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From the Desk of the Director

Dear Students

The preparation of current affairs magazine is an evolutionary process as its nature and content keeps changing according to the demands of Civil Service Exam. As you are aware about the importance of current affairs for the prelims as well as mains exam, our aim is to follow an **integrated approach** covering all stages of examination from prelims to interview. Keeping these things in mind, we, at Vajiram and Ravi Institute, are always in the process of evolving our self so as to help aspirants counter the challenges put forward by UPSC.

In fulfillment of our objective and commitment towards the students, we have introduced some changes in our current affairs magazine. The CA Magazines, now with the name of **"The Recitals"**, will have four sections. These are:

1. **Feature Article:** As you are aware of the fact that civil service mains exam has become quite exhaustive and analytical, especially since 2013 after the change in syllabus, we have decided to focus on 2-3 topics every month that will provide an insight into the issue so as to help students understand the core of the issue. This will help in Essay writing as well as Mains Exam.
2. **Mains Q&A:** New students quite often struggle to find out that in what way the given topic is useful for them and in what form questions can be framed from the article. To help those students, we at Vajiram and Ravi have designed an innovative way to teach current affairs. Now, we will cover the current issues through questions and answers so as to make it more targeted towards exam. This will not just provide the information and analysis on current issues but will also help in learning the art of answer writing. Further the related information on the topics on which questions have been framed but that is outside the purview of answer will be given in the Box as **'Extra Mile'**.
3. **Prelims Q&A:** This section will contain prelims based MCQs that will test your diligence while reading the current issues. These MCQs will be of UPSC standard and will contain detailed explanation. Students are advised to attempt these MCQs honestly and read the Explanation carefully. The idea is to also provide students with a question bank of around 600 current affairs MCQs (50 Qs × 12 months = 600 Qs) just before their prelims examination, which will act as revision on issues spanning over the entire year.
4. **Bridging Gaps:** This section will contain miscellaneous topics which has not been covered through Q&A. That is why it is called Bridging Gaps, meaning the left-over topics.

So, the new magazine is a complete overhaul of what we have been doing for so long. We hope that the new beginning will be to the liking of students.

Thanks

Best Wishes

G20 Summit

14th G20 Summit was held in Osaka, Japan, from 28-29 June 2019. The summit was attended by Heads of State/Government of 19 Member countries, EU and other invited countries and International Organizations. The summit adopted the “**Osaka Declaration**”.

About G20

Established in 1999, G20 was elevated from a forum of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to that of Heads of State/Government in 2008 **to effectively respond to the global financial crisis of 2008**. Since then it has emerged as the premier global forum for international economic cooperation.

Importance Of G20 As A Platform:

- **Significant Weight** - G20 members **represent around 85 per cent of global gross domestic product**, over **75 per cent of global trade**, and **two-thirds of the world’s population**.
- **Promotes Multilateralism** – It holds significance against the backdrop of rising protectionism and ongoing trade war between US and China.
- **A number of overarching themes** –Summits usually have a number of overarching themes. In Buenos Aires last year, these were “**the future of work, infrastructure for development and a sustainable food future**”.

The G20 was also credited with **helping avert a shift to protectionism post-global financial crisis in 2008, tripling the International Monetary Fund’s budget** and giving development banks more remit.

Osaka Declaration

Osaka Declaration highlighted its commitment to foster global economic growth, while harnessing the power of technological innovation, in particular digitalization, and its application for the benefit of all. It presented different themes to ensure Global Sustainable Development. These themes were:

A. Global Economy

- The declaration highlighted the nature of global growth which appears to be stabilizing and is generally projected to pick up moderately later this year and into 2020. Although, trade and geopolitical tensions have intensified. The declaration promised to address these risks through further action.

B. Fostering Robust Global Economic Growth

- **Trade and Investment** - It the **G20 Ministerial Statement on Trade and Digital Economy in Tsukuba**. It reaffirmed its support for the necessary reform of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to improve its functions. It recognized the complementary roles of bilateral and regional free trade agreements that are WTO-consistent.
- **Innovation: Digitalization, Data Free Flow with Trust** – The leaders through declaration shared notion of a **human-centered future society**, which is being promoted by Japan as **Society 5.0**.
- It talked about the necessity of **cross-border flow of data, information, ideas and knowledge** for higher productivity, greater innovation, and improved sustainable development, while raising challenges related to privacy, data protection, intellectual property rights, and security.
- **Quality Infrastructure Investment** – It highlighted the importance of quality infrastructure as a driver of economic growth and prosperity.

- **G20 Ministerial Meeting on Trade and Digital Economy** was held between 8-9 June 2019 in Japanese city of Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture.
- Summit discussed importance of Digitalization that is expected to continue to create benefits for economies and societies as a whole.

Society 5.0

- Society 5.0 was proposed in the **5th Science and Technology Basic Plan** as a future society that Japan should aspire to.
- It follows the hunting society (Society 1.0), agricultural society (Society 2.0), industrial society (Society 3.0), and information society (Society 4.0).
- Society 5.0 is a human-centered society that balances economic advancement with the resolution of social problems by a system that highly integrates cyberspace and physical space.

C. Global Finance

- It reaffirmed its commitment to further strengthening the global financial safety net with a strong, quota-based, and adequately resourced International Monetary Fund (IMF) at its center.
- It declared that **crypto-assets do not pose a threat to global financial stability at this point**. However, it stressed the need to closely monitor these developments and remain vigilant to existing and emerging risks.
- It reaffirmed their commitment to **applying the recently amended FATF Standards** to virtual assets and related providers for **anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism**.
- It welcomed the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2462, which stresses the essential role of the FATF in setting global standards for preventing and combatting money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing.

D. Anti-corruption

- It highlighted its commitment to play a leading role in the global efforts to prevent and fight against corruption, as well as promoting integrity, by implementing the **G20 Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2019-2021**. It welcomed the **Compendium of Good Practices for Promoting Integrity and Transparency in Infrastructure Development** and endorsed the High Level Principles for Effective Protection of Whistleblowers.

E. Creating A Virtuous Cycle Of Growth By Addressing Inequalities

- **Labour and Employment** – It recognized the importance of **promoting a healthy and active ageing society** that **enables workers to participate in the labour market at older ages**, while continuing to increase participation of youth, women and persons with disabilities in economic activities.
- It expressed its commitment to promote decent work and reaffirm our commitment to take actions to eradicate child labour, forced labour, human trafficking and modern slavery in the world of work, including through fostering sustainable global supply chains.

F. Women's Empowerment

- The declaration noted that further progress has been made towards the **Brisbane Goal, to reduce the gap in labour force participation between men and women by 25 per cent by 2025**.
- The declaration promised to continue support for girls' and women's education and training, including providing quality primary and secondary education, improved access to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) education and raising awareness toward eliminating gender stereotypes.
- It welcomed the continued implementation of the **Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi)** in support of women's entrepreneurship in developing countries including in Africa.
- It also welcomed the launch of the private sector alliance for the '**Empowerment and Progression of Women's Economic Representation (EMPOWER)**'.
- **Tourism** – It highlighted the contribution of tourism as an important driver of global economic growth.
- **Agriculture** - It stressed upon the need to increase agricultural productivity through the adoption of high-end technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics.

G. Realizing An Inclusive And Sustainable World

- **Development** - The leaders decided to play leading role in contributing to the timely implementation of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and the **Addis Ababa Action Agenda**.
- It welcomed the **Osaka Comprehensive Accountability Report**.

- **Global Health** – It expressed its commitment to moving towards **achieving universal health coverage** according to national contexts and priorities.
- It vowed to accelerate efforts based on the **One-Health approach to tackle antimicrobial resistance (AMR)**.
- **Climate change** - Signatories to the Paris Agreement on climate change reaffirmed their commitment to its full implementation. However, The United States reiterated its decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement because it disadvantages American workers and taxpayers.
- **Energy** – It acknowledged the importance of energy transitions that realize the “**3E+S**” (**Energy Security, Economic Efficiency, and Environment + Safety**) in order to transform our energy systems into affordable, reliable, sustainable and low GHG emissions systems.
- It also acknowledged G20 Japanese Presidency’s initiative **called Research and Development 20 for clean energy technologies (“RD20”)**.
- **Environment** – It highlighted importance of approaches, such as **circular economy, sustainable materials management, the 3Rs(reduce, reuse, recycle) and waste to value**, to the environment.
- The declaration expressed its optimism towards the development of a **roadmap of the G20 Resource Efficiency Dialogue** under the Japanese Presidency.
- It highlighted “**Osaka Blue Ocean Vision**” as the common global vision, which aims to **reduce additional pollution by marine plastic litter to zero by 2050** through life-cycle approach that includes reducing discharge of mismanaged plastic litter by improved waste management.
- It also endorsed the **G20 Implementation Framework for Actions on Marine Plastic Litter**.
- It recognized the importance of addressing **illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU)** fishing for ensuring the sustainable use of marine resources and conserving the marine environment including biodiversity.
- **Displacement and Migration** – It noted the **2019 Annual International Migration and Displacement Trends and Policies Report** to the G20 prepared by the OECD in cooperation with ILO, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

India At The G20 Summit

- India has participated in all the G20 Summits held so far. **India will host the G20 summit in 2022 for the first time** (2020- in Saudi Arabia, 2021 – in Italy).

- India's growth and development policies are very much aligned with the principles highlighted in the Osaka declaration.
- However, India **refused to sign the declaration on "Osaka Track"** - an overarching framework launched by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe promoting cross-border data flow - at the recently concluded G20 Summit in Japan.
- India, Indonesia, Egypt and South Africa did not sign the declaration.

What Is Osaka Track?

- The declaration described the Osaka Track as *"a process which demonstrates the commitment to promote international policy discussions, inter alia, international rule-making on **trade-related aspects of electronic commerce at the WTO.**"*
- Basically, it is an initiative seeks **the removal of prohibitions on data localisation and urges nations to negotiate rules on data flows, cloud computing among others.**

Why India Refused To Sign It?

- India considers **data was a "new form of wealth"** and has stressed on data localization.
- Last year, Reserve Bank of India has issued a directive that mandated foreign firms to store their payments data within the country.
- Hence, India is demanding to take into account of developing countries while preparing a framework to promote cross-border data flow with enhanced protection.
- India highlighted that **data should be discussed within the World Trade Organization** context and not outside of it.
- While the US, Japan, and Europe want **liberal laws allowing their companies to store data in the most efficient place in the world**, countries like India, South Africa, and Indonesia want **level playing field in digital economy**, i.e. allowing opportunity to local companies to grow to compete at global level before allowing free data flow.

WEAPONISATION OF SPACE

Space militarisation refers to the ecosystem of space systems that are utilised to achieve military objectives. It involves strategic planning, surveillance and telecommunication and reconnaissance as well as real time combat through placement and development of military technology in outer space. While, space weaponisation on the other hand refers to more aggressive and offensive use of space systems for military purposes where outer space itself emerges as the battleground and weapons are placed and created in space that travel from earth to attack or destroy targets in space.

Recent Developments In The Domain

- China is making serious advances in weaponising the outer space creating the fourth frontier of war in space by making strides in ICBM programme.
- The U.S. President had in the recent past announced the creation of a “space force” or a sixth branch of the American armed forces.
- With the launch of GSAT-7, India officially placed its first military satellite in orbit and after successful launch of Agni-V, India acquired capabilities to take down enemy satellites in low earth orbits.
- India recently became the fourth country after Russia, USA and China to possess the competency to take down an enemy in space. It achieved this feat by shooting down a low-orbit satellite through an anti-satellite weapon A-SAT which is a part of Mission Shakti.

Indian Perspective

- India is a signatory to the Outer Space treaty, and has ratified it in 1982.
- It supports the UNGA resolution on No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space. However, it considers it only as an interim step and not a substitute for concluding substantive legal measures to ensure the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which should continue to be a priority for the international community.
- It supports the substantive consideration of the issue of Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) in the Conference on Disarmament where it has been on the agenda since 1982.
- India has always maintained that space must be used only for peaceful purposes and is against the weaponisation of outer space and supports international efforts to reinforce the safety and security of

space based assets. It has clearly stated that it considers Mission Shakti as a step to strengthen its defence and not to wage a war.

- It considers the outer space as the common heritage of humanity and it is the responsibility of all space-faring nations to preserve and promote the benefits accruing from advances made in space technology.

Effects Of Militarisation Of Space

- It will lead to competition and all major countries will start competing with each other and consequently resources would be diverted from the peaceful use of space for mankind to use space for deterrence.
- The ensuing arms race for weaponisation of outer space would create an environment of uncertainty, suspicion, competition and aggressive deployment between nations, which may lead to wars creating concerns for national and international security. It would put at risk the entire range of commercial satellites as well as those involved in scientific explorations.
- The optimal utility of space power cannot be realised in the absence of an integrated space command and cohesive doctrine even after such growth of competencies.
- Growing amounts of space debris pose a real risk to satellites and spacecraft. There are over 20,000 objects of debris which are the size of golf balls while those of smaller size run into hundreds of thousands, totalling nearly 6,000 tonnes.
- The militarisation of space by India would pose security challenges for its nuclear armed neighbours and the military posture in space programme might negatively impact the regional strategic stability.
- India is yet to establish a credible space-command of its own. Shifting focus to space would require diversion of resources from other wings. It may have to increase its defence budget to maintain deterrence in the new race.

Way Forward

- There is no global regulatory regime to address the growing militarisation in space. There is a need of separation between civilian and military use of outer space, international co-operation, free exchange of ideas across borders and import of technologies and products to bring transparency and to build confidence among nations.

- It is important to develop multi-laterally negotiated controls on weapons in space through a new space treaty. This treaty should be able to notify activities, monitor, plan procedures, enforce mechanisms and ban weapons in space in the form of tests, production and deployment.
- Effective engagement of global civil society around achievable goals and viable strategies is much needed, where many western powers mainly US oppose the initiatives.
- At this point, the majority of States are still committed to pursuing a space weapons ban through the Conference on Disarmament, the official forum for multilateral arms control and disarmament treaty negotiations. Continued discussions on space arms control must be encouraged, particularly in the Conference on Disarmament, but also in the UN General Assembly & Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.
- An advocacy tool on the lines of Space Preservation act of the US Congress will go a long way to create forum for dialogues and negotiations which will mobilise various parliaments to work towards space security issues.
- Till the time some comprehensive legislation is accepted by the major players and all the concerned stakeholders, interim measures in form of space debris management regime, and space traffic control initiatives should be adopted.
- The earth from outer space is seen as a unified interconnected and unique ecosystem of life for which space wars and weaponisation should not be seen as a rational choice for the humanity. The 21st century should move towards peace and prosperity rather than conflicts and arms races.

VAJIRAM & RAVI

Fake News And Resultant Mob Lynching

The rumors and fake news have become a big menace, amid reports that around many people had been lynched in different parts of the country following issues such as child-lifting rumours spread primarily through WhatsApp.

Reason For Spread Of Fake News

- **Faster spread of Information:** Technology experts have pointed out that social networking sites created the problem of fake news by creating a transmission technology that allows super quick spread of fake news.
- **Not investing in fact checking:** The New Media is taking away business from mainstream media, which generally weeds out ridiculous falsities but not investing enough in fact checking.
- **Time consuming process to trace fake news:** Studies have shown that correcting and/or debunking a piece of fake news/dangerous rumour online takes an average of 12 hours. In 12 hours, a dangerous rumour can travel online several times around the world. \
- **End to end encryption:** Whatsapp platform is encrypted end-to-end at the device level thus all data is stored on the device and not on servers. This further creates the problem in tracking the originator of the message.
- **Behavioral issues:** Studies have demonstrated that people tend to circulate falsities far faster than facts, especially if such false information conforms to users' biases.
- **Socio-political reasons:** The lynching is also a result of disrespect for an inclusive social order, rising intolerance and growing polarization. Thus hate crimes is a product of intolerance, ideological dominance, role of bigotry, non-acceptance of plurality and diversity in creating an atmosphere where human beings are dehumanized.

Implications

- **Emboldens criminal:** Lack of deterrence and conviction in social media-related cybercrimes emboldens cyber criminals.



- **Erode people's faith in system:** It also erodes people's confidence in the ability of the system to deliver and therefore, mob justice or mob rule prevails without any fear of legal ramifications.
- **Leads to radicalization:** As in some cases the minorities are subjected to mob justice and thus lead them to adopt violent methods for redressal of their grievances.

Recent Steps Taken By Technological Companies To Check Fake News

- **Forward label:** WhatsApp has launched its "forwards label" in India, a measure it expects will help users identify if a text or a video is not originally composed and forwarded from another user. Thus it will encourage people to think before sharing messages that were forwarded.
- **Machine learning techniques:** The WhatsApp has also proposed the use of machine learning techniques to identify malicious content.
- **Limits on forwarding of messages:** The WhatsApp has limited the number of chats a message can be forwarded to maximum of 5 as against 20 for the rest of the world. The current limit is 250 chats.

SC On Mob Violence

It directed several preventive, remedial and punitive measures to deal with lynching and mob violence.

- **Suggestion of the SC:** The SC has suggested measures and given guidelines, for prevention, redressal and punishment of the crime of mob violence. For instance, appointment by states of senior police officers as nodal officers in districts, identification of vulnerable and sensitive regions and more efficient patrolling of highways in these areas.

'SET UP FAST-TRACK COURTS'	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ SC orders states to designate officer of SP rank as nodal officer in each district to prevent mob violence ➤ Centre, states to broadcast radio, TV and online messages warning that lynching and mob violence shall invite serious consequences ➤ FIR must against persons spreading such fake/irresponsible messages, videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Police, district admin's failure to comply with SC's directions will be deemed deliberate negligence ➤ States to draw up compensation scheme for lynching with provision for interim relief to victim(s)/next of kin within 30 days ➤ Lynching cases to be tried by fast-track courts in each district and preferably concluded in 6 months

- **Strengthening legal machinery:** The lodging of FIRs without delay, and the framing of compensation schemes for victims and their families. Designated fast track courts to try the culprits and prompt departmental action against police officers and administrative officials who fail to uphold the law.
- **Special law:** The court has also recommended that a special law be framed by Parliament, creating a separate offence of lynching.

Response In Other Countries

- **Banning:** Some have banned Whatsapp from time to time. Freedom House, a US-based government-funded NGO, has reported WhatsApp was disrupted in 12 of 65 countries i.e. Turkey, Zimbabwe, Azerbaijan, Qatar, UAE, Bangladesh, China, Morocco, Egypt, China, Saudi Arabia in 2016 and 2017.
- **Social media tax:** Uganda has introduced a social media tax to check online gossip, among other objectives, and on Sunday it made social media inaccessible to those who have not paid the tax.
- **Fact finding initiative:** In Mexico, private groups collaborated to set up Verificado 2018, a fact-checking initiative that tries to intervene in the spread of fake news on WhatsApp, particularly during the recent elections.
- **Comprova initiative of Brazil:** Here 24 Brazilian media outlets are fact checking viral content ahead of elections in October 2018. The media outlets span across the board with top TV, print, radio and online media companies participating in the network. Comprova is working on a WhatsApp dissemination strategy where they involve local ambassadors and influencers to debunk fake news. Comprova can also send messages to thousands of contacts in the application, instead of 256 per list permitted for regular users. And for a piece of news to be debunked as fake, it must be validated by two other media in the comprova network. The story is later published on the website and on comprova's profile on social networks. It is also replicated in the pages and profiles of the partner publications.

Steps That Need To Be Taken

- **Role of police:** The state governments must ensure a better, swifter response from the police and help buttress local intelligence networks so that the police arrives before a mob is formed, not after its work is done. For example- The police in Hyderabad have created a WhatsApp account that anyone can message with rumors that concern them, which is a best practice that the company plans to emulate elsewhere.
- **Role of enforcement authorities:** Similarly, enforcement agencies need to develop standard operating protocols to tackle such situations. Such a step needs to be reinforced by appropriate regulatory changes that make it mandatory for entities in the chain of information dissemination to share appropriate alerts with the law enforcement authorities, in a real-time electronic format.
- **Creating deterrence:** There is a need to abolish impunity and instill fear of the law in lynch mobs.

- **Mass awareness:** Mass awareness campaigns and outreach is needed in communities which place a high degree of trust in the written word to treat what they receive on their mobile phones with a degree of healthy skepticism.
- **Media literacy:** The government needs to invest much more resources into education of children and adults alike, in media literacy.
- **Localization of data:** The government should also ask the social media giants to establish and install servers in India.
- **Posting counter-videos:** The one of the method to check fake news is to post counter-videos clarifying the actual position, the other is to register the offences.
- **Role of local authorities:** The district administrations and gram panchayats have should be asked to reach out to locals to persuade them against falling for rumours and to come to the authorities if they have any fears.

MAINS Q&A

1. India has traditionally attached great importance to its relations with Central Asia. But, unfortunately, the relationship despite close historical & cultural contacts has not progressed to the desired extent. Comment.

Context

- At the invitation of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Mr. Sooronbay Jeenbekov, the Prime Minister of India paid an official visit to the Kyrgyz Republic on 13-14 June, 2019.
- **Kyrgyzstan is the current Chair** of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the bilateral meeting took place on the sidelines of SCO meeting.
- Earlier, in May 2019, GOI had invited the President of the Kyrgyz Republic **for the Swearing-in ceremony**.

Answer

Relations between India and Central Asia are ancient and civilisational. India has been connected closely with Central Asia through the Silk Route. Today, the importance of Central Asia for India is not merely civilisational and historical; it goes much beyond this.

Significance of Central Asia for India

- **Energy Security** - Central Asia contains vast hydrocarbon fields and Uranium reserve. With India projected to become ever more reliant on imported energy cultivating alternative sources of energy has become a vital concern.
- **Geostrategic Importance** –Being placed in the middle of the Eurasian Continent, Central Asia is one of the most convenient routes of transit.
- **Commercial Interest** - Both India and Central Asia have economic complementarity in terms of resources, manpower and markets.
- **Geopolitical Interest** – Today Europe, US, China, and Iran are trying to increase their influence in this region. All this is likely to bring in high-stakes power politics in Central Asia.
- **Internal Security** - India sees this region as a source of religious extremism and is concerned to check the rise of radical Islamist groups which may present a terrorist threat. These security concerns are compounded by the proliferation of drug-trafficking in Central Asia.

Challenges In Relationship

Despite all this, relationship between these two regions has not progressed to the desired level due to various challenges. These are:

- **Geographical connectivity** is the biggest challenge faced by India in this region.
- Recently, **Russia is seeking convergence with China** in the Central Asian region. It is affecting India's interest in the region.
- India **lacks in-depth understanding** of Central Asia's political, linguistic and above all intricate socio-tribal structural underpinnings.
- India's **political and economic goals** are still unclear to Central Asia.

- Central Asian **economies are weak**, their societies are **infected with corruption**, and they perilously suffer from **social polarization**, poverty and lack the rule of law.
- Central Asian political systems are **not institution-based**, they are **not accountable** to their peoples and they are unstable.
- The presence of Russia and China, and their **mutual dislike for the US**, only increases tensions in Central Asia.

Conclusion

- Central Asia can be the next Middle East for India in terms of employment and to fuel India's growth and serve domestic needs, there is an imperative for expanding cooperation with the region.
- For this, government has initiated '**Connect Central Asia**' policy. In January 2019, the **First India-Central Asia Dialogue** at the level of Foreign Ministers was held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. This will help in institutionalization of dialogue process.
- **Membership to SCO** is further providing India an opportunity to gain deeper access to Central Asia.

Extra Mile

Key Highlights Of The Bilateral Meeting (India – Kyrgyz)

- Decided to raise bilateral relations to the **level of Strategic Partnership**.
- Noted that the current level of Kyrgyz-India cooperation in the **trade and economic sphere is below its potential** and decided to take the **economic cooperation at a higher level**
- Agreed to celebrate **Year of 2021** as the **Year of Culture in both countries**.
- Kyrgyz side appreciated the **assistance provided by India** in training of specialists of the Kyrgyz within the framework of the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program (ITEC)**
- India's humanitarian assistance of providing medical radiation equipment "**Bhabhatron-2**" for treatment of cancer patient was appreciated
- Agreed to **strengthen bilateral security cooperation** between their respective Security Council structures
- A number of MoUs and Agreements were concluded, including in the fields of Avoidance of Double Taxation, Bilateral Investment, Health, Information & Communication Technology, Investment promotion, etc.
- Few Important Declaration/Agreements/MoUs:
 - Joint Declaration between India and the Kyrgyz Republic on Strategic Partnership
 - **Road map on Trade and Economic Cooperation** between the Republic of India and the Kyrgyz Republic **for the Five-Year period (2019-2024)**
 - **Bilateral Investment Treaty** between India and Kyrgyz Republic
 - MoU on cooperation between National Security Council Secretariat of India and Office of the Security Council of the Kyrgyz Republic
 - MoU on cooperation between National Security Guards of India and National Guards of the Armed Forces of the Kyrgyz
- Commended joint hosting of **India-Kyrgyz Textiles Exhibition** in Bishkek on June 14-24 2019
- Agreed for an **Indian trade show named 'Namaskar Eurasia'** to be organized in Bishkek this year
- India announced \$ 200 million worth of concessional line of credit for Kyrgyz republic.

2. Increasing interest of India in Africa has its pros and cons. Critically Examine.**Context**

- India has **extended \$15 million assistance to Niger** for organising the **African Union (AU) summit** scheduled to be held in Niamey in July 2019.
- It will be the **first time that Niger is scheduled to host** an AU summit.
- The support of grant assistance was in response to a specific request made by Niger government.

Answer

Indian interest in Africa has increased in recent years and can be seen in “**Addis Ababa declaration**”. India is a ‘**development partner**’ of Africa and has placed a growing emphasis on this and other tools of economic diplomacy to ensure it continues to develop and grow in a sustainable manner.

Pros

- **Geo-political gain** - African support will prove helpful for India to become a permanent member in UN Security Council. Also, African continent provides a platform to India to reinforce its soft power through the over two million strong Indian diaspora there.
- **Economic gain** - Africa has emerged as a crucial source for natural resources and for developing new markets. Africa also contains rich reservoir of valuable minerals, metals including gold and diamond. India had launched Focus Africa programme to ensure this gain.
- **Food security** - The availability of arable land in Africa can also become a major source of meeting India’s rapidly growing agricultural demand.
- **Energy Security** - Africa’s oil and gas provides energy-starved India with new sources of import, but also allows it to diversify its supply away from the Middle East stranglehold.
- **Geo-strategic gain** – Maritime security in Indian ocean, international terrorism, presence of aggressive china etc. are few issues which can be tackled more effectively through increased cooperation between these two countries.

Cons

- Indian investment would always at risk due to **political instability** in African region. Conflict between Sudan and South Sudan have brought to the fore the high-risk nature of investments in the African region.
- There is a **lack of business regulation** in African economies. As a result, India’s economic inroads into Africa cannot be separated from controversy over some of its deals such as its oil exploration contract with Sudan and trade agreements with Zimbabwe.
- **Chinese Investment** is more as compared to India. Hence, in the longer run, China may utilize Africa for its own interest at the expense of India’s efforts.

