

C.A From 13th June to 06th July 2019

GS-1

Cyclonic Storm 'VAYU';

Why in news?

The **Cyclonic Storm 'VAYU'** over East central Arabian Sea moved further northwards with a speed of about 09 kmph in last six hours, slightly intensified further and lay centred at 1130 hrs IST of today, the 11th June, 2019 near latitude 15.2°N and longitude 70.6°E over East central Arabian Sea, about 340 km west-southwest of Goa, 490 km south-southwest of Mumbai (Maharashtra) and 630 km nearly south of Veraval (Gujarat).

It is very likely to intensify further into a Severe Cyclonic Storm during next 12 hours.

What is a cyclone?

- In [meteorology](#), a **cyclone** is a large scale [air mass](#) that rotates around a strong center of low [atmospheric pressure](#).
- Cyclones are characterized by inward [spiraling winds](#) that rotate about a zone of [low pressure](#).

Formation of Cyclone:

- [Cyclogenesis](#) is the process of cyclone formation and intensification.
- [Extratropical cyclones](#) begin as waves in large regions of enhanced mid-latitude temperature contrasts called [baroclinic zones](#).
- These zones contract and form [weather fronts](#) as the cyclonic circulation closes and intensifies. Later in their life cycle, extratropical cyclones [occlude](#) as cold air masses undercut the warmer air and become cold core systems.
- A cyclone's track is guided over the course of its 2 to 6 day life cycle by the steering flow of the subtropical [jet stream](#).

Conditions for formation;

There are six main requirements for tropical cyclogenesis:

1. sufficiently warm sea surface temperatures, [\[27\]](#)
2. atmospheric instability,
3. high [humidity](#) in the lower to middle levels of the [troposphere](#)
4. enough [Coriolis force](#) to develop a low-pressure center
5. a preexisting low-level focus or disturbance
6. low vertical [wind shear](#). [\[28\]](#)

STARTALK

Why in News?

A programme funded by NASA in the U.S. has produced a series of videos about popular archaeological sites and institutions in India.

Significance:

- The videos come with lesson plans in [Hindi](#), to aid in teaching the language internationally using themes of science and technology .
- The videos focus on scientific innovations at various sites like Amer Fort palace and Hawa Mahal in Jaipur, the rust-resistant [Iron Pillar in Delhi](#), UNESCO Heritage site [Qutub Minar](#), the [Chand Bawri stepwell](#) and the [Jaipur Foot](#), a prosthetic given to impoverished amputees in 80 countries for free.
- Each video, designed for learners from middle school through college, employs a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) perspective “to provide interesting and incredibly rich context to create learning experiences that can push learners to the advanced level of Hindi.

About the Programme:

- The NASA-funded programme STARTALK made a USD 90,000 grant to Ved Chaudhary, director of the project.
- The programme is supplemented by funding from Chaudhary’s New Jersey-based foundation Educators’ Society for Heritage of India.
- The programme is administered by the National Foreign Language Centre at the University of Maryland.

About Hawa Mahal & Iron Pillar:

- A Hindu architect designed the honeycomb-patterned Hawa Mahal or 'Palace of Wind,' way back in 1799 when air conditioning units didn't exist. The architect used the 'Venturi effect,' Kumar said, adding that since air enters narrow passages of the building, it increases the wind speed and produces natural cooling.
- The nearly 24-foot-tall Iron Pillar of Delhi, built in 402 CE, is a testament to the skill of blacksmiths who processed the phosphorus-rich iron to create a protective layer that has withstood centuries of monsoon and summer, the university said.

UN Population Report:

Context:

India is set to overtake China as the most populous country by 2027 and will have almost 1.64 billion inhabitants by 2050, says a [United Nations](#) report, adding that South Asia's opportunity to reap the "demographic dividend" will peak by 2047.

Globally, people aged above 65 are the fastest growing age group, putting pressure on social protection systems as the proportion of the working-age population shrinks.

