Polity and Governance

CACS and 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.

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.

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).

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.

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

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.

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.

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.
  - For the total food grain production
  - For the individual food grain crops of Rice, Wheat, Pulses and Coarse Cereals.
- There are three categories of awards for total foodgrain production:
  - **Category 1** is for the States where total foodgrain production exceeds 10 million tons.
  - **Category 2** is for the States where total food grain production is less than 10 million tons but more than 1 million tons.
  - **Category 3** is for the States with total foodgrains production less than 1 million tons.

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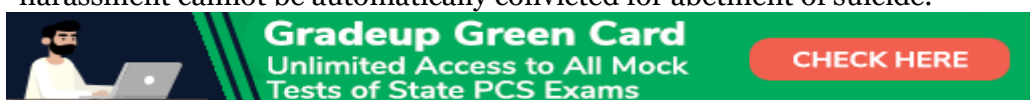- Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas

Note:

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

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:
  - He instigates someone to commit suicide (or)
  - He is part of a conspiracy to make a person commit suicide (or)
  - He intentionally helps the victim to commit suicide by doing an act or by not doing something that he was bound to do.

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:
  - Election of President
  - Election of Vice-President
  - Election of Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha
  - Elections to State Legislatures as well as Legislative Councils
  - Reservation of Seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures
  - 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.
  - The chief election commissioner is provided with security of tenure.
  - He cannot be removed from his office except in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.
  - 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:
  - The President appoints the Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners.
  - When any other EC is so appointed, the CEC acts as the Election Commission's Chairman.
  - The President can also appoint regional commissioners to assist the Commission, if necessary, after consulting with the Election Commission.
  - The tenure of office and the conditions of service of all the commissioners shall be determined by the country's President.

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.

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.

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:

1. Enhancing the ease of doing business
2. The democratisation of the coal mining sector by opening it up to anyone willing to invest.
3. The offering of unexplored and partially explored coal blocks for mining through prospecting license-cum-mining Lease (PL- cum-ML).
4. Promoting Foreign Direct Investment in the coal mining sector by removing the restriction and eligibility criteria for participation.
5. Allowing the successful bidder/allottee to utilise mined coal in any of the plants of its subsidiary or holding company.
6. 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]

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'
    - Supreme Court case 'ML Kamra v New India Assurance
    - 'Githa Hariharan v RBI' (1999)
    - 'NDMC v State of Punjab' (1996)

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.

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 Samsthais 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.

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:

1. The scheme will be implemented from January 26, 2020 (Republic Day).
2. Under Amma Vodi, the mothers of school-going children will receive annual financial assistance of Rs 15,000 per year.
3. The initiative is meant to support low-income families in educating their children.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

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,
  - Right to equality (Articles 14–18)
  - Right to freedom (Articles 19–22)
  - Right against exploitation (Articles 23–24)
  - Right to freedom of religion (Articles 25–28)
  - Cultural and educational rights (Articles 29–30)
  - Right to property (Article 31)
  - 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.

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.

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.

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.

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, Thalassemia, 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.

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:
  - Original
  - Appellate
  - 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
  - the Centre and a state
  - the Centre and a state on the one side and another state on the other side
  - two or more states.
- Article 131 cannot be used to settle political differences between state and central governments headed by different parties.

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.

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.
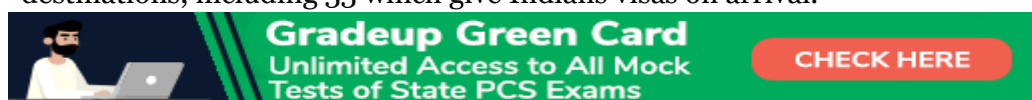
MOST POWERFUL PASSPORTS, 2020

Passport	Henley rank	Access to destinations
Japan	1	191
Singapore	2	190
S Korea	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

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).

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.

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.**

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.**
  - o 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.
  - o 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.

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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
  - to assimilate innovation
  - promote creation

- protection and commercialisation of intellectual property rights
- make 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.

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:
  - better delivery of services to the citizens by reducing duplication of work and improving administrative efficiency
  - It will also help in bringing more uniformity in Laws relating to GST, VAT and State Excise.

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.

SAIL SERVICE scheme launched
- 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.

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 Stats/UTs which have subcategorized OBCs, and the State Backward Classes Commissions.