Conclusion

India’s interest in Africa is bring the two continents together through multi-level cooperation. It needs to be structured in a way to overcome the existing challenges and to begin an era that will bring “**Amandla Ngawethu**” (power to the people).

India's Assistance to Niger

- India and Niger enjoy close relations. Bilateral ties have expanded significantly since the **opening of the Indian Resident Diplomatic Mission in Niamey in 2009**.
- India has provided **Lines of Credit worth USD 96.54 million to Niger for projects** in transport, electrification, solar energy, and potable drinking water.
- India is also establishing the **Mahatma Gandhi International Convention Centre (MGICC)** in Niamey under grant assistance.
- This convention Centre by India in Niger is part of **India's plan to build chain convention centres across 20 African states** as signature infrastructure projects.

3. **The induction of India into the SCO would greatly help New Delhi in achieving its vital national interests. However, full integration of India with the so-called Shanghai spirit will depend on India's ability to overcome the challenges. Comment.**

Context

- Prime Minister Modi attended the meeting of **Council of Heads of State (CHS) of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Bishkek (Kyrgyz Republic)** on June 13-14, 2019. The **Bishkek Declaration** was adopted by the Member states.
- This will be the second CHS meeting after India became member of SCO.
- PM Modi had also attended the last CHS meeting in **Qingdao (China)** on June 9-10, 2018.
- Next summit will be held in Russia.
- On the sidelines of CHS meeting, PM held a **number of bilateral meetings (with China, Russia and Kyrgyzstan)**.

Answer

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is an intergovernmental international organization which aims to promote cooperation among member countries in the security sphere, especially to deal with the evils of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. India and Pakistan became SCO members in 2017.

Significance of SCO for India

- India's security, geopolitical, strategic and economic interests are closely intertwined with developments in the region.
- As an SCO member, India will be able to play a major role in addressing the threats of **terrorism, radicalism and instability**. The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) of SCO specifically deals with issues relating to security and defence.
- In addition, the Central Asian region is **richly endowed with natural resources** and vital minerals.
- However, there is **lack of direct land connectivity** to this region. Joining the SCO will be a welcome diplomatic boost to India's efforts to connect with Central Asia.
- Being a full member of the SCO India would be in a position to **plan its policy to effectively deal** with China's ambitious initiative of One Belt, One Road and "China Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC).

- **Stable Afghanistan** is in India's interest. SCO will provide a platform for India to play more active role in Afghanistan.

Challenges faced by India at SCO

- The SCO has been increasingly seen by the West as **an organization to forward Chinese interests**. India will have to focus on the act of balancing between the US and China.
- **Growing convergence with China and Russia** will be another challenge for India.
- **Differences between India and Pakistan** might hamper the functioning of the SCO.
- All members of SCO have supported OBOR except India. It might lead to **isolation of India on this platform**.
- It would be difficult for India to **overcome the burden of geography** and make tangible gains in terms of trans-regional connectivity.

Conclusion

- During the **2019 SCO summit at Bishkek**, India has been able to take a balanced stand. It did not support BRI, at the same time criticized US for its protectionist measures.
- Through this, not only has **India shown its intention to use this platform to promote its national interest** but also gave a signal to the world that **it is ready to play an active role in a changing international order**.

Extra Mile

Key Highlights of This Summit

- The essential discussions revolved around terrorism, Afghanistan, the economic issues especially the economic cooperation.
- **On Terrorism** - Condemned terrorism and its manifestations in all forms; Called for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions and UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy without politicization and double standards.
- **On the Afghanistan issue** – India's stand (**any process in Afghanistan should be Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled**) was reiterated. The '**Roadmap for Further Action of the SCO Afghanistan Contact Group**' was signed.
- **Economic issues** – India criticized **protectionist tendencies in trade** amidst the US ending GSP status for Indian products; Support was shown for **WTO and the multilateral trading system**; need for **increased cooperation between SCO member states** in trade and services was highlighted.
- The SCO Bishkek document highlighted that the member states are willing to adopt the **practice of using national currencies among themselves**. Although, no detailed plan for doing so has been laid down yet.
- A document regarding **cooperation among members on Digitalization and Information and Communications Technology** was signed at the end of heads of state meeting.
- **Connectivity** – All SCO members, **except India**, reaffirmed their support for Chinese BRI initiative.
- India highlighted examples of International North South Transport Corridor, Chabahar Port, Ashgabat Agreement and the airfreight corridor between Kabul, Kandahar and New Delhi **as proof of India's focus on connectivity**.

- **Documents Signed** - Document of the Anti-Narcotic Strategy and the program of action; three documents on healthcare, on environment and on sports cooperation.
- **Indian Prime Minister introduced the acronym HEALTH**. **H** for Health Care Cooperation; **E** for Economic Cooperation; **A** for Alternate Energy; **L** for Literature and Culture; **T** for Terrorism free Society; **H** for Humanitarian Cooperation.

Analysis

- India was successfully able balance its approach between conflicting interests of the US and China.
- On one hand, *India stayed away from backing the BRI*, while on the other hand, India highlighted risks associated with **rising tendencies of protectionism** (without naming US).
- While taking a position broadly in line with the major SCO states but at variance with the US and its regional allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel, India supported the current regime in Syria while emphasising on the process of political settlement through the dialogue process.
- Another takeaway for India in Bishkek was **on the issue of terrorism**. The declaration condemned **terrorism and its manifestations in all forms**.
- The inclusion of the idea of using national currencies among themselves in the final document is interesting and if implemented will help India a lot.
- It is to be noted that, India in December 2018 proposed the **idea of carrying out bilateral trade with China in local currencies**. However, China rejected this proposal.
- India engages with the SCO to maximize its gains on energy and connectivity. However, the **2019 Bishkek summit document hardly mentions these**.
- The opening of the Chabahar port in Iran, entering the Ashgabat agreement and the ambitious International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) could alter the situation for India.
- But the latter **two are in nascent stages** of development, and there was **no effort made to push these two projects through the SCO summit**.

About SCO

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation, created in June 2001 in Shanghai (China) by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.
- SCO comprises **eight member states**, namely the Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.
- SCO counts **four observer states**, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Mongolia.
- This organization represents **approximately 42% of the world's population, 22% of its land area and 20% of its GDP**.

4. The unique relationship between India and Nepal is facing various challenges leading to growing anti-Indian sentiment amongst the government and people of Nepal. Discuss.

Context:

India has **extended a financial aid** of 1.6 billion Nepalese rupees to Nepal to help 50,000 people in Nuwakot and Gorkha districts rebuild their houses **damaged in devastating earthquake in 2015**.

Answer

- Diplomatic relations between India and Nepal, established on June 13, 1947 and subsisting at the governmental and people's level, are moving towards consolidation of mutual understanding, prosperity and peace after passing through various ups and downs.
- Since late 2015, cultural and political issues have strained relations between the two countries. Nepal did not participate in **BIMSTEC Military Exercise 2018** and conducted a *joint military exercise with China*. In 2018, Nepal got **access to 4 Chinese ports** thereby ending India's monopoly and it also conducted **Joint Military Exercise** with China.

Challenges

- After the adoption of Nepal's Constitution in 2015, Nepal blamed New Delhi for the **blockade**. This was seen as an interference in the internal affairs of Nepal by India.
- Nepal views **1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship** as unfair and wants to revise the treaty.
- **Border disputes**, including the two major areas of **dispute at Susta and Kalpani**, between two countries are another contentious issue.
- There is a need for **construction, restoration, and repair** of boundary pillars, and the clearance of no man's land on both sides.
- The need of **co-operation in hydroelectric sector**. There is a perception in certain quarters that Nepal was not given due share in the three major water deals between Nepal and India, namely the *Kosi Agreement, the Gandak Treaty and the Mahakali Treaty*.
- Another point of friction relates to India's **demonetization**. This badly affected Nepali nationals residing in Nepal as well as in India. Indian government failed to make arrangements for the exchange of those notes held by Nepali nationals.
- Also, Nepal has started to play the **China card**. This is resulting into mutual suspicion and distrust between these two countries.
- The bilateral relationships reached its lowest ebb when the Nepalese media and ruling party leaders accused India of trying to **overthrow the Oli government** in May 2016.

Conclusion

- With back to back high level visits by Indian PM to Nepal and India's humanitarian response following the April 2015 earthquake, India appears to have repaired relations with Kathmandu.
- However, to make it sustainable India must recognize the challenge it faces in keeping its ties with Nepal on track. Chinese growing presence in Nepal is a reality that India can do little about.
- India should be providing an **alternative narrative** for India-Nepal ties, one that takes into account *longstanding people to people ties and cultural connect even as it underscores New Delhi's commitment for an equitable and sustainable partnership between two sovereign nations*.

5. H-1B visa program should be scrapped, as it has become a cheap labor program through which companies are replacing Americans with people hired from abroad. Do you agree? Justify your opinion.

Context

Trump administration plans to scrap a critical provision **that allows spouses of H-1B visa holders to work legally in the US**. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has sent a proposal to ban the practice of granting **work permits to H-4 visa holders**, mostly spouses of H-1B visa holders.

About H-4 Visa

- **The H-4 visas are given to immediate family members of H-1B visa holders, which include spouses and children below 21 years of age.**
- Work permits for certain categories of H-4 visa holders **were issued under an executive order by the previous Obama administration** in 2015 in a bid to address the skill shortage in the technology domain.

Beneficiaries of H-4 Visa

- **Indians, largely female engineers**, have reportedly been the biggest beneficiaries of the H4 EAD (Employment Authorisation Document) visa programme, **taking over 90% of the 1.2 lakh visas issued since 2015.**

Answer

- H-1B visa is **an employment-based, non-immigrant visa** category for temporary workers.
- It was launched in 1990 to help American firms **deal with labor shortages** in rapidly growing fields that demand specialized skills.
- However, over a period of time, some companies have started to exploit the loopholes to hire large numbers of workers and drive down wages. As a result, critics are demanding to scrap this programme.

Misuse of H-1B visa Programme

- A **giant loophole** makes companies paying \$60,000 and above per employee – or hiring employees with master's degrees – **exempt from the rule of paying their workers the prevailing wage** and not replacing American workers.
- Businesses and outsourcing companies are exploiting this to **place immigrants in technology jobs in the United States**. The layoffs at Walt Disney and at other companies have highlighted this.
- Studies have found that H-1B workers are **paid significantly less** than U.S. workers. Hence, not only this programme is **used as a source of cheap labour**, but by increasing the supply of cheap labour it **brings wage depression** in the labour market.
- Employers are supposed to recruit Americans before they petition for an H-1B worker. However, under the law, they are not required to prove that **they tried to find an American to fill the job first**.
- Overall, according to the critics, H-1B visa programme has resulted into phenomenon like **Outsourcing, Unemployment of US workers, and Wage depression.**

Scrapping: Not A Solution

- Temporary workers on these visas actually **end up creating more jobs** for American-born workers.

- According to a report by NASSCOM, Indian tech companies in the U.S. **paid \$22 billion in taxes from 2011 to 2015**, which is a significant contribution to US economy.
- Indian temporary workers on the H-1B and L1 visas alone **contribute \$3 billion in social security funds annually**, even though many do not stay long enough to benefit from it.
- It is estimated that the **growth of American economy will be adequately supported** by the presence of temporary workers.

Conclusion

- Aside from being the only way to attract the best talent in the world, the H-1B visa is also helps in American economic growth and preserving the culture of innovation. Hence, **scrapping the programme is not a solution**.
- US policymakers need to reform this programme by fixing the existing loopholes. Companies abusing the provisions **must be made accountable**.
- Then only the programme will be able to create an environment in which the foreign workers **complement the U.S. workforce - rather than taking over**.

Extra Mile

What Changes Has The Trump Government Made To The H-1B Programme?

- Increased the H-1B visa fees
- The immigration agency in the US is conducting **more severe background checks** for H-1B workers, scrutinizing firms that hire large number of H-1B employees and has also started delaying and denying visas to more applicants.
- Mandatory electronic pre-registration with the USCIS for the annual visa lottery

U.S. Visa Process Needs Social Media Profiles

- USA will now require most individuals applying for visas to **provide details of their social media handles going back five years**.
- This step has been taken to increase surveillance of those seeking to enter the United States.

6. India has one of the most progressive disability policy frameworks in the developing world. However, there remain huge challenges in bringing the differently abled population into mainstream. Discuss.

Context

- **Second Global Disability Summit** was held at **Buenos Aires, Argentina** during 6-8 June 2019.
- The objective of this summit was to deliberate on issues across the world concerning **empowerment and inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)** and **to work out a mechanism for enabling them to live an independent and dignified life**.
- This was a follow-up to the **first "Global Disability Summit"**, held in London in 2018

Answer

From coining the term “**Divyang**” for attitude change to empowering differently abled people using a right based approach, the government has taken several initiatives. India is signatory of **UN Convention on**

Rights of Persons with Disability and Marrakesh Treaty. It has launched **Accessible India Campaign** for achieving universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities. However, poor implementation of policies along with different challenges have acted as deterrents in bringing them into mainstream.

Various Challenges

- **Social Segregation and Stigma** attached to disability is a big issue, considering their integration into society.
- **Inconsistency in Disability definition across censuses:** Different definitions in different censuses have led to inclusion of someone in one census and exclusion of the same person in another census.
- **Narrow perspective:** India looks at disability from medical or pathological angle only. Most developing countries look from social angle, highlighting institutional and social arrangements preventing those with impairments from leading normal lives.
- **Lack of standard reporting:** Census depends on self-reporting of disability; this may leave out mental disability and even physical disability.
- **Lack of Institutional and Infrastructural Support** for the disabled in India.
- **Lack of coordination-** inter-sectoral, inter-ministerial coordination as well as between govt bodies and NGOs.
- **Limited competence and capacity** of decentralizing services.

Way Forward

- Kerala became first state to conduct a census of its own called **Kerala Disability Census** for 2014-15. Other states must follow example.
- **Accessibility and support services** for persons with disability must be increased.
- **End Institutional Exclusion:** Not only the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. but every other ministries along with different departments will have to take blame for poor disability environment in India.
- **Increase public awareness and understanding of disability** through social marketing and campaigns.
- Strengthen and support **research on disability**.

Conclusion

- India has a **growing disability rights movement** and one of the **more progressive policy frameworks** in the developing world. But, a lot more needs to be done in implementation and “**getting the basics right**”.
- Newer thinking and better coordination of programs is required. There is need for **deepened preventive health programs** and **all children screened at a young age**.
- The scale of disability in India needs to be better understand by improving the measurement of disability. Most importantly, persons with disabilities should themselves be made **active participants in the development process**.
- By providing them aids to overcome their disability and enabling them to earn a dignified livelihood, we can actually transform **them from being disabled to being differently-abled**.

7. In India, the absence of uniform law to deal with its huge refugee population brings ad-hocism while providing enough scope for unequal treatment towards refugee groups. Comment.

Context

- **World Refugee Day** is observed on **20 June every year** to raise awareness about the conditions and problems that refugee faces in their lives.
- The **theme for World Refugee Day 2019** is **#StepWithRefugees — Take A Step on World Refugee Day**.

Answer

India is a home of millions of refugees and asylum seekers such as Tibetans, Afghani, Burmese, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankans and Africans. Indian hospitality of welcoming these people lies in the ancient tradition of 'Athithi Devo Bhav' (Guest is our God).

However, recently the Indian government announced its decision to deport 40000 Rohingya, including UNHCR recognised refugees. Not only has this step violated the ancient tradition of Athithi Devo Bhav, but it also highlighted flaws in Indian approach while dealing with refugees. These are:

- India has **not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention** which leads to **legal insecurity of refugees' status** and **difficulty to access in terms of refugee rights**.
- Due to the absence of specific laws, refugees and asylum seekers are **regulated under the Foreigners Act, 1946**. As a result, these people are **treated similar to tourist, illegal immigrants, and economic immigrants**.
- Absence of uniform law leads to **unequal treatment** towards refugee groups. This is reflected in how refugees from Tibet are well received compared to refugees from Myanmar in India.
- Incoming refugees are treated based on their **national origin and political considerations**, questioning the uniformity of rights and privileges granted to refugee communities as per the international human rights conventions and UN treaties.
- Recently, Indian Citizenship rules have been amended to accommodate specifically Hindu refugees from Pakistan and Bangladesh, ignoring other groups of refugees in need of protection.
- Analysts have termed this step to be motivated by **nationalist politics rather than humanitarian concern**.

Conclusion

- Over the years India has received wave after wave refugees from many of its neighbours. And India has generally followed the **principle of non-refoulement**.
- However, Rohingya crisis has highlighted the fact that **an adaptive approach** towards the sensitive human rights issues like refugees **might lead to isolation among world community**.
- If India wants a permanent position in the United Nations Security Council and wants to provide able leadership to the world, then it must set a good example in South Asia by providing a secure legal protection to its refugees and asylum seekers.

Extra Mile

History of Refugees in India

Starting from the partition to the Rohingya crisis, the country has witnessed major refugee inflows.

- **1947:** Massive population exchanges occurred between the two newly formed nations – India and Pakistan.
- **1959:** The next major movement of refugees towards India happened when **Dalai Lama**, along with more than 100,000 followers, fled Tibet and came to India seeking political asylum.
- **1971:** During the **Bangladesh Liberation war**, nearly 10 million refugees migrated from the country to India.
- **1983:** During the **Sri Lankan Civil war**, more than 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees entered India and the number increased to 700,000 in the next 20 years.
- **1979-89:** More than 60,000 **Afghan refugees** came to India in the years following the 1979 to 1989 Soviet-Afghan War.
- **2012:** After the communal violence in the state of Rakhine in Myanmar in 2012, nearly 40,000 **Rohingyas** have their home in India now.

SC Stand On Refugee

- In the absence of refugee law in India, SC has interpreted the word “person” in the Article 21 of the Constitution in an unprecedented judicial tradition.
- According to the judicial interpretation of the SC, the term “person” also includes non-citizens.
- In cases of **Khudiram Chakma v. State of Arunachal Pradesh**, and **National Human Rights Commission v. State of Arunachal Pradesh**, the SC held that “all the refugees living in India have the right to life and the personal liberty” as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution of India.
- The ‘state is obligated to protect the life and freedom of each, be a citizen or otherwise, and it cannot permit individual or group of individuals to threaten the refugees, to leave.

8. **The menace of drugs and alcohol has woven itself deep into the fabric of our society. In the light of this statement, discuss the reasons for widespread drug abuse in India. Also, suggest measures to tackle this menace.**

Context

- Recently, on 26 June 2019, the world community observed “**International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking**”.
- Theme for 2019 was “**Health for justice, justice for health**”

Answer

India is caught in the vicious circle of drug abuse, and the numbers of drug addicts are increasing day by day. According to a UN report, One million heroin addicts are registered in India, and unofficially there are as many as five million.

Reasons for Widespread Drug Abuse in India

- **To escape from hard realities of life** - The disintegration of the old joint family system, absence of parental love and care in modern families where both parents are working, decline of old religious and moral values etc. lead to a rise in the number of drug addicts who take drugs to escape hard realities of life.
- **Loosening of the traditional methods of social control** - The processes of industrialization, urbanization and migration have led to loosening of the traditional methods of social control rendering an individual vulnerable to the stresses and strains of modern life.

- **Cultural acceptance in some part of the country-** In states like Punjab, Haryana or North eastern States like Manipur use of opium has been widely accepted. Not only that in many states of India, Bhang (Hemp) is distributed during festivals like Holi.
- **Peers pressure** – Many youths start using drug under the pressure from their friends, seniors at educational institutions, or by members of their informal groupings.
- **Easy Availability** - India is situated in the sense that on its west is the '**Golden Crescent**' and on east is the '**Golden Triangle**'. The usage of drugs in India is increasing, particularly in the border areas due to their porous nature.
- **Economic prosperity** – The agricultural reforms and other industrial activity has led to increase in income in regions like Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra etc. Increase in disposable money and easy availability of drugs has led to increase in its use.

Government of India had enacted **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985** to fight against this menace. **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)** and **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE)** are involved with alcohol and drug demand reduction policies and drug de-addiction programme. However, to make this fight more effective we need to incorporate following measures in our approach:

- **Social welfare and rehabilitation:** To vain people away, drug rehabilitation and Society awareness programmers are very important.
- **Intelligence sharing:** If any drug carriers and masterminds have been caught, we should find out what are his/her travel links. This information can be shared.
- **Cooperation among countries to increase** information exchange on synthetic drugs, money laundering, banking channel, etc.

Brainstorming

- Please note that the above question on Drug abuse has been framed keeping Indian society in mind. Therefore, this question **belongs to GS paper I**.
- However, the same topic can be used to generate questions **belonging to Paper III**. Please refer the following question to appreciate this fact:
 - **India's proximity to two of the world's biggest illicit opium-growing states has enhanced her internal security concerns. Explain the linkages between drug trafficking and other illicit activities such as gunrunning, money laundering and human trafficking. What counter-measures should be taken to prevent the same? [CSM 2018]**
- Can you think of a situation based question requiring application of Principles of Ethics on this same topic?

9. The new state government of Andhra has revoked previous governments' order of barring Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) from conducting raids in state without state government permission. In this light discuss the significance of this order. Also discuss the reforms needed in working of CBI.

Answer

The previous Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government headed by then CM N. Chandrababu Naidu issued a government Order number 176 (GO 176), withdrawing general consent to CBI officers for exercising

jurisdiction in state. Thus, this GO barred CBI from conducting raids or carrying out investigations in state without its permission. But now the new government in Andhra has revoked this GO.

Significance Of The Order

- CBI will now have all powers to take up corruption and other cases in Andhra Pradesh without requiring any state permission.
- The CBI will be able to carry out searches, raids or investigation in the state with independence and as per need.
- This will resolve the operational problem for CBI, which will not have to seek permission of the state government and will be able to carry out surprise searches or register a case.
- The removal of roadblock will create deterrence against corruption.

Reforms Needed

But the larger issue is reforming the overall functioning of the CBI, which is facing challenges on various counts such as credibility issue, lack of autonomy, political interference, large pending investigation etc. In this light the reforms needed in working of CBI are as follows:

- **Liberating CBI from political interference:** Lokpal should be allowed to decide cases, which CBI should takes up. Moreover, Lokpal should supervise and oversee functioning of CBI.
- **Substitute archaic DPSE act by new CBI Act:** The new Act should clearly redefine the role, jurisdiction and legal powers of CBI.
- **Resolving infra issue:** There is a need for appointing more number of judges, prosecutors and support staff for CBI.
- **Dedicated cadre for CBI:** So to reduce dependence on personnel on deputation.

About CBI

- CBI is the premier investigative agency with headquartered in New Delhi.
- It operates under jurisdiction of **Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions** and functions under the **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act (DSPEA), 1946**. It is not a statutory body.
- Under **Section 6 of DSPEA Act 1946**, a state government routinely grants consent to CBI for exercising its authority in the respective state.

10. In light of recent arrest of a journalist for remark over UP Chief Minister, discuss the challenges posed by various Laws/Acts to the right of freedom of speech and expression. Also suggest suitable measures to check misuse of such laws.

Answer

Recently, the SC granted bail to journalist Prashant Kanojia who was arrested for allegedly making objectionable comments against Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister on social media. This issue has raised the question over right of freedom of speech and expression by misuse of legal provisions.

Some of the controversial provisions of laws that are often liable to misuse are as follows:

- **Section 124A, IPC: Sedition law** i.e. an act that brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation or otherwise.
- **Section 295A, IPC:** Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.
- **Section 66A, IT Act:** Punishment for sending offensive messages through communication service etc.

Problem Arising Out Of The Implementation Of With These Laws

- **Against democracy:** These laws stifle the democratic and fundamental right of people to criticize the government.
- **Inadequate capacity of State police machinery:** The police might not have the requisite training to understand the consequences of imposing such stringent provisions.
- **Possibility of Misuse:** These laws have been used arbitrarily to curb dissent. In many cases the main targets have been writers, journalists, activists who question government policy and projects and political dissenters.
- **Draconian nature of this law:** As the crime under above mentioned sections is non-bailable, non-cognizable and punishment can extend for life. Thus, these have a strong deterrent effect on dissent even if it is not used.
- **Gag press:** Only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government but these laws act as a gag against freedom of speech of press.

Thus, in light of the above situation only those actions/words that directly result in the use of violence or incitement to violence should be prohibited. Further, the state police must be sufficiently guided as to where the section must be imposed and where not. Hence, there is a need for striking a balance between security and smooth functioning of state with the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression.

11. The RBI has directed payment companies to locally store data. What is the rationale behind such move and the concerns/issues arising from such directive of RBI. Also suggest suitable steps to overcome the current controversy.

Answer

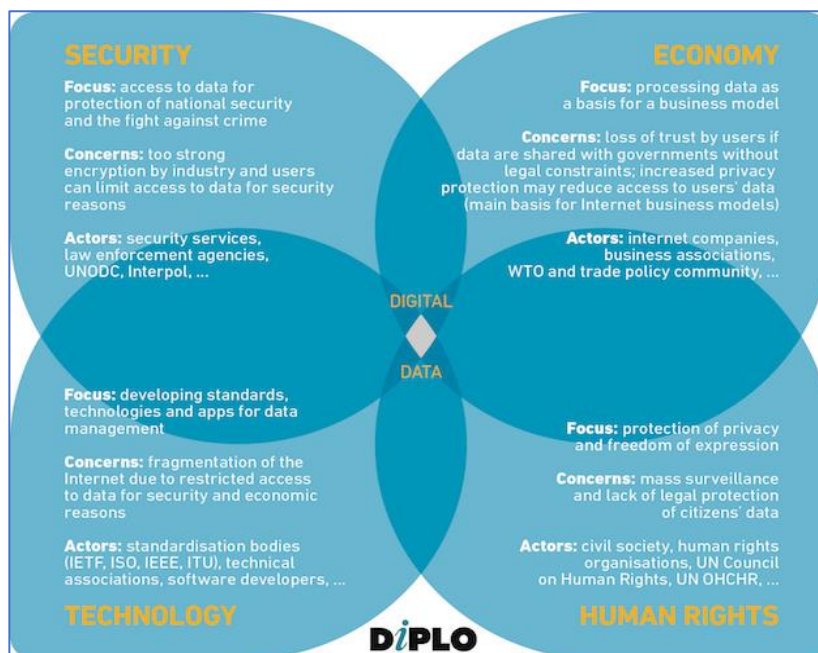
Recently the RBI asked all payment companies operating in India to set up data storage facilities within the country in the *next six months*. The central bank in its notification also said while the payments ecosystem had grown in India it needed unfettered supervisory access to the transaction data to ensure better monitoring of the network.

Post the recent **Cambridge Analytica** and Facebook data breach controversy the Indian government is considering asking all global firm to ensure that data of Indians are stored locally.

Benefits/Rationale Of Data Localization

- **Promote digital payment:** It will further help boost customer's confidence in moving towards digital payments as they won't have to worry about their personal data being compromised.
- **To ensure privacy and secure consumer data:** With digital payment services growing at a phenomenal pace in the country it is critical that players invest in data localization to ensure privacy and security of consumer data.

