. St. Helens and Mt. Shasta, Italy, Philippines, Japan Ecuador, and Canada.

Shield Volcanoes

- They are the largest of all volcanoes in the world as the lava flows to a far distance. The Hawaiian volcanoes are the most famous examples.
- Shield volcanoes have low slopes and consist almost entirely of frozen lava.
- These volcanoes are mostly made up of basalt (less viscous); a type of lava that is very fluid when erupted.
- For this reason, these volcanoes are not steep.
- They are of low explosive in general, but if somehow water gets into the vent they may turn explosive.

Cinder Cone Volcanoes:

- Cinders are extrusive igneous rocks.
- These are the small volcanoes.
- These volcanoes consist almost entirely of loose, grainy cinders and almost no lava.
- They have very steep sides and usually have a small crater on top.

Composite Volcanoes:

- They are characterized by the eruption of cooler and more viscous lavas than basalt.
- These volcanoes often result in explosive eruptions.
- Along with lava, large quantities of pyroclastic materials and ashes find their way to the ground.
- This material accumulates in the vicinity of the vent openings and leading to the formation of layers, and this makes the mount appears as composite volcanoes.

Caldera

- These are the most explosive of the earth’s volcanoes.
- They are usually so explosive that when they erupt they tend to collapse on themselves rather than building any tall structure. The collapsed depressions are called calderas.
- Their explosiveness indicates that its magma chamber is large and in close vicinity.
- A caldera differs from a crater in such a way that a caldera is a huge depression caused by collapse after a large-scale eruption, whereas a crater is a small, steep side, volcanic depression bored out by an eruptive plume.

Flood Basalt Provinces

- These volcanoes outpour highly fluid lava that flows for long distances.
- The Deccan Traps from India, presently covering most of the Maharashtra plateau, are a much larger flood basalt province.

Mid-Ocean Ridge Volcanoes

- These volcanoes occur in the oceanic areas.
- There is a system of mid-ocean ridges more than 70,000 km long that stretches through all the ocean basins.
- The central portion of this ridge experiences frequent eruptions.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Geography

Source- TOI

Diego: The giant tortoise

- The Galapagos National Park called off the Giant Tortoise Restoration Initiative (GTRI), a captive breeding programme of the National Park as the tortoise population has gone up from 15 to 2,000.

About Galápagos Tortoise

- Diego joined the breeding programme in 1976.
- A member of the *Chelonoidis hoodensis*, or the giant tortoise species.
- Diego has a “long leathery neck, dull-yellow face and beady eyes”. Fully stretched out, he extends to about five feet and weighs about 176 pounds.
- The long neck is critical for his species’ survival, helping the tortoises crane their neck to feed on cacti.
- It is distributed to seven of the Galápagos Islands, part of Ecuador, located about 1,000 km west of the Ecuadorian mainland.
- It has an average life span of in the wild is over 100 years.

Conservation Status

- The IUCN Red List status is Critically Endangered.
- It is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Biodiversity

Source- Indian Express

Blue Flag certification

- Recently the Centre issued an Extraordinary Gazette Notification declaring a list of activities and facilities that would be permissible in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) areas of certain beaches, which have been identified for obtaining the ‘Blue Flag’ certification.
- According to the latest notification, the following activities and facilities would be permitted in the CRZ of the beaches, including Islands, subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from the High Tide Line (HTL):

- o Portable toilet blocks, change rooms and shower panels;
 - o Greywater treatment plant;
 - o Solid waste management plant;
 - o Solar power plant;
 - o Purified drinking water facility;
 - o Beach access pathways;
 - o Landscaping lighting;
 - o Seating benches and sit-out umbrellas;
 - o Outdoor play / fitness equipment;
 - o CCTV surveillance and control room;
 - o First aid station;
 - o Cloakroom facility;
 - o Safety watch towers and beach safety equipment;
 - o Beach layout, environment information boards and other signages;
 - o Fencing, preferably vegetative;
 - o Parking facilities;
 - o Entry gate, tourist facilitation centre; and
 - o Other associated facilities or infrastructure, as per requirements of Blue Flag Certification.
- The notification also said that these activities and facilities would be exempt from prior clearance under the provisions of CRZ Notification, Island Protection Zone Notification and Island Coastal Regulation Zone Notifications respectively.

