



CURRENT CONNECT

MAY- 19

North Delhi	Central Delhi	Jaipur	Bhopal	Patna	Indore	Bengaluru
2521, Hudson Line, Vijay Nagar Near GTB Nagar Metro Stn	B-5/4 Poorvi Marg Old RajenderNgr. Market Near Karol Bagh Metro Stn	403-404 Apex Tower Lal Kothi Tonk Road	43-44 2nd Floor R.R. Arcade Zone - II M.P.Nagar	Above Toyota Showroom Exhibition Road Near Gandhi Maidan	232-233 2nd Floor Veda Building BhavarKuan Square	116/C-1 3 rd Floor, 5 th Block KHB Colony Koramangala Bengaluru
Delhi 110009 9717380832	Delhi 110060 9811293743	Jaipur 302015 8290800441	Bhopal 462011 7509975361	Patna 800001 7463950774	Indore 452001 9893772941	Karnataka 560095 7619166663
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GS- I	Culture-Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.	Indian history, significant events, personalities, issues and the Freedom Struggle	Post independence issues, National boundary and disputes	Indian society, features, issues, globalization and diversity	Women - issues and developments	Urbanization - problems and remedies	Distribution of industries and resources - India and world	Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc	Culture- Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.		
GS- II	Indian constitution- Amendments, acts and bills.	Legislative, executive and judicial processes.	Constitutional, non-constitutional, judicial, quasi-judicial, administrative and other types of bodies.	Federal structure and local bodies. Their powers and functions.	Government policies and various governance issues like transparency, accountability and - governance	Committees and schemes.	Non-government issues, self-help groups and role of civil society.	Vulnerable sections of our society and social sector issues and initiatives.	International Relation-India and other countries, various Indian and international agreements, effects of other countries on India and international institutions.		
GS- III	Various measures to boost Indian economy- planning, policies, management	Government budgeting and issues related to budget.	Agriculture, animal husbandry and transport	Food security- measures to boost food security and food processing issues related to land- land reforms	Industries and infrastructure their growth and investment model	Space and technology, IT space, robotics and computer	Disease, biotechnology and human welfare	Innovations, intellectual property, Awards, PGI and other import and aspects of S&I	Environment and disaster- government initiatives, various judgment, pollution, degradation and conservation efforts	International agreements and works of various international bodies, effort by individuals and misc.	Challenges to internal security. Various Security forces and their mandate. Cyber security, money laundering and its prevention.
GS- IV	Ethical issues related to family/ society, education, Corruption etc.	Ethics in public and private administration	Issues	Related laws and rules	Governance/ e-Governance	Ethics in international issues	Personalities and their teachings	Other import and topics.			
Miss.											

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Dissent in the Election Commission

In News

Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa recently dissented with the opinion of his colleagues in the Election Commission in five different matters pertaining to alleged violations of the Model Code of Conduct.

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In case of dissent

- **Section 10** of the **Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991** makes provisions for disposal of business by Election Commission by unanimous decision.
- The Act states that if the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners differ in opinion on any matter, such matter shall be decided according to the opinion of the majority.

SC on the dissent

- ❖ The Supreme Court refused to review the Election Commission's (EC) decision to clear some prominent leaders (of the ruling party) of violating poll code conduct.
- ❖ EC's highlighted before the court that a third party (in this case a party from opposition) cannot seek a review of the EC's orders and **only complainants can**, was correct on procedural grounds. A difference of opinion of third party on issues such as the content of campaign speeches is, by itself, not enough cause for a judicial review.
- ❖ The SC also stated that the right call in observing that any challenge to EC's decisions should have to come through separate writs.

IIIDEM

- ❖ It is an advanced resource centre of learning, research, training and extension for participatory democracy and election management.
- ❖ **The ECI established the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) in 2011.**
- ❖ **It has been developed in collaboration with the Union Government, United Nations, Commonwealth and inter-governmental organisations like Sweden base International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).**

Objectives

1. To fully sensitize, motivate, prepare and mobilize the machinery.
2. To train the electoral machinery in the delivery of free, fair and flawless elections.
3. To explore and expand the horizons of intellectual know-how in these fields.
4. It works for enhancing voter education, and developing human resource for efficient conduct of free and fair elections in India.

Constitutional safeguard to ensure CEC and EC independence

1. The Election Commission of India draws its authority from the Constitution itself. Under **Article 324**, the powers of "superintendence, direction and control of elections" is to be vested in an Election Commission.
2. **Article 324(5)** of the Constitution of India specifies the independence of the Election Commission and also for its insulation from executive interference.
3. The Chief Election Commissioner should not be removed from his office without following the **manner under which and the ground on which the Judge of Supreme Court is removed.**
4. The Election Commissioners cannot be removed from office **until the recommendation from the Chief Election Commissioner** is made for such removal.
5. The **Constitution does not, however, fix the size of the Election Commission.** Article 324(2) says that "the Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, if any, as the President may from time to time fix".

The new member of Finance Commission's Advisory Council

In News

Chief Economic Advisor Krishnamurthy Subramanian has been included in the **Advisory Council of the 15th Finance Commission as its member.**

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About the Council

- The Advisory Council was set **up to advise the commission on any issue or subject related to the terms of reference (ToR) of the commission.**
- It **will also assist in the preparation of any paper or research study** which would enhance the commission's understanding of the issue contained in its ToR.
- The council had also been mandated to help in broadening the **15th Finance Commission's ambit and understanding to seek best national and international practices on matters pertaining to fiscal devolution and improving the quality and reach and enforcement of its recommendations.**

Finance Commission of India

- The **Finance Commission is constituted by the President under article 280 of the Constitution**, mainly to give its recommendations on the distribution of tax revenues between the Union and the States and amongst the States themselves.
- **Two distinctive features of the Commission's work involve redressing the vertical imbalances between the taxation powers** and expenditure responsibilities of the center and the States respectively and equalization of all public services across the States.
- Functions of the Finance Commission is to make recommendations to the President as to:
 - ✓ The **distribution between the Union and the States** of the net proceeds of taxes which are to be, or may be, divided between them and the allocation between the States of the respective shares of such proceeds.
 - ✓ The **principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India.**
 - ✓ The measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the **Panchayats and Municipalities in the State on the basis of** the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State.
 - ✓ Any **other matter referred to the Commission by the President in the interests of sound finance.**
 - ✓ The **Commission determines its procedure** and has such powers in the performance of their functions as Parliament may by law confer on them.
- As per the provisions contained in the Finance Commission [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act, 1951 and The Finance Commission (Salaries & Allowances) Rules, 1951, **the Chairman of the Commission is selected from among persons who have had experience in public affairs**, and the four other members are selected from among persons who:
 - Are, or have been, or are qualified to **be appointed as Judges of a High Court**; or
 - **Have special knowledge of the finances and accounts of Government**; or
 - **Have had wide experience in financial matters and in administration**; or
 - **Have special knowledge of economics**

Commonwealth Tribunal

In News

Justice KS Radhakrishnan, a former Supreme Court judge, has been appointed as the Member of the Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal of London. He will serve as a Member of the Tribunal.

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About Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal

- The **Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal** resolves disputes of the Commonwealth organizations, international or intergovernmental.
- The Tribunal is based in London.
- It **functions under a Statute agreed by Commonwealth governments.**
- It consists of eight members including the President and 7 Members.
- Members are selected by the Commonwealth Governments.
- For the **post of Member, a person shall be of high moral character who has held or holds a high judicial office in a Commonwealth country.** Even a legal consultant with at least 10 years of experience is eligible for the post.
- The **Members are appointed for a 4-year term.** Their term can be renewed, however, only once.

Functions of the Tribunal

- It **hears applications brought by the staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Secretariat or any person who is in contract with the Commonwealth Secretariat.**
- The **Tribunal entertains only such cases in which organizations agree to surrender its jurisdiction.**

Vacation Bench of Supreme Court

In News

Supreme Court has notified its annual summer holiday and listed the judges who will occupy the Vacation Benches for hearing urgent matters during this period.

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About Vacation Bench

- **It is a special bench constituted by the Chief Justice of India.**
- **Supreme Court takes two long vacations** each year, the summer and winter breaks, but it is technically not fully closed during these periods.
- Litigants can approach the Supreme Court and, if the court decides that the plea is an “urgent matter”, the Vacation Bench hears the case on its merits.
- **There is no specific definition as to what is an “urgent matter”,** during vacations the court generally admits writs related to **habeas corpus, certiorari, prohibition and quo warranto** matters for enforcement of any fundamental right.
- **The High Courts and trial courts too have Vacation Benches** to hear urgent matters under their jurisdiction.

PEPPER IT WITH
In-House Inquiry,
Collegium, CJI

Composition

- Mentioned under **Rule 6 of Order II** of The Supreme Court rules, 2013.
- CJI appoints Division benches for hearing during the vacation period.
- It can be either a single judge court or a division court, all depends on the discretion of CJI.

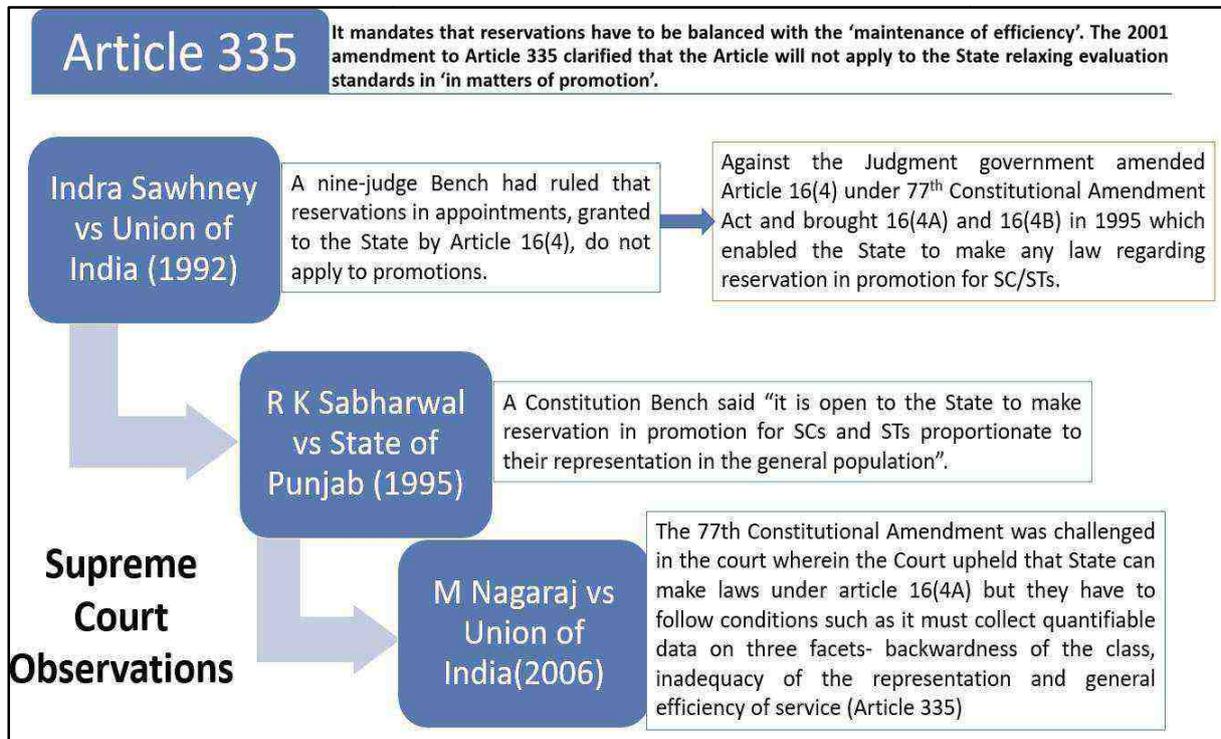
SC/ST quota in promotions

In News

Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of a 2018 Karnataka law granting consequential seniority to government servants promoted on the basis of reservation.

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Background of Reservation in promotion



The Verdict

- The court upheld the validity of the Karnataka Extension of Consequential Seniority to Government Servants Promoted on the Basis of Reservation (to the Posts in the Civil Services of the State) Act, 2018.
- Earlier in 2017, the court quashed the constitutional validity of the similar Act enacted in 2002 (in **BK Pavitra vs Union of India case**) by the state of Karnataka as it did not fulfil the guidelines laid down by the court in **M. Nagaraj vs Union of India case**.

Thorat Committee

It was formed to counter growing discrimination and rising of atrocities against Dalits in the AIIMS Campus. **Its recommendations can be applied to other universities campuses also.** Important recommendations include:

- ❖ Governing Body of Univeristy/College must setup a joint committee of student and faculty.
- ❖ Governing body must develop a policy and mechanism to regain the social harmony in the campus.
- ❖ There should be a special office called "**Equal Opportunity Office**" to deal with all the issues relating to SC, ST and OBC students. It should be headed by a senior faculty and supported by one more faculty with proper supporting staff and funding.
- ❖ ST/ST students should be nominated as representative on all Committees dealing with matter related to students.
- ❖ The committee recommended that Post based roster system of reservation be applied in the selection of Senior Faculty.

- o Following the debacle in 2017, the Karnataka government formed RatnaPrabha Committee which helped in framing the new law.

Significance

This Supreme Court order is significant because it underlines that a ‘meritorious’ candidate is not merely one who is ‘talented ‘or ‘successful’ but also one whose appointment fulfils the constitutional goals of uplifting members of the SCs and STs and ensuring a diverse and representative administration.

Crucial Observations

- ✓ **The Court opined that the quota for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes** is not at odds with the principle of meritocracy rather it helps in true fulfilment of effective and substantive equality by accounting for the structural conditions into which people are born.
- ✓ **The Court held that merit must flow from the actions a society seeks to reward**, including the promotion of equality in society and diversity in public administration.
- ✓ The Court upheld that the Constitution is a transformative document and its transformative potential rests **ultimately in its ability to breathe life and provide meaning into its abstract concepts.**
- ✓ Further, the constitution is a significant instrument of **bringing about social change in a caste-based feudal society witnessed by centuries of oppression of and discrimination against the marginalized.**

Article 335

- The Court opined that **Article 335** recognizes the fact that special measures are needed to be adopted for considering the claims of SCs and STs in order to bring them to a levelplaying field.
- Further, the court opined that Article 335 embodies a substantive effort to realize substantive equality. Also, it emphasizes that the need to maintain the efficiency of administration cannot be construed as a fetter on adopting these special measures designed to uplift and protect the welfare of the SCs and STs.
- Court held that the efficiency of administration in the affairs of the Union or of a State must be defined in an inclusive sense, where diverse segments of society find representation as a true aspiration of governance by and for the people.

Article 239A

In News

The Madras High Court **had barred Lieutenant-Governor (L-G)** of Puducherry from interfering in the **day-to-day administration** of the Union Territory when an elected government is in place. The court termed the perpetual interference from the L-G as the **parallel government.**

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Major Observations made by the Court

1. Sighting the Supreme Court’s appeal to constitutional morality and trust among high dignitaries, the High Court has also reminded the Centre and the Administrator that they should be true to the concept of democratic principles Otherwise, the

constitutional scheme of the country of being democratic and republic would be defeated.

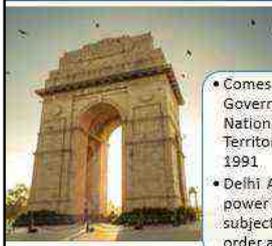
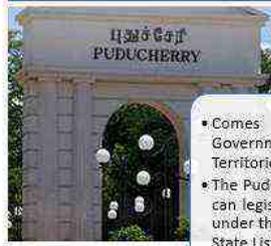
2. Government secretaries were bound to take instructions from the Ministers and the Council of Ministers, headed by the Chief Minister. Government secretaries of the Puducherry administration were required to report to the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister on all official matters.
3. Article 239A symbolizes the supremacy of the Legislature above the Administrator in case of the Union Territory of Puducherry.
4. The secretaries are not empowered to issue orders on their own or upon the instructions of the Administrator.
5. Government officials cannot be a part of social media groups through which the L-G was issuing instructions to them for a redress of public grievances. As per rules, they were bound to use the only authorized medium of communication when it came to issues related to administration.

- Section 44-** LG to execute his duty on the aid and advice of the council of Minister headed by CM. But it allows LG to act on his discretion on law-making. In case of difference of opinion between LG and Ministers the Administrator is bound to refer it to the President for a decision and act according to the decision given by the President. However, the Administrator can also claim that the matter is urgent, and take immediate action as he deems necessary.
- Section 22-** Under Section 22 of the Act, prior sanction of the Administrator is required for certain legislative proposals.
- Section 23-** it obligatory on the part of the UT government to seek the "recommendation" of the LG before moving a Bill or an amendment to the issue of taxation, use of Consolidated fund of UT.
- Rule 47-** In case the LG has a difference of opinion with the Chief Minister, he can refer the matter to the central government for the decision of the President.

The Sources and Power of LT Governor of Puducherry (The Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 and Rules of Business of the Government of Pondicherry, 1963)



Difference between Delhi and Puducherry

Lt. Governor of Delhi	Lt. Governor of Puducherry
	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comes under the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991. Delhi Assembly has the power to legislate on all subjects except law and order and land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comes under the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963. The Puducherry Assembly can legislate on any issue under the Concurrent and State Lists.

Section 23 of the PCPNDT Act

In News

The SC upheld the Constitutional validity of Sections 23(1) and 23(2) of the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994 in Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI) Vs. Union of India and others case . The Court observed that the dilution of the provision of the act defeats its purpose of preventing female foeticide and reduces the Right to Life (Article 21) of the girl child to a mere formality.

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The issue highlighted by FOGSI

1.FOGSI had highlighted the issues and problems affecting the practice of obstetricians and gynaecologists across the country under the PCPNDT Act. The license of members of the profession is being suspended on account of clerical errors/mistakes in paperwork (Form F) under the Act and the Rules made there under.

2. FOGSI had argued that anomalies in paperwork had made gynaecologists and obstetricians susceptible to prosecution, and such irregularities, under the law, are considered equivalent to the offense of sex determination, thereby violating Article 14 and Article 19 (which guarantees the right to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business).

3. FOGSI argued that Act failed to classify offenses of actual sex determination vis-à-vis clerical error in the maintenance of record. There is no gradation of the offense. At present, the punishment for any clerical error in Form F is the same as if someone were to perform illegal sex determination.

About the PCPNDT Act

- The Act was enacted with the objective to prohibit pre-natal diagnostic techniques

Offences under the PCPNDT Act	Conducting/Associating/Helping PND in an unregistered unit
	Sex selection on a woman or a man or both or on any tissue, embryo, conceptus fluid or gametes
	Conducting a PND test for any purpose other than those mentioned as permissible in the Act
	Sale, distribution, supply, renting, allowance or authorization of use of any ultrasound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of a foetus to non-registered units
	Advertisement or communication in any form in print, electronic media or internet by units, medical professionals or companies on the availability of sex determination and sex selection in the form of services, medicines, or any kind of techniques, methods or ayurvedic medicines.

for determination of sex of the foetus leading to female foeticide.

- But unfortunately, its implementation is more in letter and less in spirit. The problem of sex determination and gender selection is a serious issue and is one of the biggest social problems faced by Indian society.
- Despite the enactment of the Act and subsequent amendments, the Child Sex Ratio has not shown significant improvement, hence, putting sufficient concern and questions on the proper implementation of the Act.

Section 4 of the Act provides that no pre-natal diagnostic techniques shall be conducted except for the purpose of detection of any of the following abnormalities:

- a. chromosomal abnormalities
- b. genetic metabolic disease
- c. haemoglobinopathies
- d. sex linked genetic disease
- e. congenital abnormalities and any other, abnormalities or disease as may be specified

Major Provisions of the Act

- It prohibits sex selection before or after conception.
- It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and restricts their use in select cases only.
- It prohibits laboratory or center or clinic to conduct any test including ultrasonography for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.

- o No person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.
- o The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centers, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics, and ultrasound clinics.

The Act was amended in 2003 following a PIL filed in 2000 to improve regulation of technology capable of sex selection and to arrest the decline in the child sex ratio as revealed by the Census 2001. Amendments to the Act mainly covered:

- i) Bringing the technique of pre-conception sex selection within the ambit of the Act.
- ii) Bringing the use of Ultrasound Machines within the purview of the Act more explicitly.
- iii) Further, empower the Central Supervisory Board for monitoring the implementation of the Act.
- iv) Constitution of State level Supervisory Boards and a multi-member State Appropriate Authority for better implementation.
- v) More stringent punishments.
- vi) Empowering the Appropriate Authorities with the powers of the Civil Court for search, seizure and sealing the machines/equipment/records of the violators, including sealing the premises and commissioning of witnesses.
- vii) Making mandatory the maintenance of proper records in respect of the use of ultrasound machines.
- viii) Regulate the sale of ultrasound machines only to the registered bodies.

PEPPER IT WITH
 CEHAT, Ashray scheme,
 AapkiBetiHumaribeti Scheme,
 POCSO Act

NPPA

In News

NPPA has capped the prices of 9 non-scheduled cancer drugs by up to 87%, capping their trade margin at 30%. The decision is in continuation of the government’s efforts to curb profiteering on these vital drugs.

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Drug Control in India

- o Not all drugs are controlled in India only the drugs present in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) 2011. NLEM is adopted as the primary basis for determining essentiality, which constitutes the list of scheduled medicines for the purpose of price control.
- o The DPCO contains scheduled drug formulations spread across 27 therapeutic groups.
- o However, the prices of other drugs can be regulated, if warranted in public interest.

DPCO

The Drugs Prices Control Order, 1995 is an order issued by the Government of India under Sec. 3 of Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to regulate the prices of drugs. The Order inter alia provides the list of price controlled drugs, procedures for fixation of prices of drugs, method of implementation of prices fixed by Govt., penalties for contravention of provisions etc.

About NPPA

- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), was established on 29th August 1997 as an independent body of experts as per the decision taken by the Cabinet committee in September 1994 while reviewing Drug Policy.
- The Authority, inter alia, has been entrusted with the task of fixation/revision of prices of pharmaceutical products (bulk drugs and formulations), enforcement of provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order and monitoring of the prices of controlled and decontrolled drugs in the country.

- The NPPA currently fixes the price of drugs on the National List of Essential Medicines under schedule-I of DPCO. So far, around 1,000 drugs have been price-capped through this mode.
- The manufacturer of non-scheduled drugs (drugs not under direct price control) is not required to take price approvals from NPPA for such drugs. However, NPPA is required to monitor the prices of such drugs and take corrective measures where warranted and there includes the power to fix and regulate such prices.

Impact of NPPA Decision

- ✓ The move was expected to reduce the prices of cancer drugs by 85% and covered 72 formulations and 355 brands.
- ✓ The price cut was expected to benefit about 22 lakh cancer patients in India and would result in annual savings of around ₹800 crore to the patients.

Redactive pricing audit and the CAG’s duties

Context

The recent Comptroller and Auditor General of India’s (CAG’s) report on **redacted pricing in the Rafale fighter aircraft deal and role of the supreme audit institution of India.**

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About Redactive Pricing

- Redaction is the **selection or adaption by removing sensitive information** from a document before publication.
- Under the redactive pricing method, CAG withheld full commercial details and blackened the figures on the procurement deal on security concerns cited by the Ministry of Defence.
- Whether the Ministry’s insistence citing security concerns could have been accepted by the CAG can be examined only by the Supreme Court in the light of the constitutional provisions on the CAG’s duties and parliamentary privileges and prerogatives.

Duties of CAG

- CAG conducts **financial compliance and performance audits** and submits his reports to the legislature to help people’s representatives in enforcing legislative oversight and public accountability of the executive.
- Legislative committees such as the Public Accounts Committee and Committee on Public Undertakings examine the CAG’s selected reports.
- The CAG’s audit is expected to highlight value for money in any purchase decisions of the government.
- An audit by CAG is expected to analyze the facts and comparative pricing charts to highlight the financial propriety and prudence of the procurement decision.
- Parliament is constitutionally privileged to know the details of any procurement deal made by the executive including the conditions and circumstances of such procurement.
- Thus, any decision with respect to procurement by the executive needs to be audited independently by CAG.
- It includes non-compliance of essential procurement procedures, conditions and pricing errors which may have a negative financial impact and cause potential damage to the country’s interests.

Conclusion

- Given the dynamics of international competition in competitive products and pricing in today’s modern market scenario, pricing, delivery, and post-delivery service and other conditions are essentially covered in a Supreme Audit Institution of India (SAI) audit.
- It is a complex audit, demanding exceptional insight, expertise, knowledge, and skills.

- In case the CAG’s office lacks the expertise to conduct a performance audit, expertise can be sought from the pool of resources or credible organizations to be co-opted in the audit team.
- Pricing decisions must be subjected to detailed analysis, without resorting to redactive pricing.
- Parliament is constitutionally privileged to know what the executive had done and how and under what conditions a procurement was decided.
- The CAG’s audit is expected to highlight value for money in purchase decisions.
- A performance audit is done to establish whether the procurement activity was executed keeping in mind economy, efficiency, effectiveness, ethics, and equity.
- Only a thorough pricing audit can bring out the credibility and integrity of a purchase decision, thereby achieving a Supreme Audit Institution of India (SAI’s) constitutionally mandated responsibilities.

NPSHEW

In News

It’s been a decade since the National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at the Workplace (NPSHEW) was announced. It called for a legislation on safety, health and environment at workplaces. Yet, only the **manufacturing, mining, ports and construction sectors** are covered by existing laws on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH).

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Background

- Around 2.3 lakh workers were affected and 2,500 died in more than 81 industrial accidents in the past three-and-a-half decades. Yet sectors such as agriculture, services and transport remain unlegislated from the point of work-safety. The issue has been flagged by the Directorate General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI) of the Union Ministry of Labour & Employment.

Issues & Challenges

1. Factories Act

Under the Factories Act, 1948, the state governments are empowered to frame their respective state factories rules and enforce both the Act and the Rules in their states. The provisions for workers’ safety, health, and welfare are generally found to be inadequate and unsatisfactory and even such protection provided by this legislation does not extend to the large mass of workers employed as they are not covered by the Factories Act. In view of the large and growing industrial activities in the country, a radical overhauling of the Factories Act is called for and cannot be delayed.

2. Dock Workers (Safety, Health, and Welfare) Act

The Dock Workers (Safety, Health, and Welfare) Act, 1986 and Regulations, 1990 framed thereunder are being enforced only in major ports by DGFASLI. For the ports, other than the major 12 ports, the state governments are required to frame their respective state regulations and enforce the provisions of both the Act and the Regulations in these ports. However, till date, none of the states have framed their regulations for enforcement in these ports which are handling huge quantities of cargo, including dangerous goods in the absence of regulation on safety and health of the workers. Its enforcement is a major gap.

2. The **Building and Other Construction Workers’ Act (BOCW)**, 1996, is being enforced by the Labour Commissioners at the Centre and at the State Level. The safety and health provisions under the Act being highly technical in nature, are not being enforced in true letter and spirit.
3. The **agriculture sector** is lacking in legislation on safety and health for the workers working in this sector. There are certain Acts on occupational safety and health pertaining to certain equipment or substances, viz., the Dangerous Machines Regulation Act, the Insecticides Act. The agriculture sector is the largest sector of economic activity and needs to be regulated for safety and health aspects. Lack of legislation on safety and health in agriculture is hindering the ratification of **ILO convention 155**.

- 4. Limited research on occupational safety.**
- 5. Capturing data related to occupational safety** and health across all the sectors has also been an issue for a long time, which has not been taken seriously to date. The most recent facts and figures shared by the ministry in Parliament in February 2019 were up to 2016 only.
- 6. Industries under MSME** do not have any legislation to cover the safety and health of the workers.