- **Avoid data pilferage:** With increasing adoption of digital payments and reliance on electronic banking ecosystem India must have a data localization mandate to avoid data pilferage.
- **Faster redressal:** Besides financial data stored in the country will give unfettered access to the regulators to audit data for faster redressal.
- **Data is highly valuable:** Data localization is beneficial as it is increasingly realized that the citizen data of 1.3 billion Indians is quite valuable.
- **Aiding national security:** If data is locally stored in India, enforcement agencies will have access to a larger pool of data. This data could aid counterterrorism efforts and may help protect national security.



Concerns Raised

- **Affect on country's global competitiveness:** Restricting data flowing across borders would risk a country's global competitiveness and economic growth.
- **Impact India's IT export:** The directive could hurt India's software export market. There is also the risk of a backlash from India's IT export markets, which could result in reciprocal changes that could undermine India as the preferred outsourcing destination. (India has \$135 billion software export industry)
- **Dampen innovation:** The industry also fears that the diktat would lead to disruption of well-established global networks as well as dampen new innovation in the sector.
- **Confusion over jurisdiction:** When data is processed and stored in multiple geographies there could be a lack of clarity as to which country's data laws will be applicable to it.
- **Huge cost involved:** Data localization mandate may have its costs as servers and data centres will have to be put in place.
- **Difficult to distinguish India specific data:** Further, most technology giants and global social media platform providers will struggle to distinguish the India-specific personal data, as that would inherently be related to data from various other countries.
- **Timeline:** The stringent six months deadline has attracted the ire of several sections of the industry, which argued that it was too short a deadline to comply with.

Way forward

- The move is a step in the right direction and will ensure that data generated by Indians is controlled by Indian laws. But at the same time it must also be ensured that the strong privacy law is enacted to protect privacy of citizens.
- Moreover a one-size-fits-all model may not be appropriate thus while data localization may be considered in certain sensitive sectors it may not be advisable to prescribe it across the board.

12. The electoral bond scheme was proposed as a measure to ensure transparency in funding of election. But despite this several issues have arose in its implementation. In this light discuss the steps needed for ensuring transparency in election funding.

Answer

Electoral bonds will allow donors to pay political parties using banks as an intermediary. The electoral bond, which will be a bearer instrument, will not carry the name of the payee and can be bought for any value, in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh or Rs 1 crore.

Benefits Of Electoral Bond Scheme

- **Transparency:** Some of the experts have says that the scheme enhances transparency in political funding.
- **Reduce black money:** Under the Scheme the use of bank routes would reduce under-the- table cash transactions, thus reduce the black money in the economy. Moreover, as the transactions through banks would incentivise the use of white money and KYC requirements of banks would ensure paper trails.
- **Privacy:** The Scheme also protects the privacy of donors, which is the fundamental right guaranteed under the Constitution.
- **Non-victimization of the donor:** The non- disclosure of the identity of the donor safeguard the donor from political victimization.
- **Enforcement action possible:** The records of the purchaser are always available in the banking channel and may be retrieved as and when required by enforcement agencies.

Arguments Against The Scheme

- **Lack of transparency:** Under the scheme, both the purchaser of the bond and the political party receiving the money have a right to not disclose the identity of the donor.
- **Outside public scrutiny:** Only public sector banks can issue the bonds, thus transaction will be outside the scope of public scrutiny and it will lie exclusively with the banks.
- **Removal of various safeguards:** The scheme dismantles several restrictions that checked illegal corporate sponsoring previously. For example, any artificial juridical person can now make donations. This means that even foreign donations are now allowed.
- **Foreign influence:** The Commission also flagged the issue of laws being changed to allow political parties to receive contributions from foreign companies, which would allow unchecked foreign funding of political parties in India which could lead to Indian policies being influenced by foreign companies.
- **Fear of black money:** The requirement that a company has to be in existence for three years for it to make political donations has also been removed. This ignores all the concerns regarding the use of shell companies to siphon black money into the system.
- **No oversight of EC:** Section 29(C) of the Representation of People Act, 1951, requires every political party to submit an annual report to the Election Commission about details of contributions in excess of Rs 20,000. This requirement has been done away with in the case of electoral bonds through an amendment.
- **EC's contention:** As the information on the money received through such bonds is not reported, it cannot be ascertained whether the political party has taken any donation in violation of provisions of the Representation of the People Act, which prohibits the political parties from taking donations from government companies and foreign sources.

- **Corporate-political nexus:** The requirement to disclose in the profit and loss account the name of the political party to which a donation has been made, has also been removed. Moreover, with the removal of the 7.5% cap on the net profits of the last three years of a company, corporate funding has increased manifold, as there is now no limit to how much a company, including loss-making ones, can donate. This opens up the possibility of companies being brought into existence by unscrupulous elements primarily for routing funds to political parties through anonymous and opaque instruments like electoral bonds.

Way forward

- Partial State funding of elections as **Indrajeet Gupta Committee** recommended way back in 1998 can be a solution.
- Strong disclosure norms, strict statutory limits on election expenses and ceiling on corporate donations to political parties can further strengthen the Electoral System in India.

13. Recently, the Prime Minister in all party meeting suggested for 'one nation, one election plan'. Discuss the feasibility of such a move and also mention the challenges in its implementation.

Answer

One nation one election refers to holding elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously, once in a five year. In 1999, the Law Commission had given its views on holding simultaneous elections in Lok Sabha and Assembly polls.

Benefits Of One Nation One Election

- **Reduction in expenditure:** It would regulate massive amount of expenditure required in multiple elections.
- **Model Code of Conduct:** This would curb the policy paralysis that occurs because of implementation of Model Code of Conduct.
- **Stability in governance:** It will ensure stability and lesser disruption in the normal functioning. Continuous elections have an impact on the functioning of essential services. The rallies cause traffic problems as well as loss of productivity. This was even mentioned in the **117th report on Reform and Electoral Laws (1999)** by the Law Commission of India.
- **Good governance:** If all elections are held in one particular year, it will give a clear four years to the political parties to focus on good governance.
- **Prevents wastage of resources:** Multiple elections unnecessarily exploit resources needed to conduct elections. Simultaneous elections thus saves resources both manpower and resource deployment.
- **Time saving:** Multiple elections in a year lead to time consumption as the whole process of conducting elections is repeated.
- **Black money:** when simultaneous elections took place EC can effectively monitor black money and other means to resorted influence people.

Challenges

But at the same time the one nation one election has been challenged on the various grounds, some of these are as follows:

- **Administrative hassles** in managing all elections at same time.

- To conduct simultaneous elections, lot of **political will** is required.
- The idea of one nation one election is **against the federal democracy**. India is a “Union of States”, states have their own directly elected governments, and fixing a term adversely affects this right.
- The **voters may get confused** and may not know whether they are voting for candidates contesting assembly or parliament elections.
- The **issue of logistics** and requirement of security personnel, election and administrative officials needs to be considered.
- **Local or regional issues might overshadow** national issues if simultaneous elections are conducted.

Way Ahead

- The government should start with ‘one year one election’ as suggested by election commission. For this the recommendations of Parliamentary panel like elections of legislative assemblies whose term ends six months before/after the general elections to lok sabha should be clubbed together should be adopted.
- **Constructive vote of no confidence** along the lines of Germany as suggested by NITI Aayog should be incorporated
- In order to clean up election process simultaneous focus should be on other **election reform** process to make election more free and fair.

14. The sphere of public procurement still lacks legislative regulations leading to several challenges. In this light discuss the need for effective public procurement law.

Answer

Public procurement refers to the purchase by governments and state owned enterprises of goods, services and works. Public procurement accounts for a substantial portion of the taxpayers’ money so governments is expected to carry it out efficiently and with high standards of conduct in order to ensure high quality of service delivery and safeguard the public interest. Procurement by the government accounts for **30% of the GDP** yet there is lack of any specific legislation governing public procurement. Thus, leading to various challenges some of them are as follows:

- ***Lack of constitutional provisions:*** Existing constitutional provisions are themselves no great help in this area. While **Article 282** provides for financial autonomy in public spending, there are no further provisions that address any guidance on public procurement principles, policies, procedures or for grievance redressal.
- ***Separate state regulations:*** State public procurement is regulated by a State Act. The grievance redress mechanisms provided in these Acts are not confidence-inspiring as they are neither independent nor effective.
- ***Corruption issues:*** Charges of corruption are very common in procurement matters.
- ***Confusion:*** Instead of legislation, there is a maze of regulations, guidelines and rules. Thus, creating confusion among stakeholders.
- ***Frequent Litigations:*** Courts have imposed stringent self-imposed restrictions in the area of judicial review *vis-à-vis* tenders that the power to interfere is very sparingly exercised.

Despite the above challenges the government has taken several steps for ensuring transparency in public procurement. Some of them are as follows:

- **Establishment of GeM:** Government e Marketplace (GeM) is an online procurement platform for govt ministries and departments and the most widely used channel for public procurement in India.
- **Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSME) order 2012:** The order has mandated every Central Ministry/Department/PSU to procure minimum **25 percent** of the total annual purchases from MSMEs.
- **Public Procurement Bill, 2012:** This aims to regulate public procurement with the objective of ensuring transparency accountability and probity in the procurement process.

Thus in light of above challenges there is a need for legislation. Such Parliamentary legislation to regulate public procurements which provide adequate means for aggrieved parties to challenge inequities and illegalities in public procurement. Further, public procurement is a crucial pillar of services delivery for governments. Because of the sheer volume of spending it represents, well governed public procurement can and must play a major role in fostering public sector efficiency and establishing citizens' trust. Moreover, well designed public procurement systems also contribute to achieving pressing policy goals such as environmental protection, innovation, job creation and the development of small and medium enterprises etc.

15. The position of the speaker is important and unique in Indian Polity. In this light discuss the steps needed to ensure neutrality of speaker.

Answer

A watchful Parliament forms the foundation of a well-functioning democracy. The presiding officers of Parliament are the key to securing the effectiveness of this institution. The individual MPs look to the presiding officers (Speaker in LS and Chairman in RS) to facilitate debate, protect their rights and uphold the dignity of Parliament.

Considering the above important position of speaker there is a need to ensure neutrality in functioning of speaker. In 1951 and 1953, **the Conference of Presiding Officers of legislatures in India** passed a resolution for the adoption of the **British Convention**. However, It was unable to make much headway.

Importance Of Securing Neutrality

- **Smooth conduct of house:** The primary challenge before the Speaker is to conduct the proceedings of the Lok Sabha free from disruptions. To do so, the Speaker will have to earn the trust of the Members of Parliament. One way to earn the trust of MPs will be by being neutral, both in practice and perception while running the House.
- **To ensure effectively carry out function:** The speaker neutrality is essential for carrying out the functions such as decision on defection, deciding issue of money bill, selecting chairperson of parliamentary committees etc.

In light of importance of speaker's neutrality there is a need for following steps:

- **Adopting British Convention:** In Britain, the promise of continuity in office for many terms is used to ensure the Speaker's impartiality.
- **Election:** By convention, political parties (usually) do not field a candidate against the Speaker at the time of general elections.

- **Other features:** The Speaker can continue in office, until deciding otherwise. Moreover, the Speaker also gives up the membership of his/her political party.

Thus, maintaining neutrality of speaker towards all the political parties and securing his/her tenure is a reform long due. The government should re-think on introducing the British convention. Moreover, the guiding light for the speaker should be the Constitution and the rules of procedure of Lok Sabha.

16. As the landmark Goods and Services Tax completes 2 years of operation, enumerate its success and pitfalls in the journey so far. Also suggest measures for improvement.

Answer

- Inspired by the idea of one nation one tax, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has completed two years since it came into effect. It is a comprehensive multistage, destination based indirect tax (or consumption tax) imposed on the supply of goods and service.
- The Indian model of dual GST is unique in the world and represents a paradigm of partnership between Central and State governments and between Government and industry.

Achievements

- GST has replaced a multi-layered, complex indirect tax structure with a simple, transparent and technology-driven tax regime.
- It has led to harmonisation of taxes, elimination of cascading effect of tax, widening of the tax base and has achieved a uniform tax rate for a product or service across the country. Moreover, excellent data mining has resulted in identification of tax evasion at an early stage.
- GST has integrated India into a single common market by breaking barriers to inter-state trade and commerce and has led to supply-chain efficiencies, direct customer access and a robust transparent trail for the movement of goods.
- As more and more vendors and service providers walk into GST, it contributes to the formalisation of the economy.
- From an era of cascading taxes, which had nearly 30% of taxes on goods, dual and multiple levies on services, the consumer is now reaping the benefits of massive reduction in the rate of tax for goods and services. At the same time, the consumer is now in a position to source from any supplier across the country.
- Both Central and State governments have taken industry's concerns into consideration and resolved the same in a timely manner, which has given immense confidence to the business fraternity.
- The GST Council has played a stellar role in cooperative federalism as resolutions have been passed unanimously despite political differences. This level of unanimity is unseen even in flat association meetings.

Issues

- While the proactive manner in which the GST Council has addressed concerns has put industry at ease, there are still several procedural issues that need resolution.
- The council's very willingness to make changes to rules and procedures has rendered the current GST quite different from what was originally envisioned. There have been significant departures from the original plan and it has turned out to be quite complex, on account of design faults and frequent tinkering.

- The State-wise registration has increased the cost of compliance manifold. Further the industry is unhappy with the massive increase in compliance requirements, frequent battles with the GST portal, wastage of man hours in dealing with technical glitches and potential loss of Input Tax Credit on account of supplier facing similar problems.
- The consumers are also resorting to tax evasion. In the past, when a customer procured goods or services, he/she was least bothered about the tax rate since excise duty was invisible. Awareness about GST makes the customer assume it is a new levy which affects his/her pocket and the consumer opens the cash channel, resorting to tax evasion.
- The Advance Ruling mechanism has failed since most rulings are in favour of the revenue and in some cases, against the provisions of the statute. It is generally observed that when members of the Advance Ruling Authority are officers of state tax and central tax departments, they tend to be revenue-biased while interpreting provisions of the GST law and pronouncing a ruling.
- The constitution of the AAR is also an issue, since it is not presided by a judicial member and comprises sitting officers of the tax department.
- Further divergent rulings by different revenue officers in various states has created ambiguity, environment of uncertainty and chaos among taxpayers.

Way Ahead

- Issues like filing of returns, multiple registrations and invoice matching to dispute resolution should be addressed at the earliest to build on the gains of the past two years.
- The government should contemplate constituting an independent high-level central body similar to the one under the erstwhile indirect tax regime under the GST regime.
- To ease the compliance burden for services sector, there is a need to have centralised GST registration similar to the erstwhile service tax law.
- To curb the fake invoice racket, the government should pursue the route of adjudication, prosecution and early conviction instead of the threat of non-bailable arrest provisions which have a potential for misuse.
- The glitch prone GSTN should be updated frequently and should reflect the changes in the provisions on an ongoing basis.
- With stabilisation of revenues, there is a need to further rationalise the 28 per cent category to only cover demerit goods.
- Electricity, oil and gas, real estate and alcohol should be included under GST at the earliest, which will lead to seamless input tax credit availability across all sectors. Also, the rate structure should be streamlined to two-three slabs which will also help to address the inverted tax issues.

GST has been a major transition in the Indian tax framework and after initial hiccups has evolved significantly from the time of its inception. It is expected that Government's pro-active measures and industry's active participation, will make it a truly 'Good and Simple Tax' in the times to come.

17. Startup India programme was launched in the country with much fanfare to create a thriving startup ecosystem. Evaluate the performance of Startup India programme.

Context: Startup India fund falls short of allocation target by over Rs 1,000cr
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Answer

Startup India is a flagship initiative, intended to build a strong eco-system for nurturing innovation and startups in the country in order to drive sustainable economic growth and generate large scale employment opportunities. The idea is to empower startups to grow through innovation and design.

Interventions

- In order to meet the objectives of the initiative, an action plan that addressed all the aspects of the startup ecosystem was also launched with the program.
- The action plan included a compliance regime based on self certification, Startup India hub as a single point of contact, along with legal support and fast tracking of patent examination.
- To address the funding needs, it came up with a fund of funds with a corpus of Rs 10,000 crore along with a Credit Guarantee Fund.
- Channels and platforms have been laid to harness the expertise of the industry and academia by building Research Parks and innovation centres at national institutes, setting up of incubators with public private partnership, startup festivals and innovation focussed programs for students.

Achievements

- More than 15,000 startups have been recognised under the Startup India programme, creating around 1,50,000 jobs under them.
- The buzz generated by the programme has helped open up a lot of opportunities for startups, VC investments have seen a moderate rise despite an overall fall in funding in 2018, which indicates a positive sentiment among the investors in the near term.
- Before Startup India was launched, just four states had their startup policies in place and now, 24 Indian states have introduced their own policies. Several states have taken the onus to build their own incubators and coworking hubs, to boost the innovation in the state.
- Exchange programmes with foreign startups in countries like Germany and SAARC nations has opened new doors of opportunities for the stakeholders in the startup ecosystem.
- The formation of international startup corridors with countries like Japan, the US, the UK, Israel, and Portugal, among others, has boosted the startup and cross-border investor sentiment.
- Startup-friendly policies and tax relief measures from the government have played a key role in increasing the foreign investments in the form of foreign venture capital and private equity funds especially from Japan, Europe, and West Asia. It has also been attracting globally-acclaimed investors and multinationals to leverage Indian tech startups to supplement their technology.
- Steps have been taken to ease out the red tape maze for startups. For instance the National Portal of India significantly helps in facilitating a single window access to information and services provided by the government for startups.
- Similarly, the Startup India Online Hub is another platform which facilitates all stakeholders of the Indian entrepreneurial ecosystem to connect and engage with each other. The eBiz portal enables Indian startups to get various licenses and approvals in a hassle free manner.
- Despite all the existing gaps and ongoing challenges, the said measures have helped India to climb up to the 77th position in UN's Ease of Doing Business Ranking.

Shortcomings

- The pace of policy formulation in the country has been quite slow, which leads to a dampening in the investor sentiment.

- According to a survey of 15K startups, only 18% of the respondents said they actually benefited from the Startup India scheme. Only 163 startups had benefited from the Fund of Funds in the last three years till December 31, 2018, and the fund allocation and distribution is coming down further. This poses a question over the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the scheme.
- The government had set an ambitious target of creating 1.8 Mn jobs by 2020 under the Startup India action plan. But a reality check shows that at the moment, this plan is but a moonshot.
- Despite the initial euphoria, the Startup India fund has fallen short of its capital allocation target by around Rs 1,000-1,200 crore. The fund has managed to disburse only Rs 2,265 crore to Venture Capital funds against a disbursal target of Rs 3,300-3,500 crore by the end of March, 2019.
- Although the angel tax issue has been resolved for the time being but it had emerged as a serious threat, leading to a decline in angel investments in the last two years.
- Gender parity is still an issue in the startup ecosystem and the revelations of #MeToo left the Indian startup ecosystem disturbed.
- Further, there are still many infrastructural and bureaucratic hurdles that continue to plague the startup ecosystem.

Way Ahead

- It typically takes about 4-5 months for a VC to apply and get the approval for capital. It is important to cut the overall timeline for VCs to apply and finally get the capital.
- The preparation of the platform relating to the receipt of online application from the funds without any manual intervention should be done at a faster pace and should be operationalised soon.
- Experts have also proposed the idea of creation of a seed fund to boost early stage startups.
- Widening the definition of startups to include later stage companies with a higher annual turnover and increasing exemption limit on equity investments will give the much needed boost to mid-sized startups.
- The government needs to address the said concerns in order to push the Indian startup ecosystem on the path similar to that of Israel or Silicon Valley.

18. A large share of the Indian Pharma market is dominated by Fixed Dose Combinations. Throw light on its prevalence in India. What are the merits and demerits of fixed dose combinations? What needs to be done to optimise the use of FDCs in the country?

Context

A drug advisory body sub-committee has asked pharmaceutical companies to prove that 324 combination medicines are safe and effective for patients to consume in order to decide whether these drugs should continue to be sold in India.

Answer

- Fixed dose combination drugs are two or more drugs in a single formulation, with each drug having independent modes of action, the combination of which are synergistic or additive or complementary in their effect.
- Exploiting the liberal licensing system, bizarre FDCs tend to find their way into the market, which has led to the Indian market becoming the world leader of FDCs.

- Pharma companies prefer them to circumvent the price control. They prefer to market FDCs that are not under price control rather than single-ingredient drugs under price control.
- The individual state drug authorities in India have often indiscriminately granted manufacturing licenses and this is one reason why there are so many irrational drug combinations in India.
- Further strong marketing pressure, inadequate time and attitude of critical analysis, influences the prescribing habit toward these FDCs. Senior leaders in medicine from academia and practice who are key opinion leaders influence the prescribing trend of their juniors and have a cascading effect on the medical community.
- In the past few years the health ministry has been gunning for irrational and unsafe FDCs and the Drug Controller General of India has been withdrawing potentially harmful combinations licensed by the states.

Pros

- FDCs offer a simple dosage schedule which improves patient compliance and therefore improves treatment outcomes. This is especially important in elderly patients or patients suffering from multiple disorders.
- A government document had claimed that FDCs have shown to be particularly useful in the treatment of infectious diseases like HIV, malaria and tuberculosis where giving multiple antimicrobial agents is the norm. FDCs are also of use in chronic conditions especially when multiple disorders often co-exist.
- Cost is an important factor, instead of buying two or more separate medicines, a patient can buy just one FDC medicine to treat multiple illness symptoms, which works out easier on the purse.
- Pharma companies prefer them because it is far cheaper and quicker to combine existing ingredients to make new products than to discover new medicines and manufacture them separately. It also simplifies the procurement, management and handling of drugs.
- FDCs help in reducing the inadvertent medication errors and have also been found to prevent or slow the advance of antimicrobial resistance by reducing the need for monotherapy

Cons

- Health experts have long maintained that many FDC combinations in the market neither boast any advantage over individual drugs nor are safe. Apart from the fact that some of the drugs reportedly have dangerous side-effects, unnecessary use of combination drugs makes the human body resistant to treatment.
- The patient may not actually need all the drugs present in the combination. That may lead to therapeutic confusion of therapeutic aims and create false sense of superiority of two drugs over one especially in case of antimicrobials and painkillers.
- Dosing is inflexible and cannot be regulated to patient's needs as each patient has unique characteristics such as weight, age, pharmacogenetics, co-morbidity, which may alter drug metabolism and effect.
- FDCs formulated without due diligence can lead to pharmacodynamic mismatch between the two components, one drug having additive/antagonistic effect leading to reduced efficacy or enhanced toxicity. Also, chemical incompatibility can lead to decreased shelf life.
- Published studies have long claimed that FDCs are often prescribed to cover up for diagnostic imprecision, likely making them extremely popular with quack doctors.

- Moreover, the existence of unlimited brands of FDCs with different permutations and combinations leads to confusion rather than guiding the prescribing doctor.

Way Ahead

- A multipronged corrective approach involving regulator, academia, industry, physicians, and consumers is needed to correct the dismal FDC scenario in the country.
- The enforcement mechanism by the regulators needs to be strengthened. Both the central and state regulators must harmonize their procedures for licensing FDCs. At the same time the infrastructural shortages at CDSCO should be addressed quickly.
- Good pharmacovigilance should be ensured to assess the performance of the product in clinical practice. Industry should act responsibly, ensuring the adequate rationale to develop FDC and generating robust efficacy and safety data.
- National Formulary of India, NLEM, and Standard Treatment Guidelines should be adopted across different levels of health services.
- CMEs on drug information, training medical and pharmacy students with an orientation toward the public health implications of FDCs misuse and good prescribing and pharmacy practices will go a long way in addressing the knowledge, attitude, and practice gap of practicing physicians and pharmacists.

19. The Delhi government has come up with a proposal of free bus and Metro travel for women. Evaluate the proposal highlighting the pros and cons of the proposed step.

Answer

The Delhi government has announced a free bus and metro travel scheme for women in the city. The move, which is at the stage of feedback and planning, has drawn reactions ranging from enthusiastic approval to vehement rejection.

Global Experience

- Globally, conversations around free public transport have revolved around decongestion and affordability, rather than safety. One reason is that many of these experiments have been carried out in highly advanced countries with mostly safe public spaces and better reporting rates of crime against women.
- Hasselt, Belgium, made public transport free in 1996, and also expanded its transport fleet. A decade later, a study reported a tenfold increase in ridership, however, rising operational costs forced Hasselt to do away with the scheme in 2014.
- The small German town of Templin made public transport free in 1997, and continues with the policy even today. Within three years, ridership increased 1,200%, with children and the youth making up the vast majority of the increased numbers. This, however, led to increased vandalism.
- Also, the vast majority of the substitution effects were due to shift from soft modes — 30-40% from biking and 35-50% from walking. Only 10-20% of the substitution effects were associated with previous car trips
- In 1991, the Netherlands introduced a seasonal free-fare travel card for higher education students, which led to the share of trips made by students rising from 11% to 21%. Fifty-two per cent of cyclists, and 34% of car users moved.

- However, small European cities can hardly be an indicator for Delhi. The population of all of the Netherlands is around 1.7 crore, much less than Delhi's estimated 2 crore. Average income levels are not comparable, and the public transportation system in Delhi is weaker than in most European countries.

Pros

- As of now only 33 per cent of Metro commuters are women, the fare hike hit women the worst and the average daily ridership dropped by almost 3 lakh. Free rides would help women from the lower middle class who can't afford existing fares.
- It will make travel safer for women in metro and buses making it easier for women to move from informal and more unsafe modes of transport such as shared autos and cabs to formal and safer modes such as the Metro.
- Apart from affordability and safety, it will enrich women socially by getting them out of the house, along with helping women to reclaim public spaces. More women in public spaces will further go on to make those spaces safer for women.
- In terms of work, India has been losing women in the workforce. According to a Deloitte report released in March, the female labour-force participation fell from 36% in 2005 to 26% in 2018. In New Delhi, it is even lower, at 11%
- Ease of commute because of a safe, accessible and wide public transport network is a big factor in boosting women's employment and helping them to stay employed. Further, more women from the economically disadvantaged groups, would start working.
- It's not only work opportunities that are limited because of safety fears over travelling. A 2017 study of 4,000 Delhi University students by Brown University found that travelling distance determined which college women chose to attend. For the average woman, selecting a safe travel route requires her to choose a college that is of lower quality, leading to trade-offs between travel safety and college quality.

Cons

- According to experts the scheme could prove to be a complex affair and that similar experiments have not worked well at other place in the past. There are fears that there could be a drop in quality of services if free travel concessions erode DMRC's funds along with leading to overcrowding.
- It has been pointed that the money that the government wants to spend on the scheme should have been used to improve security infrastructure and uplift women safety in the city.
- Delhi's bus fleet has been facing a chronic shortage, the funds to be used for the scheme would have been utilised better by expanding the bus infrastructure.
- People are of the opinion that Metro fares should be reduced for all commuters rather than favouring a particular gender which defies all forms of equality.
- The argument of the government—that it will reimburse the revenue losses to the DMRC—is a poor solace. The amount involved is about Rs. 1,000 crore per annum today. This will go on increasing as the metro network expands and with further fare hikes the government will reimburse only part of this huge expenditure.
- Once concession is given to one section of commuters, immediate demands will arise from more deserving sections, such as students, the handicapped, and senior citizens. The disease will spread fast to all other metros in the country, making them dependent on state governments for subsidies.