About the ‘Blue Flag’ certification

- The ‘Blue Flag’ is a certification that can be obtained by a beach, marina, or sustainable boating tourism operator, and serves as an eco-label.

- The certification is awarded by the Denmark-based non-profit Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) with 33 stringent criteria under four major heads for the beaches:

- o Environmental Education and Information
- o Bathing Water Quality
- o Environment Management and Conservation and
- o Safety and Services.

It is awarded annually to beaches and marinas in FEE member countries.

Note:

In its July 2019 notification, the Environment Ministry identified the following beaches in India for Blue Flag certification:

- i. Shivrajpur (Devbhumi Dwarka, Gujarat)
- ii. Bhogave (Sindhudurg, Maharashtra)
- iii. Ghoghla (Diu, Daman and Diu)
- iv. Miramar (Panjim, Goa)
- v. Kasarkod (Karwar, Karnataka)
- vi. Padubidri (Udupi, Karnataka)
- vii. Kappad (Kozhikode, Kerala)
- viii. Eden (Puducherry)
- ix. Mahabalipuram (Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu)
- x. Rushikonda (Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh)
- xi. Golden (Puri, Odisha)
- xii. Radhanagar (Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar)

Topic- GS Paper 3 – Environment

Source- Indian Express

Global Risks Report 2020

- The Global Risks Report 2020 has been released by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

About the Global Risks Report

- It is based on the work of the Global Risk Network; the report describes changes occurring in the global risks landscape from year to year and identifies global catastrophic risks.
- This is the first time in the report's 10-year-history that all of the top five issues that are likely to impact the world this year are environmental.
- Top 10 risks by likelihood as per the latest report:

- o Extreme weather events.
- o Failure of climate change mitigation and adaption.
- o Major natural disasters.
- o A massive incident of data fraud/theft.
- o Large scale cyber-attacks.
- o Man-made environmental damage and disasters.
- o Large-scale involuntary migration.
- o Major Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse.
- o Water crises.
- o Asset bubbles in a major economy.

Highlights of the report

- The “top five global risks in terms of likelihood” in the next 10 years were:
 - o Extreme weather events with major damage to property, infrastructure and loss of human life.
 - o Failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation by governments and businesses.
 - o Human-made environmental damage and disasters, including environmental crime, such as oil spills and radioactive contamination.
 - o Major Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse with irreversible consequences for the environment, resulting in severely depleted resources for humankind as well as industries.

- o In the previous decade, economic and financial crises were some of the most dangerous.
- The report states that global temperatures are set to rise by 3°C toward the end of this century.
 - This is “twice what climate experts have warned is the limit to avoid the most severe economic, social and environmental consequences”.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- The Guardian

Centre exempt exploratory drilling from environmental clearance

- The Environment Ministry has exempted oil and gas firms, looking to conduct exploratory drilling, from seeking environmental clearance.

Background

- The clearance is for both on-shore and offshore drilling explorations and the process is an ecologically intensive exercise that involves digging multiple wells and conducting seismic surveys offshore.
- Until today, even exploratory surveys have merited the highest level of environmental scrutiny – called category ‘A’ – that required project proponents to prepare an environmental impact assessment (EIA) plan.
- It is scrutinised by a centrally constituted committee of experts and subjects the proposal to a public hearing involving the local residents of the proposed project site.
- The new amendments demote exploratory projects to the category of ‘B2’.
- This means it will be conducted by the States concerned and will not require an environmental impact assessment.
- Developing an offshore or onshore drilling site as a hydrocarbon block will however continue to merit a “category A” treatment.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- PIB

Irrawaddy dolphins

- Recently 146 endangered Irrawaddy dolphins sighted in Chilika Lake, which boasts of the highest single lagoon population of the aquatic mammal in the world.
- According to last year’s census, the Irrawaddy dolphin population in Chilika was 151.