Way Ahead

- There is a need to develop close involvement of social partners to meet the challenges ahead in the assessment and control of workplace risks by mobilizing local resources and extending protection to such working population and vulnerable groups where social protection is not adequate.
- Government should stand committed to review the National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Workplace and legislation through tripartite consultation, improve enforcement, compilation and analysis of statistics; develop special programmes for hazardous operations and other focus sectors, set up training mechanisms, create nation-wide awareness, arrange for the mobilisation of available resources and expertise.
- The National Policy and program envisages total commitment and demonstration by all concerned stakeholders such as Government and social partners. Its goals and objectives should be health, safety and environment at workplace through dedicated and concerted efforts consistent with the requirements of safety, thereby improving the quality of work and working life.

International Conventions

- Seoul Declaration on Safety and Health at Work 2008
- Istanbul Declaration on Safety and Health at Work 2011

Benefits

1. General guidance to all the stakeholders to discharge their responsibilities in an appropriate manner
2. It helps to create a positive safety and health culture.
3. It enables the development of research activities, skill development of employees, employers, enforcement authorities, and society at large.
4. It facilitates participation and cooperation of employers and employees, promoting employee participation for effective management.

Zero pendency Court project

In News

A Delhi High Court’s pilot project report on the backlog of cases has said the Capital needed 43 more judges above the current strength of 143 to clear all the pending cases in one year.

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About Zero Pendency Court Project

- It is the **pilot project of the Delhi High Court.**
- It aimed to study the life cycles of cases to come up with optimal timelines for cases.
- **The goal of the project was to study the flow of cases in the absence of backlog.**
- The aim of the project is to **provide information on the judicial time** required to dispose of a case together with the gathering stage wise details in each case.
- It was undertaken in certain subordinate courts of Delhi to **identify benchmarks for different types of cases timelines, a number of judges required**, case flow management rules and a host of other relevant factors.

Major Highlights of the Report

- **Need more judges: Delhi needs 43 more Judges** above the current strength of 143 to clear all pending cases in one year.
- **More criminal cases: The number of criminal cases in Delhi is far more than the number of civil cases. As in March 2019**, there were 5.5 lakh criminal cases and 1.8 lakh civil cases pending in subordinate courts in Delhi.
- **Most time spent: The highest amount of time per hearing on average was spent on the final arguments stage followed by the final order or judgment.** A considerable amount of time is taken on dictation, researching on case laws, etc. before pronouncing the final judgment. Thus, a lot of time is spent on each of the hearings.

Reasons for delays

- The **absence of the witness.**
- **Unnecessary Adjournments** sought by the advocates or the parties at various stages in the case.
- There is also a **delay in the service of summons**, especially outstation parties.

Major Issues

- **Increase in workload:** With the lesser number of judges, the workload of an individual judge could increase.
- **Credibility issue:** With persisting delays, the system becomes less credible as litigants have to wait for the decades to get their cases resolved.
- **Increase in pendency:** With an increase in the number of filings, the pendency of cases is bound to increase if no proper targeted steps are taken to overcome the issue.

Way Forward: There is the need to arrive at an optimal judge strength to handle the cases pending in the system. The current strength of judges should be increased from 143 to an ideal 186 judges to clear all the pending cases in one year.

National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) Project

In News

The Kerala Legislative Assembly recently announced an initiative to digitize all its records and proceedings under its project called E-Vidhan.

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About e-Vidhan

- e-Vidhan is a Mission Mode Project (MMP) included in Digital India Programme.
- Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA) is the 'Nodal Ministry' for its implementation in all the 31 States/ UTs with Legislature.
- The funding of NeVA is on the pattern of Central Sponsored Scheme i.e. 60:40; and 90:10 for North East & hilly States and 100% for UTs. (However, Kerala is funding the project completely from State funds)
- NeVA is a device-neutral and member-centric application which is equipped with the entire information regarding the task performed in the House.

Significance

- It will completely eliminate the process of sending out a notice/request for collection of data.
- Through cloud technology (Meghraj), data deployed can be accessed anywhere at any time.
- It enables automation of the entire law-making process, tracking of decisions and documents, sharing of information.

PEPPER IT WITH
Digi Locker, BharatNet,
SWAYAM

State Governments role

- They will appoint a Secretary level officer to be designated as the nodal officer/representative for e-Vidhan implementation in the State Legislature(s).
- They will bear the funds required for running of e-Vidhan MMP after 3 years.
- They will ensure capacity building for the effective implementation of e-Vidhan MMP module.
- They will undertake maintenance and replacement of ICT equipment after 3 years.

Project ‘SPARROW-CBIC’

In News

Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) has decided to implement Annual Performance Appraisal Report (APAR) in SPARROW (Smart Performance Appraisal Report Recording Online Window) for Group ‘B’ and ‘C’ Officers. It was insisted for IRS (C&CE) in 2016-2017.

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Advantage of the Project

- Enhances overall efficiency and morale of staff
- **Improves digitization and paperless** working environment.
- **Brings significant change in the APAR of** a large number of Group ‘B’ and ‘C’ employees
- Promotes better HR Management.

SUPREMO

Single User Platform Related to Employees Online, is a web based application which was operationalised in January, 2016. It integrates the existing applications, using latest technology to reduce redundancy and establish a centralised data base relating to Human Resource Management and functions as a Decision Support System.

Black Listing of Indian Origin

In News

The Ministry of Home Affairs has decided to put an end to the local adverse lists commonly known as ‘Black Lists’ of Indian-origin people.

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About List

- It is the list maintained by Indian missions.
- It contains a list of Indian-origin people who have taken asylum abroad under the plea of alleged persecution in India.
- These asylum seekers in the list are predominantly Sikhs.
- Those who are in the list are denied visa services by Indian missions and posts in the respective country.

Significance

- Such asylees who are not in the main adverse list will be granted, visa and consular services at par with foreigners of the country in which they are living.
- The government has also delegated to state governments and Foreigners Regional Registration Officers (FRROs) to grant permits to foreigners to visit protected and restricted areas in the country.
- The state governments and FRROs can now grant such permits even for non-tourism purposes and even in areas not opened for tourism purposes.

CTBTO Invites India

In News

The **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)** has offered India an ‘Observer’ status and access to state-of-art **International Monitoring System (IMS)** data.

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Issue

- The executive secretary of CTBTO had invited India to be an observer member of CTBTO.
- An observer status will provide India with access to data from the **International Monitoring System (IMS)**.
- IMS is a **network of monitoring stations and radionuclide labs** which can detect even small nuclear explosions using **seismology, hydroacoustic, infrasound and radionuclide technology**.
- This monitoring system has other added advantage such as:
 - ✓ **Early Warning System** for disaster.
 - ✓ **Scientific research** on the Earth's inner structures.
 - ✓ **Climate Change** monitoring, etc.

Structural Limbo in the CTBT

- CTBT never came into force because of **Article XIV** of the treaty.
- According to the Article, the treaty will come in force only when **all of the 44 states possessing nuclear weapons capabilities and research reactors sign and ratify the treaty**.
- The treaty awaits formal ratification from the United States, China, Israel, Iran, and Egypt (which have already signed), and **both signature and ratification from India, Pakistan, and North Korea**.

CTBT

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) bans nuclear explosions by everyone, everywhere: on the Earth's surface, in the atmosphere, underwater and underground. Various restriction imposed by CTBT are:

- ❖ It makes very difficult for the **country to develop nuclear weapon for the first time or more powerful bombs**, for those who already possess it.
- ❖ It also **prevents the huge damage caused by radioactivity** from nuclear explosions to humans, animals and plants.

The CTBT with its **183 signatories and 163 ratifications** is one of the most widely supported arms-control treaties.

India and Nuclear Disarmament

- India is a strong supporter of Nuclear Disarmament.
- Under, PM Nehru India called for a **Standstill agreement** (between US and USSR) in 1954. This was done at the time when the US and USSR were engaged in the nuclear arms race.
- This Standstill agreement later transformed into the **Limited/Partial Test Ban Treaty** in 1963, which India joined.
- Though the treaty was successful in significantly reducing the global levels of fallout it failed in restraining the ongoing arms race. From this treaty, CTBT evolved.
- In 1974, India conducted a peaceful nuclear test owing to intimidation from the US during the 1971 Indo-Pak war.
- In 1982, India called for a **freeze on nuclear weapons production**.
- In 1988, India recommended nuclear disarmament in a time-bound framework of 22 years.
- India, **since 1998** had placed a **unilateral moratorium** on nuclear testing.

Why is India opposing CTBT?

- India initially supported CTBT but it withdrew its support after the **extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995**.
- India believed that not only NPT profess **unequal obligations** between the nuclear-haves and have-nots, but it also **did not mandate the original Nuclear Weapon States (NWS)** to adopt equal obligations towards universal nuclear disarmament.
- Further, **the China-Pakistan Nuclear axis** forced India to conduct a major nuclear test in 1998. After the test, India expressed a **flexible position on the CTBT** and

specified its readiness to discuss a **de jure formalization** of its **voluntary moratorium** on future nuclear testing.

- India made it clear that its support for CTBT will come only **when P5 (UNSC) nation refrain from conducting future tests under the guise of safety purposes, and to preclude all horizontal and vertical proliferation.**
- Another major factor influencing India’s position on the CTBT is that it awaits ratification from the United States and China. **Equally important is that Pakistan and North Korea must also express their unconditional support to sign and ratify the CTBT.**

Way Forward

India has adhered to the fundamental obligation of the CTBT. Its voluntary commitment and restraint were meant to convince the international community of the need for meaningful negotiations to implement a more equitable CTBT and persevere towards global nuclear disarmament. Further, India strongly believes that the CTBT is an integral aspect of global nuclear disarmament, it emphasizes that there must be no discrimination in favour of the original NWS in fulfilling the obligations toward the total elimination of nuclear weapons. **Thus, India will only sign a CTBT that would enjoin equal obligations and responsibilities on all NWS.**

PEPPER IT WITH
NPT, IAEA, NSG, Atomic Energy Commission

UN Listing of Masood Azhar

In News

The UNSC has designated Masood Azhar as a global terrorist **after China lifted its technical hold on his listing under the UNSC 1267 sanctions committee.** The JeM itself was sanctioned by the 1267 Committee in 2001.

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Issue

- The **ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee** of the UN Security Council finally added Mohammed Masood AzharAlvi as the 422nd global terrorist to the UN Sanctions List of individuals and entities pursuant to **Security Council Resolution 1267/1989/2253.**
- Reasons he was listed for was being associated with **Al-Qaida for planning, financing terrorist acts, supplying arms, recruiting for Jaish-i-Mohammed** (JeM was listed as a terrorist organization in by committee in 2001.)



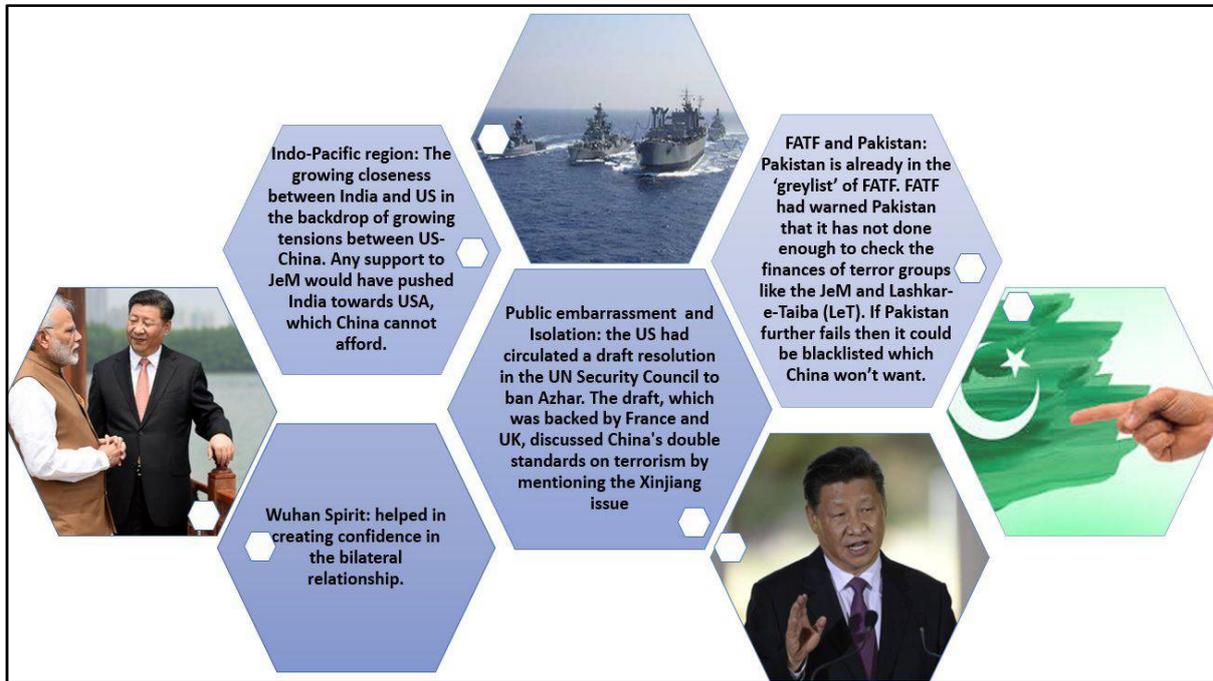
Sanctions Committee

The Sanctions Committee of the UN Nations Security Council was established under Resolution 1267 in 1999, which imposed limited sanctions on the Taliban. Over time, the sanctions regime has evolved to include a lot of measures against designated individuals and entities.

The sanctions committee also oversees the implementation of the sanctions measures and reports annually to the Security Council on the implementation of these measures

- The listing was done in accordance with UNSC Resolution 2368 (2017), which was adopted under **Chapter VII of the UN Charter to improve the effectiveness of international efforts** to prevent the disruptive activities of the waning Islamic State and its breakaway groups.

Why China Changed its stance?



Significance

- The listing as such may not help India in its fight against state-sponsored terrorism unless **Pakistan changes its policy of providing safe-haven and financial support to terrorists.**
- The UNSC has **major limitations in monitoring its sanctions and the domestic litigations against** the 1267 Committee measures. An instructive example is the sanctioning of Hafiz Saeed, who not only roam freely in Pakistan but also founded a political party.
- But the move is a success for India **beyond the label of 'symbolic diplomatic victory.'** This is because of two reasons
 - (i) It is a success in terms of power politics and projection.
 - (ii) It shows how consistent and pragmatic has been India's multilateral policy.
- The UN Security Council is a testing ground of power politics. **Once the interests of great powers get involved, a resolution against their interest is difficult both in the Council and in the UN's subsidiary organs.** However, by being patient about China's concerns and at the same time exerting pressure on Beijing at various levels, India managed to get the desired outcome.
- Similarly, **the decade-long effort for listing Azhar showcases the pragmatism that marks India's multilateral diplomacy.** It questions the general perception that India's multilateral approach is ambivalent and inconsistent. The fundamental character of diplomacy, especially multilateral diplomacy, is incrementalism. **Therefore, expecting favorable outcomes immediately and desisting from persistent efforts due to an initial unfavorable result is a suboptimal approach in multilateral engagements.**
- Further, Indian diplomacy must **sustain the pressure on Pakistan to take conclusive action against terror outfits operating from its soil against India.** This is possible as China condemned the Pulwama attack and openly empathized

PEPPER IT WITH
FATF, CCIT, UN Counter Terrorism Strategy

with India over the loss of its security personnel. **It did not also react to the ‘pre-emptive strikes’ on Balakot, indirectly recognizing India’s right to respond in a situation like this.**

- With China now willing to discuss issues of mutual interest with India, **a well-structured bilateral dialogue on regional and global terrorism may go a long way in convincing Beijing** of the need to put pressure on Islamabad to act against terror, **which is in the interest of regional and global peace and amity.**

India and US-China Trade War

In News

The US had decided to extend the ongoing tariff war and decided to hike tariffs to **25 percent on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods.**

Why the US imposed tariffs on China

There are multiple reasons for which the US had imposed tariffs on China such as:

- For **restricting** the US investment in China.
- The US accused China of **stealing American intellectual property** and Chinese firms imitating US technologies.
- The US accused China of **exploiting the WTO-enabled global trade framework** to its advantage.
- China has disrupted the **international trading system** through hidden subsidies, **currency manipulation and, more recently, technology theft.**
- The US is particularly targeting **Made in China-2025 program** which is an initiative to transform China into an advanced manufacturing powerhouse.

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Chinese Sectors affected by Hike

- ❖ Internet routers and modem
- ❖ Printed circuit board
- ❖ Furniture and Lighting products, auto parts
- ❖ Vacuum cleaners
- ❖ Building materials

The outcomes of the Trade War

1. **It will not bring manufacturing back to the US.** Further, new technologies such as 3D printing or robotics might help the US, but China leads in most high-tech industries.
2. **Big US firms will become vulnerable.** China might stop imports of some US product altogether such as soybean. There are large US firms who have China as the largest trading partner for eg. Apple, Nike, Tesla, Intel, etc.
3. **Global value chains (GVCs) will get restructured.** Machinery, electronics, and computer equipment account for 60% of US imports from China. These are made via GVCs that share production across a dozen or so countries. Less demand from the US would mean China buying fewer components and sub-assembly units from Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Thailand.
4. **Labor-intensive production could shift out of China.** The US imports large quantities of consumer goods like textiles, furniture, and toys from China.
5. **A weakened WTO,** the US measures on steel and aluminium sector on frivolous grounds of national security was a violation of the WTO spirit.
6. **The US has no interest in pursuing the WTO’s agreed Doha agenda.** It is instead pushing for plurilateral deals on matters like e-commerce which are of interest to a few large firms.

Make in China-2025

It is aimed to transform China into a “manufacturing superpower. The priority area it focuses on are:

- ❖ Information Technology
- ❖ Robotics
- ❖ Aerospace
- ❖ Biopharmaceuticals
- ❖ High-performance medical equipment

It is seeming to be inspired by Industry 4.0 initiative.

PEPPER IT WITH

WTO, Anti-dumping duty, Trade barriers, Make in India

7. **There will be increased resentment against US privileges.** The dollar's status as the world's reserve currency allows it to pay its import bills by just printing dollars. Supply of the currency enables the US to buy any firm or property anywhere or finance massive wars. This is the root cause of unbridled imports or the trade war.

What India need to do?

According to the UN, India is among a handful of economies that stand to benefit from the trade tensions between the world's top two economies but for this India need to take several steps such as:

- ✓ **Easing the market access** to a foreign country.
- ✓ **Liking up** effectively with the **Global Value Chain (GVCs)**.
- ✓ **Emphasize and improve implementation** of support policies with new flagship program such as "India: Making for the World".
- ✓ Create **export hubs**

Arctic Council

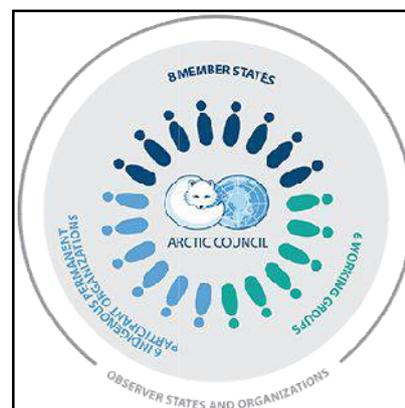
In News

11th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting was organized in the Rovaniemi, Finland. India has been **re-elected as an observer to the Arctic Council.**

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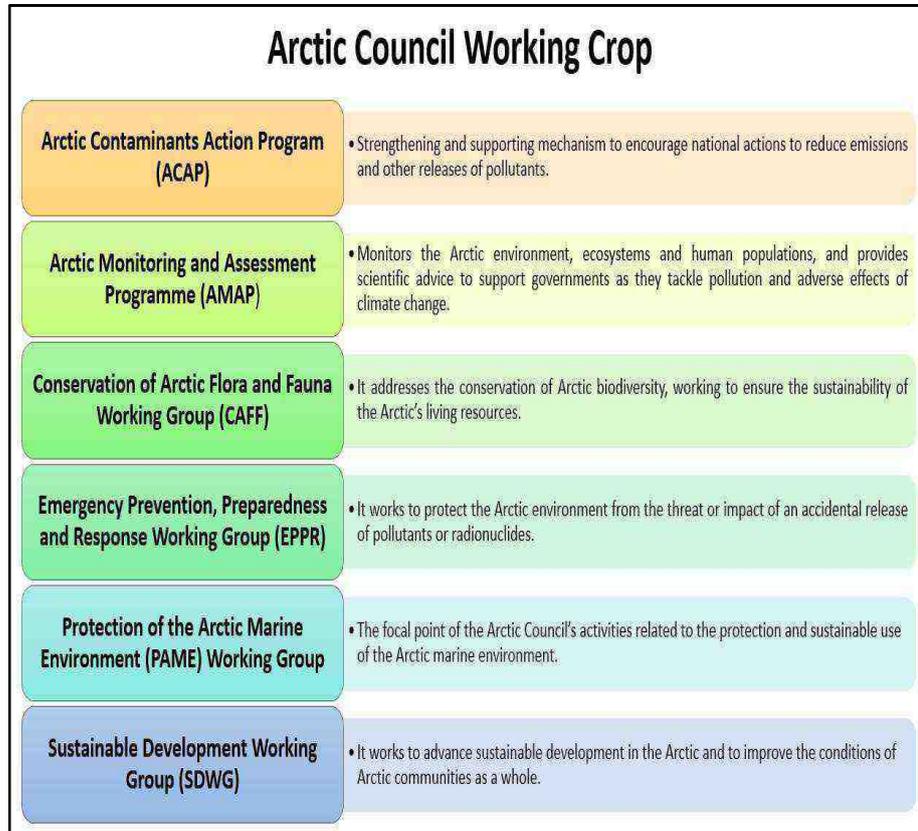
About Arctic Council

- It is an **intergovernmental forum** promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the **Arctic States, communities on common Arctic issues.**
- It looks on issues of **sustainable development and environmental protection** in the Arctic.
- Under the Ottawa declaration 1996, **Member states of Arctic council are:**
 - Canada
 - Kingdom of Denmark
 - Finland
 - Iceland
 - Norway
 - The Russian Federation
 - Sweden
 - The United States
- The observer States are
 - France
 - Germany
 - The Netherlands
 - Poland
 - Spain
 - United Kingdom
 - India (2013)
 - China
 - Italy
 - Japan
 - South Korea
 - Singapore
 - Switzerland
- Observer status in the Arctic Council is open to non-Arctic states, **along with inter-governmental, inter-parliamentary, global, regional and non-governmental organizations** that the Council determines can contribute to its work.



- Arctic Council Observers **primarily contribute through their engagement in the Council at the level of Working Groups.**
- It does not have a **programming budget. All projects or initiatives are sponsored by one or more Arctic States.** The Arctic Council **does not and cannot implement or enforce its guidelines,** assessments or recommendations. The Arctic Council's mandate explicitly excludes military security.

- The renewal of Observer status is a formality. The status, once granted, continues until there is a consensus among the members that the **Observer was engaging in activities that run counter to the objectives of the Arctic Council.**



India in the Arctic

- India had **set up a permanent station in the Arctic** for the purposes of scientific research. The region offers some unique opportunities to carry out research related to atmospheric and climate sciences that cannot be done anywhere else.
- **National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR)** is the nodal organization coordinating the research activities of its **Himadri station located in Norway.**
- The station has been used to carry out a variety of **biological, glaciological and atmospheric and climate sciences** research projects in the last decade.
- **Arctic region is of crucial importance** because of the presence of minerals, and oil and gas. It can also open ways for alternate shipping routes that can reduce existing distances.

PEPPER IT WITH
NCAOR, Nordic Council,
IndARC, DIHAR,

IBSA Summit

In News

India-Brazil-South Africa trilateral dialogue summit was held in Kochi. The central goal was to develop a **blueprint to rejuvenate IBSA** which is widely viewed as a unique voice for the **Global South.**

About IBSA

- It was established in 2003 after the signing of the **Brasilia declaration.**

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- It brings together three large democracies and major economies from three different continents i.e. Asia, Africa, and South America, **facing similar developmental challenges.**
- Development cooperation among IBSA members is guided by **the spirit of South-South Cooperation.**
- The forum is based on the principles and **values of the participatory democracy, respect for human right and the rule of law.**
- It **does not have a headquarters or a permanent executive secretariat.** At the highest level, it counts on the Summits of Heads of State and Government.
- **Monitoring and coordinating the IBSA activities** are the responsibility of senior officials of the foreign ministers, **known as Focal Points.**

IBSA Fund

It was established in 2004 and became operational in 2006. **UNDPs United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation act as fund manager, board of directors' secretariat.** The fund operates through a demand driven approach.

IBSA vs BRICS

- IBSA time and again faced the challenge of maintaining its relevance in the wake of the emergence of a similar group such as BRICS.
- This challenge IBSA can answer by
 - ✓ Ensuring **regular meets** both at the level of Heads of State and Government, as well as at the Ministerial level.
 - ✓ Work collectively to fulfil **MERCOSUR (South American Trade Block)-SACU (South African Customs Union)-India preferential trade agreement** and then establish a free trade area.
 - ✓ Since IBSA is focused on global governance, they should **push for the reforms** in the **United Nation Security Council (UNSC).**
 - ✓ Maintaining a **strict vigilance** over funds to **ensure effective and responsible financing.**
 - ✓ **Work as a joint lobby** in other international fora such as **BRICS, G-20, etc.**

Buenos Aires Action Plan (BAPA)

It is a foundational milestone in bringing Southern countries together in their demand for fair international relations and a new international economic order.

The BAPA systematized a comprehensive conceptual and **operational framework for promoting Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC)**, formulating a set of guiding principles and recommendations for the purpose of strengthening and supporting this modality of cooperation.

Conclusion

- The people-centric approach (Reflected in the **2011 Tshwane declaration**) of South-South cooperation sets it apart from other partnership models.
- IBSA **Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation** has succeeded in implementing 31 development projects in diverse countries: Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, State of Palestine, Cambodia, and Vietnam, among others.
- Brazil and South Africa should also launch their own edition of **IBSA Visiting Fellows Programme for developing countries** on the lines of India's program.
- Strengthening IBSA could increase the effectiveness of BRICS and encourage it to follow a **more balanced approach on key issues of interest to India, Brazil and South Africa.**

PEPPER IT WITH

Bandung Conference, NAM, UNCTAD, South-South Cooperation, Nairobi Declaration (2009)

Golden Card Permanent Residency Scheme

In News

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has launched the **'Golden Card' Permanent Residency Scheme** in an attempt to woo wealthy individuals and exceptional talents from all over the world.

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About the scheme

- The scheme is open to investors and exceptional talents such as doctors, engineers, scientists, students, and artists.
- Government of UAE wants to project Dubai as a home to expats rather than a temporary plan.
- Scheme will cover
 - ✓ General investors who will be granted a **10-year permanent residency visa**.
 - ✓ **Real Estate Investors, who can get a visa for a 5-year visa**.
 - ✓ **Entrepreneurs and Talented Professionals like doctors, researchers and innovators can get 10 years visa.**
 - ✓ **Outstanding students** will also be permitted 5 years of permanent residency visas.
- The benefits of the permanent residency also include the spouse and children of the cardholder that will ensure cohesive social ties.
- A **minimum investment of AED 5 million (USD 13,61,225)** is needed to obtain a five-year visa, and double that amount is necessary for a decade-long visa.

THE GOLDEN CARD

6,800

Qualified individuals in the first round to obtain the Golden Card



DH100B

Approximate total investments by qualified expats to obtain the Golden Card

UNPRECEDENTED BENEFITS FOR THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES



Investors



Entrepreneurs



Specialised talents



Researchers



Outstanding students

Advantages of the Scheme

- It will attract greater foreign investment and stimulate the local economy, making it more efficient and attractive for investors.
- It will also increase the UAE's competitiveness and reaffirm the country's position as a global incubator.
- It will give impetus to the UAE real estate market and will have a positive impact on the local property market.