Important Findings:

- According to the World Population Prospects 2019 report released on Tuesday, India is expected to add 273 million people by 2050, which will be the largest national increase in the world. China, on the other hand, is expected to become smaller, dropping from its current 1.43 billion people to approximately 1.4 billion by 2050.
- However, while India may have the highest absolute increase in numbers, its rate of growth is slowing.
- The Central and the Southern Asia region, of which India is a part, is expected to see a 25% increase in population between now and 2050.
- The rate of population growth is the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, where the fertility rate stands at 4.6 births per woman over a lifetime. The region is expected to double its population by mid-century.

- Nigeria is expected to add 200 million people over the next three decades and overtake the U.S. to become the third most populous nation.

Demographic Characteristics:

- Moving from geographical areas to age cohorts, India is still among the countries where the working-age population (25-64 years) is growing faster than other groups, creating an opportunity for accelerated economic growth.
- However, the “demographic dividend” will peak by 2047 in the region, meaning that countries such as India must rush to invest in education and health, especially for young people, the report says.
- Globally, it’s the post-working-age group that is growing the fastest.
- By 2050, one in six people will be above 65, compared with one in 11 people in 2019. In 2018, for the first time in history, people above 65 outnumbered children under five years of age.
- By 2050, the number of people over 80 is expected to triple to 426 million.
- This trend has also led to falling proportions of working-age people to support an ageing population. By 2050, almost 50 countries are expected to have less than two working-age people to support every person above 65.

Ageing impact:

- “These low values underscore the potential impact of population ageing on the labour market and economic performance as well as the fiscal pressures that many countries will face in the coming decades as they seek to build and maintain public systems of health care, pensions and social protection for older persons,” says the report.

Taj Mahal Beautification:

Why in News?

A proposal by the [Uttar Pradesh](#) government to construct a barrage across the Yamuna, a kilometre and a half away from the Taj Mahal, is stuck between two expert committees of the Union Environment Ministry. .

About the Project:

The project of the Irrigation Department envisages construction of a barrage for “securing the foundation of the Taj Mahal, improving the water level at Agra, beautifying and navigating the Yamuna at 1.50 km downstream of the Taj Mahal.”

Benefits:

- Such a storage, generally used in irrigation and hydro-electricity projects, would ensure a minimum quantity of water all through the year.
- It would help to recharge the ground water and facilitate navigation through river routes.
- That stretch of the Yamuna is a National Waterway (Delhi to Allahabad) and the barrage would serve as an alternative to motorised transport and would also help to develop a green belt around the pond which would “improve the environment around the Taj Mahal;

Background:

- A discussion on the scheme first began at the Union Environment Ministry last year.
- A committee led by Satish Wate, former Director of the CSIR-National Environment Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur, ruled that the project ought to be evaluated by the Environment Appraisal Committee (River Valley and Hydro Electric Projects).
- This committee, on February 27, held that the project did not involve hydropower generation or irrigation and therefore was better suited for another Environment Ministry committee — the one on infrastructure projects — and known as the EAC (Infrastructure Projects-2).

Hero Stone:

Why In News?:

A team of archaeologists discovered two hero stones near Avinashi(Coimbatore) recently, the age of which is speculated to be around 400 years.

About the Discovery:

- The first hero stone measured 100 cm in height and 50 cm in width, while the second one was 90 cm high and 50 cm wide.
- The heroes were seen to be wearing ornaments on their neck, shoulder, hands, and legs.
- The unique feature of these is that in both the stones the hero is seen in a worshipping posture while a tiger is seen attacking him from the right side.
- The hero is generally seen to be attacking the tigers in all the previously discovered hero stones in the Kongu Region.
- A V-shaped spear named kawai is seen on the left side of the hero in both the stones and no inscriptions were found.

In Literature:

- According to Sangam literature, the people from the ancient Kongu Region were engaged in rearing of cattle and the kawai is understood to be used to cut leaves to feed the cattle.
- Hence, these hero stones may have been erected for the heroes who died during cattle herding.
- Since there were no inscriptions on the stones, the age of the hero stones were deduced as 400 years by comparing other stones from the period.

Heat waves:

Why in News?