About Irrawaddy Dolphin

- Irrawaddy Dolphin is not a true river dolphin, but an oceanic dolphin that lives in brackish water near coasts, river mouths and in estuaries in South and Southeast Asia.
- It has established subpopulations in freshwater rivers, including the Ganges and the Mekong, as well as the Irrawaddy River from which it takes its name.
- Its habitat range extends from the Bay of Bengal to New Guinea and the Philippines.

Protection Status

- IUNC has classified it as **Endangered** in Red Data list.

About the Chilika Lake

- It is the largest brackish water lagoon of the country recorded a marginal drop in the population of Irrawaddy dolphins.
- It is spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Odisha state on the east coast of India, at the mouth of the Daya River, flowing into the Bay of Bengal.
- It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest brackish water lagoon in the world after The New Caledonian barrier reef.
- It has been listed as a tentative UNESCO World Heritage site.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- The Hindu

Steppe eagle: A rare migratory eagle

- Recently an endangered steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) has been sighted by a group of birdwatchers in a paddy field at Velagaleru near Vijayawada.

About the Steppe Eagle

- The scientific name of this eagle is *Aquila nipalensis*.
- They are listed as **Endangered** under the IUCN Red List.
- They breed in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia during the winter season.
- They are also the second-largest migratory eagle species to India.

National Identity

- The Steppe Eagle appears on the flag of Kazakhstan.
- It is also the National Bird (animal) of Egypt and appears on its flag.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment and Biodiversity

Source- The Hindu

Greenpeace report on Polluted City: 2018

- Greenpeace India has released an annual report on the most polluted cities in India.
- The Greenpeace report is based on analysis of particulate matter data across 287 cities.
- It has used the Central Pollution Control Board data to rank the most polluted cities in India.

Highlights of the Report

- Jharia and Dhanbad both are in Jharkhand were ranked as the first and second polluted city in the country in 2018.
- These cities are known for their underground coal fires.
- Delhi was 10th most polluted city in 2018 an improvement by two ranks as compared to 2017.
- Lunglei in Mizoram was the least polluted city in India followed by Meghalaya's Dowki.
- The other six of the top-10 polluted cities are in Uttar Pradesh namely Noida, Ghaziabad, Bareilly, Allahabad, Moradabad and Firozabad.

About Greenpeace India

- Greenpeace India is the Indian branch of the global environmental group Greenpeace, a non-profit NGO, with a presence in 55 countries across Europe, the Americas, and Asia.
- Greenpeace India has legally registered society in 4 locations with Bengaluru has its headquarters and other branches at Delhi, Chennai, Patna.
- It's permanently headquartered in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- TOI

1t.org

- At the 50th annual edition of World Economic Forum, Davos with the help of USA has announced to join the recently launched 1t.org initiative.

About 1t.org initiative

- It is a global initiative to grow, restore and conserve 1 trillion trees around the world - in a bid to restore biodiversity and help fight climate change.
- The initiative aims to unite and promote reforestation efforts worldwide through fund mobilization and political support.
- org offers innovative technologies, which will serve to connect tens of thousands of small and large groups around the world that are engaged in tree planting and forest restoration.

UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030

- It aims to massively scale up the restoration of degraded and destroyed ecosystems to fight the climate crisis and enhance food security, water supply and biodiversity.

Topic- GS Paper 1 –Environment

Source- The Hindu

Ophichthus kailashchandrai

- A new snake eel species residing in the Bay of Bengal has been discovered by Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) at Gopalpur-on-sea in Odisha.

About the *Ophichthus kailashchandrai*

- It is the eighth species of the *Ophichthus* genus found on the Indian coast.
- These new marine species have been named *Ophichthus kailashchandrai* to honour the vast contributions of Dr Kailash Chandra, Director of ZSI, to Indian animal taxonomy.
- The *Ophichthus kailashchandrai* lives at a depth of around 50 metres in the sea.
- It feeds on small fish and crabs.