Why Gulf Countries need Permanent Residency?

- Gulf economies are facing a silent economic crisis.
- The recent uptick in the oil and gas

Saudi Green Card

Saudi Arabia launched a Green Card like residency scheme which will allow wealthy and high-skilled expats with the grant of the special iqama (permit) residency without the need for a Saudi sponsor.

The holder of such an iqama will have family status, can recruit workers, own and lease property and transport in the kingdom, can obtain visit visas for relatives, can freely enter and exit the country and will also have the benefit of designated queues at airports.

prices is also not helping their cause, and it is yet to give a positive impact on everyday lives.

- This has also led to **employer shedding jobs** and for many of the non-natives, a loss of Job means leaving the country. Though governments stepped up to make sure people stay but it failed. **The cost of living is rising despite a dip in rent.**
- Further, the **Qatar blockade had also worsened the Gulf economies.**
- Gulf countries now realize that their days of depending on volatile oil revenues to fund unproductive and increasingly unaffordable expenditures are gone and hence **diversifying the economy and fully utilizing the talents of people has become an imperative.**
- **Lessons from Arab Spring** has also forced these regimes to act on the growing economic crises as they understand the power of protest by people who demand good governance.

PEPPER IT WITH
Arab Spring, Gulf Crises,
OPEC, Shale Gas, GCC

Removal of GSP status for India

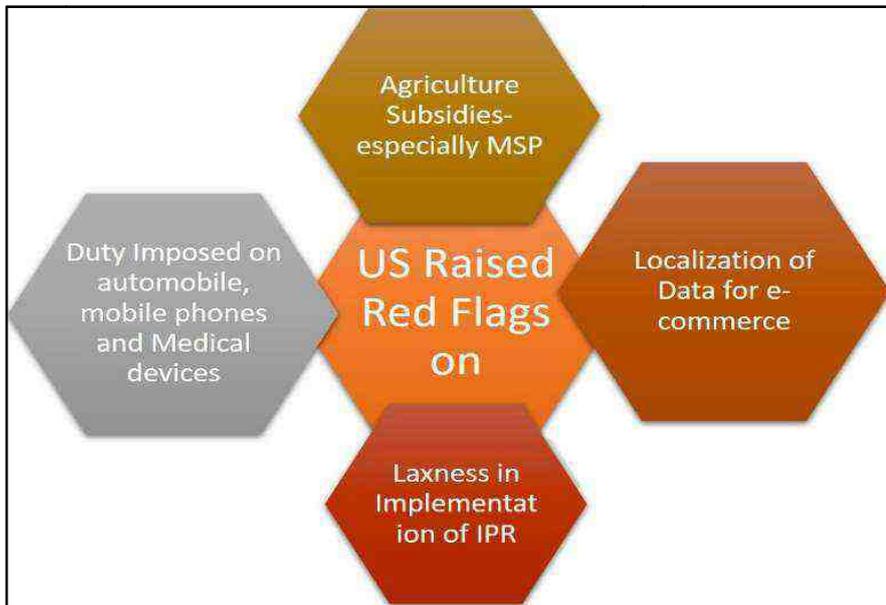
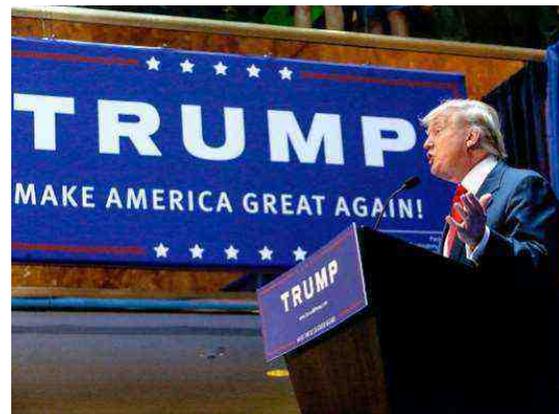
In News

United States had terminated preferential trade status for India under **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)**.

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Preferential Trade Agreements

- The preferential treatment of goods from developing countries was **introduced in the 1960s and 70s under GATT (the precursor of WTO)** as a positive gesture by developed countries to **help the developing countries** with trade and growth.
- It **allowed duty-free market access to poor countries'** products to enter developed countries' markets.
- The **legal basis for the GSP program is in the Enabling Clause (EC)**, which is a platform established under the international trade regime of the World Trade Organization (WTO) for developed countries to offer preferential trade treatment on a non-reciprocal basis to products originating in developing countries.
- The **EU had decided in 2014 that upper-middle-income countries would not be eligible for special access** under GSP as they were industrializing rapidly and were highly competitive vis-à-vis EU products.
- The EU now reserves free



market access mainly for least developed countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, and others.

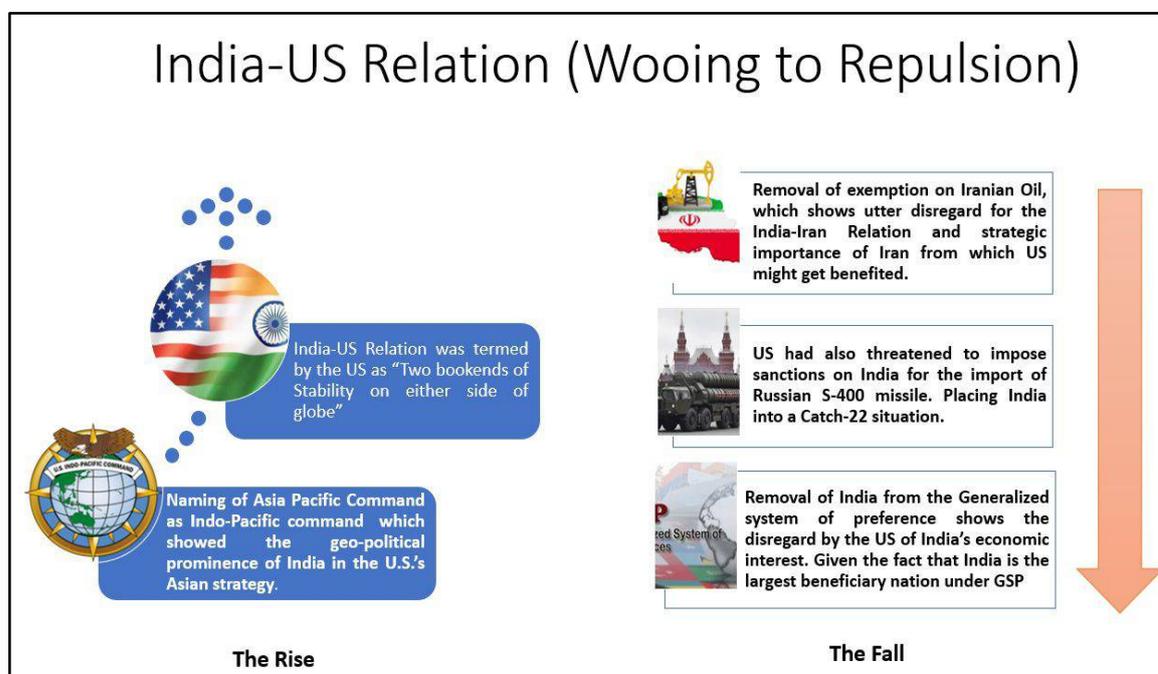
- Though **India is not an upper-middle-income country**, the US has been pressing on the fact that it is the third biggest economy in the world and hence doesn't qualify for any special tariff treatment in trade.

Why the US targeted India's GSP status?

Under the US president policy of **"making America great again"**. The US is following a protectionist policy. It involves **the arm twisting of big emerging countries into buying more American goods** on the one hand and **restraining their own exports to the US**, on the other.

Impact on the US

- The US under the Trump administration is following the **policy of bullying the allies**. It had **downgraded NATO, threatened to place tariffs on its EU allies, unilaterally walked out of the JCPOA**.
- But targeting India on GSP is the self-goal. It will **cost American businesses over \$300 million in additional tariffs**.
- India and Turkey can take up the matter in the WTO **where US contention behind imposing a sanction of not allowing equitable and reasonable access to its**



markets would fail.

- The US administration had taken this decision despite strong opposition from the Senate. They also acted despite India's willingness to negotiate new market access for American exports.
- The US must have overlooked the fact **that even the "indispensable nation" needs reliable friends and allies**.
- The U.S. action, unfortunately, seeks leadership among its trading partners and that **hurts America first and its allies next**.

India's Stand

- India understands the importance of the US in its other endeavor that is why even though it announced **retaliatory tariffs it is pussyfooting on their implementation**.
- Government of India had made it clear that **it will not push for GSP status**, rather will **build its own export competitiveness**.

- This decision comes from the fact that **The US-GSP is just a pint-sized scheme**. Hence the withdrawal will have a barely noticeable impact at the macro level.
- India's GSP loss **may benefit China as the export product profile of India and China broadly match**.
- **GSP alone may be too small an issue to justify retaliatory tariffs** or dragging the US to WTO. But this view would hold only till the time India feels that gains and losses across all areas of engagement are balanced.
- India completely understands that **diplomacy can have troughs and peaks but trade diplomacy must learn to weather all conditions**.

Note: For details on GSP please refer Current Connect March 2019

JCPOA

In News

Iran will reduce some of its commitments to the nuclear deal in response to the United States' decision to withdraw from the 2015 multilateral deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

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Issues

- Iran had earlier declared that it would continue to abide by the restrictions imposed on its nuclear activities under the JCPOA **as long as the EU would uphold the promised sanctions relief**.
- Iran was bound by the **JCPOA on excess heavy water and low enriched uranium** it can hold. But now Iran decided **to leave the deal stage by stage**.



Iran will

The US in Retaliation had

- No longer observe the ceilings of 130 MT of heavy water
- No longer observe the ceilings of 300 kg of low enriched uranium.
- If JCPOA didn't provide relief till July 2019 then it will undertake uranium enrichment above 3.67% and resume construction of Arak heavy water reactor
- Placed sanctions on Iran metal industry
- A USS Arlington which is transporter of amphibious vehicles and aircraft is deployed
- A Patriot missile defence battery have also been deployed.

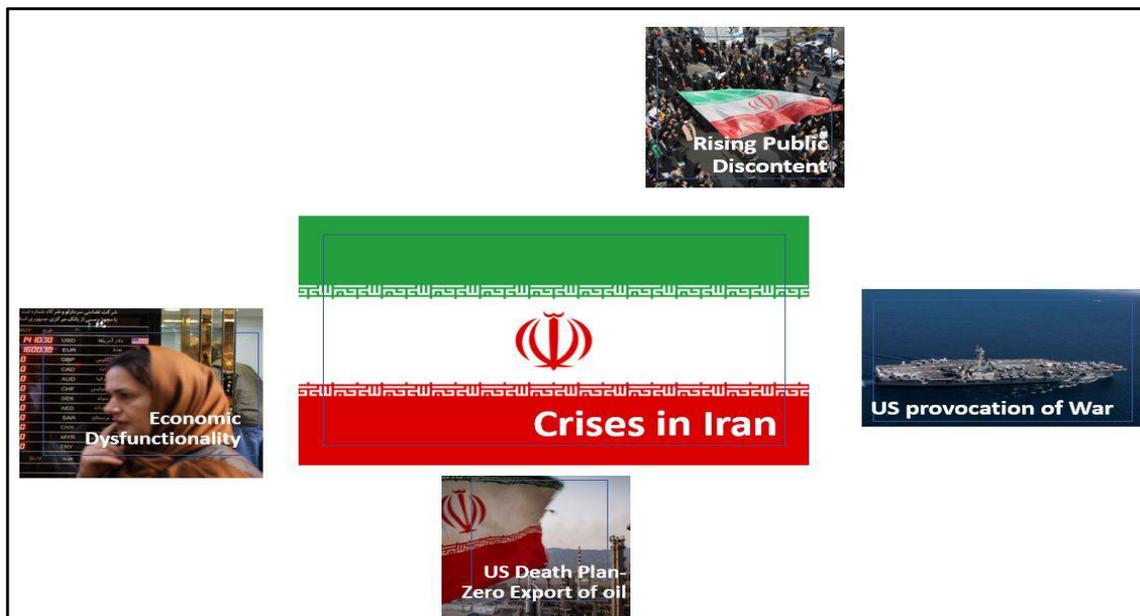
Impact of Iran decision

- The **EU rejected any deadlines** and asked for Iran's total commitment to the deal.
- **China and Russia**, which Iran considers friendly countries, **also reacted coldly**.
- Iran's withdrawal from the deal **will only increase economic and security pressures** on the country rather **than put it on a better footing**.

One-Two Process of Iran

- Iran **is aiming for a firmer reaction from the EU** and other **JCPOA signatories** vis-a-vis the U.S. Hence it will threaten to **resume its nuclear program**. If JCPOA signatories lift sanctions then **Iran will stop its nuclear endeavors**.
- If it fails then, **Iran will come out of JCPOA and might even leave NPT** and speed up its enrichment program, and **concurrently announce its readiness to conduct negotiations with all parties**.

- It will come **one to one on the negotiation table with the US and would sacrifice JCPOA for another discussion.**
- Iran understands that it **will have to bring down one structure (the JCPOA) to erect another in order to prevail under these difficult conditions** and preserve its prestige on the international scene while keeping its options open for future talks.



Faulty Stand of the US

- ✓ The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) suggests that Iran was actually complying with the deal.
- ✓ The US is myopic in not realizing that the deal **puts Iran further away from a nuclear weapon than the current sanctions**, as Iran can't enrich uranium covertly with this deal.
- ✓ The United States needs a solution to the Iran crisis, **and withdrawing from the JCPOA only leaves hostilities with Iran simmering.** They are yet again paving way for a new crisis in the Middle East.
- ✓ The US needs to realize that **secondary sanctions don't punish Iran directly.** It hurts some financial institutions that lend to businesses with Iran's oil sector. **Instead of hitting Iran, it cuts off access to US markets for third parties and strategic allies like India that import oil from Iran.**

The Big Picture

- Iran patience is running out, though the EU established **Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges** to bypass dollar based transactions, its **limited scope and protracted decision making of EU** had caused a problem in Iran.
- **The Strategy of maximum pressure of the US is not going to yield any outcome.**Iranians are a proud people and they decided to stay on JCPOA because they believed in **the idea of outlasting a single-term Trump presidency.**
- As a second term for Mr. Trump becomes likely, **Iran knows that it needs to develop its nuclear capability beyond the point of no return to ensure regime survival.** This is the **lesson from North Korea.**
- There is also hope among the regime enemies that the heightened military pressures **will tempt Iran into a provocation which can be used to justify a US military response.** If this happens, it will throw the **region into prolonged turmoil, unraveling boundaries established nearly a century ago.**
- The deal is a perfect quid pro quo if the US doesn't change its stand and If the rest of the countries don't reimpose their own sanctions, **Iran may very well end up still having more access to international markets than it had before the deal was inked.**

Chagos Island Dispute

In News

The United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) has passed a **non-binding resolution** asking the United Kingdom (UK) to return the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean to Mauritius.

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ICJ Opinion

The UK should end its control of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean as rapidly as possible. The islands are not lawfully separated from the former colony of Mauritius.

Background

- Britain detached the Chagos Islands from Mauritius in 1965, three years before



Mauritian independence. From 1967 to 1973, some 1,500 Chagos islanders were gradually forced to leave their homes so that **the largest island, Diego Garcia,**

could be leased to the US for a strategic airbase. Today, Diego Garcia hosts a major US military base.

- In 2016, after several judicial challenges, Britain extended Diego Garcia's lease until 2036 and declared that the expelled islanders would not be

Empire 2.0

It is a term used by British policy makers in the event of post-Brexit they want their trading relationship with the Commonwealth as "Empire 2.0".

This will not definitely go down well with former colonies such as India. The idea is even flawed on various counts such as:

- ❖ For Canada, largest trading partner will always remain US rather than UK.
- ❖ Australia and New Zealand have found themselves on the doorstep of the greatest manufacturing region on earth with the rise of Asian economics.
- ❖ In Africa, they are already replaced by China West Africa's new convenience food is Chinese instant noodles, not fish and chips, and the supermarkets that sell them are South African-owned.

Empire 2.0 is a fanciful vision of the future based on a **distorted misremembering of the past.** It's a delusion and, like all delusions, has the potential to lure its believers into a false sense of security and lead them to make bad decisions.

allowed to go back. In 2017, Mauritius successfully petitioned the United Nations to seek an ICJ advisory opinion on the legality of the separation.

- **Mauritius claims it was forced to give up the islands – now a British overseas territory – in 1965 in exchange for independence, which it gained in 1968.**

Mauritius Stand

- Mauritius argues it was illegal for Britain to break up its territory. It claims sovereignty over the archipelago and demands the right to resettle former residents.
- The crux of the Mauritian claim is **the right of self-determination**. In its submission to the court, the Mauritian government claimed that the separation of the islands from Mauritius was in clear breach of UN resolution 1514, also known as the Colonial Declaration.
- Passed in 1960, it enshrined the right of self-determination for colonial peoples and specifically banned the breakup of colonies prior to independence. **This was intended to keep borders stable and to prevent colonial powers from simply absorbing colonial territory into their overseas territory so as to retain their sovereignty.**
- Yet in spite of this resolution, a number of states (including France and the UK) kept possession of parts of their former colonies following the decolonization process.

PEPPER IT WITH
Senkaku Islands dispute, or Diaoyu Islands dispute, Kuril Island, Sparty Island

World Reconstruction Conference

In News

The Fourth edition of the World Reconstruction Conference was organized in **conjunction with the 6th Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDDR).**

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About Conference

- **The theme of the conference was “Inclusion for Resilient Recovery”.**
- Inclusion in disaster recovery and reconstruction is a key condition for the people’s resilience.
- **A more inclusive recovery fosters equal rights and opportunities, dignity and diversity, guaranteeing that nobody from a community is left out because of their age, gender, disability or other factors linked to ethnicity, religion, geography, economic status, political affiliation, health issues, or other life circumstances**
- **Participants in the conference included Experts, practitioners, and stakeholders from governments, civil society, private sector, academia, international organizations, and community-based organizations.**
- **The World Reconstruction Conference is a global forum that provides a platform to collect, assess, and share disaster reconstruction and recovery experiences and take forward the policy dialogue for effective international disaster recovery and reconstruction framework.**

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is defined throughout Inclusion Matters as both “the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society” and, more specifically, as “the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society.”

Sino-Indo Border Trade

In News

The 14th edition of the annual Sino-Indian border trade opened at Nathu La.

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About Border Trade At Nathu La

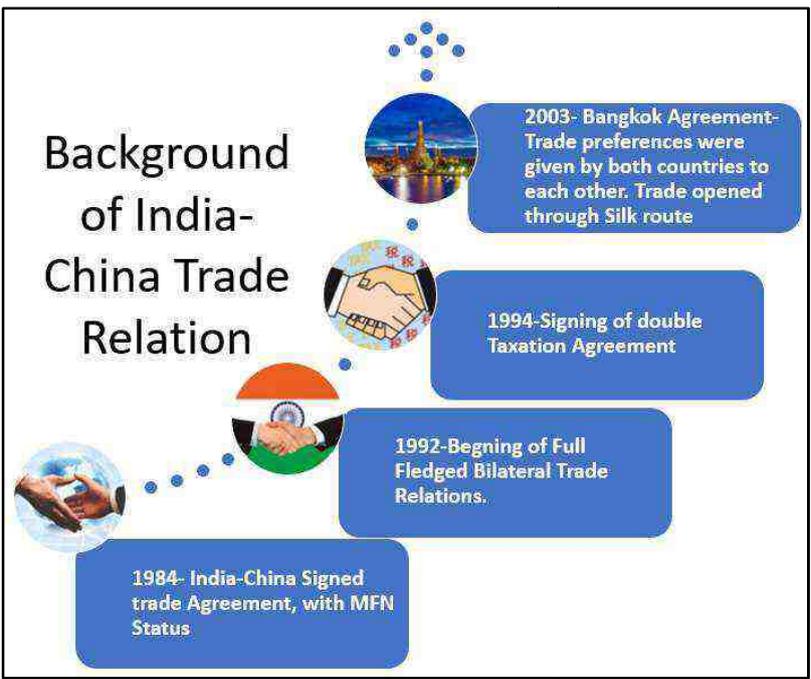
- The **bilateral border trade between the two countries is organized four days a week for six months**, between May 1 and November 30, every year.
- It was resumed in 2006 after a gap of 44 years.
- **A total of 36 items, from dairy products, are on India's export list comprising dairy products to utensils, while a total of 20 items**, including carpets, quilts, and jackets among others, are in the country's import list from the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

Issues in India-China Trade Relations

- **Trade Deficit between India and China increased** enormously in recent times and now it is more than \$60 billion.
- **The trade deficit was largely the result of China's technical advancement.** But China's strategy to stifle Indian imports also played an important part.
- **The top five exports to China are all input products.** These are used by China to manufacture costlier goods, which it ships back to India.
- **China uses a complex set of inspection, product testing, and quality certification requirements to stifle imports from India.** Such restrictions are called non-tariff barriers (NTBs). WTO rules regulate import tariffs but are weak in regulating NTBs.
- **Chinese experts inspect Indian factories. Cost is borne by the Indian side and clearance seldom comes.** Only Chinese labs do product testing, and no appeal is allowed on their decisions. China will not accept Indian basmati rice, while Pakistan's rice is welcome. Indian IT firms cannot take part if the tender size is more than \$100 million.

Border Haat

Presently, there are two border haats in Meghalaya and two in Tripura both along the Bangladesh border. It functions one day a week and is a reunion spot for each families across the border (residing within the 5 KM of the border area). The business is done on the barter basis and data is managed by Haat Management Committee. There is no operational border haat along Bhutan and Myanmar border, but recently MoU has been signed for border haats along Myanmar.



- **Such measures ensured that India’s exports to China in 2016 stayed at the 2005 level, even as India allowed almost unrestricted access to Chinese goods during 2005-17.**
- **On the other hand Indian imports of mobile phones, telecom equipment, and bulk drugs, 70% come from China.** If China stops supplying bulk drugs India’s pharma exports will have a tough time.

PEPPER IT WITH
 OBOR, Trade War, MFN
 Status, Free Trade
 Agreement

Action Plan India need to adopt

- Push for **large scale manufacturing in 30 product groups from the electronics, engineering, and chemical sectors.**
- These should form the core of Make in India program.
- Provide 20 years of direct tax holiday for investments in these sectors.
- **Create a hundred design studios for new product development.**
- **Example from the German Mittelstand model of industry-research-academia collaboration.**
- **This will help** innovation-driven small firms and reduce dependence on import of daily use goods.
- Create an institution responsible for developing standards and setting guidelines for inspection,testing and quality certification of critical products.
- **China used non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to stifle India's exports without anyone realizing what is happening. Similarly, India should also manage harmful imports through the establishment of NTBs.**
- Diversify India's export basket with emphasis on manufactured goods, services, resolution of market access issues and other non-tariff barriers.

ILO REPORT ON WOMEN IN BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT

In News

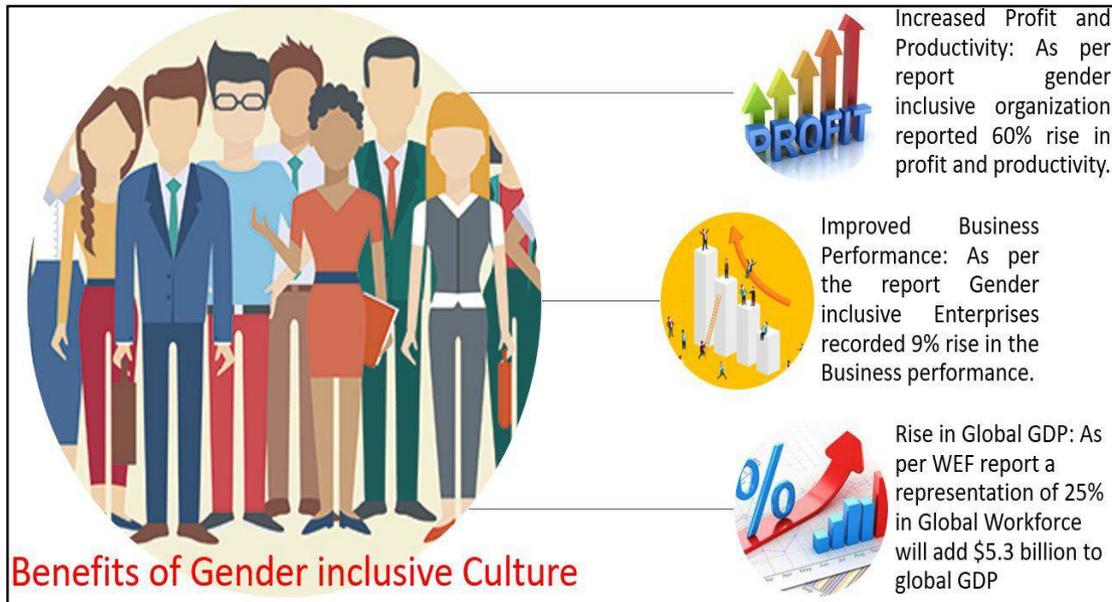
The International Labour Organization (ILO) had released its second global report, **titled Women in Business and Management: The business case for change.**

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Crucial findings

- In order to reap the benefits of **gender diversity at least 30 percent of employees must be women in any enterprise.**
- Near about half of the surveyed enterprises reported women holding less than 30 percent of entry-level management positions.
- Fewer than **30 percent of senior managers and top executives are women in 60 percent of the companies surveyed.**
- Across the world, men are still more likely to participate in the labor market than women.
- The average global labor force participation rate of women in 2018 stood at 48.5 percent, while that of men **was 75 percent. This equates to a 26.5 percentage point gender gap in labor force participation.**

- Just for Asia and the Pacific, the average female labor force participation rate has declined from **52.9 in 1991 to 45.3 percent in 2018, dropping by 7.6 percentage points.**



Benefits of Gender Inclusive Culture

- Increased Profit and Productivity:** As per report gender inclusive organization reported 60% rise in profit and productivity.
- Improved Business Performance:** As per the report Gender inclusive Enterprises recorded 9% rise in the Business performance.
- Rise in Global GDP:** As per WEF report a representation of 25% in Global Workforce will add \$5.3 billion to global GDP

Impedance in India

- The gender pay gap in India **stands at 34 percent.**
- Women **professionals even in the highest ranks of labor (legislators, senior officials, and managers) are also paid less compared to their male counterparts.**
- **Large pay gaps in terms of average daily wages exist in male and female wage rates of casual and regular workers in rural and urban areas and the gap is narrower for regular workers in urban areas.** On the other hand, for casual workers, the wage gap is narrower in rural areas.
- **While inequality in jobs has increased, inequality in education has decreased between boys and girls. But this situation further exacerbates the crisis in jobs when it comes to women.** Even as girls frequently outperform boys in school examinations, **they are not finding suitable jobs for the skills that they have.**
- **Women’s labor force participation in India is one of the lowest in the world. Women comprise half of the Indian population but make up less than a quarter of the labor force.** Three in four Indian women do not work in the country.
- **While both men and women are diversifying out of agriculture, almost 75 percent of rural women are still engaged in it.** A patriarchal ideology and local socio-cultural traditions confine women to the village where agriculture continues to be their most important (but insufficient) source of food and income. **Male outmigration has also pushed women into taking on more responsibility for own cultivation** and to perform wage labor to ensure households’ daily survival.