National Data and Analytics Platform

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

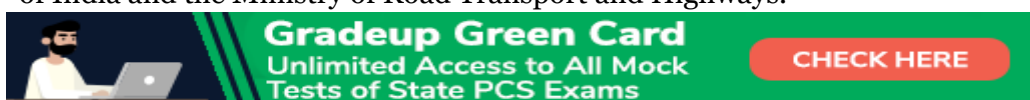**About the National Data and Analytics Platform**
- The platform aims to democratize access to publicly available government data.
- It will host the latest datasets from various government websites, present them coherently, and provide tools for analytics and visualization.
- The first version of the 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 Samvad
- 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.

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 sets 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:
  - Administration - Devi Ahilyabai Holkar (proposed name of chair)
  - Literature - Mahadevi Varma
  - Freedom Fighter (North East) - Rani Gaidinliu
  - Medicine & Health - Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi
  - Performing Art - Madurai Shanmukhavadivu Subbulakshmi
  - Forest/Wildlife Conservation - Amrita Devi (Beniwal)
  - Mathematics - Lilavati
  - Science - Kamala Sohonie
  - Poetry & Mysticism - Lal Ded
  - Educational Reforms - Hansa Mehta

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.**

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.

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.
  - in all cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court-martial;
  - 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;
  - 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:
  - to keep the door open for correcting any judicial errors in the operation of law
  - to afford relief from a sentence, which the President regards as unduly harsh.

The pardoning power of the President includes the following:
a. **Pardon:** The president can totally absolve/acquit the person for the offence and let him go free like a normal citizen.
b. **Commute:** To reduce the type of punishment into a less harsh one. For example Rigorous imprisonment to simple imprisonment.
c. **Remission:** To reduce the punishment without changing the nature of the punishment. For example 20 years rigorous imprisonment to 10 years rigorous imprisonment.
d. **Reprieve:** A delay is allowed in the execution of a sentence, usually a death sentence for a guilty person to prove his innocence.
e. **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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.
    - barring menstruating women from entering houses of worship and their homes
    - coercing people to take part in fire-walks
    - 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.

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
    - Health and nutrition
    - Education
    - Agriculture and water resources
    - Financial inclusion
    - Skill development
    - Basic infrastructure

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.

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.

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:
  - increased length of the train
  - use of double-stack containers
  - 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 vai 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.

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
  - the provision of savings vehicles
  - supply of credit to small business units
  - small and marginal farmers
  - 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.**

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.

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.

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.

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:
  - when net non-performing assets exceed 6% of net advances
  - when they incur losses for two consecutive financial years or have accumulated losses on their balance sheets
  - 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
  - capital ratios
  - asset quality
  - 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.

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.

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.

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.
    1. Front Runner
    2. Achiever
    3. Contender
    4. 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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

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:
  - 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.

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.

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.

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:
  - Health
  - Access to Education
  - Quality and Equity in Education
  - Lifelong learning
  - Access to Technology
  - Work Opportunities
  - Fair Wage Distribution
  - Working Conditions
  - Social Protection
  - 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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).

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.

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

We require the IDRSS when our astronauts are in space. But I would prefer the relay spacecraft to be in place even before we launch the unmanned mission

K. SIVAN, ISRO chief

- 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.

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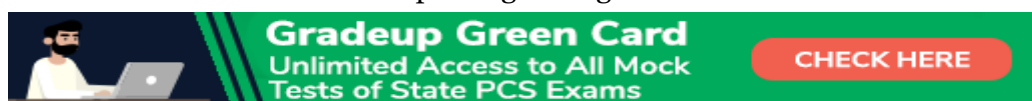 - and safer & sustainable packaging.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

'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
  - 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.

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 spacecrafts.
- 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.

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
  - It has the best rheological and detergent characteristics
  - It also has a lesser environmental impact due to low Sulphur content
  - 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.

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

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
  - assisting the healing of the stratospheric ozone layer
  - 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)
- hydrobromoflurocarbons (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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 cybercrimes is provided by the Information Technology Act, 2000.

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.

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.

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.

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
  - School Education for appropriate changes in curriculum, Health, Women and Child Development, Legal Affairs;
  - 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.

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.

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.

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 clockwise 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.

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.

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.

National Security Act, 1980
- Lieutenant Governor of Delhi Anil Baijal 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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.