About Zoological Survey of India

- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), founded in 1916 by Government of India Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It is a premier Indian organisation in zoological research and studies to promote the survey, exploration and research of the fauna in the country.
- Its headquarters in Kolkata.

Other key national survey organisations of India.

- ZSI (zoology) as well as ASI (archaeology), BSI (botany), FSI (forests), FiSI (fisheries), GSI (geology), IIEE (ecology), NIO (oceanography), RGCCI (Census of India) and SI (cartography).

Note:

- In 2019, two new species of marine eel, *Gymnothorax andamanensis* and *Gymnothorax smithi* were been discovered by this ZSI centre.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- The Hindu

India begins coral restoration in Gulf of Kachchh

- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), with help from Gujarat’s forest department, is attempting for the first time a process to restore coral reefs using bio rock or mineral accretion technology.

About Biorock

- A bio rock structure was installed one nautical mile off the Mithapur coast in the Gulf of Kachchh on January 19.
- Biorock is the name given to the substance formed by electro accumulation of minerals dissolved in seawater on steel structures that are lowered onto the sea bed and are connected to a power source, in this case, solar panels that float on the surface.

Working of bio rock or mineral accretion technology

- The technology works by passing a small amount of electrical current through electrodes in the water.
- When a positively charged anode and negatively charged cathode are placed on the seafloor, with an electric current flowing between them, calcium ions combine with carbonate ions and adhere to the structure (cathode).
- This results in calcium carbonate formation which coral larvae adhere to the CaCO_3 and grow quickly.

About Corals Reefs

- A coral reef is an underwater ecosystem characterized by reef-building corals. Reefs are formed of colonies of coral polyps held together by calcium carbonate.
- Most coral reefs are built from stony corals, whose polyps cluster in groups.

Types of Coral Reef Formations

Scientists generally divide coral reefs into four classes:

1. Fringing reefs

- o They grow near the coastline around islands and continents.
- o They are separated from the shore by narrow, shallow lagoons.
- o Fringing reefs are the most common type of reef that we see.

2. Barrier reefs

- o They are also parallel the coastline but are separated by deeper, wider lagoons.
- o The Great Barrier Reef in Australia is the largest and most famous barrier reef in the world.

3. Atolls reefs

- o Atolls are rings of coral that create protected lagoons and are usually located in the middle of the sea.
- o Atolls usually form when islands surrounded by fringing reefs sink into the sea or the sea level rises around them (these islands are often the tops of underwater volcanoes).
- o The fringing reefs continue to grow and eventually form circles with lagoons inside.

4. Patch reefs

- o These are small, isolated reefs that grow up from the open bottom of the island platform or continental shelf.
- o They usually occur between fringing reefs and barrier reefs.
- o They vary greatly in size, and they rarely reach the surface of the water.

Note:

- In India, coral reefs are located in 7 regions: Goa coast, Kerala coast, Palk Bay, Gulf of Kutch, Gulf of Mannar, Lakshadweep Islands, Andaman and Nicobar islands.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- Indian Express

Australia's iconic platypus under threat from climate change: study

- Recently in a study, published in the journal Biological Conservation examined the potentially devastating combination of threats to platypus populations in Australia due to fire.

About the Platypus

- The platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) is a semiaquatic egg-laying mammal endemic to eastern Australia, including Tasmania.
- They are the only mammals that lay eggs instead of giving birth to live young.
- The unique features of the platypus make it an important subject in the study of evolutionary biology, and a recognisable and iconic symbol of Australia.
- It is one of the five extant species of monotremes, the only mammals that lay eggs instead of giving birth to live young.
- Platypuses are also known as venomous mammals as male platypus has a venomous spur on the inside of its ankle.

Conservation Status

- They are listed as Near Threatened under the IUCN Red List.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- Livemint

Ten more wetlands in India declared as Ramsar sites

- Union Environment Minister has announced that India has added 10 more wetlands to sites protected by the Ramsar Convention,
- The Ten new ones are:
 - o Nandur Madhameshwar, a first for Maharashtra
 - o Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal (Punjab)
 - o Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and Sarsai Nawar in Uttar Pradesh.

o The other Ramsar sites are in Rajasthan, Kerala, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Tripura.