Way-Forward

- The **problem of skill shortage (especially the advent of Industrial revolution 4.0) can be solved with the increased participation of women in the workforce.**
- For **sustainable growth, a genuine gender diversity must be made a part of business strategy.**
- Representative business organizations and employer and business membership organizations **must take the lead, promoting both effective policies and genuine implementation.**

PEPPER IT WITH
World Employment and Social Outlook Report, Global Wage Report, Global Social Protection Report

- The focus must be on **imparting vocational training and increasing apprenticeship avenues which can build a strong linkage towards** considering technology linked training and employment options.
- There is a need to **empower women through quality education and re-skilling.**

BIMSTEC

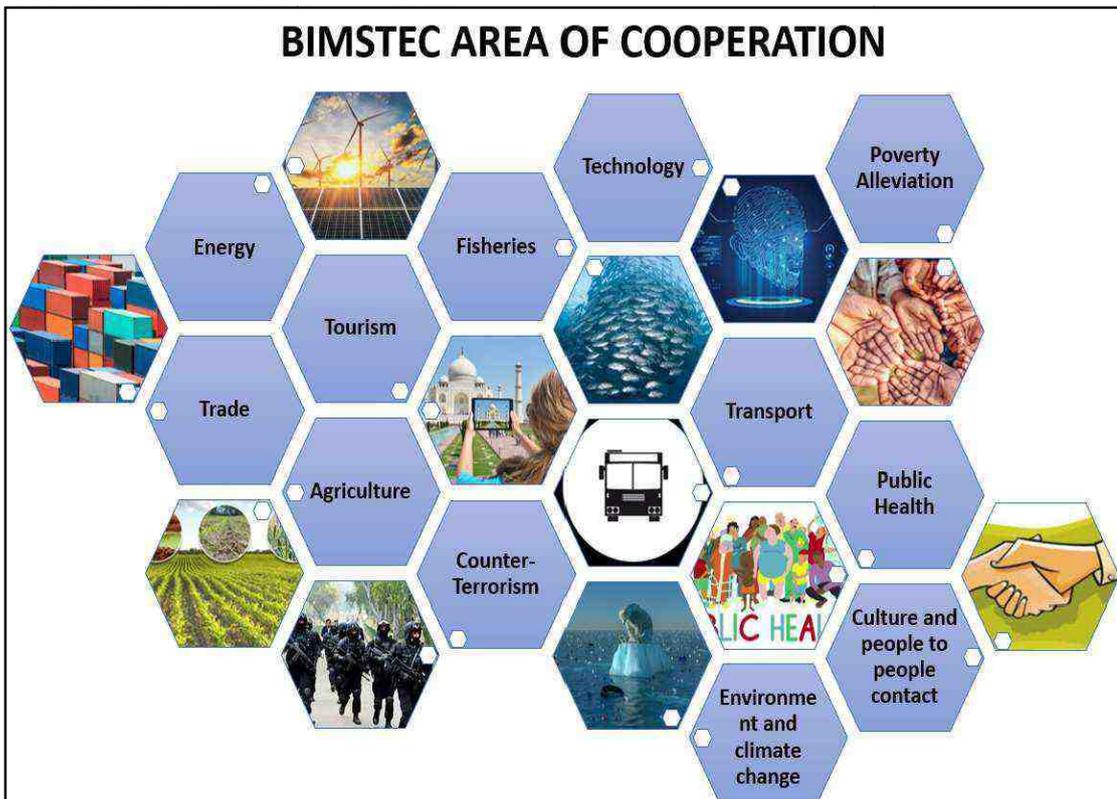
In News

India invited all the heads of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) in the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi held in the RashtrapatiBhavan.

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About BIMSTEC

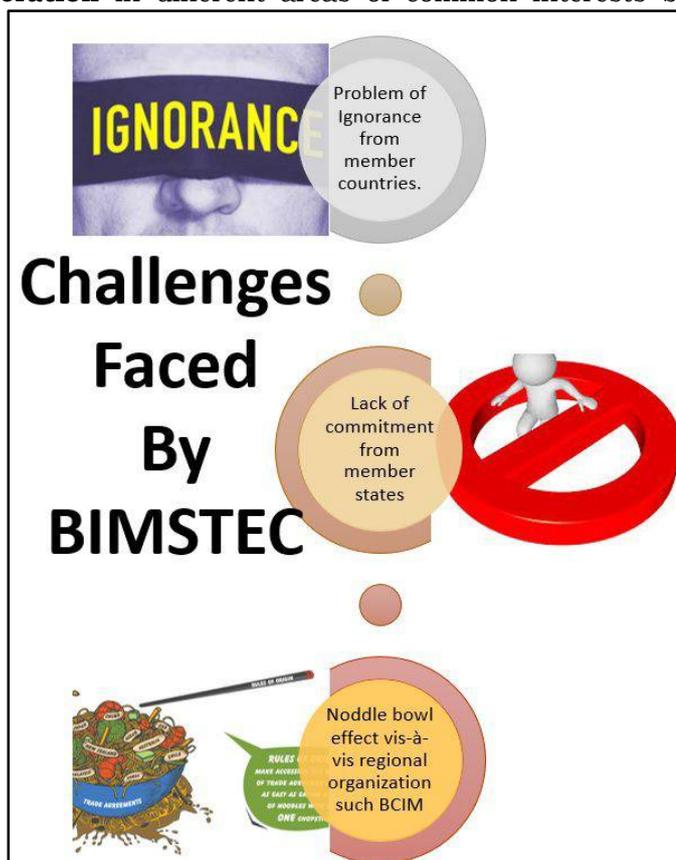
- It began its journey as **BIST-EC'** (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation)
- With the Inclusion of Myanmar in 1997, the Group was **renamed 'BIMST-EC'** (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- The organization in its present form came into being on 6 June 1997 through **the Bangkok Declaration.**
- It is a regional organization comprising **seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.**
- It constitutes seven Member States: five deriving from South Asia, **including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand. Its permanent Secretariat is located in Dhaka.**



- The objective of building **such an alliance was to harness shared and accelerated growth through mutual cooperation** in different areas of common interests by mitigating the onslaught of **globalization and by utilizing regional resources and geographical advantages.**
- The BIMSTEC States has **signed a Free Trade Agreement (2004) and a Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking (2009).**

Significance of BIMSTEC for India

- It brings **together 1.5 billion people or 21% of the world population** and a combined gross domestic **product (GDP) of over \$2.5 trillion.**
- It provides India with the opportunity to **enhance its neighborhood policy without being subjected to Pakistan conundrum as India faces in SAARC.**



- BIMSTEC relations play a key role in **enhancing India’s Act East Policy.**
- BIMSTEC Connectivity projects could transform the movement **of goods and vehicles through the countries in the grouping.** Such as **the Kaladan Multimodal project, Asian Trilateral Highway.**
- It can potentially allow **India to break through the straitjacket of traditional confines of South Asia and leverage its Bay of Bengal identity** to link up with the wider Southeast Asia.
- There is a **new South Asia growing where India’s clout in the region is constantly challenged by rising China.** As State identity in South Asia often gets linked to oppositional politics vis-a-vis India, **BIMSTEC becomes the point where India and its neighbors can have a stake in each other’s success.**

PEPPER IT WITH
BCIM, BBIN Corridor,
SAARC

Way Forward

There are a few areas where BIMSTEC needs to improve:

- ✓ It should work through a **bottom-up rather than a top-down approach.**
- ✓ It should enhance **people-to-people contacts** where it lags behind ASEAN.
- ✓ It should focus on **fewer priority areas for the purpose of better implementation.**
- ✓ It should undertake projects that are **economically feasible and result-driven in order to enhance its credibility.**
- ✓ It should build on the **regional synergies and work towards utilizing the available resources** in the most optimal manner.

US ‘Global Health Security Strategy’

In News

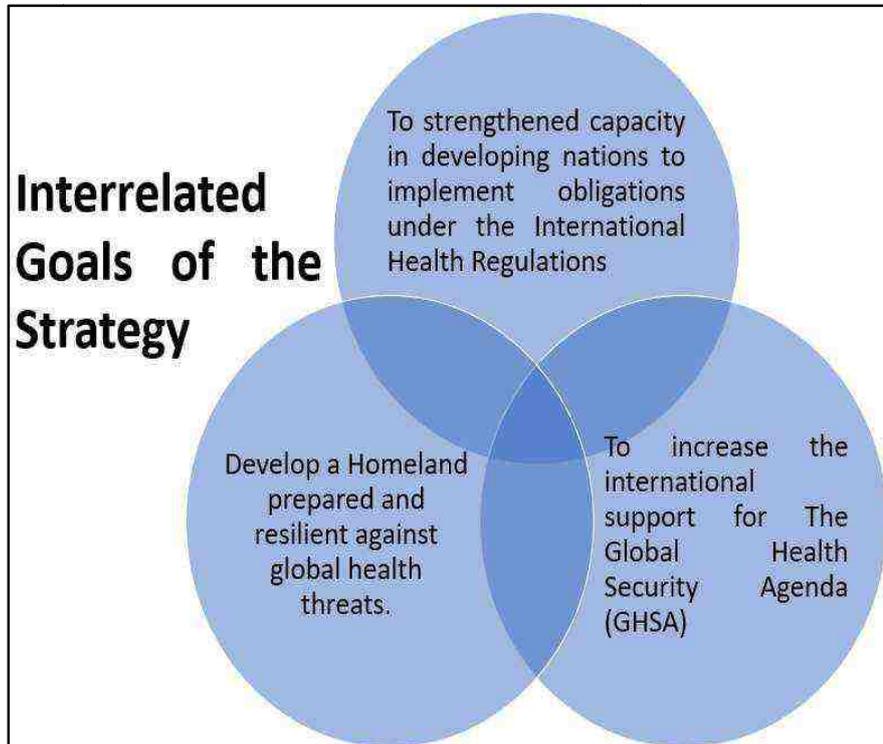
The US had announced a ‘Global Health Security Strategy’, that will help to Detect and Respond to Health security threats globally. The effort which outlines a coordinated US approach to help improve the world’s ability in stopping deadly outbreaks even before they spread between countries.

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About the Strategy

- It is a first of its kind strategy that seeks to detect, prevent, and respond to threats from various infectious diseases occurring naturally or accidentally.
- It defines the actions that the US administration will undertake by adopting a whole-of-government approach to health security.
- The Strategy precisely identifies fighting biological threats and pandemics as a central component of the US’s national security. It treats Biological threats (like infectious disease outbreaks) as a national security priority.
- The United States will continue to make investments in funding to select country partners focused on the priority global-health security risks that will be milestone-driven and time-limited.

Interrelated Goals of the Strategy



Significance

- Recent outbreaks of epidemics such as Ebola, Zika and yellow fever, etc. around the world exposed the majority of the population to dangerous pathogens. These challenges required sustained, multi-sectoral and coordinated approach.
- With this new Strategy, the United States reaffirms its steadfast support for building global and country-level health-security capacities so that we all are better protected against existing and emerging infectious disease threats.

PEPPER IT WITH
ICD-11, Health Care in India Vision 2020, Nipah Virus

International Religious Freedom 2019 Report

In News

United States Commission has released its International Religious Freedom 2019 report.

About Report

- **US Commission on International Religious Freedom is a bipartisan, independent federal government commission, created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.**

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- It is released annually and recommends to the State Department for designation of countries as **countries of particular concern (CPCs) for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, egregious violations**.
- It also **recommends to the State Department that non-state actors cited for similarly severe violations be designated as entities of particular concern (EPCs)**.
- In **2019, it has recommended 16 countries for CPC designation and five entities for EPC designation**.
- It **placed 12 countries on its Tier 2 list, meaning the violations meet one or two, but not all three, of the elements of the systematic, ongoing, egregious test for CPC status**.

Important Findings

- The 16 countries **USCIRF recommended for CPC designation include 10 that the State Department so designated in November 2018 – Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan – as well as six others that the State Department has not designated – Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, Russia, Syria, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam**.
- The 12 countries on **USCIRF’s Tier 2 list are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia, and Turkey**.
- The five entities recommended for **EPC designation include the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Taliban in Afghanistan, al-Shabab in Somalia, and new to the list this year, the Houthis in Yemen and Hay’atTahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria**.

India Specific results

- India saw an **“overall deterioration of religious freedom conditions in 2018”**.
- India continues to remain a Tier II country. It is on the same list since 2009. Tier II countries **are those in which violations engaged in or tolerated by the government are serious and characterized by at least one of the elements of systematic, ongoing, and egregious (horrible)’**.
- India is facing declining religious freedom, apart from increased securitization and politicization of religion.
- It is **increasingly becoming difficult to separate religion and politics. It is a tactic which is sometimes intended by those who seek to discriminate against certain religious communities**.
- Over the last decade minority’s conditions have deteriorated in the country. The reason is attributed to extremist groups, **anti-conversion laws, cow-protection groups, mob lynching, concerns that millions from Assam will be incorrectly left out of NRC (National Register of Citizen) and a denying international NGOs registration**.

World Press Freedom Prize

In News

Reuters reporters Wa Lone and KyawSoeOo are set to receive 2019 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize.

About Prize

- It was created in 1997.
- It **honors a person, organization or institution that has made an outstanding contribution to the defense and, or promotion of press freedom** anywhere in the world, and especially when this has been achieved in the face of danger.
- It **was established on the initiative of UNESCO's Executive Board and is formally conferred by the Director-General of the Organization**, on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May.

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- It is named in honor of Guillermo Cano Isaza, a Colombian journalist who was assassinated in front of the offices of his newspaper El Espectador in Bogotá, Colombia on 17 December 1986.

Pacific Decadal Oscillation

In News

Northeast India has been experiencing a rapid drying, especially in the last 30 years. Some places which used to get as high as 3,000 mm of rain during the monsoon season have seen a drop of about 25-30%.

There has been regular study to understand that the pattern is due to anthropogenic activity or is it a part of natural changes. In a recent publication, it has been shown that the decreasing monsoon rainfall is associated with natural changes in the subtropical Pacific Ocean.

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Details

- Changes in the **Pacific decadal oscillation (PDO)** — a pattern of fluctuations in the ocean, particularly over the north Pacific basin — are mainly associated with this declined rainfall.
- Just like **El Nino/La Nina** in the tropical Pacific, PDO has a signature for a longer time (on the decadal scale) in the sea surface temperatures and its interaction with the atmosphere, which in turn affects the northeast Indian summer monsoon.
- Policymakers should take these long-term predictions into account while planning construction of dams, power plants, etc. to prevent loss of property.

PEPPER IT WITH
NCEI PDO index, ENSO, Rainwater Harvesting pits, Pre-monsoon rainfall

Pacific Decadal Oscillation

- The Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) is often described **as a long-lived El Niño-like pattern of Pacific climate variability**. As seen with the better-known El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO), extremes in the PDO pattern are marked by widespread variations in the Pacific Basin and the North American climate.
- In parallel with the ENSO phenomenon, the extreme phases of the PDO have been classified as being either warm or cool, **as defined by ocean temperature anomalies** in the northeast and tropical Pacific Ocean.
- When sea surface temperature (SSTs) are anomalously cool in the interior North Pacific and warm along the Pacific Coast, and when sea level pressures are below average over the North Pacific, the PDO has a positive value.
- When the climate anomaly patterns are reversed, with warm SST anomalies in the interior and cool SST anomalies along the North American coast, or above average sea level pressures over the North Pacific, the PDO has a negative value.

Room for the river project

Why in News?

Kerala government is planning to incorporate the **'Room for the River Project 'model in the state's 'Rebuild Kerala' plan**. Last year, Kerala had witnessed the century's worst floods, which claimed many lives and wiped out thousands of homes.

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About Room for River Project

- It is a flagship project of the **Dutch government** and is centered on protecting areas adjoining rivers from routine flooding and improving water management systems in delta regions.

PEPPER IT WITH
Groyne, Dykes, Swarga Thoda

- The Netherlands has historically been prone to flooding of rivers due to its low elevation. Much of the country lies below the sea level. The country is located in the delta region of several major rivers like the Rhine, the Meuse and the Scheldt.
- The rise of water levels in the sea and rivers due to the effects of climate change is one of the major challenges facing the Dutch. But over the years, the country’s expert water management techniques and creation of independent local government bodies for flood control have borne praise across the world.
- The basic premise of the ‘Room for the River’ project is essentially to provide **more space for the water body so that it can manage extraordinary high water levels during floods**. The project involves tailor-made solutions for each river.
- Among the nine measures which define the project are lowering the flood plain, deepening the summer bed, strengthening of dykes, relocation of **dykes**, reducing the height of the **groynes**, increasing the depth of the side channels and removing obstacles.
- A key aspect of the project is also to improve the surroundings of the river banks through fountains and panoramic decks. The landscapes are altered in a way that they turn into natural sponges which can accommodate excess water during floods.

Relevance for Kerala

Kerala government believes that the project and its foundational ideals can be replicated in Kuttanad, the state’s rice bowl located below the sea-level. In the floods last year, Kuttanad and adjoining regions in Kottayam and Alappuzha districts remained submerged for weeks. Since the major rivers in the state empty out into Kuttanad, there’s a need for long-term comprehensive solutions on the lines of the Dutch project to prevent flooding in the region.

Fall Armyworm

Why in News?

Fall Armyworm (FAW), an insect indigenous to the Americas, has been spreading across the globe harming crops. It migrated to Africa in 2016 and India in June 2018. It has also spread to neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Southern parts of China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh.

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About Fall Armyworm

- This lepidopteran pest feeds in large numbers on leaves and stems of more than 80 plant species causing major damage to economically important **cultivated crops and grasses such as maize, rice, sorghum and sugarcane, vegetable crops and cotton**. America addressed the problem by introducing BT Maize.
- It lays eggs on plants on which larvae hatch and start feeding on the leaves and stems destroying them in the process. The female moth is a strong flyer and can cover 100km in one night.
- FAW is an invasive and damaging pest endemic that is spreading across Asia and Africa **particularly targeting maize**. It is anticipated that FAW will have long term effects on crop yields, food supplies, livelihoods, trade and threaten the resilience of chronically vulnerable population.
- In just nine months since Fall Armyworm was spotted in India in Karnataka in last June, it has invaded crops in more than 10 states. As if taking a pre-scripted route, Fall



Armyworm infestation has spread from Karnataka to all southern states, then to western Maharashtra and Gujarat and now to the eastern Indian states.

Impacts

- The impact of up to 2 cm long pest FAW is so intense that in one year, i.e 2017-18, it has damaged 20-25% crop yield worth \$3.5 billion to 5 billion in about 40 African countries.
- For the first time, **India has imported 5 million tonnes maize** and it is suspected that the impact of FAW might be one of the reasons for that.
- Maize is the **third-most important cereal crop in India** after rice and wheat. It accounts for 9 per cent of the total food grain production in the country. Maize farmers will be the worst hit by FAW.

Steps Taken

Four major organisations — USAID, International Crops Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) and Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) — have joined hands to prepare strategy to address the issue.

Recently a workshop on **FAW Management in Asia was also held** at ICRISAT where the need for an international collaboration to protect interests of the farmers and for food security in effectively tackling FAW was emphasised.

PEPPER IT WITH
Entomologist, World Environment Day, Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI)

Way forward

The agricultural research community has been working intensively to take on and inspect pest FAW and it is one of the biggest challenges facing farmers across Africa and Asia. We need innovative approaches, cutting-edge science and regional co-operation to fight this battle together. We also need private players to play key role with productive collaboration.

UNEP report on sand and sustainability

In News

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released the report- **Sand and Sustainability: Finding new solutions for environmental governance of global sand resources**, which highlights a problem that has largely stayed under the radar: sand consumption globally has been increasing and we are extracting it at rates exceeding natural replenishment rates.

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Highlights of the Report

- According to the report, **Sand and gravel are the second largest natural resources extracted** and traded by volume after water, but among the least regulated.
- It further says that we must acknowledge that this is **“one of the major sustainability challenges of the century,”** it says, and we must answer complex questions on how we reduce demand to responsible levels and stop environmentally damaging practices to protect sensitive ecosystems and meet biodiversity conservation goals.
- It presents how shifting consumption patterns, growing populations, increasing urbanization and infrastructure development have increased demand for sand three-fold over the last two decades. Further to this, damming and extraction have reduced sediment delivery from rivers to many coastal areas, leading to reduced deposits in river deltas and accelerated beach erosion.

Issues

- With **sand extraction regulated differently around the world**, important regions for biodiversity and ecosystems are made more vulnerable by challenges in the local implementation of these regulations.
- A growing trend of unsustainable and illegal extraction in marine, coastal and freshwater ecosystems makes this a sustainability challenge with a display of the various extraction impacts on terrestrial, riverine and marine environments.

- Sand extraction is fast becoming a **transboundary issue** due to sand extraction bans, international sourcing of sand for land reclamation projects and impacts of uncontrolled sand extraction beyond national borders.
- International trade in sand and gravel is growing due to high demand in regions without local sand and gravel resources and is forecast to rise 5.5 per cent a year with urbanization and infrastructure development trends.
- Unsustainable sand extraction does not only impact the environment but can also have far-reaching social implications. Sand removal from beaches can jeopardize the development of the local tourism industry, while removing sand from rivers and mangrove forests leads to a decrease of crab populations—negatively affecting people (especially women) whose livelihood depends on the collection of crabs.

Ecological damage

- ✓ Sand is created by **slow geological processes, and its distribution is not even**. Desert sand, available in plenty, is not suited for construction **use because it is wind-smoothed, and therefore non-adherent**.
- ✓ While 85% to 90% of global sand demand is met from quarries, and sand and gravel pits, the 10% to 15% extracted from rivers and sea shores is a severe concern due the environmental and social impacts.
- ✓ Their extraction often results in river and coastal erosion and threats to freshwater and marine fisheries and aquatic ecosystems, instability of river banks leading to increased flooding, and lowering of ground water levels.
- ✓ The report notes that **China and India head the list of critical hotspots for sand extraction impacts in rivers, lakes and on coastlines**.
- ✓ The **damming of rivers** for hydro-electricity production or irrigation is reducing the amount of sediment flowing downstream.
- ✓ There are also indirect consequences, like loss of local livelihoods — an ironic example is that construction in tourist destinations can lead to depletion of natural sand in the area, thereby making those very places unattractive — and safety risks for workers where the industry is not regulated.

A new Mineral Resource Governance Resolution was adopted, including call for actions on sustainable sand management at the United National Environment Assembly.

Sand is only a smaller part of the total demand for aggregates. **Aggregates are** crushed rock, gravel, sand, marine aggregates, recycled aggregates and manufactured aggregates.

What needs to be done?

- ✚ **Accountability** is something that needs to cross boundaries and borders, right down the value chain,” the report says
- ✚ The report suggests **better spatial planning and reducing unnecessary construction** — including speculative projects or those being done mainly for prestige.
- ✚ Among the **studies on recycled and alternative substitute materials** the report points to, are several from India, including oil palm shell, waste foundry sand, crushed tiles, granite powder, mine waste, bottom ash, and discarded rubber. It also cites the use in India of non-toxic municipal waste in road-building.
- ✚ We need to establish a dialogue based on transparency and accountability. Proper emphasis should be given awareness and governance.

PEPPER IT WITH
 European Commission Coordination Group on Biodiversity and Nature (CGBN), Environment Implementation Review, Bihar Sand Ban Issues

Way Forward

We are spending our **sand ‘budget’ faster than we can produce it responsibly**. By improving the governance of global sand resources, we can better manage this critical resource sustainably and truly demonstrate that infrastructure and nature can go hand in hand. Also, we need to establish dialogue based on transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

To meet demand in a world of 7.5 billion people without harming the environment, effective policy, planning, regulation and management will be needed. **Currently, sand extraction and use is defined by its local geography and governance context and does not have the same rules, practices and ethics worldwide.** The report aims to be a starting point from which a productive global conversation on sand extraction needs to begin.

To curb irresponsible and illegal extraction, the report suggests a customization of existing standards and best practices to national circumstances. It also points towards investing in sand production and consumption measurement, monitoring and planning, and further suggests establishing dialogue between key players and stakeholders in the sand value chain based on transparency and accountability.

According to report, India and China lead in global infrastructure construction.

According to 2017 figures, China produces close to two-thirds of the world's cement, an estimated 2.4 billion tonnes, with India coming in second at 270 million tonnes

White Throated Rail

Why in News?

The white-throated rail is the only flightless bird known in the Indian Ocean area. New research has found that it had once gone extinct, but rose from the dead thanks to a rare process called **“iterative evolution”**.

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Details

- The study, from the University of Portsmouth and the UK’s Natural History Museum found that on two occasions, separated by tens of thousands of years, a rail species was able to colonise an island called Aldabra and subsequently became flightless on both occasions. The last surviving colony is still found on the island.
- The white-throated rail is a chicken-sized bird, indigenous to Madagascar. Migrating to Aldabra, the rails evolved so that they lost the ability to fly. They lost the ability to fly over time, because the **lack of predators made it unnecessary.**
- However, Aldabra disappeared under the sea during an inundation event around 136,000 years ago. The researchers studied fossil evidence from 100,000 years ago when the island was recolonised by flightless rails, and compared with fossils from before the inundation event.
- They concluded that one species from **Madagascar** gave rise to two different species of flightless rail on Aldabra in the space of a few thousand years.

What is Iterative Evolution?

Iterative evolution happens when the same or similar structures evolve out of the same common ancestor, **but at different times** – meaning that the animal actually comes about twice over, completely separately.

PEPPER IT WITH

Dodo of Mauritius, Sabre toothed cat, Formosan clouded leopard, Pinta Island Tortoise, Palaeontological record

Rajaji Tiger Reserve

Why in News

The National Green Tribunal constituted a committee, drawing representatives from various departments including wildlife and PWD, to provide it a factual report on alleged illegal construction of a road for use by commercial vehicles in the **ecologically sensitive Rajaji Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand.**

A petition filed, said the road is being built in the tiger reserve without statutory clearances and requisite safeguards. The construction of the road may potentially damage the

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biological diversity and resources of the reserve.

Rajaji tiger reserve

- Rajaji was notified in 2015 as the 48th Tiger Reserve of India, and 2nd Tiger Reserve (1st is Jim Corbett) of Uttarakhand State.
- It was named after C. Rajagopalachari who was lovingly known as Rajaji, the **first Governor General of independent India**, as it was on his behest that the sanctuary was created.
- More than 50 species of mammals including the highly endangered Asian Elephant and Tiger are found in the Park. Besides tiger, leopard, Himalayan Black bear, sloth bear, Civet, Marten, Jackal, Hyena etc, it is estimated that there are more than 350 Asian elephants in the park. Goral (Mountain Goat) - a characteristic mammals of the lower Himalayas abound in the precipitous slopes of the Shivalik hills.
- Over 300 species of birds are reported from Rajaji National Park, making it an important birding area in the Country. Of these, about 90 species are migrants, which include Pochards, Gulls, Mallards, Teals and Shelducks that visit the water bodies of Bhimgora and Virbhadra Barrage and wetlands of river Ganga.

PEPPER IT WITH
Tiger translocation in Rajaji, Jim Corbett National Park, Valley of Flower, Shiwalikrange, Asian Elephants

Grizzled giant squirrel

Why in News?

For the first time, researchers have sighted nests of the grizzled giant squirrel, at **Pakkamalai Reserve Forests near Gingee in the Eastern Ghats**.

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The grizzled giant squirrel is usually known to nest in the Western Ghats in Southern India ranging **from Chinnar Wildlife sanctuary in Kerala to Anamalai Tiger Reserve and Palani hills in Tamil Nadu**.

Grizzled giant squirrel

- It is an endangered species **listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.
- Owing to habitat loss and poaching, the species has been categorised as near threatened by the Red List and listed under Schedule II of CITES.

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

In News

IPBES came out with Global Assessment. Compiled by 145 expert authors from 50 countries, the study is a cornerstone of an emerging body of research that suggests the world may need to embrace **a new “post-growth” form of economics if it is to avert the existential risks posed by the mutually-reinforcing consequences of pollution, habitat destruction and carbon emissions**.