Way ahead

- Along with safety on public transport, last mile connectivity is a big issue. For women, walking to and from the nearest bus stop or Metro station, especially during the early mornings and late evenings, remains unsafe in many places in the city.
- The government should focus on strengthening last-mile connectivity by ensuring adequate street lighting and making available modes such as smaller buses to commuters.
- The stakeholders will also have to come together to come up with a technological solution to bypass the AFC counter for women to access the Metro without paying any fare.
- Furthermore, the government should study, identify and devise solutions in all the areas which preclude women's safety, to create a city which not only gives them a free ride but also the liberty to live a life free from all forms of fear.

PRELIMS MCQs

1. Consider the following statements regarding Yellow Sea:

1. It is surrounded by mainland China, Korean Peninsula and Japan.
2. A line running from the mouth of the Yangtze River to Cheju Island off South Korea separates Yellow Sea from East China Sea.
3. It derives its name from the colour of the silt-laden water discharged from the major Chinese rivers emptying into it.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context:

- China has launched a space rocket **from sea for the first time**.
- A **Long March 11** rocket was launched from a **ship in the Yellow Sea**.
- With sea launches, China now has the ability to deploy satellites from a mobile platform

Answer – C

Explanation:

- Yellow Sea lies between **mainland China on the west and north** and the **Korean peninsula on the east**.
- It is situated to the **north of East China Sea** and a line running from the mouth of the Yangtze River to Cheju Island off South Korea separates Yellow Sea from East China Sea.
- The **Yellow Sea derives its name** from the colour of the silt-laden water discharged from the major Chinese rivers emptying into it.
- The sea annually receives an immense quantity of sediments, mostly from the Huang He (via the Bo Hai) and the Yangtze River, both of which have formed large deltas.
- The **warm current of the Yellow Sea** is a **part of the Tsushima Current**, which diverges near the western part of the Japanese island of Kyushu

2. Consider the following statements regarding African Union (AU)

1. Morocco is not a member of AU.
2. AU is headquartered at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Which of the above statement is/are Correct?

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

Context:

- The African Union (AU) has suspended Sudan's membership from the Union.
- This decision was taken after the Sudanese military launched a brutal crackdown on protesters that killed dozens of people.
- Sudan's pro-democracy leaders are protesting against the **Transitional Military Council (TMC)** - which has ruled Sudan **since longtime leader Omar al-Bashir was overthrown** in a coup in April.

Answer – B**Explanation**

- In April 2019, Omar al-Bashir has resigned as president of Sudan.
- Bashir, **who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes** and genocide, came to power in a 1989 coup and was one of the longest serving presidents in Africa.
- Weeks of protests, which erupted in December 2018, have become the biggest challenge to Bashir's three decades of rule.
- Sudan, along with Iran, Syria and North Korea, is on Washington's blacklist as state sponsors of "terrorism".

About AU:

- African Union (AU), international organization established in 2002 by the nations of the **former Organization of African Unity (OAU)**.
- The AU is the successor organization to the OAU, with greater powers to promote African economic, social, and political integration, and a stronger commitment to democratic principles.
- The AU's headquarters are at **Addis Ababa**, Ethiopia and has 55 member.
- In January 2017, **Morocco rejoined** the African Union after 33 years.

3. The United Nations designates specific days, weeks, years and decades as occasions to mark particular events or topics. In this context, consider the following pairs:

Event	Day
1. World Environment Day	5 June
2. World Food Safety Day	3 June
3. International Day for Biological Diversity	22 May

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- 1 and 3 Only
- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- All of the above

Answer: A**Explanation**

World Food Safety Day is celebrated on **7 June** to draw global attention to the consequences of contaminated food and water to the health.

World Environment Day

- World Environment Day was celebrated on 5 June 2019.
- Theme - “**Air pollution**”
- This year’s host country – **China**
- The date 5 June coincides with the first day of landmark Stockholm Conference (1972)
- World environment Day is celebrated since 1974.

World Food Safety Day

- The **first ever** “World Food Safety Day” was celebrated on **7 June 2019**.
- Theme - ‘**Food Safety, everyone's business**’
- Agencies involved - **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO)**
- In December 2018 the General Assembly decided to designate 7 June as World Food Safety Day.

Data Related To Hunger

As per the WHO data, almost 1 in 10 people in the world fall ill after eating contaminated, with almost 1,25,000 deaths of children under 5 years. Around 600 million annual cases of food borne disease have made United Nations to take a step towards food safety.

Several Initiatives Launched By India On World Food Safety Day

- **State Food Safety Index (SFSI)** – To measure the performance of States on five parameters of food safety.
- **Eat Right Awards** - To recognize the contribution of food companies and individuals to empower citizens to choose safe and healthy food options.
- **Raman 1.0** - This hand-held battery operated device performs rapid detection of economically driven adulteration in edible oils, fats and ghee.
- **Food Safety Magic Box** – This do-it-yourself food testing kit comprises a manual and equipment to check for food adulterants, which schoolchildren can use in their classroom laboratories.

4. Consider the following statements regarding “American Philosophical Society”:

1. It was founded by Benjamin Franklin for the purpose of promoting useful knowledge.
2. Recently, Romila Thapar from India has been selected as the secretary of this society.

Which of the above statements is/are Incorrect?

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

Context

Romila Thapar has been elected as an **International member** of the American Philosophical Society.

Answer – B

Explanation

- The American Philosophical Society was founded in **1743 by Benjamin Franklin** for the purpose of “promoting useful knowledge.”
 - It is the **oldest learned society** in the United States.
5. Consider the following statements regarding UN women:
1. It is an entity of United Nations working for the empowerment of women.
 2. The former President of Chile Michelle Bachelet was appointed as the first President of UN Women.
 3. Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) is another entity of UN working for the empowerment of women.

Which of the above statement is/are Correct?

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

Context

- Indian-origin **Anita Bhatia** has been appointed as the Deputy Executive Director of UN Women.
- Veteran Indian diplomat and a gender equality champion **Lakshmi Puri** had previously served as the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women.

Answer: A

Explanation

- UN Women is the **United Nations entity** dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- Also known as **United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women**
- In **July 2010**, the United Nations General Assembly **created UN Women**.
- It was created by merging following institutions:
 - the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW);
 - the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW, established in 1976);
 - the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI, established in 1997), and
 - the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, established in 1976).
- UN Women became operational in January 2011 and **President of Chile Michelle Bachelet** was the **inaugural Executive Director**.

6. Which of the following women has achieved the distinction of becoming the first woman fighter pilot to fly by day a Hawk advanced jet aircraft?

- a) Avani Chaturvadi
- b) Bhawana Kanth
- c) Mohana Singh
- d) None of the above

Answer – C

Explanation

- **Flight Lieutenant Mohana Singh** has become the first woman fighter pilot to fly by day a Hawk advanced jet aircraft.
- She achieved the feat at the **Kalaikunda Air Force Station in West Bengal**.
- She had, along with two other women pilots, **Bhawana Kanth and Avani Chaturvadi**, joined the fighter stream in June 2016.

7. 'Kharga Prahar' is related to

- a) A training exercise conducted by Indian Army
- b) A training exercise conducted by Indian Navy
- c) Joint military exercise between Indian Army and Nepalese Army
- d) Joint military exercise between Indian Army and Bhutanese Army

Answer: A

Explanation:

- 'Kharga Prahar', a major **training exercise** was conducted by the **Indian Army** in Punjab.
- Army's Kharga Corps was involved in this training.
- The Indian Army's **II Corps**, based in **Ambala** is known as **Kharga Corps**.

8. Consider the following statements regarding Siachen Glacier:

1. The glacier is located in located in the eastern Pir Panjal Range.
2. During "Operation Meghdoot", India gained control over entire Siachen Glacier.

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited the Siachen Glacier, on his first visit outside the national capital after taking office.

- The visit to the world's highest battle field was aimed at reviewing the security situation along the borders with Pakistan.

Answer – B

Explanation:

- The Siachen Glacier is a glacier located in the **eastern Karakoram range** in the Himalayas.
 - It is the **longest glacier** in the Karakoram and **second-longest** in the world's non-polar areas.
 - The **entire Siachen Glacier**, with all major passes, is currently under the administration of **India since 1984**. India gained control over this region during "**Operation Meghdoot**".
 - The Siachen Glacier lies immediately **south of the great drainage divide** that separates the **Eurasian Plate** from the **Indian subcontinent** in the extensively glaciated portion of the Karakoram sometimes called the "Third Pole".
9. Consider the following statements regarding "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" commonly known as Quad:
1. It is a formal strategic grouping consisting of India, US, Australia and Japan.
 2. The quadrilateral alliance was revived in its present format during the 2017 ASEAN Summit.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Context

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly known as Quad, met recently in Bangkok, Thailand..

Answer – B

Explanation

Key Highlights Of This Meet

- India does a **balancing act between 'Quad' and China**. Although, India held consultation with United States, Japan and Australia on Indo-Pacific, but refrained from joining them in not-so-subtly criticizing China.
- The press release issued by the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi **did not use the phrases** like "**rules-based order**" and "**respect for international law and freedom of navigation and overflight**", which have been often used by the international community to oppose hegemonic aspirations of the China in the region.
- The participants underscored their intent to continue **close coordination and collaboration in support of sustainable, private sector-led development, maritime security and good governance**.

About Quad

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is an **informal strategic grouping** consisting of India, US, Australia and Japan.
- The dialogue was initiated in 2007. However, this initiative took a back seat due to opposition from China and lack of support from the member countries.
- The dialogue was paralleled by joint military exercises, titled **Exercise Malabar**.
- However, **during the 2017 ASEAN Summits** all four former members rejoined in negotiations to revive the quadrilateral alliance

10. Which of the following countries is cooperating with India in the setting up of a national maritime heritage museum at Lothal in Gujarat?

- a) Portugal
- b) France
- c) Russia
- d) Norway

Answer – A

Explanation

- **India and Portugal** will cooperate in the setting up of a **national maritime heritage museum at Lothal in Gujarat**.
- The museum will highlight **ancient shipbuilding and navigational technologies** developed by India.
- Portugal Navy looks after their museum (a maritime museum) in Lisbon. Hence it has the required expertise.
- In March 2019, GoI had allocated a grant for building the maritime museum and the foundation stone was laid by PM Modi.
- Implementing agencies - **Ministry of Shipping** through its Sagarmala programme, with the involvement of the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**, **the State government** and other stakeholders.

11. Consider the following statements regarding “Samadhi Buddha Statue”:

1. It is situated at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.
2. The Buddha is depicted in the position of “Bhumisparsha Mudra” (Earth-Touching Mudra).
3. Bhumisparsha Mudra symbolizes Buddha’s calling of the Earth to witness his purity and chastity despite the temptations of *Mara* (desire).

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context:

- Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena gifted Indian PM Modi a **replica of the Samadhi Buddha Statue**.
- This replica of the Samadhi Buddha Statue has been hand carved using white teak and took almost two years to complete.
- On the 9th of June, Prime Minister made a short visit to Sri Lanka.
- PM Modi was first foreign leader to visit Sri Lanka after Easter attacks. His visit is considered a **sign of India's affirmation of solidarity** with Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the attacks.

Answer – B**Explanation****About Samadhi Buddha Statue:**

- The famous statue is situated at Mahamevnāwa Park in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.
- This is considered to be one of the best sculptures of **Anuradhapura era** (377 BC to 1017 AD) which is the first established kingdom in ancient Sri Lanka.
- The original statue was **sculptured between 4th to 7th centuries AD**.
- The **statue depicts** Buddha in the position of the **Dhyana Mudra**, the posture of meditation associated with his first Enlightenment.
- In the Dhyana Mudra the Buddha sits cross-legged with his upturned palms placed one over the other on his lap.
- **Bhumisparsha Mudra** symbolizes Buddha's calling of the Earth to witness his purity and chastity despite the temptations of *Mara* (desire).

12. Which of the following countries has conferred "Rule of Nishan Izzuddeen", the highest civilian honour, to Indian Prime Minister?

- a) Sri Lanka
- b) Kyrgyzstan
- c) Maldives
- d) Saudi Arabia

Context:

- PM Modi was conferred with **Maldives' highest honour "Rule of Nishan Izzuddeen"** during his visit to the country.
- Indian PM had reached the Indian Ocean archipelago in his first bilateral visit after retaining power in the Lok Sabha polls.
- This was Maldives' highest honour accorded to foreign dignitaries.

Answer – C

Explanation**Key Highlights of the Visit:**

- This was the first visit of Indian PM to the Maldives since 2011.
- The two leaders jointly inaugurate remotely two of the completed projects - **Coastal Surveillance Radar System**; the **Composite Training Center of the Maldives National Defence Forces**
- India pledged budgetary support to the Maldives of close to US\$200 million.
- Signing of the **US\$800 million Dollar Line of Credit Agreement** in March 2019, for assisting the Maldives to achieve sustainable social and economic development was appreciated.
- In this regard, **three important project** have already been identified - *Water supply and sewerage for 36 of the islands which are inhabited; Addu urban development center; SME development financing project*
- Both countries are in the **process of finalizing the currency swap agreement** which is under SAARC.
- Indian side offered to carry out **restoration of the Hukuru Miskiy (Friday Mosque)** by the Archaeological Survey of India **under an Indian grant**.
- India offered to **construct a cricket stadium of international standards at Hulhumalé** under the Line of Credit.
- It also offered its help through BCCI for overall development of Cricket as a sport in Maldives.
- President Solih thanked the Government of India for the 1000 additional training slots over next five years, offered during the State visit to India in December 2018, and for **ongoing training for civil servants, women entrepreneurs, and training for diplomats** and familiarisation visits of journalists in July 2019.
- The two leaders acknowledged the **recent joint exercise Ekatha** conducted in April 2019.
- Earlier this year India had also supported the Climate Change initiative of the Maldives **by gifting 2 lakh LED lights** for the street lighting of Male city.
- Indian PM **addressed a session of the newly constituted People's Majlis** (Parliament of Maldives) on 8 June. He was only the **second foreign Head of State** or Government to address the People's Majlis in **its 86 year history**.

List of MoUs/Technical Agreements signed:

- MoU for Cooperation in the Field of Hydrography .
- MoU on Cooperation in the field of Health .
- MoU for the Establishment of Passenger and Cargo Services by Sea .
- MoU for Cooperation in Customs Capacity Building between the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs of India and the Maldives Customs Service .
- MoU between National Centre for Good Governance, Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances and Maldives Civil Service Commission on Training and Capacity Building Programme for Maldivian Civil Servants .
- Technical Agreement on Sharing White Shipping Information between the Indian Navy and the Maldives National Defence Force

13. Consider the following statements regarding satellite Ravana-1:

1. It is Sri Lanka's first satellite designed and developed by local engineers.
2. It has been successfully launched into orbit from the International Space Station.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer – C

Explanation

- Sri Lanka's first satellite 'Ravana-1', designed and developed by two local engineers, was successfully launched into orbit **from the International Space Station**.
- It was launched along with two other BIRDS 3 satellites from Japan and Nepal.
- The satellite was deployed using the **JAXA (Japanese Aerospace and Exploration Agency) owned Kibo experiment module**.
- Raavana-1 is expected to **fulfil five missions** including the capturing of pictures of Sri Lanka and surrounding regions, active attitude stabilization which ensures that satellite's attitude is stable under the influence of external talks.

About BIRDS Projects:

- It is a cross-border interdisciplinary satellite project for non-space faring countries supported by Japan.
- It is first step towards creating an indigenous space program by designing, building, operating, testing and launching first satellite for participating nations.
- **BIRDS 3 project** involves **students from Sri Lanka, Nepal and Japan**.

14. Consider the following pairs:

Person	Why in News
1. Prayuth Chan-ocha	Prime Minister of Thailand
2. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev	Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence (Pakistan)
3. Faiz Hameed	President of Kazakhstan

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

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

Answer – D

Explanation

A. New Prime Minister of Thailand

- The National Assembly of Thailand has chosen **Prayuth Chan-ocha** as Prime Minister.
- Thailand's prime minister is chosen in a **joint vote of the 500-seat House and the 250-seat Senate** (whose members were appointed by the junta).
- In March 2019, General Elections were held to elect members in the House of Representatives (500-seat House).
- The vote officially **restored civilian rule in Thailand** after more than five years under the junta leader.
- His appointment will become official when it is endorsed by **recently crowned King Maha Vajiralongkorn of Thailand**.

B. New President of Kazakhstan

- Kazakhstan has elected interim leader **Kassym-Jomart Tokayev** as the country's **new president**.
- In March 2019, Kazakhstan's longest serving President **Nursultan Nazarbayev** resigned and the Presidentship was transferred to the then Speaker of the Senate (Upper House), Kassym-Jomart Tokayev
- Nazarbayev led Kazakhstan since its separation from the Soviet Union in 1991.

C. New ISI chief

- Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, a former senior ISI figure, has been appointed Director-General of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy agency.
- He will replace Lieutenant General Asim Munir.

15. Consider the following statements regarding the Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

1. It is an inter-governmental body with headquarters in Paris, France.
2. Saudi Arabia became the second Arab country to get FATF membership.
3. Two regional organisations namely Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and European Commission (EC) are the permanent member of FATF.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Context:

- **Saudi Arabia** has become the **first Arab country** to be granted full membership of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- The kingdom's accession came as the global money laundering watchdog celebrated the 30th anniversary of its first meeting held in Paris in 1989.
- In **2015**, Saudi Arabia joined FATF as an **Observer member**.

- Saudi Arabia had been a founding member of the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA) arm** of FATF group since November 2004.
- Its full membership came after it was reported the kingdom had made "tangible progress" and for its efforts in implementing the FATF's guidelines.

Answer – B

Explanation

About FATF

- An inter-governmental body established in 1989. **Headquarter – Paris, France**
- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- 39 Members of the FATF - 37 member jurisdictions and **2 regional organisations (GCC and EC)**
- **India is member of FATF.**

16. Consider the following statements regarding Council of Europe:

1. It is a policy-making body of the European Union.
2. The council is headquartered in Strasbourg, France.

Which of the above statements is/are Incorrect?

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

Context:

- The parliament of the **Council of Europe** has voted to **end Russia's suspension**, thereby **restoring Russia's full rights in the council**.
- They contended that if Russia left the organisation — as it had threatened to do — it would deny Russian citizens the right to bring cases before the **European Court of Human Rights, a part of the council**.
- However, opponents argued that Europe was giving in to the illegal annexation of Crimea and Russia's support for separatist warfare in eastern Ukraine.
- In 2014, following Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russia was stripped of its voting rights.
- As a reaction to this, Russia boycotted the council and since 2017 it stopped paying its share of 33 million Euro to the council.

Answer – A

Explanation

About Council of Europe:

- It is the organisation of European countries that **seeks to protect democracy and human rights** and to **promote European unity** by fostering cooperation on legal, cultural, and social issues.
- It was founded in 1949 and is headquartered in **Strasbourg, France**.
- The organisation is separate from European Union (EU) and has 47 member states (including 28 members of EU).
- **The Council of Europe should not be confused with the European Council, which is a policy-making body of the European Union.**

17. Which of the following countries has become the first country in the Gulf to launch the new anti-money laundering platform 'goAML'?

- a) Saudi Arabia
- b) Oman
- c) UAE
- d) None of the above

Context:

- **The UAE** has become the **first country in the Gulf** to launch a new reporting platform developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to curb organised crimes.
- The UAE's Financial Intelligence Unit has launched the **new anti-money laundering platform 'goAML'**.

Answer – C

18. Consider the following statements regarding the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC):

1. OIC is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
2. Every member of this organization has a Veto power.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Context:

The 14th summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) took place in **Mecca, Saudi Arabia**.

Answer – C

Explanation

- The conference was titled '**Makkah Summit: Together for the Future**'. It was hosted by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

- It addressed the "**current issues in the Muslim world**" and "**recent developments in a number of OIC member states**".
- Members also discussed **regional security issues** amid **soaring tension** between Iran and the United States and its Gulf allies.

Final communique and India:

- In its final communique at the Makkah summit, the **OIC reiterated its support for the legitimate rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir**.
- It also appointed **Yousef Aldobeay of Saudi Arabia** as its special envoy for Jammu and Kashmir.

India's Response:

- India has rejected as "**unacceptable**" the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's reference to Jammu and Kashmir in a communique.
- It said that the **OIC has no locus standi** in matters relating to Jammu and Kashmir and asserted that the state is an integral part of India.

Background:

- The **46th Session** of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation** was held in Abu Dhabi in March 2019.
- The then Minister for External Affairs Smt. Sushma Swaraj was invited by Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates as the "**Guest of Honour**" to address the Inaugural Plenary.
- India was also **invited to attend the OIC meeting in 1969** but Pakistan prevailed upon and got the **invite withdrawn**.

About OIC:

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference) is the **second largest inter-governmental** organization after the United Nations.
- It has **membership of 57 states** spread over four continents.
- The Organization was established upon a decision of the **historical summit which took place in Rabat**, Kingdom of Morocco on 25 September 1969 as a result of criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.
- It has a permanent secretariat in **Jeddah, Saudi Arabia**.
- This organization has been termed a **toothless tiger** by many analysts when it comes to dealing with squabbles among member states.
- Every member has a **veto**. As a result, the organization **fails to take a critical stand** on serious disputes that are shaping in the middle east.

19. Consider the following statements regarding Indian Meteorological Department (IMD):

1. **At present, IMD is under the administrative control of Ministry of Science and Technology.**
2. **One of the mandate of IMD is to detect and locate earthquake and evaluate seismicity in different part of the country.**
3. **It is headquartered in Delhi and operates several observation stations across India and Antarctica.**

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

a) 1 only

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

Context:

Renowned scientist and cyclone warning specialist **Mrutyunjay Mohapatra** has been appointed as the **chief of IMD**.

Answer – D

Explanation**About IMD:**

- Established in **1875**; **Headquarter** – Delhi and operates hundreds of observation stations across India and Antarctica.
- **Regional offices** are at Mumbai, Kolkata, Nagpur and Pune.
- Under the administrative control of – **Ministry of Earth Sciences**
- It is the principal government agency in all matters relating to **meteorology, seismology** (*to detect and locate earthquakes and to evaluate seismicity in different parts of the country for development projects*) and **allied activities**.
- IMD is also **one of the six Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres** of the **World Meteorological Organization**.
- It has the responsibility for **forecasting, naming and distribution of warnings for tropical cyclones** in the Northern Indian Ocean region, including the Malacca Straits, the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf.

20. Consider the following statements regarding the International Olympic Committee (IOC)

1. It is an inter-governmental sports organisation based in Lausanne, Switzerland.
2. IOC is the authority responsible for organising the modern Summer and Winter Olympic Games.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Context:

- International Olympic Committee (IOC) has formally opened its **new headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland**.
- The new headquarter was inaugurated during the celebration of **125th anniversary** of IOC.

Answer – A

Explanation

About IOC:

- It is a **non-governmental sports organisation** based in **Lausanne, Switzerland**.
- Created by **Pierre de Coubertin and Demetrios Vikelas** in 1894.
- It is the authority responsible for **organising the modern Summer and Winter Olympic Games**.
- The IOC is the **governing body** of the **National Olympic Committees (NOCs)**, which are the national constituents of the worldwide Olympic Movement.

21. Consider the following statements regarding the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO):

1. **It is one of the principal organs of United Nations.**
2. **It is dedicated to developing safe and efficient international air transport for peaceful purposes.**

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Context:

Senior bureaucrat **Shefali Juneja** has been appointed as India's representative in the council of International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

Answer – B

Explanation

About ICAO:

- ICAO is a **UN specialized agency**, established by States in 1944 to manage the administration and governance of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention).
- It codifies the principles and techniques of international air navigation and fosters the planning and development of international air transport to ensure safe and orderly growth.
- Its **headquarters** is located in the Quartier International of **Montreal, Quebec, Canada**.
- It has several component bodies: (1) an **Assembly of delegates** from all member countries that meets every three years, (2) a **Council of representatives from 33 member states**, elected by and responsible to the Assembly, that sits in continuous session at ICAO headquarters, (3) an **Air Navigation Commission** appointed by the Council for addressing technical matters, and (4) **various standing committees**

Note: The **United Nations** has **six principal organs**: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat.

22. Consider the following statements regarding World Food India (WFI) event:

1. The objective of this summit is to promote food-processing sector to position India as Food Processing Destination of the World.
2. It is an annual event initiated by the government.
3. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare is the nodal ministry responsible for this event.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Context:

- Union Minister for Food Processing Industries has announced that World Food India 2019 will be held from **1-4th November 2019 in New Delhi**.
- The tagline of the event will be **"Forging Partnerships for Growth"**.

Answer – A

Explanation

About WFI

- The government initiated a **biennial event- World Food India** to promote **food processing sector** at global level.
- The first such event was conducted in 2017 which helped in creation of **Brand India in global food map** by positioning India as a World Food Factory.

Food Processing in India: Statistics

- The processing levels in India **remain low at 7.7%** behind several economies such as China, Malaysia and US.
- India's share in **global exports of processed food is only 2%**.
- Besides, India also has a **high share of harvest and post-harvest losses** from major agricultural produces on account of poor storage, transportation and logistics to the **extent of INR 92,651 Crores** (\$13 Billion)-3 times the agricultural budget.
- However, recently, Indian Food Processing Industry has grown tremendously **recording 11% growth rate**, which is twice the pace of Global Industry.
- The sector has recorded **double digit growth rate** across all major sub-segments of the sectors both in terms of value and volume.

23. Consider the following statements regarding different operations launched by armed forces in India:

1. Operation Bandar was launched by Indian air force to attack terrorist training camp in Balakot, Pakistan.
2. Operation Sankalp was launched by Indian Army to capture Siachen Glacier.
3. Operation Vijay was the of Indian operation to clear Kargil sector.

Which of the above statements is/are *incorrect*?

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

Answer – B

Explanation

Operation Bandar

The air strike **by the Indian Air Force (IAF)** on a terrorist training camp in Balakot, Pakistan, was code-named '**Operation Bandar**'.

Operation Sankalp

- Recently, Indian Navy has launched Operation Sankalp in the **Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman**.
- The aim of this operation is to reassure Indian flagged vessels transiting through the area following the recent maritime incidents in the region.
- The operation has been launched in the **wake of escalating tension in the Gulf of Oman**, where two oil tankers were attacked. The incident has since heightened tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Operation Vijay

India will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of Operation Vijay, also known as Kargil Vijay Diwas, in July 2019. Operation Vijay was the name of Indian operation to clear Kargil sector.