About Ramsar Convention

- The Convention, signed in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar, is one of the oldest inter-governmental accords for preserving the ecological character of wetlands.
- It is also known as the Convention on Wetlands which aims to develop a global network of wetlands for the conservation of biological diversity and for sustaining human life.
- Wetlands declared as Ramsar sites are protected under strict guidelines of the convention

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- The Hindu

SC allows Centre to introduce African cheetah to suitable habitat in India

- The Supreme Court has lifted its seven-year stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis.
- The Court also set up a three-member committee, comprising former Director Wildlife of India Ranjit Singh, Director General of Wildlife of India Dhananjay Mohan and Deputy Inspector General, Wildlife, Ministry of Environment and Forests to guide the NTCA in taking a decision on the issue.

Reasons for Delay?

- In May 2012, the top court had stalled the plan to initiate the foreign cheetahs into the Palpur Kuno sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, fearing that they may come into conflict with a parallel and a much-delayed project to reintroduce lions into the same sanctuary.
- The court was also worried whether the African cheetahs would find the sanctuary a favourable climate as far as an abundance of prey is concerned.

About Cheetah

- The cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) is a large cat of the subfamily Felinae that occurs in North, Southern and East Africa, and a few localities in Iran.
- It inhabits a variety of mostly arid habitats like dry forests, scrub forests, and savannahs.

Conservation Status:

- The cheetah has been classified as endangered by the IUCN.
- It is listed under Appendix I of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species).

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Environment

Source- The Hindu

Indian environmental economist Pavan Sukhdev wins 2020 Tyler Prize

- Recently renowned Indian environmental economist and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Goodwill Ambassador Pavan Sukhdev has won the 2020 Tyler Prize.
- He got this award after The Economics of Ecosystems & Biodiversity' TEEB report became a foundation for the Green Economy movement.

About Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement

- It is regarded as the "Nobel Prize for the Environment which was established in 1973.
- It is the annual award for environmental science, environmental health, and energy.
- It is administered by the University of Southern California.

Topic- GS Paper 2–Environment

Source- Business Standard

Security Matters

PM dedicates five DRDO Young Scientists Laboratories to the nation

- Prime Minister dedicated the five Young Scientists Laboratories of Defence Research and Development Organisation to the nation.
- These laboratories are located in five cities: Bengaluru, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and Hyderabad.

About DRDO Young Scientists Laboratories

- These labs will work on key advanced technology of importance to the development of futuristic defence systems.
- This includes Artificial intelligence, Quantum technologies, Cognitive technologies, Asymmetric technologies and Smart materials.

About Defence Research and Development Organisation

- It is India's premier organization for research related to defence technology which was established in 1958.
- It is under the administrative control of the Department of Defence Research and Development, Ministry of Defence.
- It's headquartered in New Delhi.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source-Business Standard

Maharashtra Govt launches 'Cyber Safe Women' initiative

- Maharashtra Government has launched a 'Cyber Safe Women' initiative under which awareness camps will be held across all the districts of the state regarding cyber safety.

About the 'Cyber Safe Women' initiative

- The initiative will help in educating women about how the web is used by anti-social elements and child predators to commit various types of crimes.
- The campaign is to be implemented all over the state by the State Government in collaboration with state police, public relations department and cyber cell.

Other Initiative launched by Government to deal with Cyber Crime:

Cyber Dost

- It has been launched by Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) which a Twitter account is named @CyberDost.
- It aims to spread awareness about cybercrimes and normal precautions to be taken for prevention.

Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)

- It is an office within the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- It is the nodal agency to deal with cybersecurity threats like hacking and phishing.

Cyber Crime Prevention against women and children Scheme

- The scheme was launched in 2019 with the objective to have an effective mechanism to handle cybercrimes against women and children in the country.
- The features of the scheme include online cybercrime reporting platform, research and development, and cybercrime awareness activities.