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According to the report, only a wide-ranging transformation of the global economic and financial system could pull ecosystems that are vital to the future of human communities worldwide back from the brink of collapse. It was endorsed by 130 countries, including the U.S., Russia and China.

Highlights

- Relentless pursuit of economic growth, twinned with the impact of climate change, has put an “unprecedented” one million species at risk of extinction.
- Industrial farming and fishing were identified as major drivers with the current rate of species extinction tens to hundreds of times higher than the average over the last 10

million years.

- The report found that the average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900.
- The threatened list includes more than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef-forming corals, and more than a third of all marine mammals. The picture was less clear for insect species, but a tentative estimate suggests 10% are at risk of extinction.

Concerns

- Ecological economists have for years pointed to the extreme harm that humanity as a whole is courting by modifying terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems to suit immediate needs, such as raising agricultural and food output and extracting materials that aid ever-increasing consumption.
- Losses from pollution are usually not factored into claims of economic progress made by countries, but as the IPBES assessment points out, **marine plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980**, affecting at least 267 species, including 86% of marine turtles, 44% of seabirds and 43% of marine mammals.
- At the same time, about 9% of 6,190 domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture had gone extinct by 2016, and another 1,000 may disappear permanently.

PEPPER IT WITH
Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, Sustainable Development Goals

Way Forward

Viewed against a shrinking base of wild varieties of farmed plants and animals, all countries have cause for alarm. They are rapidly emptying their genetic resource kit. Reversing course is a dire necessity to stave off disaster. This can be done by incorporating biodiversity impacts into all economic activity, recognising that irreparably breaking the web of life will impoverish and endanger people everywhere.

Monkeypox

In News

Singapore has reported its first case of the rare **monkeypox virus brought in by a Nigerian man** who authorities said may have been infected by bushmeat he ate at a wedding.

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Details

- Monkeypox, a virus similar to the human smallpox **which was eradicated in 1980**, does not spread easily from person to person, but can in rare cases be fatal.
- Human monkeypox infections have only been documented three times outside of Africa, in the United States, the United Kingdom and Israel.
- Monkeypox typically lasts for two to four weeks, starting as a fever and headache and progressing through to small bumps called pustules that spread over the body.

Monkeypox

- It is a rare disease caused by a virus that is **primarily transmitted from animals to humans**. The virus occurs sporadically in the central and western parts of Africa's tropical rainforest.
- Since 1970, there have been reports of humans infected with monkeypox from 10 African countries. The disease is called monkeypox because it was first discovered in laboratory monkeys in 1958.
- Transmission of the virus usually occurs when a person comes into close contact with infected animals, such as rodents, through the hunting and consumption of bush meat.
- The spread of the virus occurs primarily via droplet respiratory particles, and usually requiring prolonged face-to-face contact.
- There are no specific treatments or vaccines available for monkeypox infection, but smallpox vaccination has proven to be 85 per cent effective in preventing the viral infection.

PEPPER IT WITH
Acute Encephalitis Syndrome, Hutchinson-Gilford Progeria, Cat Scratch Disease

UK Parliament declares climate change emergency

Why in News?

Britain's opposition Labour Party called for "real action" after parliament became the **first in the world to vote to declare a climate emergency**. The vote was taken following 11 days of protests organised by climate activists Extinction Rebellion that brought several London sites to a standstill.

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The UK are legally committed to a 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 (relative to their 1990 levels) and was recently recognised as one of just 18 developed economies that have driven down carbon dioxide emissions over the last decade.

What is a climate emergency?

While there is no precise definition of what constitutes action to meet such an emergency, the move has been likened to putting the country on a "war footing", with climate and the environment at the very centre of all government policy, rather than being on the fringe of political decisions.

The cost of inaction: Research in Australia has investigated the cost to the global economy if the Paris Agreement is not met and the world hits 4°C warmer. **The values are eye-watering:** an estimated \$23 trillion a year over the long-term. This has been likened to the world experiencing four to six global financial crises on the scale of 2008 every year.

PEPPER IT WITH

IPCC, Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, Documentary film Merchants of Doubt, UNFCCC, Paris agreement, Green climate fund

Way forward

We are now at a stage where we need major overhaul of our lifestyles and patterns of consumption. The U.K. Parliament became the first recently to declare a climate emergency. It remains to be seen if appropriate actions will follow this declaration.

Ongole breed cattle

In News

The globally popular Ongole cattle breed stands neglected in the country and hence should be protected and promoted, said vice president of India, while releasing a compendium on the animal at the **Swarna Bharat Trust in Vijayawada**.

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Ongole breed cattle

- Like most livestock breeds around the world, the Ongoles take their name from the region of their main breeding area - **the Ongole Taluka (Andhra Pradesh)**.
- The Ongoles are very fine and majestic-looking cattle, huge in size, extremely docile and suitable for steady, heavy draught.
- Their performance has been admirable under varying conditions and they are one of the most unique triple-purpose cattle of the tropics, serving well as draught, milk and meat animals.
- Brazil, which has imported these cattle and produced hybrid Ongoles, is earning huge revenue by exporting them. Unfortunately, India is not focusing enough attention on its own breed.
- It is known for its toughness, high milk yield, tolerance to tropical heat and disease resistance.

PEPPER IT WITH

Golden Lion Tamarin, Happy Eagle, Manatee

Meetings of the conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions

Why in News?

The **fourteenth meeting** of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention (BC COP-14), the **ninth meeting** of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention (RC COP-9) and the **ninth meeting**

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of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention (SC COP-9) were held back to back in Geneva.

The theme of the meetings was "**Clean Planet, Healthy People: Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste**".

Details

It adopted various decisions, including seven identical decisions for the three meetings on: international cooperation and coordination, cooperation between the joint Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention, the clearing-house mechanism for information exchange, synergies in preventing and combating illegal traffic and trade in hazardous chemicals and wastes, "**from science to action**", dates and venue of the next meetings of the conferences of the Parties and existing United Nations guidelines on the mobilization of resources from non-state actors.

Basel Convention

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal was adopted in 1989 by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Basel, Switzerland, in response to a public outcry following the discovery, in the 1980s, in Africa and other parts of the developing world of deposits of **toxic wastes imported from abroad**.

The provisions of the Convention center around the following principal aims:

- the reduction of hazardous waste generation and the promotion of environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes, wherever the place of disposal;
- the restriction of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes except where it is perceived to be in accordance with the principles of environmentally sound management; and
- a regulatory system applying to cases where transboundary movements are permissible.

Rotterdam Convention

The text of the Rotterdam Convention was adopted in 1998 by a Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The Convention entered into force in 2004.

The objectives of the Convention are:

- To promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among Parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment from potential harm;
- To contribute to the environmentally sound use of those hazardous chemicals, by facilitating information exchange about their characteristics, by providing for a national decision-making process on their import and export and by disseminating these decisions to Parties.

The Convention creates legally binding obligations for the implementation of the **Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure**. It built on the voluntary PIC procedure, initiated by UNEP and FAO in 1989 and ceased in 2006.

Stockholm Convention

- The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants was adopted by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries in 2001 in Stockholm, Sweden. The Convention entered into force in 2004.
- The Stockholm Convention **on Persistent Organic Pollutants is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that remain intact in the environment for long periods**, become widely distributed geographically, accumulate in the fatty tissue of humans and wildlife, and have harmful impacts on human health or on the environment.
- The Global Environmental Facility (GEF) is the designated interim financial mechanism for the Stockholm Convention.

PEPPER IT WITH
Global Environment Facility, Minamata Convention on Mercury, ILO Convention on Chemicals

‘Not all animals migrate by choice’ campaign

Why in News?

Ahead of the International Day of Biological Diversity celebrated on May 22, UN Environment India and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) of India launched an awareness campaign ‘Not all animals migrate by choice’ to be displayed at major airports across the country. In collaboration with the Airports Authority of India and GMR Group, the campaign will travel across 22 airports across India over the next year.

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Details

In the first phase of the campaign, Tiger, Pangolin, Star Tortoise and Tokay Gecko have been chosen as they are **highly endangered due to illegal trading in International markets**. Tiger is traded for its skin, bones and body parts; **Pangolin, the most illegally traded wild mammal on the planet is trafficked for its meat and its scales are used in traditional medicines**; Star Tortoise for meat and pet trade and Tokay Gecko in traditional medicine mostly into South East Asia and particularly Chinese Markets. Phase two will see more threatened species and explore other routes of trafficking.

Significance

Illegal wildlife trade is driving species to the brink of extinction. A thriving industry with organized wildlife crime chains spreading across the world, in India, illegal trade in wildlife has seen a sharp rise. The campaign ‘Not all animals migrate by choice’ aims at creating awareness and garnering public support for the protection and conservation of wildlife, prevention of smuggling and reduction in demand for wildlife products. The campaign also complements worldwide action on illegal trade in wildlife through **UN Environment’s global campaign, Wild for Life**.

Wildlife Crime Control Bureau

It is a **statutory multi-disciplinary body established by the Government of India** under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.

PEPPER IT WITH
Pangolin, NTCA, CITES, AAI, UN Environment, UNEP, UNDP

Under **Section 38 (Z)** of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, it is mandated to

- Collect and collate intelligence related to organized wildlife crime activities and to disseminate the same to State and other enforcement agencies for immediate action so as to apprehend the criminals; to establish a centralized wildlife crime data bank
- Co-ordinate actions by various agencies in connection with the enforcement of the provisions of the Act; assist foreign authorities and international organization concerned to facilitate co-ordination and universal action for wildlife crime control
- Capacity building of the wildlife crime enforcement agencies for scientific and professional investigation into wildlife crimes and assist State Governments to ensure success in prosecutions related to wildlife crimes
- Advise the Government of India on issues relating to wildlife crimes having national and international ramifications, relevant policy and laws. It also assists and advises the Customs authorities in inspection of the consignments of flora & fauna as per the provisions of **Wild Life Protection Act, CITES and EXIM Policy** governing such an item.

Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)

Why in News?

India is unanimously chosen as **co-chair of the Consultative Group (CG) of Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)** for the fiscal year 2020. The decision was taken during the CG meeting of GFDRR held in Geneva, Switzerland, on the margins of the 6th Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) 2019.

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Background

India became member of CG of GFDRR in 2015 and expressed its interest to co-chair in last

meeting of CG held in October 2018. India's candidature was backed by its **consistent progress in disaster risk reduction (DRR)** in the country and its initiative to form a coalition on disaster resilient infrastructure.

GFDRR

GFDRR is a global partnership that helps **developing countries better understand and reduce their vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change**. GFDRR is a grant-funding mechanism, **managed by the World Bank** that supports disaster risk management projects worldwide. It is presently working on the ground with over 400 local, national, regional, and international partners and provides knowledge, funding, and technical assistance.

PEPPER IT WITH

UNISDR, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, New Delhi declaration on disaster risk reduction

UN-Habitat Assembly

Why in News?

India has been elected to the Executive Board of the first UN-Habitat Assembly. The first session of the **UN-Habitat Assembly** was held at the headquarters of UN-Habitat in Nairobi.

The special theme for the UN-Habitat Assembly was "**Innovation for Better Quality of Life in Cities and Communities**".

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UN-Habitat

- It is the United Nations programme working towards a better urban future. Its mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all.
- **Mandated by the UN General Assembly in 1978** to address the issues of urban growth, it is a knowledgeable institution on urban development processes, and understands the aspirations of cities and their residents.
- UN-Habitat has been working in human settlements throughout the world, focusing on building a brighter future for villages, towns, and cities of all sizes. Because of these four decades of extensive experience, from the highest levels of policy to a range of specific technical issues, UN-Habitat has gained a unique and a universally acknowledged expertise in all things urban.

CFC-11 use by China and violation of the Montreal Protocol

In News

China has been illegally emitting **Trichlorofluoromethane or CFC-11 which are the banned ozone-depleting chemical**. This has been found in the research published in the journal Nature recently.

Use of CFC in China

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- China has the **world's largest polyurethane foam market, accounting for about 40 percent of the world's consumption**.
- Chinese foam manufacturers have been **using CFC-11 illegally to save on the higher cost of alternatives, such as hydrochlorofluorocarbons like HCFC-141b, which is to be phased out in China by 2026**.
- CFC-11 was phased out under the 1987 Montreal Protocol. **Despite being the signatory to the Montreal Protocol, and agreeing to phase out production of CFC-11 in 2010, China continued to emit the polluting gas**.
- Emissions of CFC-11 were on the rise since 2013. In fact, the emissions increased by 25 percent since 2012. **Between 2008 and 2012, eastern China emitted an average of about 6,400 metric tonnes of CFC-11 per year. That number increased to about 13,400 metric tonnes per year from 2014 to 2017**.

The necessity of CFC Ban

- The ozone layer absorbs most of the Sun’s ultraviolet light which is harmful to human life and other life forms. **The layer absorbs about 97 to 99% of ultraviolet rays and maintains the ozone-oxygen cycle.**
- Dobson unit is a unit which is used to measure the ozone in the atmosphere at standard temperature and pressure.
- The **hole in the ozone is on the path to recovery according to the World Meteorological Organization’s (WMO’s) assessment.**
- Reduction in the atmospheric concentration of CFC-11 has made the second-largest contribution to the decline in the total atmospheric concentration of ozone-depleting chlorine since the 1990s.
- **But this gas still contributes one-quarter of all chlorine reaching the stratosphere, and timely recovery of the stratospheric ozone layer depends on a sustained decline in CFC-11 concentrations.**
- The continued success of the Montreal Protocol in protecting stratospheric ozone depends on continued compliance and China must adhere to it.

About the Montreal protocol

- ✓ The **Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was designed to reduce the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances in order to reduce their abundance** in the atmosphere and thereby protect the earth’s fragile ozone Layer. The original Montreal Protocol was agreed on 16 September 1987 and entered into force on 1 January 1989.
- ✓ The **Montreal Protocol includes a unique adjustment provision that enables the Parties to the Protocol to respond quickly to new scientific information and agree to accelerate** the reductions required on chemicals already covered by the Protocol. These adjustments are then automatically applicable to all countries that ratified the Protocol.
- ✓ **Montreal Protocol stipulates that the production and consumption of compounds that deplete ozone in the stratosphere-chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), halons, carbon tetrachloride, and methyl chloroform-are to be phased out by 2000** (2005 for methyl chloroform). These compounds significantly deplete the stratospheric ozone layer that shields the planet from damaging UV-B radiation.

PEPPER IT WITH
 Basel Convention, Rotterdam Convention, Stockholm Convention, Nagoya Protocol

CRISPER and Anti-Dote

In News

CRISPER(Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats)gene-editing technology has been used to create an antidote to world most venomous sting belonging to a species of box jellyfish.

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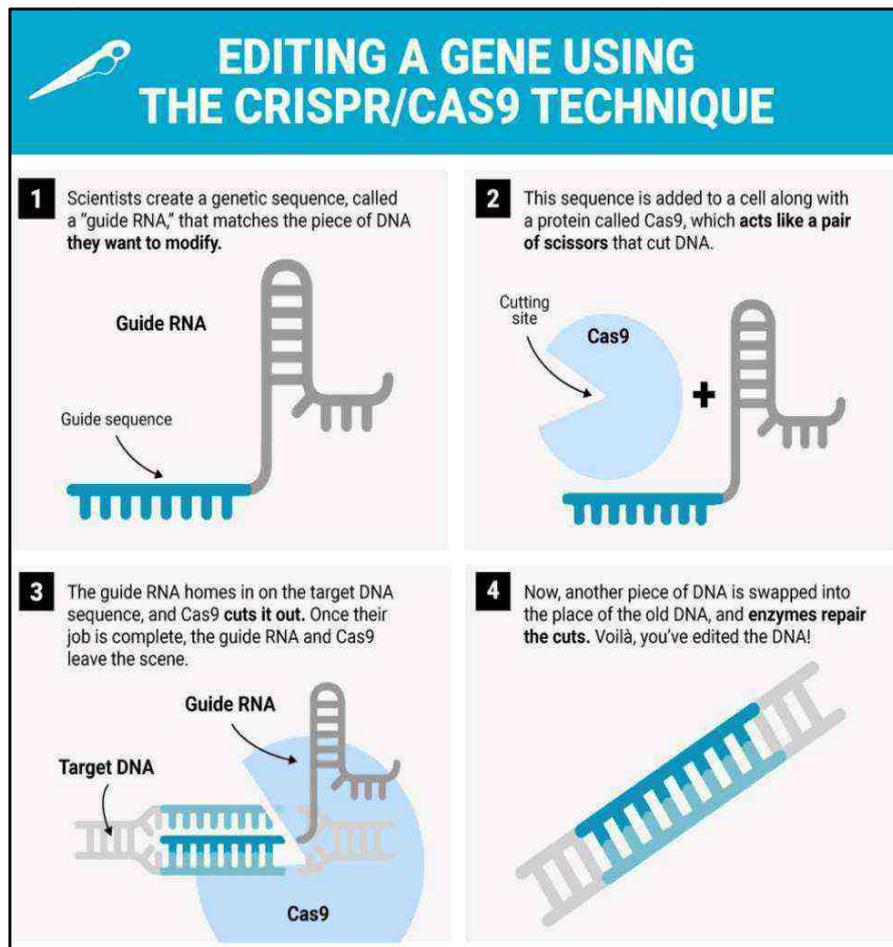
About Box jellyfish

- These are common to waters of **Australia and Asia.**
- Owing to their **transparency** they are **hard to spot.**
- Their tentacles produce a toxin called nematocysts, which raises the blood pressure of its victims to a dangerous level if left unattended for 20 mins or more.
- *Chironexfleckeri* is among the deadliest box jellyfish species, with an explosive sting that causes **cardiac arrest in human.**

An antidote to the venom of Box jellyfish

- The Antidote made using CRISPER technology pulls **out the cholesterol out of the cell membrane** which is required by the venom to exert its effect.

- In order to achieve this, human DNA is modified by turning a **set of four genes off, which shuts the pathway the body uses to regulate cholesterol.** This renders jellyfish venom ineffective.
- Interestingly, there are some **cholesterol drugs** (For e.g. Cyclodextrin) which are effective against the venom too, **for up to 15 minutes after a poisonous sting.**



Issues with CRISPER

- Even beyond Side-Effects"**

 - ✓ Large DNA deletions far from the intended editing sites.
 - ✓ Unintended mutations may lead to **unpredictable health consequences.**
 - ✓ A dysfunctional CRISPER associated protein **may cause cancer rather than protecting from it.**
- The Ethical dilemma**

 - ✓ In the absence of any clinical trial data as well as consensus to use this tool to prevent HIV infection, **performing it on babies as a form of medical intervention is unethical.**

PEPPER IT WITH
Gene Therapy, Stem Cell, Endonuclease

Lecanorchistaiwaniana

In News

In Assam, forest officials have discovered India's **one of smallest orchids in terms of size and duration of bloom** to be recorded botanically.

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About

- Lecanorchistaiwaniana* was earlier found in Japan, Taiwan, and Laos.
- It has a maximum height of 40 cm and a blossoming period of five-six days.
- It is a **variant of a Japanese orchid.**

The Insulin Plant
Costus pictus found in India is a medicinal plant. **Its extract improves insulin sensitivity.** It also has therapeutic potential to restore thyroid hormone levels and prevent the biochemical complications.

- o Lecanorchistaiwaniana is a **myco-heterotroph** which are the parasitic plants that have abandoned photosynthesis.

Significance

Lecanorchistaiwaniana adds to the orchid wealth of northeast India, which has 800 of some 1,300 species in the country. About 300 species are found in the Western Ghats and 200 in the north-western Himalayas.

Anti-Cancer Plant
Ophiorrhizamungosis used in treating cancer because of the **alkaloid Camptothecin** present in it.

PEPPER IT WITH
 Amomumpratisthana, Smilax sailenii, Indian snake root

New Definition of Kilogram

In News

The **International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM)** recently agreed to change the definition of the kilogram. It has now joined other **SI units such as second, meter, ampere, Kelvin, mole and Candela** and will no longer be compared with physical objects as standards of reference.

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Why Change?

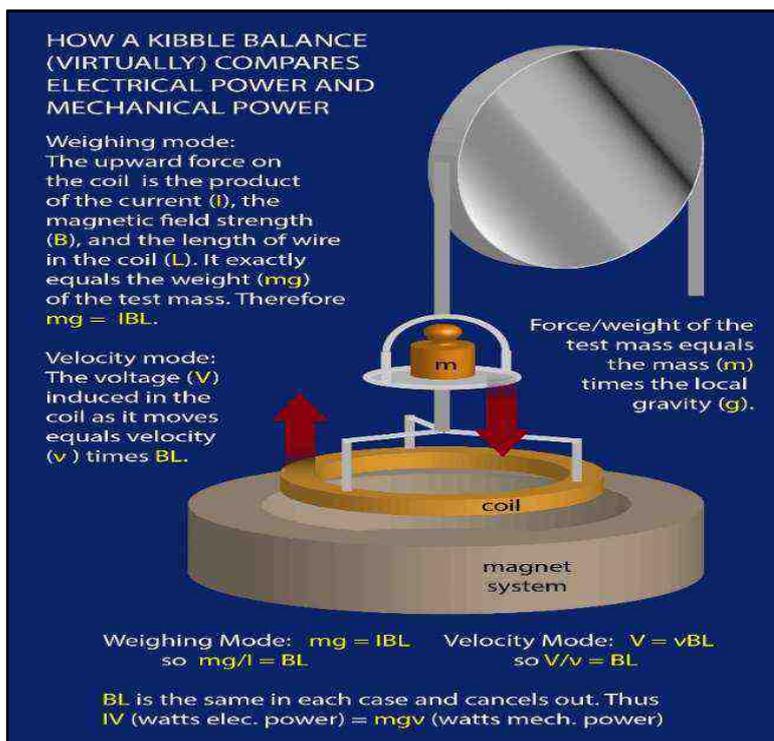
- Since 1889, it was based on **Le Grand K** which is defined by the weight of a **platinum-iridium cylinder**.
- The problem with LE Grand K is that its fluctuation is **about 50 parts a billion**. Though it is **negligible** in terms of weight, it would have larger consequences.
- Further, prototype kilogram doesn't always weigh the same is affected by the atmosphere and **sometimes needs a wash which can change its mass**. This would have a significant impact on the many areas such as **drug development, nanotechnology, and precision engineering**.
- In this system relating **small masses to large masses** by subdivision becomes very difficult.

The seven defining constants of the SI (International System of Units) are:

- ❖ The caesium hyperfine **frequency Delta nuCs**.
- ❖ The **speed of light in vacuum c**.
- ❖ The **Planck constant h**.
- ❖ The **elementary charge e**.
- ❖ The **Boltzmann constant k**.
- ❖ The **Avogadro constant NA**.
- ❖ The luminous efficacy of a defined **visible radiation Kcd**.

Planck Constant

- Max Planck postulated that **electromagnetic energy at a given frequency** could only be emitted in discrete amounts, **or quanta, whose energy is proportional to h**, which is known as the Planck constant.



- Measuring Planck Constant is difficult as it **is an incredibly small number**.
- To overcome this challenge Kibble balance was developed by Dr. Ryan Kibble.
- By measuring the current running through the electromagnet to incredible precision, the **researchers are able to calculate h to an accuracy of 0.000001%**. This breakthrough has paved the way for Le Grand K to be deposed by **“die Kleine h”**.

New Methodology

- Now a kilogram will be **defined by a fundamental value called the Planck constant**.
- It uses an apparatus known as the Kibble balance, which makes use of the constant to measure the mass of an object using a **precisely measured electromagnetic force**.
- The Electromagnetic force lifts the object on the **kibble balance and the pull of the electromagnet directly** related to the amount of electrical current going through its coils.

Manav: Human Atlas Initiative

In News

Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has launched MANAV: Human Atlas Initiative, towards improving knowledge on human physiology.

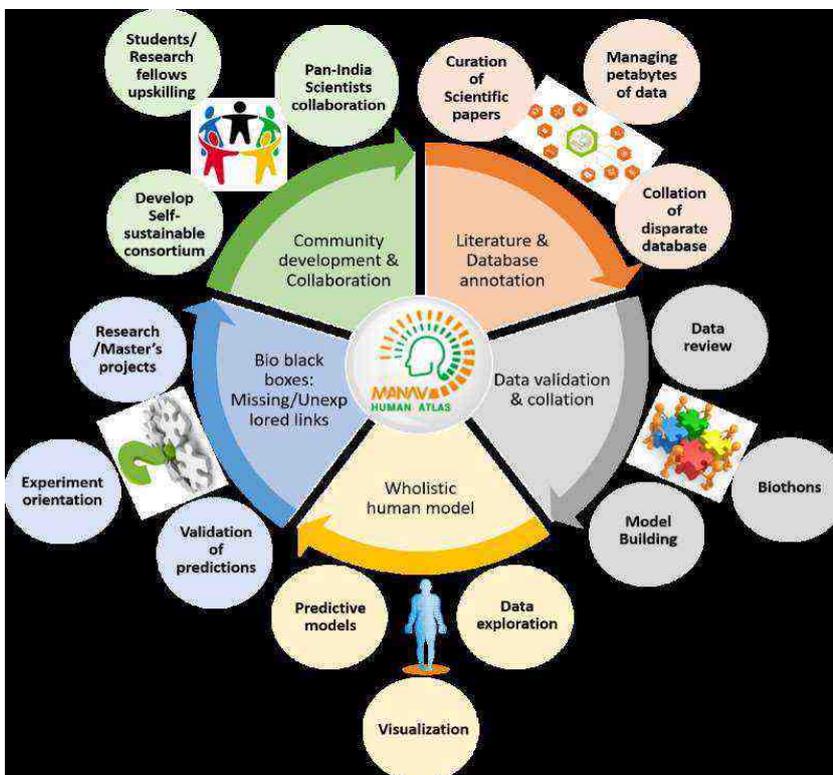
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About Manav

- It aims at creating a database network of all tissues in the human body from the available scientific literature.
- National Centre for Cell Science (NCCS) and Indian Institute of Science, Education, and Research (IISER), Pune and Persistent Systems Limited** has co-funded the project and is developing the platform.
- It will involve gaining better **biological insights through physiological and molecular mapping**, develop disease models through predictive computing and have a holistic analysis and finally drug discovery.

Significance

- The platform will deliver key **skills to the student community to read classified scientific literature**, in this case, on individual tissue-basis, and perform annotation and curation.
- All, the information generated **will pass through multiple levels of reviews**, it will be an Atlas or a reliable collection on human body tissues.



- The **collated data will be useful for both future researchers and parallelly, clinicians and drug developers**, who finally handle human bodies in disease conditions.

Application

- The aim of the project remains to **understand and capture the human physiology in two stages** – in a normal stage and while in a disease stage.
- Such a **database on individual tissues, once ready, can come handy in tracing the causes of disease**, understanding specific pathways and ultimately decode the body’s disease **stage linked to tissues and cells**.
- The teams will also study **any potent elements or molecules** that have never been used in the form of drugs, **to target the specific cells or tissues**.