24. Operation Sunrise 2 is related to

- a) **Coordinated army patrol by India and Bangladesh along the border**
- b) **Establishing forward army post along Chinese border in Arunachal Pradesh**
- c) **Joint military exercise between India and Nepal in the mountains of Himalayas**
- d) **Coordinated operation by armies of India and Myanmar along Indo-Myanmar border**

Context

- **Armies of India and Myanmar** carried out a coordinated operation in their respective border areas called '**Operation Sunrise 2**' to bust terror camps.
- It was a three-week-long operation, targeting several militant groups operating in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam.
- This operation was carried out as a proactive measure to **protect Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project**.
- **First phase** of this operation was launched in **February 2019**.

Answer – D

Explanation

India and Myanmar share a **1,643 km unfenced** border along **Arunachal Pradesh** (520 km), **Nagaland** (215 km), **Manipur** (398 km) and **Mizoram** (510 km) and permit a **‘free movement’** regime upto 16 km beyond the border.

25. Consider the following statements regarding Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP):

- 1. It is the first regional Government-to-Government agreement to deal with piracy and armed robbery at sea in Asia.**
- 2. ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC) has been established at Singapore.**

Which of the above statements is/are Correct?

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

Context:

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) co-hosted **12th Capacity Building workshop** with **Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP)** Information Sharing Centre (ISC) in New Delhi.

Answer – C

Explanation

- The ReCAAP is the **first regional Government-to-Government agreement** to deal with piracy and armed robbery at sea in Asia.
- Presently 20 countries are members of ReCAAP.
- **Information sharing, capacity building** and **mutual legal assistance** are the three pillars of co-operation under the ReCAAP agreement.
- An ISC has been established at **Singapore** to collate and disseminate the information among the contracting parties and the maritime community.
- Capacity building workshop is organised annually by the ISC and is co-hosted by one of the contracting parties.
- The **main objective** of this workshop is to **share updated situation of piracy** and armed robbery against ships in Asia and **best practices** of Asian countries.
- The workshop also aims to **deepen the knowledge of participants** on various issues related with piracy and armed robbery such as international laws, prosecution process, forensics and emerging threats.

26. Consider the following statements regarding 103rd constitutional Amendment:

- 1. The amendment changed two fundamental rights, Article 15 & 16 and provide for the advancement of the “economically weaker sections” of the society.**
- 2. 10% EWS reservation quota is given to all sections of the society.**

3. The states can set their own income cut-off to decide who constitutes EWS and even exceed the income criteria set by the centre.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation

10% EWS reservation quota is given only for the General Category candidates. Other category candidates already have reservation benefits – OBC (27%), SC (15%), and ST (7.5%).

27. Consider the following statements regarding NITI Ayog:

- 1. NITI Aayog was formed via a resolution of the Parliament.
- 2. Team India Hub and the Knowledge & Innovation Hub are the creation of NITI Ayog.
- 3. To focus on technology up gradation and capacity building for implementation of programmes and initiatives is one of the function of it.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation

The National Institution for Transforming India, also called NITI Aayog, was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on January 1, 2015. NITI Aayog is the premier policy 'Think Tank' of the Government of India, providing both directional and policy inputs. While designing strategic and long term policies and programmes for the Government of India, NITI Aayog also provides relevant technical advice to the Centre and States. The Government of India, in keeping with its reform agenda, constituted the NITI Aayog to replace the Planning Commission instituted in 1950. This was done in order to better serve the needs and aspirations of the people of India. An important evolutionary change from the past, NITI Aayog acts as the quintessential platform of the Government of India to bring States to act together in national interest, and thereby fosters Cooperative Federalism.

28. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Supreme Court has declared Right to decent environment including pollution free water as part of Article 21.
- 2. Parliament may by law provide for the adjudication of any dispute with respect to the use, distribution and control of waters of any inter-state river and river valley.

3. Development of inter-state rivers, water supplies, irrigation and canals come under the Union List.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1, 3
- b) 2, 3
- c) 1, 2
- d) 1, 2, 3

Answer: C

Explanation

Right to decent environment including pollution free water and air and protection against hazardous industries is part of Article 21. While, water supplies, irrigation and canals, drainage and embankments and storage fall in the State List, issues like development of inter-state rivers come under the Union List.

29. Consider the following statements regarding Speaker of Lok Sabha.

- 1. The Speaker of Lok Sabha leave the office just after dissolution of the assembly.
- 2. Business Advisory Committee and Rules Committee work directly under the Chairmanship of the Speaker.
- 3. In the case Speaker decides some bill as a money bill, this decision cannot be challenged.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1, 2
- b) 1, 3
- c) 2, 3
- d) 1, 2, 3

Answer: C

Explanation

The Speaker of Lok Sabha does not leave the office just after dissolution of the assembly. He continues to be in the office till the newly formed assembly takes its first meeting and elects the new Speaker. Committees like the Business Advisory Committee, the General Purposes Committee and the Rules Committee work directly under her Chairmanship. The Speaker decides whether a bill brought to the house is a money bill or not. In the case Speaker decides some bill as a money bill, this decision cannot be challenged.

30. Consider the following statements regarding Data Localization.

- 1. Data Localization means storing data within the borders of a specific country where only the Government has access to the data.
- 2. BN Srikrishna committee recommended for Data Localization.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both
- d) None

Answer: B

Explanation

Data localization is the act of storing data on any device that is physically present within the borders of a specific country where the data was generated. Recommendations by the RBI, the committee of experts led by Justice BN Srikrishna, the draft ecommerce policy and the draft report of the cloud policy panel show signs of data localisation.

31. Consider the following statements.

1. National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) can take suo motu cognisance and issue notices to central ministries, states and Union Territories on the issue of public health infrastructure in the country.
2. Right to live with human dignity is part of Right to Life and it is the Constitutional duty of the Central/State Governments to ensure that Right to Life is guaranteed.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both
- d) None

Answer: C

Explanation:

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recently issued notices to the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry (MoHFW), and all States and Union Territories, over what it termed was the “deplorable public health infrastructure in the country”. The NHRC took suo motu cognisance of several media reports on recent deaths across the country due to deficiencies and inadequacies in the healthcare system. The Commission has reminded the Central/State Governments of their constitutional duty under Article 21 of the Constitution under which Right to Life is guaranteed. Quoting the Supreme Court of India, the Commission has observed that right to live with human dignity is part of Right to Life.

32. Consider the following statements regarding Leader of the Opposition in either House of the Parliament of India.

1. The position of Leader of the Opposition received statutory recognition through the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977
2. When no party in the Lok Sabha secures required seats to form an opposition party and to designate a Leader of opposition, the matter is then decided by the President of India.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

d) None

Answer: A

Explanation: The Leader of the Opposition is the politician who leads the official opposition in either House of the Parliament of India. To claim the status of “official opposition” in either house a party has to secure 55 seats (10%) of the seats in the Lok Sabha and likewise 25 (10%) of the seats in the Rajya Sabha. It received statutory recognition through the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977 which defines the term “Leader of the Opposition” as that member of the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha who, for the time being, is the Leader of that House of the Party in Opposition to the Government having the greatest numerical strength and recognised, as such, by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha or the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. As per the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977 by which the post has got official and statutory status, the majority required is decided by the heads of the houses, that is speaker and chairman as the case may be.

33. With reference to Jan Shikshan Sansthan consider the following statements

- 1. The scheme comes under Ministry of Human Resource and Development.**
- 2. The scheme of Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) was initially launched in 1967 as Shramik Vidyapeeth**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- Only 1**
- Only 2**
- Both 1 and 2**
- Neither 1 nor 2**

Context

Fee for SC/ST candidates, who join vocational training under Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), has been waived off.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Jan Shikshan Sansthan are institutes of education focusing on the poor, the illiterates, the neo-literates, the under-privileged and the un-reached. JSSs are unique in that they do not provide just skill development, but link literacy with vocational skills and provide large doses of Life Enrichment Education (LEE) to the people
- They do not work in isolation but aim for convergence with other stakeholders in society. It is their endeavour to shape their beneficiaries into self-reliant and self-assured employees and entrepreneurs.
- The scheme was initially launched in 1967 as Shramik Vidyapeeth and was renamed as Jan Shikshan Sansthan in April 2000. Along with the change in its name came the change in its focus. A scheme that was meant for the industrial workers and their families was expanded both in terms of its clientele and focus and was extended to the rural areas.
- It was formerly under the Ministry of Human Resources Development and **transferred to the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship in 2018.**

- The centres can play an important role in bridging information asymmetry between skill training and market opportunities thereby giving an impetus to the creation of a workforce equipped in technology-driven skills, including in areas like health & wellness, tourism, e-commerce, retail and trade.
- The JSSs have helped open over 1 lakh bank accounts under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and mobilised around 7.5 lakh beneficiaries who were enrolled in Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana. With a substantial rise in establishment of more than 1 lakh entrepreneurs, JSS has successfully generated employment across various sectors.

34. With reference to National Defence Fund consider the following statements

1. The Union Home Minister is the chairperson of the executive committee of National Defence Fund.
2. The fund is only used for the welfare of the members of the Armed Forces.
3. It was set up in 1962.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 3
- b) 1 and 2
- c) Only 3
- d) All of the above

Context

Changes have been introduced in the Prime Minister's Scholarship Scheme under the National Defence Fund

Answer: C

Explanation

- The National Defence Fund (NDF) was set up in 1962 to take charge of the voluntary donations in cash and kind received for promotion of the national defence effort and to decide on their utilisation.
- Currently the fund is being used for the welfare of the members of the Armed Forces, Para Military forces and Railway Protection Force, and their dependents. The fund is administered by an Executive Committee with the Prime Minister as the Chairperson and the Defence, Finance and Home Ministers as members.
- Under NDF a major scheme of 'Prime Minister's Scholarship Scheme (PMSS)' is being implemented to encourage technical and post-graduate education for the widows and wards of the deceased/ex-service personnel
- Following changes have been recently introduced in the Prime Minister's Scholarship Scheme:
- The rates of scholarship have been increased from Rs. 2000 per month to Rs. 2500 per month for boys and from Rs. 2250 per month to Rs. 3000 per month for girls.
- The ambit of the Scholarship Scheme is extended to the wards of State Police officials who are/were martyred during terror/naxal attacks. The Ministry of Home Affairs will be the nodal Ministry in this regard.

35. With reference to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) consider the following statements

1. Abujh Maria is a PVTG from Chattisgarh

2. Highest number of PVTGs are in Odisha

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: C

Explanation

- The Chhattisgarh government is processing habitat rights for Abujh Marias, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), who live in the Abujmarh forest in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh. Abujmarh stands for the unknown hills ("Abuj" means "unknown" and "Marh" means "hill") in the Gondi language native to the region.
- Keeping in view the differential vulnerability of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) among the forest dwellers, the FRA has a provision according to which the District Level Committee should play a pro-active role in ensuring that all PTGs receive habitat rights in consultation with the concerned PTGs' traditional institutions of these groups, after filing claims before the gram sabha.
- Habitat is defined under the act as, the area comprising the customary habitat and such other habitats in reserved forests and protected forests of primitive tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities and other forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes.
- Tribal communities are often identified by some specific signs such as primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness to contact with the community at large and backwardness. Along with these, some tribal groups have some specific features which qualify them as PVTGs. The criteria for determination of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are:
 - A pre-agriculture level of technology
 - A stagnant or declining population
 - Extremely low literacy and
 - A subsistence level of economy.
- In 1973, Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups. In 2006, the Government renamed the PTGs as PVTGs. PVTGs have some basic characteristics -they are mostly homogenous, with a small population, relatively physically isolated, social institutes cast in a simple mould, absence of written language, relatively simple technology & a slower rate of change etc.
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs implements the Scheme of Development of PVTGs exclusively for them. Under the scheme, Conservation-cum-Development (CCD)/Annual Plans are to be prepared by each State/UT for their PVTGs based on their need assessment, which are then appraised and approved by the Project Appraisal Committee of the Ministry.
- Among the 75 listed PVTG's the highest number are found in Odisha (13), followed by Andhra Pradesh (12), Bihar including Jharkhand (9) Madhya Pradesh including Chhattisgarh (7) Tamil Nadu (6) Kerala and Gujarat having five groups each.

36. With reference to World Food Safety Day consider the following statements

1. World Food Safety Day is celebrated on 7th June
2. It was celebrated for the first time in 2019.

3. FAO is designated with overseeing food safety along various aspects of the food chain.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 3
- b) 2 and 3
- c) Only 3
- d) All of the above

Answer: D

Explanation

- Food safety has a critical role in assuring that food stays safe at every stage of the food chain - from production to harvest, processing, storage, distribution, all the way to preparation and consumption.
- The first ever celebration of the United Nations World Food Safety Day, marked on 7 June, aims to strengthen efforts to ensure the safety of food.
- Every year, nearly one in ten people in the world (an estimated 600 million people) fall ill and 420,000 die after eating food contaminated by bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemical substances.
- Unsafe food also hinders development in many low and middle income economies, which lose around US\$ 95 billion in productivity associated with illness, disability, and premature death suffered by workers.
- World Food Safety Day 2019's theme is food safety is everyone's business. It contributes to food security, human health, economic prosperity, agriculture, market access, tourism and sustainable development.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations (FAO) is the only international organization overseeing food safety along all aspects of the food chain. Through a longstanding partnership, FAO and the World Health Organization (WHO) support global food safety and protect consumers' health.
- FAO generally addresses food safety issues along the food chain during production and processing, while WHO typically oversees relationships with the public health sector.

37. With reference to Sheath Blight disease consider the following statements

1. It is a disease caused by bacteria.
2. It affects rice crops.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Context

- A team of scientists at Delhi-based National Institute of Plant Genome Research has unravelled the genomic diversity associated with aggressiveness of two Indian strains of *Rhizoctonia solani*, the fungal pathogen that causes the dreaded Sheath Blight disease in rice.
- The researchers have identified several genes and gene families in the strain that might account for their disease aggressiveness. This genomic insight is expected to help develop rice varieties resistant to sheath blight disease.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Sheath Blight disease is a major issue in rice cultivation and can cause up to 60 per cent reduction in rice yield. It is difficult to breed disease resistant rice varieties, as there is lack of natural source of disease resistance. Consequently, controlling the disease in a sustainable manner has remained a challenge.
- Further characterisation of the identified genes will be helpful to understand their role in the pathogenesis of the fungus. The genetic manipulation of the pathogenicity-associated genes in rice through various biotechnological approaches may prove helpful in developing sheath blight resistant rice.

Occurrence

- Sheath blight occurs in areas with high temperature (28–32°C), high levels of nitrogen fertilizer, and relative humidity of crop canopy from 85–100%. Plants are more vulnerable to sheath blight during the rainy season.
- High seeding rate or close plant spacing, dense canopy, disease in the soil, sclerotia or infection bodies floating on the water, and growing of high yielding improved varieties also favour disease development.

38. With reference to Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAs), consider the following statements

1. PFAs are used in cookwares.
2. The use of PFAs are regulated in India.
3. Consumption of PFAs can be fatal for human beings.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Context

According to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAs), chemicals found on non-stick cookwares, have made its way into the human food chain. According to the report, more than 98 per cent of blood samples collected in the US were contaminated with PFAs

Answer: C

Explanation:

- PFAs are a group of artificial chemicals used in many items of daily use. Apart from cookware, they are found in resistant fabrics used for cleaning, paints and food packaging. The chemical comes in contact with food through contaminated ground water, soil and air, apart from household items.
- The chemicals can be fatal for human beings, travelling through bloodstreams and collecting in the kidney and liver. Continuous deposition can lead to dysfunction of organs or cancer after a period.

PFAs in India

- As far as India is concerned, the situation is worse as PFAs are still unregulated in the country.

- India joined as a party to the Stockholm Convention in 2006 and in turn, the Convention included India's name to PFA global restriction list in 2009. But, India has not accepted this amendment till now.

39. With reference to the Economic Census consider the following statements

- The Seventh Economic Census is conducted by Ministry of Commerce and Industry**
- The first Economic Census was conducted by the Central Statistics Organization in 1977**
- Household enterprises are not captured in the Economic Census**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 and 2
- Only 2
- 1 and 3
- All of the above

Context

The Seventh Economic Census is being **conducted by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** in 2019.

Answer: B

Explanation:

- Six Economic Censuses, (EC) have been conducted by the Union Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation till date. **The first Economic Census was conducted in 1977 by Central Statistics Organization** in collaboration with the Directorate of Economics & Statistics (DES) and the Sixth edition of Economic Census was conducted in 2013.
- 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.
- An IT based digital platform for data capture, validation, report generation and dissemination is being used in the current census.

Significance

- It **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.
- It provides disaggregated information on various operational and structural variables of all establishments of the country.
- It also provides valuable insight into the geographical spread/clusters of economic activities, ownership pattern, persons engaged, etc. of all the economic establishments.
- The information collected is useful for socio-economic developmental planning at state and district levels.

40. With reference to Financial Stability and Development Council consider the following statements

- Finance Minister is the chairperson of FSDC.**

2. FSDC is a statutory body.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Context

- The Finance Minister held the meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) to review the current global and domestic economic situation and financial stability issues including, those concerning banking and NBFCs.
- The Council was also apprised of the progress made towards setting-up of the Financial Data Management Centre (FDMC) to facilitate integrated data aggregation and analysis as also a Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-Fin) towards strengthening the cybersecurity framework for the financial sector.

Answer: A

Explanation:

- Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) is an apex-level body constituted by the government in 2010. It was decided to set up an autonomous body in order to deal with macro prudential and financial regularities in the entire financial sector of India. It is not a statutory body.
- The council is **headed by the finance minister** and has the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor and chairpersons of the Securities and Exchange Board of India, Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority and Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority as other members along with finance ministry officials.
- **Functions**
 - The new body envisages to strengthen and institutionalise the mechanism of maintaining financial stability, financial sector development, inter-regulatory coordination, financial literacy, financial inclusion and macro prudential supervision of the economy including the functioning of large financial conglomerates.
 - It also helps to coordinate India's international interface with financial sector bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Financial Stability Board.

41. With reference to Fall Armyworm consider the following statements

1. The geographical spread of Fall Armyworms is restricted to Asia.
2. Fall Armyworms only feed on maize crops.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Context: Government is taking several steps to control the spread of Fall Army Worm

Answer: D

Explanation:

- First reported in India last year, the Fall Armyworm (FAW) or *Spodoptera frugiperda* has become a major problem for farmers this year, with the pest hitting the production of the crop.
- Ahead of the new kharif season, more than 50 per cent of the country, has reported cases of FAW infestation this year.
- A native of the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the Americas. The pest accidentally landed in Africa in 2016 from the Americas, almost after 100 years. Since then, it has spread to over 50 countries in Africa and Asia ravaging crops, especially maize.
- It was reported in India for the first time last year, when it affected crops in Karnataka. Within a span of only six months, almost 50 per cent of the country, including Mizoram, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal, has reported FAW infestations.
- The ability of the adult moth to fly more than 100 km per night and its polyphagous (ability to feed on different kinds of food) nature makes FAW very dangerous. This explains the quick spread of the pest across India.
- Adult moths are nocturnal in habit. They gather together in large numbers like an army and go to cultivated fields and cut the stems and feed on the leaves.
- Till date, India has reported FAW infestation on maize, sorghum (jowar) and sugarcane crops. Maize has been the worst affected as most maize-growing states in southern India have been affected by the pest.

42. With reference to Rashtriya Gokul Mission consider the following statements

1. Rashtriya Gokul Mission is implemented by Ministry of Rural Development
2. The Mission aims to aims to conserve and develop indigenous and exotic breeds in a focused and scientific manner

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: D

Explanation:

- “Rashtriya Gokul Mission”, a focussed project under National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development, aims to conserve & develop indigenous breeds in a focused & scientific manner.
- Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture has been implementing the Mission through the State Implementing Agencies (SIA viz Livestock Development Boards).
- The Mission has the following objectives
 - Development and conservation of indigenous breeds
 - Undertake breed improvement programmes for indigenous cattle breeds so as to improve the genetic makeup and increase the stock

- Enhance milk production and productivity
- Upgrade nondescript cattle using elite indigenous breeds like Gir, Sahiwal, Rathi, Deoni, Tharparkar, Red Sindhi
- Distribute disease free high genetic merit bulls for natural service.

Gokul Grams

- The Mission also aims to establish Integrated Indigenous Cattle Centres or Gokul Grams in the breeding tracts of indigenous breeds.
- They will act as centres for development of indigenous breeds and a dependable source for supply of high genetic breeding stock to the farmers in the breeding tract.
- They will also function as state of the art in situ training centre for farmers and breeders.
- The Gokul Gram will maintain milch and unproductive animals in the ratio of 60:40 and will have the capacity to maintain about 1000 animals.

43. With reference to Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi consider the following statements

1. It is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfar
2. Only farmers with a landholding size below 2 hectares are eligible for the schem
3. The responsibility of identifying the beneficiaries lies entirely with the State Government

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) 1 2 and 3

Answer: C

Explanation:

- With a view to augment the income of the Small and Marginal Farmers (SMFs), the Government had launched a new Central Sector Scheme, namely, "Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- The PM-KISAN scheme aims to supplement the financial needs of the SMFs in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of the each crop cycle
- The Central Government has recently notified to extend the benefit of ₹6,000 per year under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme to all 14.5 crore farmers in the country, irrespective of the size of their landholding (subject to the prevalent exclusion criteria)
- The amount is released in three 4-monthly instalments of Rs.2000/- each over the year, to be credited into the bank accounts of the beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer mode.
- The responsibility of identifying the eligible beneficiary farmers and uploading their data on PM-KISAN portal lies entirely with the State Governments.
- Those excluded from the PM-KISAN include institutional land holders, farmer families holding constitutional posts, serving or retired officers and employees of State or Central government as well as Public Sector Undertakings and Government Autonomous bodies.

- Professionals like doctors, engineers and lawyers as well as retired pensioners with a monthly pension of over ₹10,000 and those who paid income tax in the last assessment year are also not eligible for the benefits.

44. Districts in which of the following states have been given the GI tag for Kolhapuri chappal?

1. Maharashtra
 2. Karnataka
 3. Andhra Pradesh
 4. Madhya Pradesh
- a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) 1 and 2
d) None of the above

Answer: C

Explanation

- The controller general of patents, designs and trademarks has granted the GI tag to Kolhapuri chappal across four districts each in Maharashtra and Karnataka. The districts are Kolhapur, Solapur, Sangli and Satara in Maharashtra and Dharwad, Belgaum, Bagalkot and Bijapur in Karnataka.
- Kolhapuris can be traced back to the 12th-century ruler King Bijjal of Karnataka and his Prime Minister Vishwaguru Basavanna who wanted to uplift the cobbler community.
- The footwear was traded only in the 20th century under Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, where during his rule 29 tanning centres were opened to facilitate trade.
- The tag was sanctioned after a joint application made in 2009 by the Sant Rohidas Leather Industries & Charmakar Development Corporation Limited of Maharashtra (LIDCOM) and the Dr Babu Jagjeevan Ram Leather Industries Development Corporation of Karnataka (LIDKAR). A previous bid by Maharashtra was rejected.
- The GI tag brands the footwear made from these select eight districts as 'Kolhapuris' and prohibits usage of the term for similar products made in other parts of the country.
- An established icon, the move is expected to further better the product's domestic and international prospects and would protect genuine artisans from both states against knock-offs.

45. Which of the following companies is planning to launch the cryptocurrency Libra?

- a) Google
- b) Facebook
- c) Reliance
- d) SpaceX

Answer: B

Explanation

- Facebook has announced the launch of a new cryptocurrency that will be rolled out by 2020.
- A dedicated wallet app called Calibra, has also been announced for Libra, which will be built into WhatsApp and Messenger as well, to let users store and use Libra coins.

- The values of most cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, tend to fluctuate against real currencies.
- However, Libra will be backed by a reserve of assets designed to give it intrinsic value and ensure stability. These assets include securities, fiat currencies (like dollar, pound) and short-term government securities in currencies from stable and reputable central banks.
- Libra is planned as a global currency for use anywhere in the world without transaction fees.

The Libra model

- Libra will be controlled by the Libra Association, a non-profit based in Geneva. Facebook will have a leadership role for 2019, but will later become one of the many members of the association.
- The association has 28 members now and aims at 100 founding members by the first half of 2020.

How cryptocurrency works

- It is a virtual currency, which users buy and store in any of several available digital wallets, and use it for transactions on a decentralised network that is not controlled by one bank or a government. Bitcoin is among the best known cryptocurrencies.
- Cryptocurrency is powered by a technology called blockchain, which functions like an open ledger that gets updated in real time. Each transaction on a blockchain network is preserved, and reversing it is impossible.
- Because data is encrypted, cryptocurrency is supposed to be secure and anonymous. From a digital wallet, however, it is possible for stored coins or currency to be stolen.

Privacy concerns

- Concerns are abound that with its plan to create a cryptocurrency, Facebook is continuing its unchecked expansion and extending its reach into the lives of its users.
- However, Facebook has stressed it will respect user privacy and transactions will not be linked to the user's real world identity. Calibra being a subsidiary company separate from Facebook, the data will not be shared with Facebook.
- Calibra will have a dedicated team of experts in risk management to prevent fraudulent use. If someone loses Libra coins from Calibra wallet, they will get a refund.
- For Libra, a new programming language is being built, called Move, which the organisation claims is more secure and private.

46. With reference to Anthrax consider the following statements

1. It is caused by fungus
2. There are no vaccines for Anthra
3. The disease is found in both humans as well as animal
4. Consumption of meat can lead to anthrax

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2
- b) Only 3
- c) 1,3 and 4
- d) 3 and 4

Context

Researchers from the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Mysore and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) have developed a new vaccine against anthrax. It is claimed to be superior over existing vaccines as it can generate immune response to anthrax toxin as well as its spores rather than the toxin alone.

Answer: D

Explanation:

- Anthrax is a deadly disease caused by gram-positive, rod-shaped bacterium *Bacillus anthracis* that also infects animals like horses, sheep, cattle and goats. Humans, pigs and dogs are comparatively less susceptible and only get infected if exposed to copious amount of spores.
- In 2001, these spores were used as agents of bio-terrorism when letters containing anthrax spores were sent to some people in America, leading to widespread panic.
- Spores of the bacterium that causes anthrax are present in soil and can stay in latent form for years. People and animals get infected with anthrax when spores get into the body, where they can be activated. This can happen when people breathe in spores, eat food or drink water that is contaminated with spores, or get spores in a cut or scrape in the skin.
- Anthrax is not contagious, which means one can't catch it like the cold or flu. However, In rare cases, person-to-person transmission has been reported with cutaneous anthrax, where discharges from skin lesions might be infectious.
- Anthrax is most common in agricultural regions of Central and South America, sub-Saharan Africa, central and southwestern Asia, southern and eastern Europe, and the Caribbean.

Types

- Inhalation anthrax can occur when a person inhales spores that are in the air (aerosolized) during the industrial processing of contaminated materials, such as wool, hides, or hair.
- Cutaneous anthrax can occur when workers who handle contaminated animal products get spores in a cut or scrape on their skin.
- People who eat raw or undercooked meat from infected animals may get sick with gastrointestinal anthrax. This usually occurs in countries where livestock are not routinely vaccinated against anthrax and food animals are not inspected prior to slaughter.