Cyber Crime reporting portal

- It enables complainants to report complaints pertaining to Child Pornography or sexually explicit content.

Significance

- According to Crime Report-2017, released by NCRB (National Crime Record Bureau) in 2019, the numbers of cybercrimes in the country have been increasing constantly.
- In 2014, the number of cybercrimes was 9,622, in 2015, it increased to 11,592 and in 2016 the number of cybercrimes was 12,317.
- The legal framework of cyber crimes is provided by the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Women Empowerment (Cyber Security)

Source- AIR

Army gets working on GOCO model to improve efficiency

- 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.
- The agenda of these interactions would be to understand from interested industry participants their views on opportunities envisaged and issues/concerns if (Army Base Workshops)ABW(s) were to be run under GOCO model.
- The eight ABWs identified are located in Delhi, Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh), Kankinara (West Bengal), Allahabad, Agra and Meerut (Uttar Pradesh), Kirkee near Pune and Bengaluru.
- 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.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- The Hindu

12th Edition of 'Naseem-Al-Bahr'

- The ship of Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) has recently arrived in Goa to participate in the 12th edition of the Indo-Oman bilateral naval exercise 'Naseem-Al-Bahr.
- It is being conducted since 1993.

Other Exercise with Oman

Exercise Eastern Bridge

- It is an Air Force exercise that is held between India and Oman.

Exercise Al-Najah

- It is an army exercise conducted between India and Oman.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- PIB

Operation Sankalp

- Recently the Indian Navy had commenced maritime security operations, code-named ‘Operation Sankalp’, in the Gulf Region on 19 June 2019 to ensure the safe passage of Indian Flag Vessels transiting through the Strait of Hormuz.”
- The operation is being progressed in close coordination with all stakeholders including the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Shipping and Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

About Strait of Hormuz

- The Strait of Hormuz is a strait between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.
- It provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean and is one of the world's most strategically important choke points.
- On the north coast lies Iran and on the south coast the United Arab Emirates and Musandam, an exclave of Oman.
- A third of the world’s liquefied natural gas and almost 25% of total global oil consumption passes through the strait, making it a highly important strategic location for international trade.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- Business Standard

National Mission for Safety of Women

- Recently Government will be set up 1023 Fast Track Special Courts for Speedy disposal of Rape and POCSO Act Cases as a part of National Mission for Safety of Women (NMSW).

About the National Mission for Safety of Women

- The National Mission for Safety of Women helps in evolving a credible response to the emerging situation with regards to crimes against women, especially minor girls.
- It would also ensure focus on the time-bound implementation of measures with a tangible impact on women safety besides improved coordination by stakeholder Departments like Justice, MHA.
- The Mission would also coordinate with the departments like
 - o School Education for appropriate changes in curriculum, Health, Women and Child Development, Legal Affairs;
 - o media campaign for raising awareness
 - o improved monitoring at Mission level in time-bound prosecution
 - o investigation in cases of rape and other matters related to women safety.

Note:

- 216 numbers of POCSO courts have already been operationalized in 12 States under the scheme.

Topic- GS Paper 2 –Women Issues

Source- TOI

6th joint naval exercise: Sea Guardians

- Navies of China and Pakistan, holding nine-day Sea Guardian exercises in the Arabian Sea.
- The goal of the Sea Guardians-2020 drills is to boost
 - o the two countries' military cooperation
 - o enhance their all-weather strategic cooperative partnership
 - o build a safe maritime environment and enhance the two navies' capability to deal with maritime terrorism and crime.
- The exercise is also the first between China and Pakistan that will feature anti-submarine and submarine rescue training

Related Information

- The Arabian Sea region is strategically important for India as major ports including Kandla, Okha, Mumbai, Nhava Sheva (Navi Mumbai), Mormugão, New Mangalore, and Kochi are located there.
- The exercise is regarded strategically significant for China which is now developing Pakistan's deepwater Gwadar port there.
- Gwadar is being connected through the over \$60 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to China's Xinjiang province, providing a key land route to China to access the warm waters of the Arabian Sea.