WHO strategy on Antivenoms

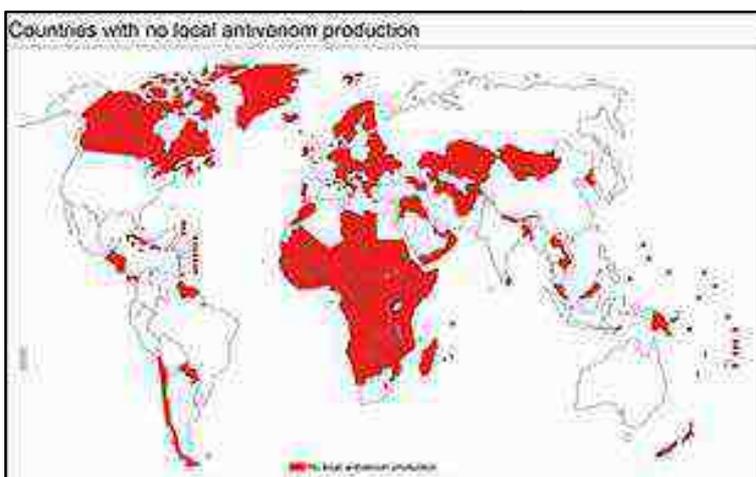
In News

World Health Organisation (WHO) has released a strategy on the prevention and management of snakebite envenoming.

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Issue

- Each year, **nearly three million people are bitten by poisonous snakes**, with an estimated 81,000-138,000 deaths. Another 400,000 survivors suffer permanent disabilities and other after-effects.
- **Snake venom can cause paralysis that stops breathing, bleeding disorders that can lead to fatal hemorrhage, irreversible kidney failure and tissue damage** that can cause permanent disability and limb loss.
- Most snakebite victims live in the **world's tropical and poorest regions**, and children are **worse affected due to their smaller body size**.
- The WHO in 2017 re-recognized snake bite as a neglected tropical disease, after dropping it as one in 2013, due to the efforts of various civil societies.



Challenges to WHO Project

- ❖ A significant challenge in manufacturing of antivenoms is the preparation of the correct immunogens (snake venoms).
- ❖ Lack of regulatory capacity for the control of antivenoms in countries with significant snake bite problems results in an inability to assess the quality and appropriateness of the antivenoms.
- ❖ Poor data on the number and type of snake bites have led to difficulty in estimating needs, and deficient distribution policies have further contributed to manufacturers reducing or stopping production or increasing the prices of antivenoms.
- ❖ Poor regulation and the marketing of inappropriate or poor quality antivenoms has also resulted in a loss of confidence in some of the available antivenoms by clinicians, health managers, and patients, which has further eroded demand.

Problem in India

- Snakebite causes

nearly 50,000 deaths in India every year.

- Indian snake varieties - **Indian Cobra, Russel’s viper, saw-scaled viper, and Indian common krait** are mostly responsible for most snakebite deaths.
- **Indian common krait (B. caeruleus)** is one of the medically important venomous snakes in the subcontinent and accounts for a large number of snakebite deaths and illness. **The neurotoxic effect of its venom is due to two large proteins – beta-bungarotoxin, and κ-bungarotoxin.**
- Although antivenins were able to bind and neutralize larger proteins, they were unable to do so with **smaller proteins like phospholipase A2 (PLA2) and three finger toxins (3FTxs), which are present in copious amounts (up to 85%) in South India Krait venom.**

WHO Strategy

- ✓ WHO strategy is for a **12-year period (aim to reduce incidents of snakebite envenoming to half by 2030)** and the budget for its implementation would be provided by WHO itself.
- ✓ It will **focus on significantly boosting the production of quality antivenoms.**
- ✓ It will **focus on the restoration of a sustainable market for snakebite treatment.**
- ✓ It will **help in integrating snakebite treatment and response into national health plans in affected countries,** including better training of health personnel and educating communities.

RISAT-2BR1 Launched

In News

ISRO had successfully launched PSLV-C46 carrying radar imaging earth observation satellite Risat-2B.

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About Risat-2B

- It will **help in boosting surveillance capabilities of the country as it has X-band synthetic aperture radar which can do earth observation day and night and even see through clouds.**
- The Satellite will replace Risat-2 and will have **mission life of five years.**
- The Resolution of the new satellites **will be better than 1 meter.**
- ISRO will launch Risat-2BR1, Risat-2BR2, Risat-1A and thereon Risat-1B and Risat 2A.

Significance

- It will help in **monitoring Indian borders 24x7** and will help security agencies to keep an eye on infiltrators and anti-terrorist operations.
- It will also help in monitoring the **activities of Chinese warships in the Indian ocean.**
- These are the satellites used by India to **plan surgical strike in 2016.**

Aditya L1 Mission

In News

ISRO is planning to **launch Aditya- L1 mission** to study the sun early in 2020.

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About Mission

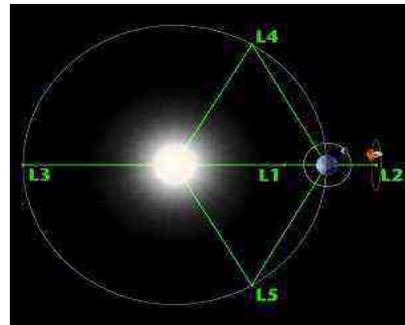
- Aditya-L1 will be placed in the **vantage point also known as the L1 Lagrange point, to do imaging and study of the sun.**
- At the point, **L1 due to the balance of gravitational forces,** the satellite will require very little energy to maintain its orbit.

- At the point, **L1 satellite will not be eclipsed by the Sun** and hence will be able to monitor it uninterrupted by eclipses for years.
- The **satellite will study the magnetic field of the sun's corona** which is the outer layer that one sees during total solar eclipses.
- The mission will carry seven **payloads, consisting of a coronagraph, equipment that will image the sun using ultraviolet filters, X-ray spectrometers, and particle samplers** all being made within the country.
- The largest payload, or instrument, aboard the satellite, will be the **Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VLEC)**.
- Apart from this, the two in situ particle-detection payloads - **Aditya Solar wind Particle Experiment (ASPEX) and Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya (PAPA)** will study aspects that affect space weather.

What is a Lagrange Point?

There are five special points where a small mass can orbit in a constant pattern with two larger masses. The Lagrange Points are positions where the gravitational pull of two large masses precisely equals the centripetal force required for a small object to move with them.

Of the five Lagrange points, three are unstable and two are stable. **The unstable Lagrange points - labeled L1, L2 and L3 - lie along the line connecting the two large masses. The stable Lagrange points - labeled L4 and L5 - form the apex of two equilateral triangles that have the large masses at their vertices. L4 leads the orbit of earth and L5 follows.**



Artemis Programme

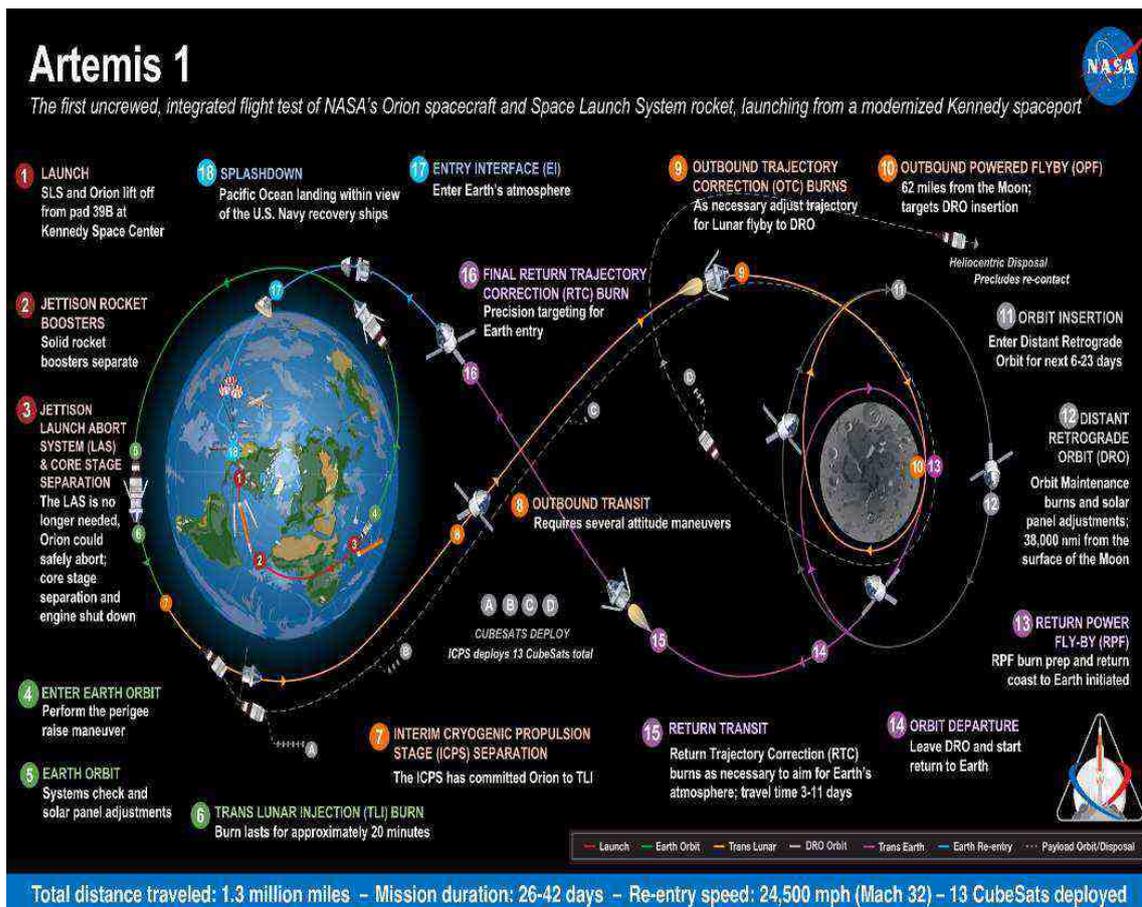
In News

NASA has unveiled the calendar for the 'Artemis' program that will return astronauts to the Moon for the first time in half a century, including eight scheduled launches and a mini-station in lunar orbit by 2024.

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About the Programme

- The **ARTEMIS mission uses two of the five in-orbit spacecraft from another NASA Heliophysics constellation of satellites (THEMIS)** that were launched in 2007 and successfully completed their mission earlier in 2010. The **ARTEMIS mission allowed NASA to repurpose two in-orbit spacecraft to extend their useful science mission, saving tens of millions of taxpayer dollars instead of building and launching new spacecraft.**
- ARTEMIS stands for '**Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence, and Electrodynamics of the Moon's Interaction with the Sun.**'
- Artemis was the twin sister of **Apollo and goddess of the Moon in Greek mythology. Now, she personifies the path to the Moon as the name of NASA's program to return astronauts to the lunar surface by 2024,** including the first woman and the next man.
- Artemis 1 will be an uncrewed mission around the **Moon planned for 2020.**
- Next will come Artemis 2, which will orbit Earth's satellite with a crew around 2022; followed finally by **Artemis 3 that will put astronauts on lunar soil in 2024,** including the first woman.



- The three will be launched into space by **the biggest rocket of all time, the Boeing-led Space Launch System (SLS)**, which is currently under development but has seen numerous delays and has been criticized in some quarters as a bloated jobs program.

Ultima Thule

In News

NASA has found evidence of a **unique mixture of water ice, methanol, and organic molecules on Ultima Thule’s surface.**

About Ultima Thule

- It is located **in the Kuiper belt** in the outermost regions of the Solar system beyond the orbit of Neptune.
- It is **an irregularly shaped object** that measures near about 30 km in diameter
- It has a **reddish color, probably caused by exposure of hydrocarbons** to sunlight over billions of years.
- It belongs **to a class of Kuiper belt objects called the “cold classical”**, which have nearly circular orbits with low inclinations to the solar plane.
- It is the **most primitive planetary object yet explored and reveal the conditions in the distant part of the Solar System** as it condensed from the solar nebula.

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NASA MODIS

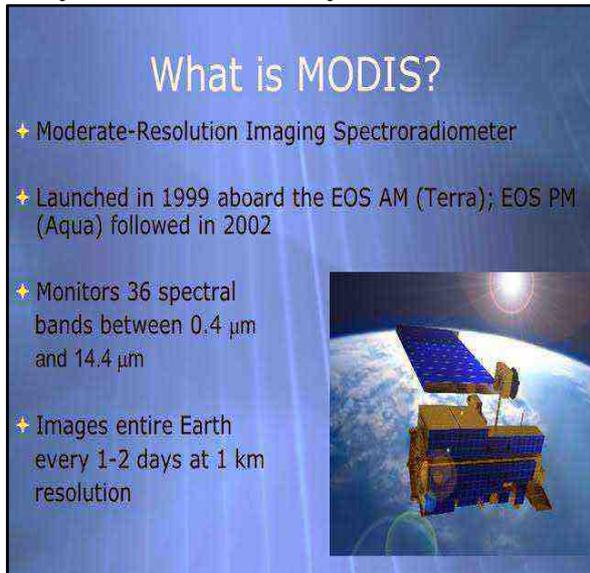
In News

NASA’s Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) data shows that China and India are leading the increase in “greening efforts” across the world.

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Important findings

- The global green leaf area has increased by 5% since the early 2000s.
- China alone accounts for 25% of the global net increase in leaf area.
- India has contributed a further 6.8%.
- The greening in China is from forests (42%) and croplands (32%) but in India is mostly from croplands (82%) with a minor contribution from forests (4.4%).
- Data show that since Independence, a fifth of India’s land has consistently been under forests.
- The Forest Survey of India’s State of Forest Report 2017 had recorded that forest cover had increased by 6,600 sq km or 0.21% since 2015.



Importance

The data will improve our understanding of global dynamics and processes occurring on the land, in the oceans, and in the lower atmosphere. MODIS is playing a vital role in the development of validated, global, interactive Earth system models able to predict global change accurately enough to assist policy makers in making sound decisions concerning the protection of the environment.

YuvaVigyaan Karyakaram

In News

ISRO recently inaugurated the **Young Scientist Programme YUVIKA 2019**.

About the Programme

- The Program is primarily aimed at imparting basic knowledge on Space Technology, **Space Science and Space Applications to the younger ones with the intent of arousing their interest in the emerging areas of Space activities.**
- ISRO has chalked out this program to **“Catch them young”**.
- The residential training program will be of around two weeks duration during summer holidays and it is proposed to **select 3 students each from each State/ Union Territory to participate in this program every year covering CBSE, ICSE and State syllabus.**
- Those who have finished **8th standard and are currently studying in the 9th standard will be eligible for the program.**

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7thEconomic Census

Why in News?

The 7th economic census is under process and is being conducted by Ministry of Statistics and Planning Implementation (MoSPI).

Conducting periodic Economic Census has been the means of measuring the diversity of **non-farm economic activities** in all its major dimensions.

About Economic Census

- It is the **complete count of all establishment** located within the geographical boundary of India. The Economic Census provides disaggregated information on various operational and structural variables of all establishments of the country.

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- It also provides valuable insight into geographical spread/clusters of economic activities, ownership pattern, persons engaged, etc. of all economic establishments in the country.
- The information collected during Economic Census are useful for socio-economic developmental planning at state and district levels.
- The Census provides an updated sampling frame for follow- up enterprise surveys undertaken for detailed and comprehensive analysis of all establishments in the country.

Economic Census-2019

- In the current Economic Census, MoSPI has partnered with **CSC e-Governance Services India Limited**, a Special Purpose Vehicle under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as the implementing agency for 7th EC.
- In the 7th EC, an IT based digital platform for data capture, validation, report generation and dissemination will be used.
- The ministry is also introducing **geo-tagging** which will help to find out the distribution of economic activity in a certain place.
- The Statistics Ministry has decided to **use mobile phone application** for conducting 7th economic census, which will speed up the process of data collection and analysis. There will be two round of supervision to ensure quality.
- The census will provide insights of all economic activities and ownership patterns of businesses across the country. EC will cover all establishments including household enterprises, engaged in production or distribution of goods/services (other than for the sole purpose of own consumption) in non-farm agricultural and non-agricultural sector.
- The coverage is same as the one in 6th Economic Census.

PEPPER IT WITH
Socio-Economic and Caste Census, India Census 2021, MoSPI, MCA-21

Previous Economic Censuses

Six Economic Censuses, (EC) have been conducted by the Union Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation.

- 1st: 1977**
- 2nd: 1980**
- 3rd: 1990**
- 4th: 1998**
- 5th: 2005**
- 6th: 2013**

Merger of NSSO and CSO

Why in News?

To streamline and strengthen the statistical system, the government has decided to merge the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) to form a **National Statistical Office (NSO)**.

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NSSO comes out with various sample surveys such as on consumption expenditure, health, employment and unemployment, whereas the CSO releases various data such as GDP and IIP. Both the wings are currently part of the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**.

Background

- In 2000, a committee headed by former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor **C. Rangarajan** suggested the establishment of NSO as the nodal body for all core statistical activities. It would have worked under the National Statistical Commission (NSC), **which was to be answerable to Parliament, not the government**.
- The intent was to clean up collection, calculation and dissemination of data. **NSC was set up in 2005**, but didn't have a statutory role. It was given supervisory powers over

one arm of the statistical system, NSSO. The idea of an NSO that would include NSSO and CSO was not effected.

- The Rangarajan committee had also recommended setting up of the NSC, headed by a person with a Minister of State-level designation, to serve as a nodal and empowered body for all core statistical activities of the country.
- According to the Rangarajan Commission, the new NSO was envisaged as an agency to implement and maintain statistical standards and coordinate statistical activities of Central and State agencies as laid down by the NCS.
- According to the report, the NSO's other roles included collection of core statistics, carrying out methodological research and studies, maintaining a warehouse of core statistics.

NSSO: Established in **1950**, the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) headed by a Director General is responsible for conduct of large scale sample surveys in diverse fields on All India basis. It also collects data on rural and urban prices and plays a significant role in the improvement of crop statistics through supervision of the area enumeration and crop estimation surveys of the State agencies. It also maintains a frame of urban area units for use in sample surveys in urban areas. It has 4 divisions.

CSO: The Central Statistics Office coordinates the statistical activities in the country and evolves statistical standards. It is headed by a Director General.

Criticism

The NSO would be directly under the government headed by the secretary (who will be assisted by director generals) of the ministry of statistics and programme implementation. **This is different from the original plan to merge the NSSO and other statistics-producing organizations into one body that would be accountable to Parliament and not directly to the government.** This merger would bring official economic data more directly under the control of the government.

Centralisation of data in the ministry can become a hurdle for quick and timely release of the data for public research and debate. A recent example of such trouble was the recent non-availability of data on unemployment.

Conclusion

- ✓ The CSO and the NSSO are two organs of the same body and **need to work together.** This is a measure **to avoid duplication of work** and leverage the strength of the statistical system. There is no dilution of independence and in fact strengthens the system.
- ✓ This will help in meeting the requirement of the statistical system as a lack of control on these two bodies was one challenge presently. **The National Statistical Commission will continue to work as an overarching body and at an arm's length.**
- ✓ The move will align India's statistical system with other countries (e.g China). It will bring administrative ease.
- ✓ The administration of the statistical system will become easier with setting up of an NSO. **Integration will ensure that various bodies do not work in silos.**

PEPPER IT WITH
Data Quality Assurance Division, Periodic Labour Force Survey, Shell Companies, Impactful Policy Research in Social Science by ICSSR

About NSC: The government had set up the NSC through a resolution in 2005. The setting up of the NSC followed the decision of the Union Cabinet to accept the recommendations of the Rangarajan Commission, which reviewed the **Indian Statistical System.** The NSC was constituted in 2006 with a mandate to evolve policies, priorities and standards in statistical matters. The NSC has four Members besides a Chairperson, each having specialization and experience in specified statistical fields.

MCA 21

What is MCA 21?

- MCA 21 is a project being implemented by Ministry of Corporate Affairs, GoI (previously Department of Company Affairs, MoF, and GoI).
- It is an e-Governance initiative which enables an easy and secure access of the MCA services to the corporate entities, professionals and citizens of India.
- **National Institute for Smart Governance** (NISG) is assisting the MCA in operations and maintenance of the project.
- It is an IT-driven and forward-looking mission mode project under the Government of India's **National e-Governance plan**.
- It has put the Ministry of Company Affairs on track to meet stakeholder needs in the 21st century.
- MCA21 is envisioned to provide anytime and anywhere services to businesses by Ministry of Company Affairs. It is the first mission mode e-governance project being undertaken in the country.
- It has ushered in global best practices that are based on experiences drawn from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Singapore.
- Piloted in Coimbatore in 2006, the countrywide rollout of the project was completed in 2006.

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Why has it Been Designed?

The MCA21 application is designed to fully automate all processes related to the proactive enforcement and compliance of the legal requirements under the

PEPPER IT WITH
 Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008, Companies Act 1956, NISG

Companies Act, 1956, New Companies Act, 2013 and Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008. This will help the business community to meet their statutory obligations

The MCA21 application offers the following

1. Enables the business community to register a company and file statutory documents quickly and easily.
2. Provides easy access of public documents
3. Helps faster and effective resolution of public grievances
4. Helps registration and verification of charges easily
5. Ensures proactive and effective compliance with relevant laws and corporate governance
6. Enables the MCA employees to deliver best of breed services

Chief Risk Officer of NBFCs

Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently said non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) **with assets of more than ₹5,000 crore (50 billion)** must appoint a chief risk officer (CRO).

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Background

- NBFCs have been struggling to get funds for their operations, as banks and mutual funds have been very cautious lending to them since many NBFCs have been under stress following the beleaguered Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS) group defaulting on its debt obligations, triggering panic in the financial markets.
- Moreover, the cost of borrowing for these entities has also gone up. Now, they are relying more on **retail bond issuances, external commercial borrowings (ECB), masala bonds, and securitisation for funds.**
- The **asset-liability mismatch**, wherein the NBFCs were borrowing in the short term and using the money to give long-term loans, was exposed because of the IL&FS

defaults. This engulfed many NBFCs/housing finance companies, causing them to virtually stop lending, so as not to weaken the balance sheet any further.

About CRO

1. CRO's will have clearly specified role and responsibilities. They are required to **function independently** so as to ensure highest standards of risk management. The CRO shall have direct reporting lines to the MD & CEO/ Risk Management Committee (RMC) of the Board.
2. The CRO shall be a senior official in the hierarchy of NBFC and shall possess adequate professional qualification/ experience in the area of risk management.
3. The CRO shall not have any reporting relationship with the business verticals of the NBFC and **shall not be given any business targets**. Further, there shall not be any 'dual hatting' i.e. the CRO shall not be given any other responsibility.
4. The CRO shall be involved in the process of identification, measurement and mitigation of risks. All credit products (retail or wholesale) shall be vetted by the CRO from the angle of inherent and control risks. The CRO's role in deciding credit proposals shall be limited to being an advisor.
5. The CRO shall be appointed for a fixed tenure with the approval of the Board. They can be transferred/ removed from post before completion of the tenure only with the approval of the Board and such premature transfer/ removal shall be reported to the Department of Non-Banking Supervision of the regional office of the Bank under whose jurisdiction the NBFC is registered. In case the NBFC is listed, any change in incumbency of the CRO shall also be reported to the stock exchanges.

What is difference between banks & NBFCs?

NBFCs lend and make investments and hence their activities are akin to that of banks, however there are a few differences:

- 1) NBFC **cannot accept demand deposits**;
- 2) NBFCs do not form part of the payment and settlement system and **cannot issue cheques** drawn on itself;
- 3) **Deposit insurance facility** of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in case of banks.

Registration of NBFCs

It is **not necessary** that every NBFC should be registered with RBI. To obviate dual regulation, certain categories of NBFCs which are regulated by other regulators are exempted from the requirement of registration with RBI.

Why is it needed?

- RBI's directive comes at a time when India's **shadow banks** are facing a funding crisis as some of the firms are burdened with over-leveraging and mismatch between assets and liabilities.
- With the increasing role of NBFCs in direct credit intermediation, there is a need for NBFCs to augment risk management practices.

PEPPER IT WITH
Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation, Section 45-1A of RBI Act 1934, Companies Act 1956, Net Owned Fund, ECB

Concept Clearing Assignment: Discuss the possibility and need of an asset quality review (AQR) of NBFCs. What are the other ways to gauge the extent of problems at the so-called shadow banks?

Regulatory Cadre within RBI

Why in News?

Reserve Bank of India's Central Board met recently and reviewed current economic situation, global and domestic challenges and various areas of operations of the central bank. The central board of RBI is **chaired by Governor** of the central bank.

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With a view to **strengthen the supervision and regulation of commercial banks**, urban cooperative banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), the board decided to create a specialised supervisory and regulatory cadre within the RBI.

Background

The reason behind a potential overhaul of the RBI supervisory structure are expected to the non-bank finance crisis, failures of credit rating agencies to flag risks, divergence in asset quality by big banks and alleged lapses on the part of auditors.

There is a need for a proper asset quality review of NBFCs to gauge the extent of problems of the shadow banks.

PEPPER IT WITH
IL&FS crisis, Prudential Framework for Resolution of Stressed Assets, High Level Committee on Deepening of Digital Payments

Issues with NBFC

There is an imminent crisis in the NBFC sector. There is a credit squeeze, over-leveraging, excessive concentration, massive mismatch between assets and liabilities, coupled with some misadventures by some very large entities, which is a perfect recipe for disaster.

₹ 700-cr venture capital fund for agri, rural startups

Why in News?

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) announced a Rs 700-crore venture capital fund for equity investments in agriculture and rural-focused startups. This is **the first time that the rural development bank has launched a fund of its own.**

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Details

- The fund has been launched by **Nabventures**, a subsidiary of NABARD, and has a proposed corpus of Rs 500 crore with an option to retain over-subscriptions of Rs 200 crore, called as the **greenshoe option**.
- NABARD has given an anchor commitment for the fund, which will be investing across startups engaged in agriculture, food and rural development space.
- The fund will have a high impact as it will provide a boost to investment ecosystem in the core areas of agriculture, food and improvement of rural livelihoods.

PEPPER IT WITH
National Housing Bank, Sustainable and Equitable Agriculture, Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC)

NABARD

- NABARD came into existence in 1982 by transferring the agricultural credit functions of RBI and refinance functions of the then Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC). It was approved by the parliament in 1981.
- It came into existence on the recommendation of a Committee to Review the Arrangements for Institutional Credit for Agriculture and Rural Development (**CRAFICARD**). The committee was chaired by **Shri B. Sivaraman**, former member of Planning Commission, Government of India.
- Consequent to the revision in the composition of share capital between Government of India and RBI, **NABARD today is fully owned by Government of India.**

WTO Ministerial Meeting of Developing Countries

In News

A WTO Ministerial meeting of developing countries was hosted by India in New Delhi. Sixteen developing countries, Six Least Developed Countries and DG, WTO participated in the meeting.

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Background

The meeting was held at a timewhen the multilateral rule-based-trading system is facing serious and grave challenges. In the recent past, there have been increasing unilateral

measures and counter measures by members, deadlock in key areas of negotiations and the impasse in the **Appellate Body**, which threaten the very existence of **Dispute Settlement Mechanism** of the WTO and impacts the position of the WTO as an effective multilateral organisation. The current situation has given rise to demands from various quarters to reform the WTO.

Significance

- The meeting was an effort to bring together the developing countries and Least Developed Countries on a platform for sharing common concerns on various issues affecting the WTO and work together to address these issues.
- The two-day meeting also provided an opportunity to the developing countries and LDCs to build consensus on how to move forward on the WTO reforms, while preserving the fundamentals of the multilateral trading system enshrined in the WTO.
- The deliberations aimed at getting a direction on how to constructively engage on various issues in the WTO, both institutional and negotiating, in the run up to the **Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the WTO to be held in Kazakhstan in June 2020**.
- The present trade tensions show no signs of abating and protectionist tendencies are on the rise which makes it very essential to collectively debate and discuss the way forward in a multilateral framework.
- New Delhi Ministerial Meeting is an initiative by India to facilitate a free and frank exchange of views on all issues of common interest, particularly of the Developing Countries and it explored how to collectively address the challenges emerging from suggestions on WTO reform.

In 2018, India had organised an Informal WTO Ministerial Gathering, in which more than 50 Members – both developed and developing- had participated. In the Gathering in New Delhi, it was emphasized that there is a need to preserve and enhance the functioning and credibility of the rules-based **Multilateral Trading System as embodied in the WTO**.