47. Which of the following state has launched the 'Back to Village Program'?

- a) Uttar Pradesh
- b) Jammu and Kashmir
- c) Tamil Nadu
- d) Bihar

Answer: B

Explanation:

- J&K Government has embarked on an ambitious initiative of reaching out to people at grassroots level through a program named as 'Back to the Village'. The program was organized from June 20 to June 27 across all Panchayats of the state.

- It involves the people of the state and government officials in a joint effort to deliver the mission of equitable development across rural areas.
- The programme has four main goals: energising panchayats, collecting feedback on delivery of government schemes and programmes, capturing specific economic potential and undertaking assessment of needs of villages.
- It has been conceived with the notion that developmental initiatives that are built on the feedback and cooperation of the people are more result oriented and have greater probability to succeed than those which are top down.

48. With reference to Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana consider the following statements

- 1. Under PMAY Grameen, the beneficiary is entitled to 180 days of unskilled labour from MGNREG**
- 2. The Urban component of PMAY was launched by Ministry of Urban Development**
- 3. PMAY Grameen is implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 2 and 3**
- b) Only 3**
- c) 1 and 2**
- d) 1, 2 and 3**

Answer: B

Explanation:

- PMAY was launched in June 2015. It envisages building affordable pucca houses with water facility, sanitation and electricity supply round-the-clock.
- The programme has two verticals
 - Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramee
 - Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban
- The program duration is 7 years from 2015 to 2022
- PMAY Grameen is implemented under the Ministry of Rural Development
- Under PMAY Grameen, the beneficiary is entitled to 90 days of unskilled labour from MGNREGA.
- PMAY was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA)

VAJIRAM & RAVI

BRIDGING GAPS

Indo-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge

- Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Riva Ganguly Das has visited the construction of the India-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge 1 (also known as Feni Bridge) and land port in Ramgarh upazila of Khagrachhari.
- The construction of the bridge over **Feni River started** in 2017, and is expected to see completion by April 2020. The bridge will **connect Tripura with Chittagong port of Bangladesh**.
- Ramgarh land port will serve as a link between India and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

5th CICA Summit Meeting

- EAM, Dr S. Jaishankar, attended the 5th **Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)** Summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, from 14-15 June 2019.
- Theme - **"Shared Vision for a Secure and More Prosperous CICA Region"**
- CICA is a pan-Asia forum for enhancing cooperation and promoting peace, security and stability in Asia.
- India is a member of CICA since its inception and late Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee had participated in the **first CICA Summit held in 2002 in Almaty**.

Ahmedabad and Kobe are Sister City

- Letter of Intent (LoI) were exchanged between authorities from Japanese city of **Kobe** and their counterparts in **Ahmedabad** for a **sister city partnership**.
- This will pave the way for an enhanced economic relationship between the two vibrant cities as well as the two countries.
- In November 2016, Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe **inked a sister-state relationship MoU for Gujarat and Hyogo prefecture**. Kobe is the capital city of Hyogo.

Sister City:

- A sister city, county, or state relationship is a broad-based, long-term partnership between two cities/communities in two countries.
- **India has signed sister city agreements with:** China, Australia, United States, South Korea (RoK), Russia, Canada, Germany, Belarus, Mauritius, Hungary, Jordan, Bangladesh, Lithuania and Portugal.

Jaipur Foot Korea

- Korean Ambassador to India has launched 'Jaipur Foot Korea', a **collaborative initiative between Korea and Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti (BMVSS)**, a prosthetic limb organisation.
- Under this agreement, Korea will provide financial and technical assistance to further research and development collaboration in the med-tech sector.
- Jaipur foot is a lightweight and durable prosthetic limb/artificial limb.

Visit Of Secretary Of State Of The United States Of America

- The U.S. Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo, visited India on 25-27 June 2019. This was the first high level engagement with the US after the elections in India.
- His visit was focused on advancing the “**incredibly important ties with India**” as India is a **significant partner** in US’ Indo-Pacific strategy.

India-US Strategic Ties (Under Trump Administration)

- Kicked off the 2+2 Dialogue,
- The reinvigoration of the Quadrilateral Dialogue
- The operationalisation of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)
- Signing of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)
- Possibility of initiation of the tri-service exercise from 2019
- Defence ties - India received the Apache and Chinook helicopters and deploying P-8is and C-130s
- US granting India the Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 status

A Museum of Peace Built on Memories of WWII

- Japan has gifted Manipur a **museum of peace** built on the memories of one of the fiercest battles of the Second World War.
- The inauguration of the **Imphal Peace Museum** at Red Hill, about 20 km southwest of Manipur’s capital Imphal, marked the **75th anniversary of the Battle of Imphal**.

India's Haj Quota Increased

- Saudi Arabia has increased India's Haj quota from 170,000 to 200,000.
- The issue of India's Haj quota was discussed during Prime Minister Modi's bilateral talks with Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman on sidelines of G-20 summit.
- The government last year allowed **women to go on Haj without 'Mehram'** or male companion.

Russia Opens First Arctic Train Service

- Russia has launched its **first Arctic tourist train service** from St. Petersburg station. It will travel through **Russia's Arctic region and on to Norway**.
- Name of the train - "Zarengold"
- Whole trip will take 11 days and allow passengers to discover areas difficult to access by other means.

Chinese President Awarded Kyrgyzstan's Highest Medal

- Chinese President Xi Jinping was conferred with the **Manas Order of the First Degree, the highest national award of Kyrgyzstan**.
- He was given the award for his special contributions to the development of the Kyrgyzstan-China comprehensive strategic partnership.

Pakistan Gets \$3 Billion Bailout From Qatar

- Pakistan has secured a bailout package of USD 3 billion from oil-rich Qatar.
- Qatar is the 4th nation that has come forward to rescue Pakistan from default during past 11 months.
- Earlier, **China** gave USD 4.6 billion in shape of deposits and commercial loans and **Saudi Arabia** provided USD 3 billion cash deposit and USD 3.2 billion oil facility on deferred payments.
- The **United Arab Emirates** also provided USD 2 billion cash deposit.

ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Outlook

- After more than a year of negotiations, ASEAN members have adopted the '**ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific**'.
- It was adopted in the recently concluded (20th to 23rd June 2019) **ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) held in Bangkok, Thailand**.

Need For This Strategy

- US President Trump proposed the **Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy** during his Asia tour in 2017 and at the 2017 APEC Summit in Vietnam.
- Countries like Australia, France, India and Japan had also come up with their own individual visions and strategies for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Therefore some countries in the ASEAN like Indonesia, Thailand **did not want the Southeast region to be sidelined and left out of this new geopolitical game**.

Key Highlights

- It outlines the organization's concept and strategy of the Indo-Pacific, in which the **Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions** have been regarded as the **most dynamic expanse and centre of economic growth**.
- The 'Outlook' denotes that the **ASEAN grouping** wants to **maintain its central role** in the evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia and its surrounding regions.
- It intends to strengthen and give new momentum for **existing ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS)**, as platforms for **dialogue and implementation of the Indo-Pacific cooperation**.
- The document impinges upon a **rules-based order anchored upon international law, openness, transparency, inclusivity and commitment to advancing economic engagement** in the region.
- In this regard, four areas of cooperation- **maritime cooperation; connectivity; UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030; and economic development** have been put forward for engaging with other countries in the Indo-Pacific.

Analysis

- The region is **encountering a geopolitical shift** like the ongoing tussle between the US and China. In this context, emphasis on **ASEAN Centrality** while managing affairs in this region assumes significance.
- The document does not mean to **create new mechanisms or replacing existing ones**. It intends to **enhance ASEAN's Community building process** while promoting ASEAN-led mechanisms as a platform to negotiate and build relationships.

- Unlike the policy papers and the strategic documents of other countries like US, Australia and also Japan where the threats and challenges have been clearly outlined, the ASEAN document **chose to take the safer or the diplomatic route**.
- This will be a **positive factor in boosting India-ASEAN ties in this region** as India too has taken a diplomatic route, instead of military route, for this region.

St. Petersburg International Economic Forum 2019

- St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) 2019 was held in Russia from 6-8 June 2019. It is an annual event to meet and discuss the **key economic issues facing Russia, emerging markets, and the world as a whole**.
- SPIEF has been held since 1997, and since 2006, it has been held under the auspices of the President of the Russian Federation.
- 2019 Theme - **Creating a Sustainable Development Agenda**
- The 2019 edition saw **the participation of Chinese President** signifying a new era of friendship between China and Russia.
- It is significance against the **backdrop of US-China trade war** as well as **international sanctions imposed** on Russia following the annexation of Crimea.

Global Peace Index 2019

- Australian think tank Institute for Economics & Peace has released the Global Peace Index (GPI) 2019.
- The report revealed that since 2008 **global peacefulness has deteriorated by 3.78 per cent**.
- **India's rank** in the index has slipped **five places to 141** among 163 countries.

Key Highlights:

- **Iceland remains the most peaceful country** in the world, a position it has held since 2008. It is joined by New Zealand, Austria, Portugal, and Denmark.
- **Afghanistan is now the least peaceful** country in the world, replacing Syria, which is now the second least peaceful.
- **South Sudan, Yemen, and Iraq** comprise the remaining five least peaceful countries.
- In South Asia, **Bhutan** topped the index with **15th rank**, followed by Sri Lanka 72, Nepal 76 and Bangladesh 101.
- Pakistan has been ranked 153rd on the index.
- **Countries with the highest risk of multiple climate hazards** - China, Japan, India, Philippines, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh (total 9 countries)
- **Countries with the largest total military expenditure** – US, China, India, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

About GPI:

- The GPI is a report **produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)** and developed in consultation with an international panel of peace experts from peace institutes and think tanks with **data collected and collated by the Economist Intelligence Unit**.
- The Index was **first launched in May 2007**, with subsequent reports being released annually.

- It covers **99.7 per cent of the world's population** and uses 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators to compile the index.

Nepalese Nationals Must Have Visa To Enter India Via Pakistan, China

- A citizen of Nepal must have a visa for India if the he or she is entering India from China, Macau, Hong Kong and Pakistan. Notice in this regard has been issued by Nepalese embassy in Delhi.
- As per existing rule, a citizen of Nepal entering India by land/air directly from Nepal does not require a passport/Visa, but is required to possess an identity card.

Defence Space Research Agency

- The Cabinet Committee on Security headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given its approval for setting up of this new agency called the **Defence Space Research Agency (DSRA)**.
- The agency has been entrusted with the **task of creating space warfare weapon systems and technologies**.
- The agency will comprise scientists who will work closely with integrated staff officers of the three armed forces - the Indian Air Force, Army, and the Navy.
- Apart from this, the government has also set up agencies for tackling space and cyber warfare. This is along with a Special Operations Division, which will tackle the need for special operation required that need to be carried out both inside and outside the country.
- This move will increase the capabilities of the armed forces to fight wars in space.
- DSRA would provide the **R&D support to the Defence Space Agency (DSA)**.

About DSA

- It has been created, in April 2019, to help the country fight wars in outer space and comprises members of the three services (Army, Naval and Air Force).
- It has been **set up in Bengaluru** under an Air Vice Marshal-rank officer and will gradually **take over the space-related capabilities** of the three forces.
- India's **existing military space agencies** — including the Defence Imagery Processing and Analysis Centre, located in New Delhi, and the Defence Satellite Control Centre, located in Bhopal — **will be merged with DSA**.

National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System-II

- India is in the process of **acquiring the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System-II (NASAMS-II) from the US**.
- This missile system along with the Israeli, Russian and indigenous systems, will be used to create the ambitious multi-layered missile shield over Delhi.

Multi-layer Defence Shield:

- The **outermost layer** of Delhi's missile shield will be provided by the indigenous two-tier **ballistic missile defence (BMD)** being developed by DRDO.

- The **second layer** will be through the highly **automated and mobile S-400 systems**, which is being acquired from Russia.
- **Third layer** will consist of the **Barak-8** medium-range surface-to-air missile systems, jointly developed by Israeli Aerospace Industries and DRDO, which have a 70-100 km interception range.
- **Fourth layer** will be the **Akash layer**, which is an indigenous area defence missile system with a range of 25 km.
- The **innermost layer** of protection will be **through NASAMS II**. It will be a combination of different weapons like Stinger surface-to-air missiles, gun systems and AIM-120C-7 AMRAAMs (advanced medium-range air-to-air missile), backed by three-dimensional Sentinel radars, fire-distribution centres and command-and-control unit. The networked system will be capable of even shooting around the building and **will take care of 9/11-like and other close-in threats**.

India's Ballistic Missile Defence System:

- The Indian **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** is developing a two-tier Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system that provides a multi-layered shield against ballistic missile attacks.
- The two-tier system is intended to destroy an incoming missile, at a **higher altitude, in the exo-atmosphere** and if that miscarries, an **endo-atmospheric interception** will take place.
- It can intercept incoming missiles at exo-atmospheric altitudes of 150km and endo-atmospheric altitudes of 80km.
- The BMD system consists of a **Prithvi Air Defence (PAD)** missile and an **Advanced Air Defence (AAD) Missile** for high and low altitude interception.
- The PAD intercepts missiles at altitudes between 50km-80km and the AAD missile destroys them at altitudes of 15km-30km.
- DRDO plans to develop two new ballistic missiles, namely AD-1 and AD-2, in phase 2 of the missile shield development. The AD-1 and AD-2 interceptors can engage intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) / intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

PAD Ballistic Missile Interceptor:

- PAD is a two stage missile based on the Prithvi missile. Also known as Pradyumna, PAD has a maximum interception altitude of 80km.
- The first stage is liquid fuelled and the second stage is solid fuelled.

AAD Ballistic Missile Interceptor:

AAD is a single stage solid rocket propelled guided missile. It can intercept incoming ballistic missile at altitudes of up to 30km.

Swordfish Radar

- Swordfish is a long-range tracking radar developed for the BMD system. It was derived from the Israeli Green Pine long range radar.
- Swordfish guides the exo-atmospheric interceptor missile PAD to engage aerial targets at altitudes over 80km. The radar can detect very small targets within the range of 600km-800km.

Governor's Rule In J&K Extended For 6 Months

- **Introduction:** The Union Cabinet approved the extension of President's rule under **Article 356(4)** of Indian Constitution, in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) for a period of 6 more months and will be applicable only if the Parliament approves the same.
- **About President's rule:** President's Rule in a state can continue for a period of **6 months** at a time and after this period it can be extended for another term with approval of both houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) but for a maximum period of **3 years**.
- **Background:** J&K was placed under Governor's Rule after BJP pulled out of coalition government with PDP in June 2018. The Governor's Rule was proclaimed under **Section 92 of Constitution of J&K** with concurrence of President of India. During this time, State Assembly was initially suspended due to breaking of coalition government and was later dissolved by Governor in November 2018.
- **Governor's rule:** The President's Rule under Article 356 of Indian Constitution was imposed in J&K after Governor's rule imposed in June 2018 had ceased after six months period in December 2018. There is no provision for further continuation of such Proclamation after six months period.
- **Consequence of President rule:** It had resulted in Governor assuming to himself functions of Government as well as Legislature of J&K.
- **Exercise of power:** In Governor's rule, law making power, financial power, budgetary sanction, all these powers are with the Governor. Once President's rule is imposed, law making power is transferred to the parliament; the Budget is also passed by Parliament.

Virendra Kumar to be Pro-tem Speaker of 17th Lok Sabha

- **Introduction:** The BJP MP from Madhya Pradesh Dr Virendra Kumar will be the Pro-tem Speaker of 17th Lok Sabha. He is a seven term MP and has won the 17th Lok Sabha election from Tikamgarh Lok Sabha constituency.
- **Functions of pro-term speaker:** A Pro-tem Speaker preside over the 1st sitting of newly constituted Lok Sabha, administer the oath of office to newly elected MPs and also oversee the election of LS Speaker. In the first week of session of 17th Lok Sabha, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker to Lok Sabha will be elected.
- **Constitutional position:** The word Pro-tem is a Latin phrase which in English means 'for the time being' or 'temporary'. Thus a Pro-tem Speaker performs the duties of office of Speaker from commencement of 1st sitting of newly constituted Lok Sabha till the election of the Speaker. The **Article 94** of constitution states that previous Speaker must resign immediately before 1st sitting of the new Lok Sabha. **Article 93** of constitution states that, a Speaker and Deputy Speaker to Lower House of Parliament must be elected in 1st sitting of Lok Sabha. The appointment of Pro tem speaker is **a convention** and there is no provision mentioned in the Constitution for this position
- **Selection:** President appoints and administers the oath of a member of Lok Sabha as Pro-tem Speaker. By convention a senior most Lok Sabha member is usually is selected.

Reconstitution of NITI Aayog

- **Introduction:** Prime Minister approved the reconstitution of government of India's policy think tank NITI Aayog (or National Institution for Transforming India).
- **Composition:** Chairperson: Prime Minister Narendra Modi; Vice-Chairperson: Dr. Rajiv Kumar. Full time Members: includes (1) Shri V.K. Saraswat, (2) Prof. Ramesh Chand (3) Dr. V.K. Paul. *Ex-officio*

Members includes (1) Rajnath Singh (Defence Minister), (2) Amit Shah (Home Affairs Minister), (3) Nirmala Sitharaman (Finance Minister and Corporate Affairs Minister) (4) Narendra Singh Tomar (Rural Development Minister, Panchayati Raj Minister and Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister)

- **Special Invitees to NITI Aayog:** Includes (1) Nitin Gadkari (Road Transport and Highways Minister and MSME Minister) (2) Piyush Goyal (Railways Minister and Commerce & Industry Minister) (3) Shri Thaawar Chand Gehlot (Social Justice and Empowerment Minister) and (4) Rao Inderjit Singh (Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation and Minister of State (I/C) of Ministry of Planning).
- **About NITI Aayog:** It was established on 1st January 2015 by replacing Planning Commission (PC). It is India's premier policy making institution. It was formed with aim to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and to enhance cooperative federalism by fostering state governments' involvement in economic policymaking process using a bottom-up approach unlike the top-down model of planning commission. **Governing council** is top body of NITI Aayog. It includes all chief ministers, lieutenant governors (LG) of Union Territories, several union ministers and senior government officials.

New Jal Shakti Ministry

- **Introduction:** The Centre has created a new Ministry called Jal Shakti by merger of Ministries of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation along with Drinking Water and Sanitation. The move will bring all aspects of water management and regulation under one department.
- **Background:** In 2014 the project to clean Ganga was moved from Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to Ministry of Water Resources. Later, with a greater push and larger monetary allocation, the Namami Gange project was launched in June 2014.
- **Objective:** As promised in BJP's vision document in run-up to 17th Lok Sabha elections, the **Nal se Jal scheme** to provide piped drinking water to every household will be a component of government's **Jal Jivan Mission**. The ministry will roll out government's ambitious plans to provide piped water connections to every household in India by 2024. It will also address international and inter-states water disputes and the Namami Gange project which is the flagship initiative to clean the River Ganga, its tributaries and sub-tributaries. The Jal Ministry's priority will be to provide clean drinking water to everyone.

Reconstitution Of Various Cabinet Committees

- **Introduction:** The new government has reconstituted six Cabinet Committees while **two new Committees** have been formed. The new committees will finalize policies to push growth, investment and employment with special focus on skill development.
 - **Composition:** Barring the Committees on **Parliamentary Affairs** and **Accommodation** all six committees will be headed by the Prime Minister. The two remaining committees will be chaired by Home Minister.
- (a) **Cabinet Committee on Security:** Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of External Affairs and Minister of Finance.
- (b) **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs:** Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of External Affairs, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Minister of Chemicals & Fertilizers, Minister of Finance, Minister of Agriculture & Farmer Welfare, Minister of Rural

Development and Minister of Panchayati Raj, Minister of Food Processing Industries, Minister of Railways, Minister of Steel.

- (c) **Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs:** Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Finance, Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Minister of Agriculture & Farmer Welfare, Minister of Rural Development, Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment, Minister of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Minister of Coal and Mines + Special Invitees.
- (d) **Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs:** Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Road Transport and Highways; Minister of Finance, Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Minister of Agriculture & Farmer Welfare, Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Minister of Food Processing Industries, Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Minister of Railways, Minister of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprise, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.
- (e) **Appointments Committee of the Cabinet:** Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs.
- (f) **Cabinet Committee on Accommodation:** Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Minister of Finance; Minister of Railways + special invitees.
- (g) **Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth:** Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Minister of Finance, Minister of Railways, Minister of Commerce & Industry.
- (h) **Cabinet Committee on Employment & Skill Development:** Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Finance, Minister of Agriculture & Farmer Welfare, Minister of Railways, Minister of Human Resource Development, Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Minister of Skill development & Entrepreneurship, MOS(I/C) Labour & Employment, Minister of State(I/C) of the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, Minister of State(I/C) of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Minister of State in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry + Special invitees.

All Panchayats To Have Broadband Connectivity By March 2020

- **Introduction:** Union Minister Electronics and Information Technology has informed Parliament that all gram panchayats will be provided high speed broadband connections under BharatNet project by March 2020.
- **About BharatNet Project:** The project seeks to provide affordable last mile high speed broadband connectivity to 2.5 lakh gram panchayats across the country. In Phase I of BharatNet project government connected 1 lakh gram panchayats and the Phase II of project is under implementation, and a total of 2 lakh gram panchayats are targeted to be completed by March 2020. The project is being funded by **Universal service Obligation Fund (USOF)**.
- **Objective:** The objective of the project is to facilitate delivery of e-governance, e education, e-health, ebanking, Internet and other services to rural India.

Bombay High Court Upheld Reservation For Maratha Community

- **Introduction:** Bombay High Court (HC) has upheld the reservation for Maratha community in government jobs and education constitutional but at the same time suggested to reduce the quota percentage from present 16% to 12-13%.
- **Background:** The court was hearing petitions challenging Maharashtra government's decision granting **16 per cent reservation** to the Maratha community in government jobs and educational institutions. Maratha community was also declared a socially and educationally backward class by government.

- **Key Highlights of Judgment:** The Court suggested that there is need to reduce quota limit as recommended by State Backward Classes Commission. The High Court also held that the state government possesses legislative competence to create a separate category of socially and educationally backward class (SEBC) and grant reservation.

UN Women

- Indian origin Anita Bhatia, a veteran in strategic partnerships, resource mobilisation and management, has been appointed the Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) for Resource Management, Sustainability and Partnerships.
- UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- For many years, the United Nations faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally, including inadequate funding and no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues.
- In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, to address such challenges. The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact.
- It works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a more inclusive world by focusing on four strategic priorities:
- Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems
- Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy
- All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence
- Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action

Main Roles

- Support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- Help Member States implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- Lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality, as well as promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Pension Scheme for Traders

- Union Cabinet has approved a pension scheme for shopkeepers and retail traders. The new scheme is a part of the Universal Social Security programme.
- All small shopkeepers and self-employed persons as well as the retail traders with GST turnover below ₹1.5 crore and age between 18-40 years can enroll for this scheme. It guarantees a monthly pension amount of Rs 3,000 upon attaining the age of 60 years.

- To make it easier, minimal documentation is required to avail the scheme. One needs the 12-digit Aadhaar card number and the bank account details for enrolling. Common people can enroll themselves through over 3.25 lakh common service centres spread across the country.
- It is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme on a 50:50 basis where a prescribed age-specific contribution shall be made by the beneficiary and a matching contribution by the central government.
- Five crore traders are expected to join the scheme in the next three years.

Population Research Centres

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently organised a two-day workshop for Population Research Centres (PRCs) to highlight the various features of the flagship schemes of the Health Ministry for concurrent monitoring.

PRCs

- PRCs were established to undertake research projects relating to family planning, demographic research and biological studies & qualitative aspect of population control, with a view to gainfully utilize the feedback from these research studies for plan formulation, strategies and policy interventions of ongoing schemes. In addition, they also monitor important components of NHM Programme Implementation Plans.
- Till now, the PRCs have completed more than 3600 research studies since inception. They have more than 110 research papers published in prestigious international journals.
- PRCs are autonomous in nature and are administratively under the control of their host University/Institutions. They are provided with 100 per cent central assistance in the form of grants-in-aid on a year-to-year basis.
- The scheme started with the establishment of 2 PRCs at Delhi and Kerala in 1958 and expanded to 18 PRCs with the latest inclusion of PRC, Sagar during 1999. Of these, 12 are attached to various Universities and 6 are in research institutions of national repute.
- In most of the States where PRCs are present, Research Coordination Committees have been constituted under the chairmanship of Health Secretaries of respective States. This is to provide a forum for exchange of ideas and findings between programme administrators and researchers for the optimum utilisation of resources and also identification of areas where further research may be needed.

ICANN NASSCOM Collaboration

- Global internet body ICANN and Indian IT industry body Nasscom have announced a collaboration to develop identifier technology that can be used for managing Internet of Things devices.
- The two bodies have established a partnership center, known as the Internet Identifier Innovation Center, which will drive collaborative activities as laid out in an MoU.
- The project team comprises ICANN's technical experts, Nasscom's Centre of Excellence-IoT team, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad, and participants from India's Education and Research Network (ERNET).
- Under the collaboration, both the bodies will first focus on updating Internet of Things (IoT) devices using domain name system (DNS) even in situations where the manufacturer or supplier has closed down the business.

IoT and India

- Besides being a major information technology and telecommunications powerhouse, India has a fast-growing Internet ecosystem, with close to 560 million Internet users today along with an exponential growth expected in the future.
- Most upcoming IoT devices are expected to have addresses belonging to IPv6. India also leads the world in IPv6 adoption, with 56.8 percent of all connections being made over IPv6. This environment provides a robust ecosystem to test new technologies.
- This is the first collaboration of its kind, and with the combined resources it is hoped that the collaboration will witness significant innovation and development in the DNS and Internet space to support billions of IoT devices in the coming years.
- Also, India can further strengthen its potential as an innovation hub through more investments in research and strategic collaborations.

ICANN

- Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) was formed in 1998 as a not-for-profit public-benefit corporation and a community with participants from all over the world. Its mission is to help ensure a stable, secure, and unified global Internet.
- To reach another person on the Internet, one has to type an address - a name or a number - into the device. That address must be unique, so computers know where to find each other.
- ICANN helps coordinate and support these unique identifiers across the world. Without this coordination, the world will not have one global Internet.

NASSCOM

- The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) is the premier trade body and chamber of commerce of the IT-BPM industries in India and comprises of over 2800-member companies including both Indian and multinational organisations that have a presence in India.
- Guided by the vision of the country to adopt and integrate digital technologies, NASSCOM believes in enabling a digital transformation in the country through technology.
- It aims to position the country as a global hub for innovation and co-creation by imbibing the ideology of 'Think Digital, Think India', to drive focus towards emerging technologies, digitally skilling talent and ensuring the pace of transformation in the country meets the global standard.