India's Concern

- The Gwadar is located close to Iran's Chabahar Port being jointly developed by Iran, India and Afghanistan to ensure a trade corridor for Indian exports to Afghanistan.
- The Arabian Sea provides entry to the Indian Ocean where China currently has built a logistics base at Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- PIB

Naval exercise Milan

- Recently thirty countries have confirmed participation out of the 41 countries invited for the multilateral naval exercise Milan 2020 to be held in March 2020
- The theme for the exercise MILAN 2020 is '**Synergy across the Seas**'.

About MILAN naval exercise

- It is a series of biennial multilateral naval exercise conducted by Indian Navy.
- It was first held in the year 1995.
- It was conducted at Andaman and Nicobar Command until last year and is being conducted for the first time on the mainland at Eastern Naval Command.

- The exercise is aimed to enhance professional interaction between friendly foreign navies and learn from each other's strengths and best practices in the maritime domain.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- PIB

Indian Army conducts biggest airborne exercise 'Winged Raider'

- The Indian Army conducted its biggest airborne exercise called the 'Winged Raider' comprising of more than 500 Special Forces troops in the North-Eastern theatre.

About the exercise Winged Raider

- The exercise demonstrated the operational preparedness of the paratroopers and air warriors to undertake airborne missions.
- The exercise indicated the shift in the army's focus towards the frontier with China.
- It involved a large number of the Special Forces troops and all kind of air transport platforms of the Air Force.
- The newly inducted aerial platforms and equipment were also validated during the exercise with clockwork precision and seamless integration between the Army and the Air Force.

About Exercise Him Vijay

- In October 2019, the Indian army had also carried out Exercise 'Him Vijay' in Arunachal Pradesh to test its mobility, communication and coordination of such a huge body of fast-moving troops in difficult terrain.
- The integrated battle groups had participated for the first time in an exercise.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- AIR

K-4 nuclear-capable missile

- India has recently successfully test-fired a 3,500-kilometre range nuclear-capable missile called **K-4 nuclear-capable missile** that can be launched from a submarine.

About K-4 missile

- The missile has been developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation which is a nuclear-capable Intermediate-range submarine-launched ballistic missile.
- The missile has a maximum range of about 3500 km which is powered by solid rocket propellants.
- The missile is to be fitted into the indigenously built Arihant-class nuclear-powered submarines of the Indian Navy.
- Only the US, Russia and China have submarine-launched ballistic missiles of 3,500-kilometre range.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- Business standard

Exercise Topchi

- Indian Army recently showcased its artillery firepower capability at Exercise Topchi at Deolali Camp near Nashik.

About Exercise Topchi

- It means a gunner in English is an annual exercise by the School of Artillery, Deolali.
- The exercise aims to showcase the Indian Army's artillery firepower, aviation and surveillance capabilities.

About School of Artillery

- The School of Artillery was established for the Indian Army at Kakul now in Pakistan in April 1918 afterwards it moved to Devlali in June 1941.

- Since 1947, the School of Artillery has undergone many changes, in conformity with modernisation and expansion of the Indian Army and consequently of the Regiment of Artillery.

About Deolali Camp

- Deolali is a small hill-station in the Nashik district of Maharashtra.
- It has one of the oldest military centres in India.
- It was established in 1869 and is situated on the banks of the River Darna.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- TOI

North Korea to attend Munich Security Conference for the first time

- North Korea will send a delegation to the Munich Security Conference for the first time in the 56-year history of the top diplomatic gathering.

About Munich Security Conference

- It is an annual conference on the international security policy that takes place in Munich, Germany since 1963.
- It is an independent venue for policymakers and experts for open and constructive discussions about the most pressing security issues of the day and of the future.
- Its motto is **Peace through Dialogue**.
- It publishes the Munich Security Report, an annual digest of relevant figures, maps, and research on crucial security challenges.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- TOI

National Security Act, 1980

- Lieutenant Governor of Delhi Anil Bajjal has recently issued an order giving the Police Commissioner the power to detain individuals under the tough National Security Act (NSA), 1980.