Dispute Settlement crisis

- Dispute Settlement crisis is a deep crisis and all countries have to look for a resolution. Business as usual approach is not an option anymore and all members should work for a solution.
- Plurilaterals should not be seen as a division between Developed and Developing Countries as they contain members from both sides. Special and Differential Treatment Mechanism must be innovative in order to address the impasse. If left unaddressed it may go either way.
- The ideal way is to have a bench mark because the differentiation is already happening and is essential for small Developing Countries. The best way forward is to **have a trade-facilitation-agreement-type model** where countries may set their own benchmarks.
- There are billions of people living in Developing Countries and they cannot and should not be deprived of the benefits of growth and WTO is an institution which addresses these concerns of development and growth of countries through trade and not aid.
- The Multilateral Trading System is the collective responsibility of all countries who have a stake in it. It is the duty of countries to successfully address conflicting interests, motives and ideologies, in order to preserve and strengthen this valuable institution.
- The principles of non-discrimination, predictability, transparency, the tradition of decision-making by consensus and, most importantly, the commitment to development, underlying the multilateral trading system, are too valuable to lose.

PEPPER IT WITH
Bali Package, WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism, Global Economic Crisis

Conclusion

The approach of the New Delhi Ministerial Meeting is to re-energise and strengthen multilateralism and put in place a more inclusive decision - making process. Towards this end, it is essential that the collective view of as many Developing Countries as possible is formally articulated in submissions on WTO reforms.

New Delhi Ministerial Meeting is aimed to re-endorse the centrality of development in WTO negotiations and provide suggestions for WTO reforms with development at its core.

Regional Heads of Customs Administration of Asia Pacific Region

Why in News?

Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) organised a meeting of the Regional Heads of Customs Administration of Asia Pacific Region of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) in Kochi. India hosted this meeting in its capacity as Vice Chair of the Asia Pacific region that it assumed for a two-year period.

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Details

- The meeting took stock of the progress being made in carrying forward the programmes and initiatives of WCO to promote, facilitate and secure the cross-border trade in the region and the capacity building and technical assistance required to achieve this goal.
- Recognising the importance of the collaborative approach between Customs and trade, a **Trade Day** was organised on 7th May, 2019 as a precursor to the meeting of the Regional Heads of Customs.
- In this day-long deliberation, representatives from trade & industry and think-tanks shared their insights and experiences that are expected to shape the thinking of customs administrations of the region in adopting policies and measures to promote trade facilitation and secure global trade, and promote ethical leadership.

Revised Kyoto Convention

The International Convention on the simplification and harmonization of Customs procedures (as amended), known as the **Revised Kyoto Convention is the blueprint for modern and efficient Customs procedures in the 21st century.**

PEPPER IT WITH
Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide, International Customs Law, UNCTAD, Marrakesh Agreement

The revised Kyoto Convention promotes trade facilitation and effective controls through its legal provisions that detail the application of simple yet efficient procedures. The revised Convention also contains new and obligatory rules for its application which all Contracting Parties must accept without reservation.

About World Custom Organisation

- The World Customs Organization (WCO), **established in 1952** as the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC) is an independent intergovernmental body with a mission to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.
- Presently, it represents **183 Customs administrations** across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade.
- As the global centre of Customs expertise, the WCO is the only international organization with competence in Customs matters and can rightly call itself the voice of the international Customs community.

Importance of Industrial Policy

Context

The immediate impact of Industrial reforms is seen in the increase of investment from both domestic and foreign player. **At the time of Independence, the Indian economy was facing severe problems of illiteracy, poverty, low per capita income, industrial backwardness, and unemployment. After India attained its Independence in 1947, a sincere effort was made to begin an era of industrial development.**

The government adopted rules and regulations for the various industries. This industrial policy introduction proved to be the turning point in Indian Industrial history. **The all-**

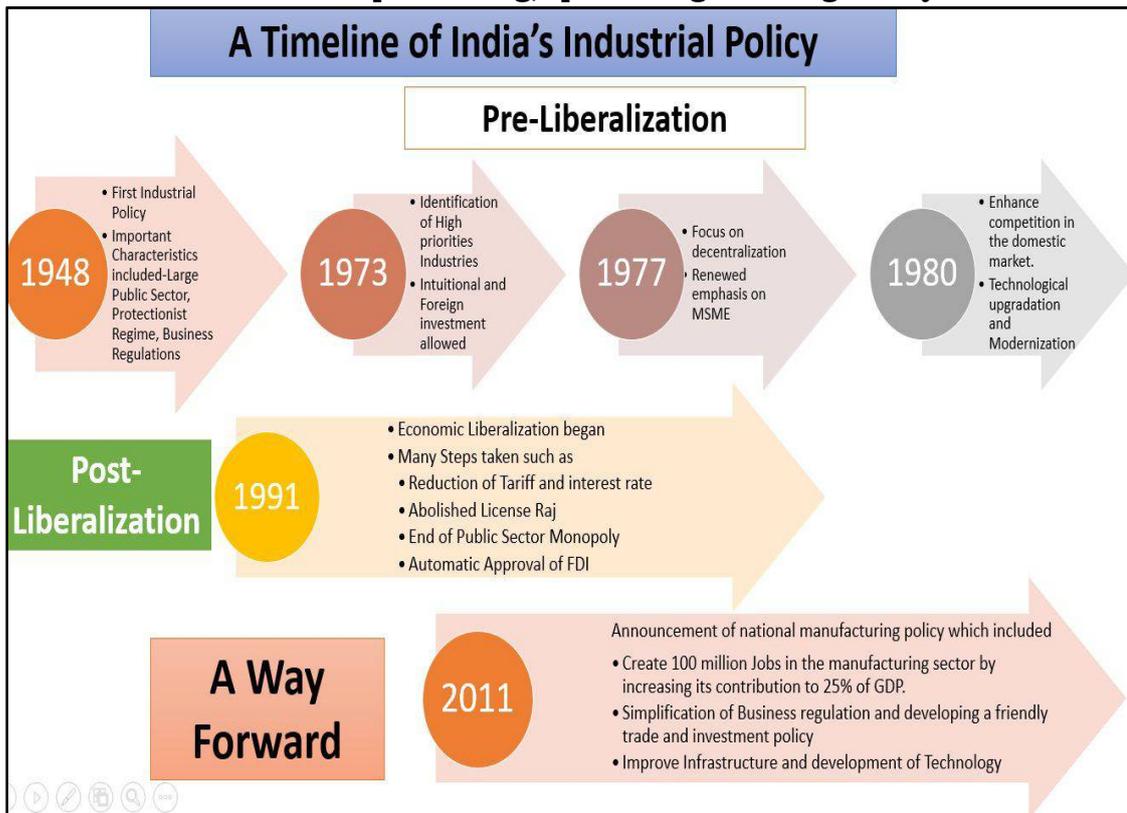
around changes introduced in the industrial policy framework have given a new direction to the future industrialization of the country.

Why the New Manufacturing Policy?

- The **contribution of manufacturing to GDP in 2017 was only about 16%, a stagnation since the economic reforms began in 1991.**
- The contrast with the major Asian economies is significant. For example, Malaysia roughly tripled its share **of manufacturing in GDP to 24%, while Thailand’s share increased from 13% to 33% (1960-2014).**
- In India manufacturing has never been the leading sector in the economy other than during the **Second and Third Plan periods.**

Role Played by an Industrial Policy in India

- It sets the **tone in implementing, promoting the regulatory roles of the**



government.

- It helps **in coordinating complementary investments** when there are significant economies of scale and capital market imperfections. For example, as envisaged in a Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor.
- They **are needed to address learning externalities such as subsidies for industrial training (on which we have done poorly).** For Eg Industrial policy was reinforced by state investments in human capital, particularly general academic as well as vocational education/training aligned with the industrial policy, in most East Asian countries. However, a lack of human capital has been a major constraint upon India historically being able to attract foreign investment (which Southeast Asian economies succeeded in attracting).
- It **not only prevents coordination failures (ensure complementary investments) but also avoid competing investments in a capital-scarce environment.** For eg, excess capacity leads to price wars, adversely affecting the profits of firms — either leading to the bankruptcy of firms or slowing down investment, both happening often in India (witness the aviation sector). Even worse, price wars in the telecom sector in India have slowed profits (even caused losses), which hampers investment in mobile/Internet coverage of rural India where access to mobile phones and

broadband Internet, needs rapid expansion. The East Asian state managed this role of industrial policy successfully.

- It **helps the state in playing the role of organizer of domestic firms into cartels in their negotiations with foreign firms or governments**, a role particularly relevant in the 21st century after the big business revolution of the 1990s.
- **Industrial policy can ensure that the industrial capacity installed is as close to the minimum efficient scale as possible.** For eg, choosing too small a scale of capacity can mean a 30-50% reduction in production capacity the missing middle among Indian enterprises is nothing short of a failure of industrial strategy. Contributing to the missing middle phenomenon was the reservation of products exclusively for production in the small-scale and cottage industries (SSI) sector (with large firms excluded) from India’s 1956 Industrial Policy Resolution. By then, a small scale and informality had gotten entrenched in Indian manufacturing. Incentivization to remain small in scale cost India dearly.
- **When structural change is needed, industrial policy can facilitate that process. In a fast-changing market, losing firms will block structural changes that are socially beneficial but make their own assets worthless.** In this quest for increased exports, economies of scale are critical. Such economies were not possible with the policy-induced growth of micro-enterprises and informal units (the unorganized sector accounts for 45% of India’s exports).

Significance of Industrial Policy

It is widely agreed that government intervention is crucial in the case of market failures which may include – deficiencies in capital markets, usually as a result of information asymmetries\ lack of adequate investments inhibiting exploitation of scale economies imperfect

information **with respect to**

firm-level investments in learning and training lack of information and coordination between technologically interdependent investments.

Given the present economic situation in India, these are good **reasons why an economy-wide planning mechanism is needed. However**, the Indian state should shift away from the “command and control” **approach that was the case in pre-1991 days.**

Conclusion

- ✓ **Unfortunately, the potential role of industrial policy has been consistently downplayed** in developing countries outside of East Asia ever since the early 1980s after the growing dominance of the orthodox paradigm with well-known consequences in much of India, Latin America and also sub-Saharan Africa.
- ✓ **One of the objectives of China’s industrial policies since the 1990s has been to support the growth of domestic firms** (examples being Lenovo computers, Haier

The IT Lesson

Without the features below, the IT success story would not have occurred:

- ❖ **First**, the government invested in creating high-speed Internet connectivity for IT software parks enabling integration of the Indian IT industry into the U.S. market.
- ❖ **Second**, the government allowed the IT industry to import duty-free both hardware and software. (In retrospect, this should never have continued after a few years since it undermined the growth of the electronics hardware manufacturing in India.)
- ❖ **Third**, the IT industry was able to function under the Shops and Establishment Act; hence not subject to the 45 laws relating to labour and the onerous regulatory burden those laws impose.
- ❖ **Finally**, the IT sector has the benefit of low-cost, high-value human capital created by public investments earlier in technical education.

PEPPER IT WITH

Industrial Corridors of India, Make in India, Ease of Doing Business, Foreign Portfolio Investment, FDI

home appliances, and mega-firms making mobile phones).

- ✓ **The East Asian miracle was very much founded upon export-oriented manufacturing, employ surplus labor released by agriculture, thus raising wages and reducing poverty rapidly.**
- ✓ **This outcome came from a conscious, deliberately planned strategy** (with Five Year Plans). India has been practically left out of Global Value Chains.**Increasing export of manufactures will need to be another rationale for industrial policy, even though India has to focus more on “make for India”.**
- ✓ The growing participation of **East Asian countries in global value chains (GVCs), graduating beyond simple, manufactured consumer goods to more technology- and skill-intensive manufactures for export was a natural corollary to the industrial policy.**

Elephant Bonds

Why in News?

A high-level advisory group chaired by **Dr Surjit S Bhalla** and constituted by the government last year for suggestions to improve India’s trade performance, has come up with a significant recommendation to tackle the menace of black money in the country.

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Recommendations

- The committee has asked the government to allow people to declare their ‘undisclosed income’ with a mandatory condition to invest 50% in a government bond, termed as **Elephant Bond**, which should be utilised only for infrastructure projects.
- Holding that India’s trade performance from 2012-2017 was below par, the group has made many other wide-ranging recommendations to improve trade. These include reduction of trade tariff, increasing exports, reforming of financial service sector policies, improvement in tourism infrastructure, **set a target to double the exports (goods and services) to \$1,000 billion by 2025**etc.
- The recommendation of the advisory group regarding undisclosed income seems to be based on the fact that black money exists in the domestic sector and it should be utilised in a productive manner.
- The group has suggested a separate regulation for medical devices and a single ministry for the sector, abolishing **Essential Commodities Act and the APMC** (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) to boost farm exports, and simplified medical visa regime along with a pan-India tourism board to promote tourism and medical value tourism.
- For textiles and garments sector, it suggested modification in labour laws (like the **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**) to remove limitation on firm size and allow manufacturing firms to grow.

What are Masala Bonds?

- ❖ Masala Bonds are rupee-denominated borrowings issued by Indian entities in overseas markets. Masala means spices and the term was used by International Finance Corporation (IFC) to popularise the culture and cuisine of India on foreign platforms.
- ❖ The objective of Masala Bonds is to fund infrastructure projects in India, fuel internal growth via borrowings and internationalise the Indian currency.
- ❖ During the acute current account deficit crisis in 2013, the idea of Masala Bond was pitched.
- ❖ **Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board** listed 21.5 billion rupees (\$305 million) of Masala bonds on the London Stock Exchange recently. It became India’s first local government to sell an offshore rupee-denominated bond.

Background

In the recent time, the government has made several attempts to bring the undisclosed income into circulation. All these schemes were aimed at encouraging people to avoid prosecution and declare black money by paying penalty only.

1. In 2015, it introduced Black Money (**Undisclosed Foreign Income And Assets**) And Imposition of Tax Rules, 2015, under which a window was provided to declare income and assets parked in foreign countries.
2. The second major initiative was **Income Declaration Scheme** (IDS) in which people with undisclosed income were given time between June 1, 2016, to September 30, 2016, to declare their income with a tax including penalty of 45% of the total undisclosed income.
3. In November 2016, the government **demonetised** high currency notes to fight black money.
4. **Pradhan Mantri GaribKalyan Yojana** was launched under which the government asked people with black money to pay 50% fine of the undisclosed income and deposit an additional 25% in government schemes which would be refunded without interest after four years. This scheme also expired on March 31, 2017.

PEPPER IT WITH
Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), Free Trade Agreement

US Currency Monitoring Watchlist

Why in News?

US recently **removed India from its currency monitoring list** of major trading partners after certain developments and steps were taken by the country to avert concerns surrounding foreign exchange irregularities.

Along with India, Switzerland was also dropped from the currency monitoring list. The list currently includes China, Japan, South Korea, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

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Background

India for the first time was placed by the US in its currency monitoring list of countries with potentially questionable foreign exchange policies in May 2018 along with five other countries - China, Germany, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland.

In its next report in October 2018, the Treasury had said that India has made improvements and its name would be removed from the currency manipulation list in the next report.

Why has India been Removed?

- India has been removed from the monitoring list in this report, **having met only one out of three criteria** - a significant bilateral surplus with the US - for two consecutive reports.
- This is a positive development for India as it is out of the currency watch list radar, which could have ultimately led to a tag of being a currency manipulator.
- Once on the list, **the country remains there for at least two consecutive reports**, which span at least a year.

The criterion

Countries with a current-account surplus equivalent to 2 per cent of gross-domestic product are eligible for the list, according to modifications made in the new list, down from 3 per cent earlier. Other thresholds include repeated intervention in the currency markets and a trade surplus with the US of at least \$20 billion.

About the Report

The US Department of Treasury releases the semi-annual report where it has to track

PEPPER IT WITH
Currency Policy, Foreign Exchange Policy, Trade War, Generalised System of Preferences, Hard Currency, Strengthening and Weakening of rupee

developments in international economies and inspect foreign exchange rates. If any trade partner of the US meets a three-assessment review, bilateral talks are held to resolve the issues.

Tag of Currency Manipulator

Countries which indulge in manipulating the currency exchange rate for gaining unfair competitive advantage in international trade often end up with the tag of a currency manipulator. Designation as a currency manipulator comes **with no immediate penalties but can rattle financial markets.**

BasavaJayanthi

In News

BasavaJayanthi was observed on the birthday of Basavanna, a Hindu Kannada poet of the 12th century.

About Basavanna

- Basavanna was a 12th-century philosopher, statesman, Kannada poet and a social reformer during the reign of the Kalachuri-dynasty king Bijjala I in Karnataka, India.
- Basavanna spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as Vachanaas. Basavanna rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals.
- He introduced new public institutions such as the AnubhavaMantapa (or, the “hall of spiritual experience”), which welcomed men and women from all socio-economic backgrounds to discuss spiritual and mundane questions of life, in open.
- As a leader, he developed and inspired a new devotional movement named Virashaivas, or “ardent, heroic worshippers of Shiva”. This movement shared its roots in the ongoing Tamil Bhakti movement, particularly the Shaiva Nayanars traditions, over the 7th- to 11th-century.
- Basava championed devotional worship that rejected temple worship and rituals led by Brahmins and replaced it with personalized direct worship of Shiva through practices such as individually worn icons and symbols like a small linga.
- Basaveshwara is the first Kannadiga in whose honor a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms.
- In November 2015, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi inaugurated the statue of Basaveshwara along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.

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Basavanna and Sharana movement

- The Sharana movement he presided over attracted people from all castes, and like most strands of the Bhakti movement, produced a corpus of literature, the vachanas, that unveiled the spiritual universe of the Veerashaiva saints.
- The egalitarianism of Basavanna’sSharana movement was too radical for its times.
- He set up the AnubhavaMandapa, where the Sharanas, drawn from different castes and communities, gathered and engaged in learning and discussions.
- Sharanas challenged the final bastion of the caste order: they organized a wedding where the bridegroom was from a lower caste, and the bride a Brahmin.

Social and Labor Convergence Programme (SLCP)

In News

The ‘Social and Labor Convergence Programme (SLCP),’ an initiative to have a standard-neutral, converged assessment framework for the textile and clothing industry, will be launched in India shortly.

Features

- The SLCP is not a code of conduct or compliance program.
- The converged assessment framework is a tool developed by the SLCP, which provides a data set with no value judgment or scoring.

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- It is, however, compatible with existing audit systems and codes of conduct. This means that the same data set can be used by a wide range of stakeholders. It eliminates the need for repetitive audits to be carried out on the same facility.
- **The initiative is led by** the world’s leading manufacturers, brands, retailers, industry groups, non-governmental organizations, and service providers.
- The objective of the initiative is to improve the working conditions in textile units by allowing resources that were previously designated for compliance audits to be redirected towards the improvement of social and labor conditions.
- This is a voluntary adoption by the textile and clothing makers.

Significance

For the exporting units, it will reduce the number of social audits and facilitate the measuring of employment practices, thus improving working conditions and employee relations. It also redeploys resources towards improvement in actions and fosters collaboration between supply chain partners.

Varuna 19.1

In News

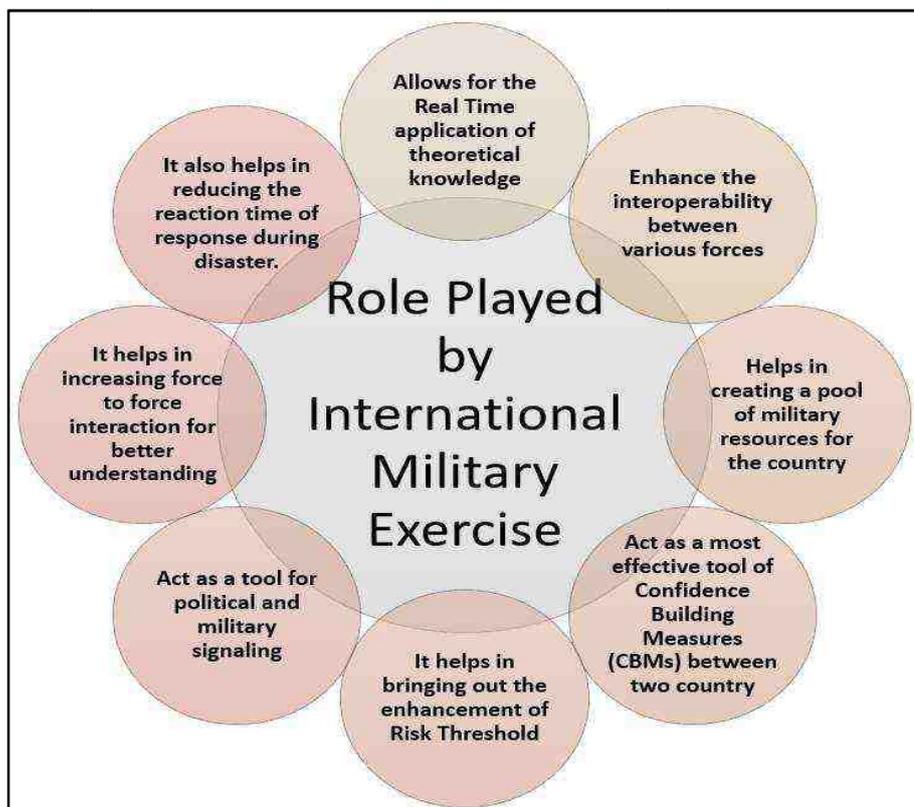
The 17th edition of Varuna 19.1 a bilateral exercise between Indian and French navy was held in Goa.

About Exercise

- Varuna though initiated in 1983 came into force in 2001.

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- It forms a vital part of the Indo-French strategic partnership.
- Fleet participated in the current exercise from both sides included **an aircraft carrier (INS Vikramaditya)** a **destroyer (INS Mumbai)**, a **frigate (the Teg-class frigate INS Tarkash)** a **submarine (Shishumar-class INS Shankul)**, and a **fleet tanker (INS Deepak)**.



- The Exercise was conducted in two phases viz. Harbour phase (Goa) and Sea Phase.
- Harbour **phase includes cross-visits, professional interactions and discussions**, and sports events whereas **Sea phase includes various exercises across the spectrum of maritime operations**.
- The exercise exemplifies the strong relations between the two nations, in line with the **Joint Strategic Vision of India-French Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region signed in 2018**.

- The exercise **underscores the shared interests and commitment of both nations** in promoting **maritime security**.

Common Threats to India-France

• It lies in the gulf region.

• Region is fraught with intensive conflicts such as in Yemen, Syria where States are pursuing a power policy, and their growing defence budgets are not a good indicator.

• Such conditions paves way for larger crises such as Nuclear proliferation and destabilization of energy supplies.

• American policy on Iran has already created crises in the gulf of Homruz.

Threat of Strength



• It lies in the Africa and Af-Pak region.

• Both regions have failing States which can no longer discharge their responsibilities. This becomes a strategic phenomenon of a new magnitude. Terrorism is the first beneficiary of such situations.

• Organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS are establishing them in the regions like Mali, Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is also a resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan, since the announcement of American withdrawal.

Threat of Weakness



• These includes global common such as cyber attack and Piracy.

• These are the two extremities of the spectrum: on one hand, criminal networks and powerful States controlling technologies that, in their hands, constitute threats for the whole world. On the other, groups using rudimentary but effective means, which threaten, for example, the security of sea routes that are essential for the global economy

Threat of Globalization



France and India Defence Cooperation

- India-France defense cooperation dates way back in the modern Indian history in the 18th and the early 19th centuries. **French Commanders have trained the armies of Scindia, Tipu Sultan, and Ranjit Singh**. Later in the **first World War thousands** of Indian soldiers fought for France freedom.
- Post Independence, in **1953 Dassault signed its maiden agreement with India for supplying the Toofan/Ouragan aircraft**.
- Both nations regularly conduct **land (Shakti), naval (Varuna), and air joint exercises (Garuda)**.
- **The DCNS company is currently building six Scorpeneclass submarines**.

ADDM

In News

Singapore and Brunei co-hosted ASEAN Defense Minister’s Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) focused on maritime security and counterterrorism.

About

- **ADMM-Plus includes 10 ASEAN states** along with Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the United States.
- The exercise is designed to enhance practical military cooperation as well as to promote interoperability and coordination among participating nations, in part to facilitate a more effective response to regional challenges.

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India and ADDM

- The Indian Navy has been a regular participant in maritime exercises conducted by the ADMM countries. ADMM Plus Ex Maritime Security& Counter Terrorism (Ex MS& CT) is a multinational exercise under the aegis of ADMM Plus consortium.
- India has deep historical and cultural linkages with ASEAN countries which have been strengthened in the recent past by vibrant economic engagement and a growing sense of shared maritime destiny.

- Indian Navy and the navies of ASEAN countries have a mutual interest in promoting peace and prosperity in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific, given our shared maritime security interests.
- ADMM Plus Ex MS & CT is aimed at enhancing mutual understanding with respect to maritime security issues and streamlining drills on counter-terrorism operations at sea.

Apache helicopter handed over the IAF

In News

Apache Guardian helicopter was formally handed over to the Indian Air Force at Boeing production facility in Mesa, Arizona, USA.

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About Apache

- It has the **capability to carry out precision attacks** at standoff ranges and operate **in hostile airspace with threats from the ground.**
- It has the capability to **transmit and receive the battlefield picture**, too and from the weapon systems **through data networking.**
- It can **classify and threat-prioritization** of up to 128 targets in less than a minute.
- It can **detect the objects (moving or stationary) without being detected.**
- These **attack helicopters will provide a significant edge** in any future joint operations in support of land forces.



SIMBEX

In News

The India-Singapore held annual bilateral maritime exercise known as SIMBEX.

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Background

- The **exercise began in 1993**
- It has transformed from traditional anti-submarine exercises to more complex maritime exercises **such as advanced air defense operations, anti-air/ surface practice firings, tactical exercises, etc.**
- The **sea phase of SIMBEX 19 had been conducted in the South China Sea** included various maritime combat exercises such as firing on aerial/ surface targets, advanced aerial tracking, coordinated targeting exercises and tactical exercises on surface/ air scenarios.

Indo-Myanmar coordinated patrol (IMCOR)

In News

The 2019 Indo-Myanmar coordinated patrol (IMCOR) is taking place. This is the **8th edition** of the coordinated patrol (CORPAT) between India and Myanmar.

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Important Facts

- The initiative between the Indian Navy and Myanmar Navy seeks to address issues of terrorism, **human trafficking, poaching, illegal fishing, drug trafficking and other illegal activities harmful to the interest of both nations.**
- **The CORPAT series was first started in Mar 2013.** Since then it has fostered improved professional interaction and enhanced mutual understanding between the two navies for maritime interoperability.

Sanauli- Archaeological Site

Why in News?

A recent excavation by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at Sanauli has unearthed several fascinating artifacts, including two wooden 'legged coffins with skeletons.

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Details

- **Sanauli, in Uttar Pradesh's** Baghpat district is located on the left bank of the Yamuna River, around 70 km northeast of Delhi.
- The site is dated back to **2100-1900 BC** - to a culture that was **contemporary** to the late phase of mature Harappan period.
- These artifacts belong to the Copper Hoard Culture and the Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) Culture.
- The Copper Hoard and OCP **Cultures were urban cultures found around the second millennium BC**, and these excavations reveal a great deal about their ways of living and burying the dead.
- These cultures are **different from the Harappan or Indus Valley Civilisation** since they have different making techniques for pottery and beads, as well as distinct burial practices. Legged coffins with decorations, and an antenna sword also differentiate this culture.
- But, both Harappan and Sanauli used burnt bricks.
- Excavations at Sanauli had brought to light the largest **necropolis** of the late Harappan period which date back to around the early part of second millennium BCE.