Fiscal Performance Index

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has unveiled the Fiscal Performance Index (FPI), an innovative tool using multiple indicators to examine quality of Budgets at the Central and State levels.
- The index is constructed using UNDP's Human Development Index methodology. By construction, a higher value of index is indicative of an improved performance and vice versa.
- CII has constructed the FPI for the period 2004-05 to 2017-18 for both the Central and State budgets (for States, the end year is 2016-17).

Need for FPI

- A single criterion such as the fiscal deficit to GDP ratio does not give a true picture of the quality of the budget.

- Hence, it is important to study diverse sources of revenue and expenditure heads to truly assess the fiscal situation of a nation.

Methodology

- The proposed composite index of fiscal performance comprises of six components for holistic assessment of the quality of Government Budgets
- Quality of revenue expenditure: measured by the share of revenue expenditure other than interest payments, subsidies, pensions and defence in GDP
- Quality of capital expenditure: measured by share of capital expenditure (other than defence) in GDP
- Quality of revenue: ratio of net tax revenue to GDP (own tax revenue in case of States)
- Degree of fiscal prudence I: fiscal deficit to GDP
- Degree of fiscal prudence II: revenue deficit to GDP and
- Debt index: Change in debt and guarantees to GDP
- It considers expenditure on infrastructure, education, healthcare and other social sectors beneficial for economic growth compared to other revenue expenditure.
- It also considers tax revenues a more sustainable source of revenue for the government as compared to one-time income sources.

Highlights

- The analysis shows that the combined performance of all state budgets has improved despite worsening of fiscal deficit numbers because of improvements in revenue and capital expenditure indices.
- The study points out that relatively high income states including Gujarat, Haryana and Maharashtra which are presumed to have good fiscal health because of low fiscal deficit to GDP ratio do not perform well on the composite FPI, because of poor expenditure and revenue quality compared to other states.
- This clearly is indicative of the inadequacy of one single criterion in judging the overall quality of budgets of the State governments. These states have performed poorly on the expenditure quality and revenue quality as compared to other states.
- On the other hand, among the low-income states, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have shown a consistently good performance on the FPI over the years mainly due to good performance in Expenditure Quality Indices (revenue and capital). However, the performance of these States on the Fiscal Deficit Index has remained below average.
- Such a comprehensive measure can better help target government's social and capital expenditures keeping in mind fiscal stability.
- It would also contribute to strategy formulation to manage economic development with macroeconomic prudence.

Financial Literacy Week

- Financial Literacy Week 2019 will be observed from June 3-7. It is an initiative of RBI to promote awareness on key topics every year through a focused campaign.
- Financial Inclusion and Education are two important elements in the RBI's developmental role. The main aim behind the initiative is to create awareness about financial products and services, good financial practices and digitisation.

- This year the theme is 'Farmers' and how they benefit by being a part of the formal banking system. Growth in agriculture is necessary for the overall economic growth & finance is an essential enabler for the same.
- RBI is actively involved in formulating policies that enhance the flow of credit to the farming community. In recent years, the Bank has undertaken several initiatives to strengthen credit delivery mechanism and financial inclusion.
- In order to build awareness and disseminate financial literacy messages to the farming community, focused content in the form of posters and leaflets have been prepared for dissemination.
- Banks have been advised to display the posters and content in their rural bank branches, Financial Literacy Centers, ATMs and websites.
- Further, RBI will undertake a centralized mass media campaign during the month of June on Doordarshan and All India Radio to disseminate essential financial awareness messages to farmers.

Base Erosion and Profit Shifting

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved the ratification of the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (MLI). It was signed by the then Finance Minister in Paris in June, 2017.
- India was part of the Ad Hoc Group of more than 100 countries and jurisdictions from G20, OECD, BEPS associates and other interested countries, which worked on an equal footing on the finalization of the text of the Multilateral Convention, starting May 2015.
- Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS), is resorted to by MNCs through tax planning strategies by exploiting gaps and mismatches in tax rules.
- It helps them artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations, resulting in little or no overall corporate tax being paid.
- Post this convention, 90 countries have now implemented the automatic exchange of financial account and tax information.

Significance

- The Convention will modify India's treaties in order to curb revenue loss through treaty abuse and base erosion and profit shifting strategies by ensuring that profits are taxed where substantive economic activities generating the profits are carried out and where value is created.
- It enables countries to implement the tax treaty related changes to achieve anti-abuse BEPS outcomes through the multilateral route without the need to bilaterally re-negotiate each such agreement which is burdensome and time consuming.

RBI's Framework For Resolution Of Stressed Assets

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued a new prudential framework for resolution of stressed assets. The revision became imperative after Supreme Court ruled the original circular issued in February 2018 as ultra vires, or beyond the central bank's legal powers.
- Three major changes mark the new circular
- The central bank has made it voluntary for lenders to take defaulters to the bankruptcy court.
- The framework now applies to a larger universe of lenders.

- Penal provisions have been introduced for lenders.

Provisions

- The new norms leave it to the discretion of lenders and give them 30 days to start working on a resolution plan from the day of default. Earlier norms, stipulated that even a one-day default must be reported and acted upon.
- While the defunct circular was applicable only to Scheduled Commercial Banks (excluding Regional Rural Banks) and all-India financial institutions, the new circular is also applicable to small finance banks, term-lending financial institutions (such as Exim Bank or Small Industries Development Bank of India) and systemically important non-deposit taking non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and deposit-taking NBFCs.
- While leaving it to lenders to take action, the RBI will direct banks to start insolvency proceedings for specific defaults. The lenders may also choose to initiate legal proceedings for insolvency or recovery.
- While the review period for defaulters of ₹2,000 crore and above will start immediately, the review period for defaulters between ₹1,500 crore and less than ₹2,000 crore will start only from 1 January 2020.
- It directs the lenders to put in place board-approved policies for resolution of stressed assets, including the timelines for resolution and ideally expects lenders to initiate the process of implementing a resolution plan (RP) even before a default.
- While the central bank has made it voluntary for lenders to use the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, it has, at the same time, put in penal provisions for resolution plans that are not implemented.
- A lender will have to set aside 20% more provisions if the plan is not implemented within 210 days from the date of default and 35% if not implemented within 365 days of default. Accelerated provisioning on delay in implementation of RP, will disincentivise lenders from avoiding referring cases to IBC wherever required.

Resolution Plan

- During this review period, lenders may decide on the resolution strategy, including the nature of the RP and the approach for its implementation. Lenders may also choose to initiate legal proceedings for insolvency or recovery.
- In cases where the RP is to be implemented, all lenders have to enter into an inter-creditor agreement (ICA) for the resolution of stressed assets during the review period to provide for ground rules for finalisation and implementation of the RP in respect of borrowers with credit facilities from more than one lender.
- Under the ICA, any decision agreed to by the lenders representing 75 per cent of total outstanding credit facilities by value and 60 per cent by number will be binding upon all the lenders. In particular, the RPs will provide for payment which will not be less than the liquidation value due to the dissenting lenders.

Analysis

- The framework strikes a fine balance between tight regulatory timelines mandated previously for resolving stressed assets and inordinate delays that occurred in the past when resolving and provisioning for such assets.
- The additional 30-day review period provides lenders time to formulate their strategy for, and approach to, resolution and will incentivise banks for accelerated resolution of stressed assets.

- No mandatory referral of stressed assets for resolution under IBC will provide an option to resolve the stressed assets outside the ambit of IBC, which in some cases can lead to improved realisations due to better preservation of intrinsic value of the assets.
- Inter-creditor agreement (ICA) between lenders will lead to faster decisions with approval of only 75% of lenders (by value) and 60% (by number of lenders) needed instead of 100% previously. However, the provisions on signing inter creditors agreement within 30 days of default will be practically difficult.
- With close to 70% of assets in the state-owned banking system, where tenured bankers have little or nil incentive to pursue resolution, the likelihood of higher provisioning acting as a disincentive is suspect.
- Also, the additional provisioning is not a strong deterrent as many cases are already close to 100% provisioning. So the resolutions may get delayed.
- Inclusion of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and small finance banks (SFBs) under the framework is a step in the right direction considering they form around 20% of overall credit in the Indian financial landscape.
- But two other important credit providers remain outside the regulatory ambit - mutual funds and private equity companies, which have become large credit dispensers (and, in some cases, active participants in the evergreening of non-performing assets) without necessarily investing in the requisite credit appraisal skills.
- Mutual funds, in particular, have been caught on the wrong foot after lending against the security of pledged shares and with exposures to dodgy NBFCs.
- The new prudential framework is a breather for stressed accounts where RPs were under implementation but had to be referred to the IBC because of not being completed in 180 days.
- One of the key beneficiaries will be stressed power sector assets that were operational and on the verge of being referred to insolvency proceedings under the IBC. These are estimated at Rs. 1 lakh crore and banks were staring at significant haircuts on many of these assets.
- The revised framework provides much needed clarity on the way forward in stressed assets resolution. It should help reduce the stockpile of gross non-performing assets (NPAs) further over the medium term.

Nandan Nilekani Panel On Digital Payments

- The five-member high-level panel headed by Aadhar architect Nandan Nilekani constituted by the central bank to strengthen the digital payments industry has submitted its report.
- In the last five years, India has seen many people enter the banking network through the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, and a lot of digital credit into bank accounts due to direct benefit transfers, and digitisation of government payments.
- Banks have issued about a billion debit cards and 50 million credit cards. However, acceptance is still low from an infrastructure perspective, with only about 3.5 million PoS devices, and 2 lakh ATMs to accept cards.
- The report has made policy recommendations to all major regulators such as RBI, SEBI, IRDAI and DoT with the objective to reduce cash based payments. Additionally, the committee has put the onus on government to be at the forefront of the transition.
- It has set a target for the government and regulators to achieve a ten fold volume growth in digital payments over the next three years through customer friendly pricing mechanisms and broadening access infrastructure.

Recommendations

- Banks need to ensure that no user is more than 5 kms away from a banking access point and if such areas are found, these must be considered 'shadow areas' and a local vendor be made a banking correspondent (BC).
- A special data monitoring mechanism to garner granular district level data on consumer trends and payment behaviour has been suggested to improve the existing infrastructure.
- The committee has asked RBI to set an interchange rate for transaction between customers and leave the MDR on competitive market pricing which would reduce the transaction cost for customers.
- Keeping in mind that digital transactions result in larger balances with the bank the customers must be allowed to initiate and accept a reasonable number of digital payment transactions with no charges.
- Another key recommendation is to increase the timings for RTGS window and to make NEFT facility available 24/7 for customers.
- The current import duty of 18 per cent on PoS machines should be reduced to nil for a period of three years to facilitate adequate expansion of acquiring infrastructure in the country.
- It made a case for internationalisation plan for Indian payment systems such as RuPay and BHIM UPI to ease remittances into India, and to help Indian travellers make payments abroad.
- Special impetus on digitising mass volume channels such as recurring bill payments, toll and ticket payments at public facilities and digital onboarding of khirana store merchants has also been recommended in order to achieve the targeted growth.

IMD World Competitiveness Rankings

- The World Competitiveness Rankings 2019 by International Institute for Management Development (IMD) were released recently.
- Economists regard competitiveness as vital for the long-term health of a country's economy as it empowers businesses to achieve sustainable growth, generates jobs and ultimately, enhance the welfare of citizens.
- The rankings, which started in 1989, assesses 63 economies on 235 indicators. It takes into account hard data such as unemployment, economic growth and government spending on health and education, as well as soft data from a survey of international business executives on topics such as social cohesion, globalization, and corruption.
- The economies are judged in four categories: economic performance, infrastructure, government efficiency and business efficiency.

Global Findings

- Singapore has moved up to the top, from the third position last year, due to advanced technological infrastructure, availability of skilled workers, favorable immigration laws, and efficiency for starting businesses
- Hong Kong held onto its second place, helped by a benign tax and business policy environment and access to business finance.
- The US fell two spots as the confidence boost from tax cuts faded and high-technology exports weakened. While still setting the pace globally for levels of infrastructure and economic performance,

the competitiveness of the world's biggest economy was hit by higher fuel prices and fluctuations in the value of the dollar.

- Asia-Pacific region has emerged as a global beacon with 11 out of 14 economies either improving or holding their ground.
- In the top-five, Switzerland has climbed to fourth place from fifth, helped by economic growth, the stability of the Swiss franc and high-quality infrastructure.
- United Arab Emirates ranked 15th as recently as 2016 entered the top five for the first time. Stronger trade revenues helped oil and gas producers such as this year's biggest climber Saudi Arabia, which jumped 13 places to 26th, and Qatar, which entered the top 10 for the first time since 2013.
- Venezuela remained anchored to the bottom of the ranking, hit by inflation, poor access to credit and a weak economy.

Indian Findings

- India has moved up one place to rank as the world's 43rd most competitive economy on the back of its robust economic growth, improvements in business legislation, a large labour force and its huge market size.
- India has scored well on several economic parameters and tax policies but has lagged in terms of public finance, societal framework, education infrastructure, health and environment.
- The challenges before India remain maintaining high growth with employment generation, digital literacy and internet bandwidth in rural areas, managing fiscal discipline, as also issues related to the implementation of Goods and Services Tax and resource mobilisation for infrastructure development.

Beekeeping Development Committee Report

A Beekeeping Development Committee under the Chairmanship of Professor Bibek Debroy, set up by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister has submitted its report.

Objective

- BDC was constituted with the objective of identifying ways of advancing beekeeping in India, that can help in improving agricultural productivity, enhancing employment generation, augmenting nutritional security and sustaining biodiversity.
- Further, beekeeping can be an important contributor in achieving the 2022 target of doubling farmer incomes.

Indian scenario

- As per Food and Agricultural Organization database, in 2017-18, India ranked eighth in the world in terms of honey production (64.9 thousand tonnes) while China stood first with a production level of 551 thousand tonnes.
- Based on the area under cultivation in India and bee forage crops, India has a potential of about 200 million bee colonies as against 3.4 million bee colonies today.
- India's recent efforts to improve the state of beekeeping have helped increase the volume of honey exports from 29.6 to 51.5 thousand tonnes between 2014-15 and 2017-18 (as per data from National Bee Board and Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare). However, challenges persist and a lot more can be done to enhance the scope and scale of beekeeping.

Recommendations

- Recognize honeybees as inputs to agriculture and consider landless beekeepers as farmers.

- Plantation of bee friendly flora at appropriate places and engage women self-help groups in managing such plantations.
- Institutionalize the National Bee Board and rechristen it as the Honey and Pollinators Board of India under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.
- Such a body would engage in advancing beekeeping through multiple mechanisms such as setting up of new Integrated Bee Development Centres, strengthening the existing ones, creating a honey price stabilization fund and collection of data on important aspects of apiculture.
- Apiculture should be recognised as a subject for advanced research under the aegis of Indian Council for Agricultural Research.
- Training and development of beekeepers should be undertaken by state governments.
- National and regional infrastructure should be developed for storage, processing and marketing of honey and other bee products.
- Simplify procedures and specify clear standards for ease of exporting honey and other bee products.

National Freight Index

- In its bid to bring transparency in the road-freight marketplace, Rivigo a tech-enabled logistics start-up has launched National Freight Index (NFI) that will provide live freight rates for different lanes and vehicles across the country.
- The Indian road freight market size is estimated at \$150 billion-\$160 billion, of which \$130 billion-\$140 billion is full-truck load (FTL) market, but it has been facing a growing challenge of shortage of truck drivers.
- Logistics account for nearly 14% of India's GDP and 70% of it comes from road transportation. But, there is no pricing transparency and working conditions of drivers is deplorable.
- In the existing logistics market structure, there are high inefficiencies due to information asymmetry, which leads to a great loss of value.
- NFI offers an aggregated picture of both live rates and historical trends of spot price movements in the road freight industry. The index is represented in two main forms: in terms of actual freight rates condensed to Rupees per tonne-km and in terms of relative movement with respect to a base month.
- The rates on the exchange and index are computed using millions of data points from historical transactions, current market dynamics, micro market insights and other factors to give a fair and precise representation of the state of the spot market in the country.
- It will enable unrestricted access and sharing of freight rate information. This will bring transparency in the market and propel the logistics sector towards efficiencies and growth.

IISc Reports Superconductivity

- IISc researchers have reported superconductivity at room temperature. Their finding, now under review, will be a breakthrough if verified.
- The search for a material that exhibits superconductivity at room temperature, or at least manageable low temperatures, has been going on for decades, without success.

Superconductivity

- Superconductivity is a state in which a material shows absolutely zero electrical resistance. While resistance is a property that restricts the flow of electricity, superconductivity allows unhindered flow.
- Ever since it was first discovered in 1911, it has only been observed at very low temperatures, somewhere close to what is called absolute zero (0°K or -273.15°C).
- In a superconducting state, the material offers no resistance at all. All the electrons align themselves in a particular direction, and move without any obstruction in a “coherent” manner. It is akin to vehicles moving in an orderly fashion on a superhighway.
- Because of zero resistance, superconducting materials can save huge amounts of energy, and be used to make highly efficient electrical appliances.
- Another fundamental property of a superconductor apart from zero resistance to electrical current, is diamagnetism. It is a property opposite to normal magnetism that the world is used to.
- A diamagnetic substance repels an external magnetic field, in sharp contrast to normal magnetism, or ferromagnetism, under which a substance is attracted by an external magnetic field.
- In recent years, scientists have been able to find superconductive materials at temperatures that are higher than absolute zero but, in most cases, these temperatures are still below -100°C and the pressures required are extreme.
- Creating such extreme conditions of temperature and pressure is a difficult task. Therefore, the applications of superconducting materials have remained limited as of now.

Applications

- Currently, sub-zero superconductors are used in research & medicine, where it is employed in MRI machines.
- Achieving room-temperature superconductivity could revolutionalise lives by paving the way for more cost-effective technology like magnetic-levitation trains, besides making regular appliances like refrigerators considerably more energy-efficient.
- If confirmed, this would probably be the biggest discovery to come out of an Indian laboratory since the Raman effect in the 1920s.

Rice Fortification

- The Department of Food and Public Distribution has approved the Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on fortification of rice and its distribution through Public Distribution System.
- Further, the Government has also advised all states and UTs especially those states and UTs, that are distributing wheat flour through PDS, to distribute fortified wheat flour through PDS.
- It would be funded by the Centre in the ratio of 90:10 with respect to the Northeast, hilly and island states and 75:25 for the remaining states.
- The rice crop will be fortified with iron, folic acid, Vitamin A and Vitamin B-12 in rice mills before packaging for distribution.

Fortification

- Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in a food, so as to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health.

- Regular milled rice is low in micronutrients and serves primarily as a source of carbohydrate only. Many Micronutrients are removed due to multi-level milling process. The fortification of rice is a major opportunity to improve nutrition.
- Micronutrient deficiencies of public health significance are widespread in most countries consuming high levels of rice; thus rice fortification has the potential to aid vulnerable populations that are currently not reached by wheat or maize flour fortification programmes.
- Rice can be fortified by adding a micronutrient powder to the rice that adheres to the grains or spraying of the surface of ordinary rice grains in several layers with a vitamin and mineral mix to form a protective coating.
- Rice can also be extruded and shaped into partially precooked grain-like structures resembling rice grains, which can then be blended with natural polished rice.
- Rice kernels can be fortified with several micronutrients, such as iron, folic acid and other B-complex vitamins, vitamin A and zinc.

Parthenogenesis

- The New England Aquarium in the US recently announced that a “virgin” anaconda had given birth during the winter.
- The aquarium does not have a male anaconda. Yet Anna, a green anaconda, gave birth to a few babies in January, two of which have survived. In scientific terminology, it is known as parthenogenesis.
- This is only the second known case of parthenogenesis in green anacondas. It is not unknown in snakes, but undocumented enough to make it to scientific journals
- The term parthenogenesis is an amalgam of the Greek words parthenos meaning virgin and genesis meaning origin. It is defined as a reproductive strategy that involves development of a female (rarely a male) gamete (sex cell) without fertilisation.
- It occurs commonly among lower plants and invertebrate animals (particularly rotifers, aphids, ants, wasps and bees) and rarely among higher vertebrates.
- A gamete is the egg in females and the sperm in males. In animals, parthenogenesis means development of an embryo from an unfertilised egg cell.
- Many species that reproduce through parthenogenesis do not reproduce sexually. Others switch between the two modes taking cues from the environment. The anaconda is a higher vertebrate, which is why the birth of her two babies has been met with so much surprise.
- About 2,000 species are known to reproduce through parthenogenesis, which is one of the known means of asexual reproduction. Grafting (of plants) is also a type of asexual reproduction.

Clones of Mother

- Babies born through parthenogenesis are clones of the mother, as has now been confirmed by the aquarium through DNA tests.
- Parthenogenetic offspring tend to be clones of the parent because there has been no exchange and rearrangement of genetic information with another individual as happens in case of a sexual reproductive process.

ISRO Plans To Launch Space Station

- Indian Space Research Organization has recently announced that India is planning to launch its own space station.
- India would be the fourth country to launch a space station as the US and Russia have already launched their space stations and China is planning to launch in 2020.
- A space station is an artificial satellite placed in orbit and is used as a long-term base for manned operations in space.
- The proposed Indian space station would be similar to the International Space Station but smaller in size weighing about 20 tonnes and would take another 5 to 7 seven years to construct.
- The planned Indian space station is reportedly to conduct microgravity experiments in space where astronauts can stay for 15-20 days and would be stationed at an altitude of 400 kilometres from Earth.
- This project would be an extension of the Gaganyaan mission, which intends to put two or three Indian astronauts in space for a maximum of a week and is scheduled to be launched by August 2022.

ISS

- The International space station (ISS) is currently the only active space station in the earth's orbit. It is the largest human-made body in low Earth orbit and can often be seen with the naked eye from Earth.
- It is a joint project between five participating space agencies - NASA (USA), Roscosmos (Russia), JAXA (Japan), ESA (Europe) and CSA (Canada). The ownership and use of the space station is established by intergovernmental treaties and agreements.
- The ISS maintains an orbit with an average altitude of 400 kilometres and circles the Earth in roughly 92 minutes and completes 15.5 orbits per day.
- The first ISS component was launched in 1998, with the first long-term residents arriving on 2 November 2000. Since then, the station has been continuously occupied. This is the longest continuous human presence in low Earth orbit.
- The ISS serves as a microgravity and space environment research laboratory in which crew members conduct experiments in biology, human biology, physics, astronomy, meteorology, and other fields
- The station is suited for the testing of spacecraft systems and equipment required for missions to the Moon and Mars
- NASA has a plan to send humans deeper into space than ever before. The space station is one of the first steps. NASA will use lessons from the space station to get astronauts ready for the journey ahead.

Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) recently conducted the maiden test of an indigenously developed Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV) along with several technologies on Wednesday morning.
- Under the project, a hypersonic vehicle is being developed that will be powered by a scram-jet engine.
- It is dual-use technology, which when developed, will have multiple civilian applications. It can be used for launching satellites at low cost and will also be available for long-range cruise missiles of the future.

- In scram-jet technology, combustion of fuel takes place in a chamber in the missile at supersonic speeds. This is different from a ram jet system where the system collects the air it needs from the atmosphere during the flight at subsonic speeds and the propellants burn in the combustion chamber.

Jal Shakti Abhiyan

- In line with the government's promise to focus on water, the Centre is set to initiate the Jal Shakti Abhiyan to ramp up rainwater harvesting and conservation efforts in 255 water-stressed districts from July 1.
- The campaign would follow the model of last year's Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, where central officials monitored the implementation of seven flagship development schemes in 117 aspirational districts across the country.

Participating Actors

- Though water is a State issue, 255 Joint Secretary and Additional Secretary-rank officers and 550 Deputy Secretary-level officers will also be a part of the campaign. State- and district-level officials would join these teams on the ground.
- Scientists and IITs would provide technical support and National NGOs would aid in community mobilisation.

Intervention Areas

- Water conservation and rain water harvesting
- Renovation of water bodies
- Renovation of borewell recharge structures
- Watershed development
- Intensive afforestation

Programme Details

- JSA is a time bound, mission mode water conservation and irrigation efficiency campaign for water security in rural India.
- Overall, 313 blocks with critical groundwater levels would be covered, along with 1,186 blocks with over-exploited groundwater and 94 blocks with low groundwater availability.
- The campaign would run from July 1 to September 15 in States receiving rainfall during the south-west monsoon.
- While States receiving rainfall in the retreating or north-east monsoon would be covered from October 1 to November 30.
- Block and district-level water conservation plans would be drafted, and Kisan Vigyan Kendras would hold melas to promote better crop choices and more efficient water use for irrigation.
- A major communications campaign on TV, radio, print, local and social media would be carried out, with celebrities mobilised to generate awareness for the campaign.
- Progress would be monitored in real time through mobile applications and an online dashboard at indiawater.gov.in.

SDG Gender Index

- The first-ever Sustainable Development Goals Gender Index, which measures strides made in achieving gender commitments against internationally set targets was recently released.
- It has been developed by UK-based Equal Measures 2030, a joint effort of regional and global organisations including African Women's Development and Communication Network, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and International Women's Health Coalition.
- It accounts for 14 out of 17 SDGs (sustainable development goals) that cover aspects such as poverty, health, education, literacy, political representation and equality at the workplace.
- The overall index scores are based on a scale of 0–100. A score of 100 indicates the achievement of gender equality in relation to the underlying indicators. It means, for example, that 100% of girls complete secondary education, or that there is around 50-50 parity for women and men in Parliament.

Global Findings

- The ranking found that the world is far from achieving gender equality with 1.4 billion girls and women living in countries that get a very poor grade. The global average score of the 129 countries — which represent 95% of the world's girls and women — is 65.7 out of 100 (poor in the index).
- Just 8% of the world's population of girls and women live in countries that received a “good” gender equality score (80-89) and no country achieved an “excellent” overall score of 90 or above.
- Not all countries' scores on the index correlate with their national income, some countries perform better than would be expected based on their GDP per capita, and others underperform.
- Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Canada, Ireland, and Australia rank as the top 10 countries in the index, while the bottom 10 comprise Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Yemen, Congo, DR Congo and Chad.
- China ranked at 74 position, Pakistan at 113 while Nepal and Bangladesh at 102 and 110 respectively.

Indian Findings

- The index has ranked India at 95 (very poor category) among 129 countries with India's highest goal scores are on SDG 3 of health (79.9), SDG 2 of hunger and nutrition (76.2) and SDG 7 of energy (71.8).
- India's lowest goal scores are on SDG 17 of partnerships (18.3, in the bottom 10 countries worldwide on the goal), SDG 9 of industry, infrastructure and innovation (38.1) and SDG 13 of climate (43.4).
- Some of the factors based on which the ranking of India has been decided include proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (score of 23.6, 16th in region, women made up 11.8 per cent of parliament in 2018), extent to which a national budget is broken down by factors such as gender, age, income, or region (score of 0.0, tied for worst in region) and percentage of seats held by women on a country's Supreme Court or highest court (score of 18.2, 4th worst in region).