Large parts of western and central Europe sweated under blazing temperatures on June 26, with authorities in one German region imposing temporary speed limits on some stretches of the autobahn, the federal controlled-access highway system designed for high-speed vehicular traffic, as a precaution against heat damage.

Authorities have warned that temperatures could top 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in parts of the continent over the coming days as a plume of dry, hot air moves north from Africa.

What is a Heat wave?

- A **heat wave** is a period of excessively hot weather, which may be accompanied by high [humidity](#), especially in [oceanic climate](#) countries.
- While definitions vary, a heat wave is usually measured relative to the usual weather in the area and relative to normal temperatures for the season.
- Temperatures that people from a hotter climate consider normal can be termed a heat wave in a cooler area if they are outside the normal [climate](#) pattern for that area.

Effects:

- Severe heat waves have caused catastrophic crop failures, thousands of deaths from [hyperthermia](#), and widespread power outages due to increased use of air conditioning.
- A heat wave is considered [extreme weather](#), and a danger because heat and sunlight may overheat the human body.

Heat waves can usually be detected using [forecasting](#) instruments so that a [warning call](#) can be issued.

Monsoon Prediction :

The story so far:

The southwest monsoon made a late entry into Kerala on June 7, after a delay of nearly a week.

As of June 27, India got only slightly more than two-thirds of rain it normally gets in this month. Many places, including Chennai, are in the grip of a water crisis and about 80% of the country's meteorological divisions have registered deficient rainfall.

What is the prediction for the months ahead?

- July and August are most important for the monsoon and contribute nearly 66% of the 89 cm of rainfall that India gets from June-September.

- This year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had [forecast](#) in May that July rainfall would be 95% of what it usually gets and August 99% of its normal.
- These numbers were calculated on the assumption, in April, that an El Niño—characterised by a warming of the Central Pacific ocean—that seemed to be visible on the horizon, would slowly lose steam.

Cause of delay:

- The delayed progress of the monsoon, that is causing national consternation, is largely due to the laggardly branch of the monsoon that begins in Kerala and travels upwards along the western coast.
- The monsoon branch that enters eastern India, around the same time as the southern branch, is relatively better performing thanks to convective currents formed in the Bay of Bengal.

To what extent has the monsoon covered the country?

- The monsoon has covered the whole of south as well as eastern India.
- By July 15 the monsoon should have ideally covered its last outpost in western Rajasthan, but this is unlikely given the delay in the monsoon's advent.
- In the week ahead, it's expected to make further inroads into central India and most of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. However, the geographic spread obscures the quantity of rain.
- Only two of India's 36 meteorological subdivisions have posted normal rainfall and 27 of them are grappling with deficient rainfall. By June 30, a low pressure pulse is expected to form over the Bay of Bengal and give a significant push to the monsoon.

How is the monsoon forecast?

- Until about the 2010, the only method employed by the IMD to forecast the monsoon was statistical models.
- These essentially involved identifying climate parameters linked to the performance of the monsoon — for instance, the sea surface temperature gradient between North Atlantic and North Pacific, the

volume of warm water in the equatorial Pacific, the Eurasian snow cover.

- Their values in February and March are correlated to values of actual rainfall over a hundred years and then, using statistical techniques, extrapolated to forecast a particular year's monsoon.
- This has, however, proved wrong and the IMD missed its mark on forecasting major droughts and rain-deficits — particularly 2002, 2004 and 2006.
- The IMD responded by finding new parameters but keeping the technique essentially the same.

Only around 2015 did it start testing a dynamical system.

About Dynamical System:

- This simulates the weather at a chosen set of locations on a given day — the land and ocean temperature, moisture, windspeeds at various heights, etc — and powerful computers calculate how these weather variables will change over days, weeks, months.
- It's able to do this by solving physics equations that show how each of these weather variables is related to each other.
- Though meteorological agencies around the world are shifting to such techniques, they still aren't considered entirely reliable for forecasting the monsoon.
- These models are also useful for anticipating heat-wave or a cold-wave and therefore useful to urban planners and government.
- The statistical model continues to be the bedrock of the IMD's forecast philosophy but its days are numbered.