About the National Security Act, 1980

- The NSA was described as “An Act to provide for preventive detention in certain cases and for matters connected therewith”.
- The Act has been widely criticised as being “draconian” because of the powers of preventive detention that it gives to the government.
- The detention under the NSA can extend up to 12 months — or even for longer if the government is able to produce more evidence against the detainee.

Background

Bengal Regulation III of 1818

- The Bengal Regulation III of 1818 was enacted to empower the government to arrest anyone for defence or maintenance of public order without giving the person recourse to judicial proceedings.

The Rowlatt Acts of 1919

- The British government enacted the Rowlatt Acts of 1919 that allowed confinement of a suspect without trial.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Internal Security

Source- PIB

Navy launches Operation Vanilla to help Madagascar

- The Navy has recently launched Operation Vanilla in support of the national disaster in Madagascar and diverted a large amphibious ship to provide assistance.
- Madagascar has been hit by a cyclone and there has been heavy flooding and landslips since last week, causing loss of lives.

About Madagascar

- Madagascar is also known as the Red Island, the Rainbow Island, the Eighth Continent.

- It is the world's 4th largest island.
- **Spoken languages are Malagasy and French.**

Location:

- Madagascar is situated in the southwestern area of the Indian Ocean east of the coast of Africa about 400 km off the coast of Mozambique.
- The island is recognized as one of the world's top ten hotspots for biodiversity.

Ethnic Group

- Madagascar is inhabited by various ethnic groups of Malayo-Indonesian, mixed African and Malayo-Indonesian, and Arab ancestry.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- AIR

Citizen centric services on the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS) platform

- National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) launched Police related Citizen centric services like Search of Missing Persons and to Generate Vehicle NOC on CCTNS platform.

About Search of Missing Persons

- The Citizens can search for their missing kins against the national database of the recovered unidentified found person/unidentified dead bodies from their homes.

About Generate Vehicle NOC

- 'Generate Vehicle NOC' allows citizens to ascertain the status of a vehicle before its second-hand purchase, as to whether it is suspicious or clean from Police records.

About Crime & Criminal Tracking Network and Systems

- The Crime and Criminal Tracking Network Systems (CCTNS) was conceptualized by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- CCTNS aims at creating a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effective policing at all levels and especially at the Police Station level.

Objectives

- Provide Citizen-Centric Police Services via a web portal
- Pan India search on National database of Crime & Criminal records
- Crime and Criminal reports at State and Center
- Computerization of Police Processes

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Security and Related issues

Source- Indian Express

24th Malabar naval exercise

- India is considering inviting Australia to take part in its trilateral Malabar naval exercise with the US and Japan in 2020.

About Malabar naval exercise

- It is an annual exercise between the navies of India, Japan, and the U.S. held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- The exercise began in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between India and the U.S. then it got permanently expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
- The exercise aims to endeavour to further strengthen India - Japan - US Naval cooperation and enhance interoperability based on shared values and principles.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- Indian Express

Exercise SAMPRITI

- SAMPRITI-IX is being conducted at UMROI, Meghalaya, India as a part of the ongoing Indo-Bangladesh defence cooperation.

About the Exercise SAMPRITI

- It is an important bilateral defence cooperation endeavour between India and Bangladesh which is hosted alternately by both countries.
- During the joint military exercise SAMPRITI-IX, a Command Post Exercise (CPX) and a Field Training Exercise (FTX) will be conducted.
- The exercise will be emphasized to strengthen military trust and cooperation between the two nations.

Other Exercise

Recently India – Bangladesh Navies Undertake Coordinated Patrol in North Bay of Bengal

- The second edition of Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) of the navies of India and Bangladesh commenced in Northern Bay of Bengal.
- The India Bangladesh CORPAT commenced in 2018.
- The exercise aims at the development of mutual communication and sharing of best practices between the two navies.

Topic- GS Paper 3 –Defence

Source- PIB

UPSC and PCS Monthly Current Affairs January 2020