Acute Encephalitis Syndrome

- Bihar has recently recorded around 700 cases of acute encephalitis syndrome with over 150 deaths of children. AES outbreaks in Muzaffarpur have been reported since 1995.
- AES is a syndrome and not a disease. It is a group of clinically similar neurologic manifestations caused by several different viruses, bacteria, fungus, parasites, spirochetes, chemicals/ toxins.

- But the syndrome is also caused by scrub typhus, dengue, mumps, measles, even Nipah or Zika virus. In several cases though the cause of AES remains clinically unidentified.
- It affects central nervous system, mostly in children and young adults. It starts with high fever, then hampers neurological functions causing mental disorientation, seizure, confusion, delirium and coma.
- Japanese encephalitis (JE) virus is the most common cause of AES in India, with the Union Health Ministry estimate attributing 5-35 per cent cases due to JE. In the latest outbreak in Muzaffarpur, the cause is yet to be clinically identified in most of the children.

Status of AES in India

- According to National Vector Borne Diseases Control Programme (NVBDCP), 10,485 AES cases were diagnosed in 2018 with 632 deaths across 17 states.
- India records fatality rate at 6 per cent in AES, but the fatality rises to 25 per cent amongst children.
- Bihar, Assam, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Tripura are worst affected.

Multiple theories on relation between hypoglycaemia, children and AES

- The combination of AES with hypoglycaemia is unique to Muzaffarpur, Vietnam and Bangladesh.
- Government officials claim, the cause of death in these children was found to be prolonged hypoglycaemia that witnessed delayed treatment.
- Methylene cyclopropyl glycine (MCPG) which has been known to be a content of litchi fruit has been shown to cause hypoglycaemia in experimental animals. Several children in Muzaffarpur who suffer from AES before 2014 have a history of visit to litchi orchards. The impact is worse on undernourished children who remain hungry for several hours.
- However, Bihar state surveillance department claims that if toxins from Litchi were affecting children, then the AES cases should remain consistent each year and affect children of all socio-economic strata. While, this year's deaths have all been recorded in lower income groups.
- Association of litchi and deaths due to infectious organism present in it is well documented, but it cannot be attributed as the only factor as the cause of death.
- Moreover, hypoglycaemia in itself is not a sufficient reason to explain death unless the condition is prolonged and cannot be corrected. There are other contributing factors like malnutrition that increase risk of death.
- A Centre for Disease Control, Atlanta team, and CMC Vellore's findings in the past had narrowed down to malnutrition, heat, humidity and poor hygiene as reasons of AES.

Current Interventions

- National Programme for Prevention & Control of JE/AES, follows a multi pronged strategy encompassing preventive (sanitation, safe drinking water, improvement in nutrition etc.), case management (capacity building of medical and para-medical staff, referral etc.) and rehabilitation (physical and social rehabilitation of disabled children), measures to address the problems relating to JE/AES.
- As per the government guidelines, 2 doses of JE vaccine have been approved to be included in UIP to be given one along with measles at the age of 9 months and the second with DPT booster at the age of 16-24 months.

Way Ahead

- It is important to adopt an integrated approach to tackle the healthcare issues faced by the State.

- The Bihar government has resolved to tackle malnutrition among children and to provide income-enhancing opportunities to poor families by linking them with self-help groups and other schemes.
- Bed capacity would be increased in government medical colleges along with improved facilities at primary health centres, referral and district hospitals.
- Provisions would be made through supplementary budgets for expenditure on tackling the AES and JE, while the families of victims would be linked to anganwadi kendras and other schemes to provide them with food nutrients.

One Health Concept

- The World Organization of Animal Health, commonly known as OIE (an abbreviation of its French title), summarises the One Health concept as “human health and animal health are interdependent and bound to the health of the ecosystems in which they exist.
- Though of late it has been formalised in health governance systems, One Health is not a new concept.
- Circa 400 BC, Hippocrates in his treatise On Airs, Waters and Places had urged physicians that all aspects of patients’ lives need to be considered including their environment; disease was a result of imbalance between man and environment.

Need for One Health

- As human populations expand, it results in greater contact with domestic and wild animals, providing more opportunities for diseases to pass from one to the other.
- Climate change, deforestation and intensive farming further disrupt environment characteristics, while increased trade and travel result in closer and more frequent interaction, thus increasing the possibility of transmission of diseases.
- According to the OIE, 60% of existing human infectious diseases are zoonotic i.e. they are transmitted from animals to humans; 75% of emerging infectious human diseases have an animal origin
- Of the five new human diseases appearing every year, three originate in animals. Further 80% biological agents with potential bio-terrorist use are zoonotic pathogens.
- It is estimated that zoonotic diseases account for nearly two billion cases per year resulting in more than two million deaths — more than from HIV/AIDS and diarrhoea.
- One-fifth of premature deaths in poor countries are attributed to diseases transmitted from animals to humans.
- Humans require a regular diet of animal protein. Thus, loss of food animals on account of poor health or disease too becomes a public health issue even though there may be no disease transmission.

Indian Scenario

- The size of India’s human and animal population is almost the same; 121 crore people (2011 Census) and 125.5 crore livestock and poultry.
- A network of 1.90 lakh health institutions in the government sector form the backbone of health governance, supported by a large number of private facilities.
- On the other hand, only 65,000 veterinary institutions tend to the health needs of 125.5 crore animals; and this includes 28,000 mobile dispensaries and first aid centres with bare minimum facilities.
- Private sector presence in veterinary services is close to being nonexistent. Unlike a physician, a veterinarian is always on a house call on account of the logistic challenge of transporting livestock to the hospital, unless they are domestic pets.

Approach for One Health

- This builds a strong case for strengthening veterinary institutions and services. The most effective and economical approach is to control zoonotic pathogens at their animal source.
- Disease surveillance has to go beyond humans and encompass preventive health and hygiene in livestock and poultry, improved standards of animal husbandry for greater food safety, and effective communication protocols between animal and public health systems.
- Early detection at animal source can prevent disease transmission to humans and introduction of pathogens into the food chain. So a robust animal health system is the first and a crucial step in human health.
- It calls not only for close collaboration at local, regional and global levels among veterinary, health and environmental governance, but also for greater investment in animal health infrastructure.
- There is a strong case for reinventing the entire animal husbandry sector to be able to reach every livestock farmer, not only for disease treatment but for prevention and surveillance to minimise the threat to human health.
- While the institutional mechanism for One Health governance is in place, the concept would really catch the imagination if the critical importance of animal health in human well-being is underscored continuously

Draft National Education Policy

- The Committee for Draft National Education Policy chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan submitted its report. The report proposes an education policy, which seeks to address the challenges of access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability faced by the current education system.
- It provides for reforms at all levels of education from school to higher education and seeks to increase the focus on early childhood care, reform the current exam system, strengthen teacher training, and restructure the education regulatory framework.

Key Recommendations**Pre-primary education**

- The draft NEP acknowledges a severe learning crisis in India. Attributing a major part of this crisis to a tragic deficiency in early childhood care and education (ECCE) of children in the age group 3-6 years, the draft recommends that ECCE be made an integral part of the Right to Education (RTE) Act.
- Once ECCE becomes a justiciable right, it will be obligatory for the public system to provide appropriate and quality educational infrastructure, facilities, and educators to all children in the age group 3-6 years.

Curriculum and pedagogy

- While the 1986 education policy standardised school education with its push for a uniform 10+2 structure, the 2018 draft pitches for reconfiguration of curriculum and pedagogy in a “5+3+3+4” design, which recognises different stages of development of cognitive abilities in children.
- This corresponds to the age groups 3-8 years (foundational stage), 8-11 (preparatory stage), 11-14 (middle stage), and 14-18 (secondary stage).
- The choice among science, arts and commerce should be delayed so that it is based on a student’s experience and interests and not dictated by parents and society. It proposes no hard separation of

school content in terms of curricular, extracurricular, or co-curricular areas, and between arts and sciences.

- Further, it advocates reduction in curriculum load and reorientation of curriculum to promote multilinguism, ancient Indian knowledge systems, scientific temper, ethical reasoning, social responsibility, digital literacy and knowledge of critical issues facing local communities.

Governance of schools

- At present, the Department of School Education (DSE) in a state is in charge of operation, regulation and policy-making.
- The draft calls for decentralisation, with each of these functions carried out by separate bodies
 - Policy-making by a 'Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog' (Education Commission at national level, headed by the PM);
 - Operation by DSE;
 - Regulation by an independent 'State School Regulatory Authority' or SSRA in each state, which will set basic and uniform standards for both public and private schools;
 - Academic matters, including standard setting and curriculum, to be continued to be led by the State Councils of Educational Research and Training.
- **Languages:** While the draft recommends continuance of the three-language formula, it has proposed flexibility in the choice of languages, as long as students can show proficiency in any three languages. Hindi and English are no longer the stipulated languages that students must study from Grade 6.

Other recommendations

- Students' progress should be mapped regularly through state census examination in Grades 3, 5, and 8, and not just at the end of Grades 10 and 12.
- Teachers should not be engaged in time-consuming, non-teaching work such as electioneering and cooking of midday meals. Excessive teacher transfers to be halted immediately.
- All schools will be accredited as per the School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework.
- The existing B.Ed. programme to be replaced by a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme that combines high-quality content, pedagogy, and practical training.

Higher Education

Regulatory structure

- The current higher education system has multiple regulators with overlapping mandates. This reduces the autonomy of higher educational institutions and creates an environment of dependency and centralised decision making. Therefore, it proposes setting up the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA).
- The role of all professional councils such as AICTE and the Bar Council of India would be limited to setting standards for professional practice. The role of the University Grants Commission (UGC) will be limited to providing grants to higher educational institutions.

Establishment of new higher educational institutions

- Currently, higher educational institutions can only be set up by Parliament or state legislatures. The draft proposes that these institutions could be allowed to be set up through a Higher Education Institution Charter from NHERA.

Restructuring of higher education institutions:

- Higher education institutions should be restructured into three types
 - Research universities focusing equally on research and teaching
 - Teaching universities focusing primarily on teaching; and
 - Colleges focusing only on teaching at undergraduate levels.
- All such institutions will gradually move towards full autonomy - academic, administrative, and financial.

Education Governance

- There is a need to revisit the existing system of governance in education, and bring in synergy and coordination among the different ministries, departments and agencies.
- Creation of a National Education Commission or Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog, as an apex body for education, to be headed by the Prime Minister. This body will be responsible for developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising the vision of education in the country on a continuous and sustained basis.

Vocational Education

- Less than 5% of the workforce in the age-group of 19-24 receives vocational education in India. This is in contrast to 52% in the USA, 75% in Germany and 96% in South Korea. The draft recommends integrating vocational educational programmes in all educational institutions (schools, colleges and universities) in a phased manner over a period of 10 years
- Establish a National Research Foundation, an autonomous body, for funding, mentoring and building the capacity for quality research in India. The Foundation will consist of four major divisions: sciences, technology, social sciences, and arts and humanities, with the provision to add additional divisions.
- Development of a Continuous Professional Development programme and introduction of a permanent employment (tenure) track system for faculty in all higher education institutions by 2030. Further, a desirable student-teacher ratio of not more than 30:1 must be ensured.

World Population Prospects 2019

The recently released World Population Prospects 2019, published by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, provides a comprehensive overview of global demographic patterns and prospects.

Global Findings

- The global population is projected to increase by another 2 billion people by 2050, from 7.7 billion in 2019 to 9.7 billion thirty years down the line. By the end of the century, the world population is set to peak at a level of about 11 billion.
- The report highlights higher fertility rates, growing older population and migration as few reasons for projections of the population growth.
- Between now and 2050, 55 countries are estimated to see their populations shrink by at least one per cent. Incidentally, since 2010, 27 countries have recorded a minimum one per cent reduction in population.
- This trend of a growing number of countries experiencing a decline in population has been attributed to sustained low levels of fertility and, in some cases, high rates of emigration.

- In China, the largest of these 55 countries, the population is projected to shrink by as much as 2.2 per cent or 31.4 million by 2050. Following the India-China re-ordering in 2027, the ranking of the five largest countries is projected to remain the same until the end of the century.
- India is expected to remain the world's most populous country with nearly 1.5 billion inhabitants, followed by China at 1.1 billion, Nigeria with 733 million, the United States with 434 million, and Pakistan with an estimated population of 403 million.
- The world's population is ageing, with the age group of 65 and above growing at such a fast rate that by 2050, one in six people in the world will be part of it as compared to one in 11 in 2019.
- The report also observes that migration has become a major component of population change in some countries. Between 2010 and 2020, 14 countries or areas will see a net inflow of more than one million migrants, while 10 countries will see a net outflow of similar magnitude.
- Some of the largest migratory outflows are driven by the demand for migrant workers (Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines) or by violence, insecurity and armed conflict (Myanmar, Syria and Venezuela).
- The key message from the report is that national leaders must redouble their efforts to raise education, health and living standards for people everywhere.

Indian Findings

- In just eight years, India is projected to surpass China as the world's most populous country. India is also expected to add 273 million people by 2050 and will remain the most populated country until the end of the century.
- India leads the set of nine countries that will make up for more than half the projected growth of the global population by 2050.
- The rise in population will lead to a rise in equality and the country will have to work out a mechanism to tackle these problems.
- The major implication will be on the demographic dividend. The country will have more young people as well as older people. The employment rates are going down in India and with more young people, India won't be able to absorb them in workforce and won't be able to reap the benefits of its demographic dividend.
- A high population with no jobs will lead to a rise in inequality and may become a threat to the economy and the current challenges will become harder.

Way Ahead for India

- It is imperative for India to stabilise its population numbers by raising the quality of life of people, and achieving sustainable development that will not destroy the environment.
- There should be singular focus on improving education and health access for women, both of which will help them to be gainfully employed.
- Making agriculture remunerative and keeping food prices stable are crucial to ensure nutrition for all and keep a check on the rising inequity.
- A growing population of older adults is a certainty, and it opens up prospects for employment in many new services catering to them.
- Urban facilities have to be reimagined, with an emphasis on access to good, affordable housing and mobility.

National Mission On Natural Language Translation

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT has placed before the Union Cabinet a ₹450 crore proposal for Natural Language Translation — one of the key missions identified by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).
- The mission aims to make science and technology accessible to all by facilitating access to teaching and researching material bilingually — in English and in one's native Indian language.
- To achieve this, the government plans to leverage a combination of machine translation and human translation.
- Translation activities can also help generate employment for educated unemployed, and would help not just students but also teachers, authors, publishers, translation software developers and general readers.

NITI Aayog's Health Index

- NITI Aayog has released its comprehensive Health Index report 'Healthy States, Progressive India'. The report ranks states and Union territories on their year-on-year incremental change in health outcomes, as well as, their overall performance with respect to each other.
- It has been developed by NITI Aayog, with technical assistance from the World Bank, and in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- States and UTs have been ranked in three categories namely, larger States (21), smaller States (8), and Union Territories (8), to ensure comparison among similar entities.
- The health index is a composite score incorporating 23 health indicators such as neonatal mortality rate, sex ratio at birth, average occupancy for an officer (in months), proportion of vacant health care provider positions in public health facilities etc.
- It is a weighted composite Index, which for the larger States, is based on indicators in three domains: Health Outcomes (70%); Governance and Information (12%); and Key Inputs and Processes (18%).
- It has been developed as a tool to leverage co-operative and competitive federalism to accelerate the pace of achieving health outcomes.
- It would also serve as an instrument for nudging States & Union Territories (UTs) and the Central Ministries to a much greater focus on output and outcome based measurement of annual performance than is currently the practice.

Key Results

- Kerala retained its spot as the healthiest state, while Uttar Pradesh stood at the bottom. Kerala was followed by Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra in terms of overall performance in the health sector.
- While Gujarat, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh stood at fourth, fifth and sixth spots, the report ranked Haryana, Rajasthan and Jharkhand as the top three states in terms of incremental performance.
- Among larger states, seven of the top 10 states continued to improve their health index scores from the base year to the reference year whereas scores of several least performing states further deteriorated.
- Larger states that improved their rankings include Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka and Telangana.

- Among the smaller states, Mizoram ranked first in overall performance, while Tripura and Manipur were the top-two states in terms of incremental performance. Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh had the biggest decrease in overall health index scores.
- Among union territories, Chandigarh ranked first in overall performance, while Dadra and Nagar Haveli improved the most.

Progress Of The World's Women Report

- UN Women has released its flagship report 'Progress of the world's women 2019–2020: Families in a changing world'.
- It assesses the reality of families today in the context of sweeping economic, demographic, political, and social transformation. It also analyses key issues such as family laws, employment, unpaid care work, violence against women, and families and migration.

Global Findings

- As women's rights have advanced over the past decades, families around the world have become a place of love and solidarity but also one where fundamental human rights violations and gender inequalities persist
- Although it is all too clear, through research and evidence that there is no 'standard' form of family, nor has there ever been. Around the world, there are concerted efforts to deny women's agency and their right to make their own decisions in the name of protecting 'family values'.

Discrimination

- Three billion women and girls live in countries where rape within marriage is not explicitly criminalized.
- In one out of five countries girls do not have the same inheritance rights as boys, while in others (a total of 19 countries) women are required by law to obey their husbands.
- Around one third of married women in developing countries report having little or no say over their own healthcare.

Lone Mothers

- The vast majority of lone-parent families i.e. eight of every 10 lone-parent households are headed by women (84.3%), often juggling paid work, child-rearing and unpaid domestic work. This translates to 101.3 million households where lone mothers live alone with their children. Many other single mothers live with their children in extended households.
- The poverty rates of households with lone mothers is much higher than those of dual parent households with children 6 years of age or younger.

Labour participation

- Women continue to enter the labour market in large numbers, but marriage and motherhood reduce their labour force participation rates, and the income and benefits that come with it
- Globally, just over half of married women aged 25-54 are in the labour force, compared to two-thirds of single women, and 96 per cent of married men.
- A major driver of these inequalities is the fact that women continue to do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men in the absence of affordable care services.

Indian Findings

- The report identifies India as a country with abnormally high sex ratio (greater than 105 males per 100 females) as of 2017 along with Afghanistan, Brunei, Bhutan, Malaysia and Pakistan.

Lone Mothers

- Families while single-person families account for 12.5% and 4.5% of all Indian households are run by single mothers. This puts the figure of lone mother households in India at 13 million. Another 32 million are estimated to be living in extended households
- The poverty rate of lone-mother households is 38 per cent as compared to 22.6 per cent for dual-parent households.

Marriage

- Non-marriage remains extremely rare in India, where less than 1% of all women aged 45-49 have never been married.
- The number of female divorcees in India has doubled over the past twenty years, but are still only 1.1 per cent of the population.
- Women face disproportionate economic impacts from marriage, relationship dissolution and widowhood. An in-depth survey found an overwhelming majority to be dependent on their natal families, particularly parents and brothers, in terms of both financial support and living arrangements after separation. [1] [SEP]

Labour Participation

- Women's labour force participation rate is influenced by their marital status.
- Only 29.1% of all women aged 25-54 years are in the labour force, compared to 97.8% for men of the same age.

Dowry

- The practice of dowry continues to be rampant across India despite several feminist and equal-rights movements and legislations. Dowry practices can fuel violence against women when the bride's family fails to pay the dowry in full or the gifts are deemed unsatisfactory.
- Data on dowry-related killings from the National Crime Records Bureau in India indicate that female dowry deaths account for 40 to 50 per cent of all female homicides recorded annually, with little change between 1999 and 2016.

Recommendations

- The report calls on policymakers, activists and people in all walks of life to transform families into places of equality and justice—where women can exercise choice and voice, and where they have physical safety and economic security.
- Amend and reform family laws to ensure that women can choose whether, when and who to marry; that provide the possibility of divorce if needed; and enable women's access to family resources. Recognize diverse partnership forms, to protect women's rights in both cohabiting and same sex partnerships.
- Invest in public services, especially education and reproductive healthcare, so that women's and girls' life choices are expanded, and they can make informed choices about sex and childbearing.
- Paid parental leave, and State support for the care of children and older persons, must be considered in crafting comprehensive social protection systems that can help to sustain families.
- Ensure women's physical safety by implementing laws and policies to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls and providing access to justice and support services for survivors of violence.

Kheer Bhawani Mela

- Kashmiri Pandit devotees paid obeisance at the famous Ragnya Devi temple in Jammu and Kashmir's Ganderbal district at the Kheer Bhawani mela.
- Ragnya Devi is the patron deity of the local Pandits and the Kheer Bhawani mela is one of the biggest religious functions of the displaced community.
- It has become a symbol of communal harmony as Muslims in the locality make all the arrangements for the devotees.
- It is believed that the colour of the water in the spring, which flows below the temple, is an indication of the valley's well-being.
- Black or darkish colour of the water is believed to be a sign of inauspicious times for Kashmir. However, the water in the spring this time was clean and milky white.

Amitav Ghosh Receives Jnanpith Award

- Author Amitav Ghosh was recently felicitated with the 54th Jnanpith Award for his outstanding contribution to the enrichment of Indian Literature in English
- Mr. Ghosh is the first English language writer to become a Jnanpith laureate.
- Mr. Ghosh who is a social anthropologist by academic training, has written extensively in both fiction and non-fiction sphere of literature. His work has been translated in more than 30 languages.
- He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 for his book *The Shadow Lines* and the Padma Shri in 2007 for his services to literature and education. Mr. Ghosh also holds four honorary doctorates.

Jnanpith Award

- The Jnanpith Award is an Indian literary award presented annually by the Bharatiya Jnanpith to an author for their "outstanding contribution towards literature"
- It is the highest literary award in India and can only be conferred upon an Indian citizen
- Instituted in 1961, the award is bestowed only on writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India and English, with no posthumous conferral. English language was added to the list of languages for consideration after the 49th Jnanpith Award.
- The first recipient of the award was the Malayalam writer G. Sankara Kurup who received the award in 1965 for his collection of poems, *Odakkuzhal* (*The Bamboo Flute*), published in 1950

Maharaja Ranjit Singh

- A statue of Ranjit Singh, who ruled Punjab for almost four decades (1801-39), was recently inaugurated in Lahore.
- Ranjit Singh was born in 1780 in Gujranwala, now in Pakistan. At that time, Punjab was ruled by powerful chieftains who had divided the territory into Misls. Ranjit Singh overthrew the warring Misls and established a unified Sikh empire after he conquered Lahore in 1799.
- He was given the title Lion of Punjab (Sher-e-Punjab) because he stemmed the tide of Afghan invaders in Lahore, which remained his capital until his death. His general Hari Singh Nalwa built the Fort of Jamrud at the mouth of the Khyber Pass, the route the foreign rulers took to invade India.

VAJIRAM & RAVI

- At the time of his death, he was the only sovereign leader left in India, all others having come under the control of the East India Company in some way or the other.
- He combined the strong points of the traditional Khalsa army with western advances in warfare to raise Asia's most powerful indigenous army of that time.
- He also employed a large number of European officers, especially French, to train his troops. He appointed French General Jean Franquis Allard to modernise his army. In 2016, the town of St Tropez unveiled the maharaja's bronze statue as a mark of respect.

Expanse Of The Empire

- Ranjit Singh's trans-regional empire spread over several states. His empire included the former Mughal provinces of Lahore and Multan besides part of Kabul and the entire Peshawar.
- The boundaries of his state went up to Ladakh — Zorawar Singh, a general from Jammu, had conquered Ladakh in Ranjit Singh's name — in the northeast, Khyber pass in the northwest, and up to Panjnad in the south where the five rivers of Punjab fell into the Indus. During his regime, Punjab was a land of six rivers, the sixth being the Indus.

Legacy

- The maharaja was known for his just and secular rule; both Hindus and Muslims were given powerful positions in his darbar.
- The Sikhs take pride in him for he turned Harimandir Sahib at Amritsar into the Golden Temple by covering it with gold.
- He is also credited with funding Hazoor Sahib gurudwara at the final resting place of Guru Gobind Singh in Nanded, Maharashtra.
- His throne is still displayed prominently at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Some More Information

- In an effort to bring the bicycle and the cycling habit back in fashion, the United Nations, in 2018, had declared **3 June as World Bicycle Day**. Days ahead of the celebration last year, Bengaluru had appointed its first ever '**Bicycle Mayor**' — the first of its kind in India, **Satya Shankaran. Professor Leszek Sibilski of Montgomery College**, Maryland, United States with his Sociology class petitioned for the bicycle to have its own day.
- Indian Navy has deployed its **P-8I long-range maritime surveillance aircraft** for anti-piracy sorties from *Salalah in Oman to patrol the Gulf of Aden*. P-8I is a long-range anti-submarine warfare, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft capable of broad-area, maritime and littoral operations. **Since 2008**, India has been **conducting anti-piracy patrols** in the commercially crucial Gulf of Aden.
- National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval, has been reappointed to the post for five more years and given a Cabinet rank in the current government. NSA is the **chief adviser** to the Prime Minister **on national and international security policy**. NSA presides over the **National Security Council (NSC)**. The post of NSA was created **in 1998 by Vajpayee government**. IFS officer **Brajesh Mishra** was the **first NSA** of India.
- Former President Pratibha Patil was bestowed on the highest civilian award of Mexico for foreigners called "**Orden Mexicana del Aguila Azteca**" (Order of the Aztec Eagle). The honorable foreign citizen who has **strengthened humanitarian relations with Mexico** is given this honor. Patil is the **first Indian woman** to receive such an award. Earlier *Dr. Nelson Mandela, Queen Elizabeth II (2nd), Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Bill Gates* were honored with this award."

- **Tayari Jones** won the literary award for her novel **“An American Marriage”**. Her novel narrates story of a family torn apart by the US judicial system. For this she won the **Women's Prize for fiction**.
- **16th Asia media summit** was held in Siem Reap Province, **Cambodia** (15th summit was held in India). It was held under topic of **Media Digitalization Focusing on Developing Markets**. Leaders attending the summit agreed to launch **Angkor Fake News Initiative**, a yearlong research project to find out appropriate measures to counter fake news.
- **The International Day of Family Remittances (IDFR)** is celebrated every year on 16 June. It is observed to recognize the contribution of migrants to improve the lives of their family members back home. The **United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** is a custodian of the IDFR.

IFAD
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries.• Was one of the major outcomes of the 1974 World Food Conference.• Established in 1977• Headquarter – Rome, Italy
- **Comptroller and Auditor General of India Rajiv Mehrishi** has been elected as **external auditor of the World Health Organization (WHO)** for four years from 2020 to 2023. This is the **second major international audit assignment** for the CAG this year following his selection for the post of External Auditor of **Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome** earlier this year in March 2019. Mehrishi is currently also on the **Board of Auditors of the United Nations** and **Vice-Chair of the UN Panel of External Auditors**.
- **CEA Krishnamurthy Subramanian**: He has been appointed part-time member in IBBI.
- **Thawarchand Gehlot**: He has been appointed as Leader of the ruling party in Rajya Sabha.
- **V.S. Kaumudi**: He has been appointed as Director General of Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D).
- **Samanat Goel**: He has been appointed as RAW Chief.
- **Arvind Kumar**: He has been appointed as Director of Intelligence Bureau.
- **K Natarajan**: He has recently been appointed as new Coast Guard DG.