What is the difference between History and Archaeology?

The aim of both archaeology and history is the research of the human past. The difference between these two disciplines derives from the source materials: historians use written sources while archaeologists concentrate on physical remains.

PEPPER IT WITH

Pre-Iron or Bronze Age, Neolithic revolution, Mahabharata, Harappan Civilization, Dholavira, Ganga Yamuna Doab

Background

Excavation at the site first started in 2004-05. Last year, ASI excavated three pre-Iron Age chariots that can challenge the famed **Aryan invasion theory**, lending sharper focus on to whether it were horses or bulls that pulled these carriers estimated to be from 2000-1800 BC.

The copper remains of the chariots, found inside burial pits in a quiet spot along the Gangetic plains date further back to the Bronze Age.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- ASI under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India was established in 1861.
- The functions of ASI are as per the provisions of
 1. **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958,**
 2. **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act Rules, 1959 and**
 3. **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010.**
- The ASI regulates the export trade of non-antiquities through the provisions of :
 1. **Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972 and**
 2. **Antiquities and Art Treasure Act Rules, 1973.**

Sri Vedanta Desikan

Why in News?

A postage stamp was recently released to commemorate the **750th birth anniversary** of Sri Vedanta Desikan.

About Sri Vedanta Desikan

- He was celebrated as '**sarva-tantra-svatantra**' or master of all arts and crafts; awarded the title '**kavitarkika-kesari**', the lion amongst poets and logicians; and glorified as '**ramanuja-daya-patram**', the recipient of Ramanuja's blessings.
- Anyone, irrespective of caste and creed could join the Sri Vaishnava fold. This is a truly democratizing movement that obliterated caste distinctions.
- Vedanta Desikan rejected the offer of joining the court of the King of Vijayanagara and considered that the greatest treasure he had was the grace of the Lord.
- Some of his major works were as under:
 - **RahasyaTraya Sara:** It is a masterly treatise on Prapatti or surrendering oneself to the divine.
 - **PadukaSahasram:** It reveals his poetic eloquence and his mathematical ingenuity.
 - **Silpartha-saram:** A treatise on sculpture
 - **Bhugola-nirayam:** A research text on geography
 - **SubhashitaNeevi:** It contains a fund of moral and ethical advice which is relevant and practical.
 - Taking cues from the Vedic scriptures, Vedanta Desikan authored **AahaaraNiyamam** that detailed how different food items help in maintaining a healthy mind and a disease-free life.

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The **Sri Vaishnava philosophy** that Saint Ramanuja initially propounded got a much wider audience with Vedanta Desikan's writings and preachings. One of the essential features of this philosophy was the aspect of inclusion.

PEPPER IT WITH

Sri Vedanta Desikan Manipaduka Indraprastha Trust, Sri Rangam Temple, Vijayanagara Empire

Stucco sculpture

Why in News?

A life-sized stucco sculpture from a Buddhist site at Phanigiri in Suryapet (Telangana) was unearthed recently. It is the **biggest** stucco sculpture found in the country so far.

The life-size figurine found in the excavations is thought to represent one of **Bhodhisattva** in **Jataka Chakra**.

Details

- Apart from the life-sized stucco, these excavations brought to light a Mahastupa, apsidal chaitya grihas, votive stupas, pillared congregation halls, viharas, platforms with staircases at various levels, sculptural panels with Brahmi inscriptions, belonging to **Satavahana period** from first century BC, continued with Mahayana till the end of **Ikshuvaka period** and others in third-fourth century AD.
- The stucco is about 1.73 metres in height and 35 cm in width. The preliminary excavation at Phanigiri was started in **1941 by Khaja**

Pattachitra style of painting is one of the oldest and most popular art forms of Odisha. The name Pattachitra has evolved from the Sanskrit words patta, meaning canvas, and chitra, meaning picture. Pattachitra is thus a **painting done on canvas, and is manifested by rich colourful application**, creative motifs and designs, and portrayal of simple themes, mostly mythological in depiction.

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Muhammad Ahmad of archaeology department of the then erstwhile Hyderabad state, and it continued till 1944.

- The mahastupa is considered as **Paribhogika stupa** which contains the personal belongings of Buddhist monks, a practice that was prevalent during the Ashoka period and continued till the 4th century AD.

What is Stucco?

Stucco is the common name for Portland Cement Plaster, which is applied either to the indoor or outdoor surfaces of buildings. Stucco is hard and durable. It's also rot and fungus resistant. It's a great low-cost home exterior material. It does not require much maintenance.

PEPPER IT WITH
International Building Code (IBC),
Ikshuvaka Period, Jataka Chakra

Contemporary stucco is made from Portland cement materials, sand, and water mixed together to form a plaster. However, there are other stucco options that are made from a variety of raw materials. Traditional stucco, for example, uses lime instead of Portland Cement. Stucco is mixed on site and applied in various layers.

Mawmluh cave and Therriaghat (Meghalaya)

In News

To preserve the geological site and raise awareness, the Geological Survey of India (GSI) recently installed geological display boards at Mawmluh cave and Therriaghat, Sobhar in East Khasi district of Meghalaya.

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Meghalaya has a unique geological history of more than 2,000 million years.

Mawmluh cave

- High resolution stable isotopic studies of the stalagmites from the Mawmluh cave showed that there was a major climatic event about 4,200 years ago.
- The stalagmite in the Mawmluh cave has now been tagged a **Global Boundary Stratotype Section and Point (GSSP)**. This is the first formally ratified marker of a geological time period in India.

Therriaghat

- Therriaghat marks the **cretaceous (K)-Palaeogene (Pg)** mass extinction event.
- The Um-Sohryngkew (Wahrew River) section at Therriaghat is known for having the most complete records of the cretaceous-Palaeogene (K-Pg) boundary transition in India. There is also a high level of iridium metal.
- According to studies, about 65 million years ago, the Earth experienced a major global extinction event that marks the boundary between the **Mesozoic and Cenozoic eras** and on a finer scale, the Cretaceous and the Palaeogene.

PEPPER IT WITH
Khasi fest Seng KutSnem,
Committee for "The Investigation
of Coal and Mineral Resources"
(1837), Geological Time Scale

GSI

The Geological Survey of India (GSI) **was set up in 1851** primarily to find coal deposits for the Railways. The main functions of GSI relate to creation and updation of national geoscientific information and mineral resource assessment. These objectives are achieved through ground surveys, air-borne and marine surveys, mineral prospecting and investigations, multi-disciplinary geoscientific, geo-technical, geo-environmental and natural hazards studies, glaciology, seismotectonic study, and carrying out fundamental research.

Thrissur Pooram

- **Thrissur Pooram**, Kerala's most extravagant temple festival concluded recently. It is an annual festival.
- Thrissur Pooram festival was started in the 18th century by **Raja Rama Varma**, the ruler of the Kingdom of Cochin. He was also

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known as the **SakthanThampuram**, who played a vital role in shaping the Thrissur city and making it Kerala’s cultural capital.

- Before the emergence of ‘Thrissur Pooram’ as Kerala’s most extravagant temple festival, there was the festival at Arattupuzha temple.
- During this festival, one can see an excellent collection of elephants decorated with various golden ornaments.
- The name Thrissur is derived from “**Thiru-Shiva-Perur**”, which literally translates to “The city of the Sacred Siva”.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

In News

The desecration of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's statue during a violent clash in Kolkata on has put the spotlight on the renowned philosopher and key figure of the Bengali Renaissance.

Vidyasagar was a well-known writer, intellectual and above all a staunch supporter of humanity. He had an imposing personality and was revered even by the British authorities of his time.

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About Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) was as one of the pillars of Bengal renaissance who managed to continue the social reforms movement that was started by Raja Rammohan Roy in the early 1800s.
- He brought about a revolution in the Bengali education system and refined the way Bengali language was written and taught. His book, ‘BornoPorichoy’ (Introduction to the letter), is still used as the introductory text to learn Bengali alphabets.
- Born in Bengal as Ishwar ChnadraBandopadhyay, the title ‘**Vidyasagar**’ (**ocean of knowledge**) was given to him due to his vast knowledge.
- **His major publications include:** BetaalPanchabinsati (1847); Jeebancharit (1850); Bodhadoy (1851); BornoPorichoy (1854); Sitar Bonobash (1860);
- Vidyasagar was an ardent advocate of women education and empowerment and also challenged the widespread practice of child marriage. He rightly viewed education as the primary way for women to achieve emancipation from all the societal oppression they had to face at that time.
- He challenged the Brahminical authorities and proved that widow remarriage is sanctioned by Vedic scriptures. He took his arguments to the British Authorities and his pleas were heard when the **Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856 or Act XV**, 1856, was decreed on July 26, 1856.
- He did not just stop there. He initiated several matches for child or adolescent widows within respectable families and even married his son Narayan Chandra to an adolescent widow in 1870 to set an example.

Orchha Town of Madhya Pradesh

Why in News?

The Orchha town of Madhya Pradesh (MP), which is situated on the bank of Betwa River, has been **included in the tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites**. It is located in the Niwari district in Madhya Pradesh and is 15 km from Jhansi of Uttar Pradesh.

According to the rules, to be a part of UNESCO’s World Heritage sites, the heritage or any historical site first has to be on the tentative list. After it makes to the tentative list, another proposal is sent to the UNESCO.

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Facts about Orchha

- The architectural heritage of Orchha town depicts peculiar style of the **Bundela dynasty**. It was built by **king Rudra Pratap Singh** of Bundela dynasty in the 16th century.
- The ancient town is famous for its **Chaturbhuj Temple**, Orchha fort complex, Raja Mahal among others. It is a place where Lord Ram is worshipped as a king with a dedicated temple in his name.
- Palatine and temple designs of the Bundelas were stylistic innovations in medieval Rajput architecture. Based upon archetypal Mandala forms with elements from **Sultanate and Mughal architecture**, they are unique aesthetic statements.
- **Mandala plan** is square subdivided into smaller squares and rectangles with open space in the center leading to highly evolved composition and massing and play of solids and voids.
- These open courtyards alternating with pavilions at higher stories such that interior open spaces form an inverted pyramid structure, mark the achievement of the Bundeli architectural style, which influenced the later architecture of the whole of Bundelkhand.

What is Tentative List?

- ❖ A Tentative List is an inventory of those properties which each State Party intends to consider for nomination.
- ❖ States Parties should submit Tentative Lists **at least one year prior** to the submission of any nomination.
- ❖ States Parties are encouraged to re-examine and re-submit their Tentative List at least every ten years.

Sacred Mountain Landscape and Heritage Routes

- The Sacred Mountain Landscape and Heritage Routes, located in the Pithoragarh district in the north-eastern part of Uttarakhand has also been included in the tentative list recently.
- The area is flanked in the east by Nepal and bordered by China to the north. The Indian site is part of the larger landscape referred to as the **‘Kailash Sacred Landscape’** constituting the Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar.
- Renowned for its immense cultural, ecological and historical importance, this area represents a diverse, multi-cultural and fragile landscape.
- The property within the Indian territory comprises key sacred cultural sites, with ancient pilgrimage and trade routes, which leads to the spiritually and historically significant Kailash Mansarovar region.
- This unique area is significant not only as a religious-spiritual site, but is also host to high-altitude, trans-Himalayan ecosystems, habitats and biodiversity.
- The area is dominated by west Himalayan forest types, with a rich diversity of rare and endangered flora and fauna along a varied altitudinal range.
- The area includes natural protected areas like the **Askot Wildlife Sanctuary** and the **Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve** critical for in situ conservation of terrestrial biodiversity.

PEPPER IT WITH

Silk Road sites in India, Santiniketan, Desert National park, Garo Hills Conservation Area, Cold Desert Cultural Landscape in India

Miscellaneous

ChintanBaithak

Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) held a ‘ChintanBaithak’ with the stakeholders of Renewable Energy sector recently. The ‘Baithak’ (meet) was chaired by Secretary, MNRE.

It deliberated upon various issues pertaining to the RE sector viz. solar, wind, bio-energy, small-hydro, regulatory issues, bidding & pricing, demand forecasting, financing of RE projects, energy storage, Make in India, skilling India’s RE work force etc.

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Swami Atmabodhanand

Swami Atmabodhanand, aged 27 recently broke his 194-day fast in protest against sand mining and the upcoming dams on key rivers that feed the Ganga. Atmabodhanand had begun fasting days after G.D. Agrawal, 86, a former professor and hermit, died of a heart attack on October 11 after a 111-day fast.

He has been assured that laws banning sand mining on certain stretches of the Ganga would henceforth be enforced.

KalasaBanduri Project

It is a drinking water project of Kerala government. The Kalasa-Banduri Drinking Water Supply Scheme doesn't involve hydro-electric power generation.

GOLDMAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE 2019

Six grassroots environmental activists received the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Prize founded in 1989 by U.S. philanthropists Rhoda and Richard Goldman. Also called the **Green Nobel Prize**, the annual award honors grassroots environmental heroes from six continental regions: Europe, Asia, North America, Central and South America, Africa, and islands and island nations.

World Migratory Bird Day

- World Migratory Bird Day was observed on 11th may 2019.
- It was dedicated to highlighting the problem of pollution with the theme, '**Protect Birds: Be the Solution to Plastic Pollution.**'
- World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) is an annual awareness-raising campaign highlighting the need for the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats.
- It has a global outreach and is an effective tool to help raise global awareness of the threats faced by migratory birds, their ecological importance, and the need for international cooperation to conserve them.

Sasakawa Award 2019

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) conferred Sasakawa Award 2019 for Disaster Risk Reduction to Dr. Pramod Kumar Mishra, Additional Principal Secretary to Prime Minister of India.

The United Nations Sasakawa Award is the **most prestigious international award in the area of Disaster Risk Management**. It is jointly organized by the UNDRR and the Nippon Foundation. The theme of the 2019 Sasakawa award was "Building Inclusive and Resilient Societies".

Kappaphycusallvarezi

- The invasive Kappaphycusalvarezii seaweed, which smothers and kills coral reefs, has spread its wings to coral reef areas in **Valaiisland in the Gulf of Mannar (GoM)** and set to invade new coral colonies in the marine national park.
- After invading Shingle, Kurusadai and Mulli islands in Mandapam cluster of the GoM, the red algae invaded Valaiisland along Kilakarai coast following its cultivation in south Palk Bay.
- A 2005 Government Order had restricted cultivation of the exotic seaweed only to the seawaters north of the **Palk Bay and South of Thoothukdi coast**.

Concept Clearing Assignment

1. Though "the carrot and the stick" are always being deployed by RBI in the regulation of financial entities in India. The recent crises in the NBFCs shows that "the stick" is missing. Discuss in the context of the creation of a new Chief risk officer for the NBFCs by the RBI.
2. "The quota for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is not at odds with the principle of meritocracy rather it helps in true fulfillment of effective and

- substantive equality by accounting for the structural conditions into which people are born”. Discuss the statement in the light of recent Supreme Court judgment on the reservation in promotion.
3. “The Office of the Lt. Governor of Puducherry cannot run a parallel office of governance.” In the context of statement, discuss the powers and privileges of Lt.Governor of Puducherry and how are they different from the powers of Lt. Governor of Delhi.
 4. Chagos Island dispute reflects the failure of Britain’s Empire 2.0 policy. Substantiate your views.
 5. Snakebite envenomings have become a major global health crisis and India is also not an anomaly to the crises. In the context of the statements discuss the problem of snakebite envenomings in India. Also, Comment on the WHO strategy on Antivenoms and the challenges it faces in its implementation.
 6. What is the role played by an Industrial policy in India? What are the factors that made the IT sector a success story in India? Also discuss the measures India should take to increase the contribution of manufacturing in its GDP?
 7. Discuss the significance of International Military Exercise. What are the common security threats faced by India and France?
 8. “Though IBSA act as a significant tool for global South-South Cooperation, its significance and reach are often eclipsed by the BRICS”. In the view of the statement suggest some of the measures which IBSA can take to regain its prominence and advance its goals of South-South cooperation. Also, mention some successful IBSA initiatives.
 9. Discuss the importance of the discovery of chariots at Sanauli (Archaeological Site). How does it challenge the Aryan Invasion Theory?
 10. What are in your opinions are the circumstances which moved China to change its stance on the Issue of listing of Masood Azhar? Also, discuss the significance of the listing of Masood Azhar for India.
 11. Explain the significance of BIMSTEC in forwarding India’s foreign policy interest? What are the challenges being faced by the BIMSTEC? Can BIMSTEC replace SAARC? Substantiate your views with examples.
 12. Highlight the role played by Sand in the stability of the Ecosystem. Also, Comment on the UNEP report on sand and sustainability.
 13. Elucidate the challenges faced by the National Policy on Safety, Health, and Environment at the Workplace (NPSHEW). Also, suggest some measures for the improvement of the same.
 14. The pond is not devoid of the fish it’s the inability of the person to cook made him suffer from hunger similarly it’s not the lack of skills but the dismal participation of women in the workforce has delayed India’s economic growth. In the context of the statement discuss the challenges in Women Participation in the workforce in India. Also, highlight the major findings of the ILO report on Women in Business and Management.
 15. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) laid the foundation of long-lasting peace which was long demanded in conflict-ridden West Asia. Discuss, Also, Critically analyze the Iran policy of leaving the deal stage by stage. Is the decision taken by Iran is the result of increased American pressure?

P.T Oriented Questions

1. Identify the Bird species with the help of given information:
 1. It is the only flightless bird known in the Indian Ocean area.
 2. It is a chicken-sized bird.
 3. It is indigenous to Madagascar.
 4. New research has found that it had once gone extinct, but rose from the dead thanks to a rare process called “iterative evolution”.

Codes:

 - (a) Dodo of Mauritius
 - (b) White Throated Rail
 - (c) Jerdon’s Courser
 - (d) Bengal Florican

2. Consider the following statements about the Elephant bonds:
 1. It was introduced on the recommendation of Surjit Bhalla committee to curb the black money.
 2. It will be utilised for the infrastructure projects only.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

 - (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only
 - (c) Both 1 and 2
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2

3. Identify the Virus/Disease with the help of given information:
 1. It is a rare disease caused by a virus that is primarily transmitted from animals to humans.
 2. It lasts for two to four weeks, starting as a fever and headache and progressing through to small bumps called pustules that spread over the body.
 3. It is transmitted through the hunting and consumption of bush meat.

4. The virus occurs sporadically in the central and western parts of Africa's tropical rainforest.
5. There are no specific treatments or vaccines available for this infection.

Codes:

 - (a) Acute Encephalitis Syndrome
 - (b) Hutchinson-Gilford Progeria
 - (c) Monkey Pox
 - (d) Cat Scratch Disease

4. Which of the following government has launched the ‘Golden Card’ Permanent Residency Scheme in an attempt to woo wealthy individuals and exceptional talents from all over the world?
 - (a) USA
 - (b) CHINA
 - (c) UAE
 - (d) INDIA

5. Which one of the following statements given below is **INCORRECT**?
 - (a) CostusPictus Plant found in India is used to improve Insulin sensitivity.
 - (b) Lecanorchistaiwaniana is a myco-heterotroph which are the parasitic plants that have abandoned photosynthesis.
 - (c) *Ophiorrhizamungos* plant is used to treat heart disease and Diabetes.
 - (d) CRISPER gene-editing technology has been used to create an antidote to world most venomous sting belonging to a species of box jellyfish.

6. Consider the following statements with regard to Grizzled Giant Squirrel:
 1. For the first time, researchers have sighted nests of the grizzled giant squirrel at Chinnar Wildlife

Sanctuary in Kerala in the Western Ghats.

2. It is critically endangered species listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
3. It has been categorized as near threatened by the Red List and listed under Schedule II of CITES.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 2 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 2 and 3 only

7. Consider the following statements about BIMSTEC:

1. It constitutes of seven member states from South Asia.
2. Myanmar was the last state to be included in the organisation in 1997.
3. It helps in enhancing India's Act East Policy.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

8. Consider the following statements with regard to Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR):

1. It is a non-governmental organization partnership that helps developing countries better understand and reduce their vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change.
2. GFDRR is a grant-funding mechanism, managed by the United Nations Development Programme.
3. Recently India has been unanimously chosen as co-chair

of the Consultative Group (CG) of GFDRR.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

9. Consider the following statements:

1. The powers of Lt. Governor of Puducherry are mentioned in the Constitution of India.
2. The Puducherry government can legislate on any matters mentioned in the concurrent and state list only.

Which of the statement(s) mentioned above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

10. Consider the following statements with regard to Rotterdam Convention:

1. The objective of this convention is to promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among Parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals.
2. The restriction of transboundary movements of hazardous chemicals is its principle aim.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

11. Consider the following statements about the e- Vidhan Project:

1. It is a Mission Mode Project included in Digital India Programme.

2. Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is the 'Nodal Ministry' for its implementation.
3. It enables automation of the entire law-making process.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) All of the above.

12. Consider the following statements:

1. Stockholm Convention is related to the reduction of hazardous waste generation and the promotion of environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes, wherever the place of disposal.
2. Basel Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that remain intact in the environment for long periods.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

13. Consider the following statements about the vacation bench of Supreme Court:

1. It is a special bench created by the Chief Justice of India on the recommendation of president.
2. The high court and trial courts too have vocational benches to hear cases of urgent matters.
3. The composition of the benches is depended solely on the discretion of CJI.

Which of the statement(s) given above is /are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only

- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

14. The 7th economic census is under process and is being conducted by Ministry of Statistics and Planning Implementation (MoSPI). Consider the following statements with respect to Economic Census in India:

1. Conducting Periodic Economic Census has been the means of measuring the diversity of non-farm economic activities.
2. It is the complete count of all establishment located within the geographical boundary of India.
3. The information collected during Economic Census are useful for socio-economic developmental planning at state and district levels.
4. In the current Economic Census, MoSPI has partnered with CSC e-Governance Services India Limited.
5. The ministry is also introducing geo-tagging.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 3, 4 and 5 only
- (c) 1, 2, 4 and 5 only
- (d) All of the above

15. Consider the following statements about the drug control in India:

1. The drugs present in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) only are controlled in India.
2. National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), has entrusted with regulation of both scheduled and non-scheduled drugs.

Which of the statement(s) given above is /are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2

- (d) Neither 1 nor 2
16. Consider the following statements about the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act:
1. It prohibits laboratory or clinic to conduct any test for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.
 2. Section 4 of the Act provides exemption to the conduction of pre-natal diagnostic techniques.
- Which of the statement(s) given above is/are incorrect?
- (a) 1 only
 - (b) 2 only
 - (c) Both 1 and 2
 - (d) Neither 1 nor 2
17. Consider the following statements with regard to the Young Scientist Programme YUVIKA 2019.
1. The Program is primarily aimed at imparting basic knowledge on Space Technology, Space Science and Space Applications to the younger ones.
 2. Those who have finished 9th standard and are currently studying in the 10th standard will be eligible for the program.
 3. ISRO has chalked out this program to "Catch them young".
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
 - (b) 1 and 3 only
 - (c) 2 and 3 only
 - (d) 1, 2 and 3
18. Consider the following statements with regard to MCA 21:
1. It is a project implemented by Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
 2. It is an IT-driven and forward-looking mission mode project

- under the Government of India's National e-Governance plan.
3. National Institute for Smart Governance (NISG) is assisting the in operations and maintenance of the project.
 4. It is the first mission mode e-governance project being undertaken in the country.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
 - (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
 - (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
 - (d) All of the above
19. Which of the following statement is correct about fall armyworm?
- (a) A pest of American origin causing harm to the crops globally.
 - (b) A infection causing worm endemic to West Africa, India and Pakistan
 - (c) Thread worm infecting the small intestine of humans.
 - (d) Pest causing harm to the millets particularly in Asia and Africa.
20. Consider the following statements with regard to World Custom Organisation:
1. It is a non-governmental body.
 2. Its mission is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.
 3. It represents around 100 Customs administrations across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade.
 4. It is the only international organization with competence in Customs matters.
- Which of the following statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only
 - (b) 2 and 3 only
 - (c) 2 and 4 only
 - (d) 3 and 4 only

21. With reference to 'Global Climate Change Alliance', which of the following statements is/are correct? (UPSC-Prelims 2017)

1. It is an initiative of the European Union.
2. It provides technical and financial support to targeted developing countries to integrate climate change into their development policies and budgets.
3. It is coordinated by the World Resources Institute (WRI) and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD).

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

22. With reference to the religious history of India, consider the following statements:

1. Sautrantika and Sammitiya were the sects of Jainism.
2. Sarvastivadin held that the constituents of phenomena were not wholly momentary, but existed forever in a latent form.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (UPSC Prelims 2017)

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

23. In the context of Indian history, the principle of 'Dyarchy (diarchy)' refers to (UPSC Prelims 2017)

- (a) Division of the central legislature into two houses.
- (b) Introductions of double government i.e., Central and State governments.

- (c) Having two sets of rulers; one in London and another in Delhi.
- (d) Division of the subjects delegated to the provinces into two categories.

24. With reference to 'Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)' sometimes mentioned in the news while forecasting Indian monsoon, which of the following statements is/are correct? (UPSC Prelims 2017)

1. IOD phenomenon is characterized by a difference in sea surface temperature between tropical Western Indian Ocean and tropical Eastern Pacific Ocean.
2. An IOD phenomenon can influence El Nino's impact on the monsoon.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

25. Consider the following pairs: Commonly used/consumed materials Unwanted or controversial chemicals likely to be found in them

1. Lipstick - Lead
2. Soft drinks - Brominated vegetable oils
3. Chinese fast food - Monosodium glutamate

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched? (UPSC Prelims 2017)

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

26. Consider the following statements about the Finance Commission:

1. It is appointed mainly to recommend the distribution

- between the Union and the States of the net proceeds of taxes.
2. It is entitled to look into any matter in the interest of sound finance.
 3. It redresses the vertical imbalances between the taxation powers.
- Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only
 - (b) 2 and 3 only
 - (c) 1 and 3 only
 - (d) 1, 2 and 3
27. Which one of the following statements given below are incorrect?
- (a) The Lagrange Points are positions where the gravitational pull of two large masses precisely equals the centripetal force required for a small object to move with them.
 - (b) NASA has launched Artemis programme to study the magnetic field of the sun's corona.
 - (c) Recently, NASA has found evidence of a unique mixture of water ice, methanol, and organic molecules on Ultima Thule's surface.
 - (d) Ultima Thule belongs to a class of Kuiper belt objects called the "cold classical".
28. Consider the following statements with respect to the Commonwealth tribunal:
1. Recently, Justice RS Radhakrishnan has been appointed as the member of the Tribunal based in London.
 2. The Members are appointed for a 4-year term which can be renewed only once.
 3. It entertains only those cases in which the organisations surrender its jurisdiction.
- Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only
 - (b) 2 and 3 only
 - (c) 1 and 3 only
 - (d) 1, 2 and 3
29. Consider the following statements with regard to Social and Labour Convergence Programme(SLCP)?
1. It is an initiative to have a standard-neutral, converged assessment framework for the textile and clothing industry.
 2. It is a code of conduct or compliance programme.
 3. The initiative is led by the world's leading manufacturers, brands, retailers, industry groups.
 4. The objective of the initiative is to improve the working conditions in textile units.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
 - (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
 - (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
 - (d) All of the above
30. What are the findings of the NASA's Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS)?
1. The global green leaf area has increased by 10% since the early 2000s.
 2. China alone accounts for 25% of the global net increase in leaf area.
 3. The Greening in China is from Croplands is more than India.
 4. The Forest Survey of India's State of Forest Report 2017 had recorded that forest cover had increased by 6,600 sq km since 2015.
- Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?
- (a) 1 and 3 only
 - (b) 2 and 3 only
 - (c) 2 and 4 only
 - (d) 1 and 2 only