Does the monsoon have a bearing on India's water crisis?

- Yes and no. India's water crisis, according to experts, is due to over-extraction of groundwater resources and not enough storage of rain water and surface water.
- The Central Water Commission, in its recommendation of how reservoirs should store and release water assumes that reservoirs will be empty on June 1 and gradually refill over the course of the monsoon, and be available for the non-monsoon months.

- Given that June contributes only 17cm or about 20% of the monsoon rainfall and is known to progress in spurts, farmers have already delayed sowing and relying on crop varieties that grow relatively quickly.
- Moreover, several farmers plant intensely water-guzzling crops that aren't suited to their climate or prevalent water table.
- While a July rainfall can temporarily alleviate parched ground, it can't solve the graver crisis of depleting groundwater and insufficiently charged aquifers.

Kailash Mansoravar :

Why in News?

Proposal for 'Sacred Mountain Landscape and Heritage Routes' (Indian side of Kailash Mansoravar) has been included in Tentative List of World Heritage Sites of India as a Mixed site in April, 2019.

Details:

- As per UNESCO's Operational Guidelines 2017, a site must be on tentative list of UNESCO at least for a period of one year before proposing it for final nomination.
- Once the nomination dossier is completed, it is sent to the World Heritage Centre (WHC) by the stipulated deadline of 01 February of a calendar year.
- In furtherance an expert of the respective field in cultural & natural fields is deputed for the evaluation of site by WHC.
- Accordingly, decision of permanent inclusion of any site in World Heritage list is taken by the members of the World heritage committee.

About World Heritage Site:

- A **World Heritage Site** is a landmark or area which is selected by the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#) (UNESCO) as having cultural, historical, scientific or other form of significance, and is legally protected by international treaties.
- The sites are judged important to the collective interests of humanity.
- To be selected, a World Heritage Site must be an already classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and

historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance (such as an ancient ruin or historical structure, building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, mountain, or wilderness area.

- It may signify a remarkable accomplishment of humanity, and serve as evidence of our intellectual history on the plane

WHS in India:

- There are 37 [World Heritage Sites](#) located in [India](#).
- These include 29 cultural sites, seven natural sites and one mixed site.
- India has the sixth largest number of sites in the world. [

A new geological epoch — the Anthropocene

Context:

On May 21, a 34-member panel of the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) voted 29-4 in favour of designating a new geological epoch — the Anthropocene.

The vote signals the end of the Holocene Epoch, which began 11,700 years ago.

Background:

- According to Nature, the panel plans to submit a formal proposal for the new epoch by 2021 to the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which oversees the official geologic time chart.
- That nearly 90% voted in favour of a naming the new epoch to reflect how the Earth has been shaped by human activity, is not surprising, as an informal vote had already conducted three years ago in Cape Town at the 2016 International Geological Congress.
- The term ‘Anthropocene’ was coined in 2000 by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer to denote the present geological time interval in which human activity has profoundly altered many conditions and processes on Earth.

Phenomenon Associated:

According to the AWG, the phenomena associated with the Anthropocene include :

- an order-of-magnitude increase in erosion and sediment transport associated with urbanisation and agriculture,
- marked and abrupt anthropogenic perturbations of the cycles of elements such as carbon, environmental changes generated by these perturbations, including global warming, sea-level rise, and ocean acidification,
- rapid changes in the biosphere and finally proliferation and global dispersion of many new 'minerals' and 'rocks' including concrete, fly ash and plastics, and the myriad 'technofossils' produced from these and other materials.

Golden Spike:

- The focus is now on identifying a definitive geologic marker or golden spike (technically called Global boundary Stratotype Section and Point) to signal the beginning of the Anthropocene Epoch.
- The golden spike must be present globally and should be a part of deposits for geological record.
- Many in the AWG believe that artificial radionuclides spread across the world by atomic bomb tests from the early 1950s would serve as the golden spike.
- The radionuclides are present almost everywhere — from marine sediments to ice layers and even stalagmites and stalactites.

What lies Ahead?

- Once a formal proposal is made by the AWG, it will be considered by several more groups of the International Commission on Stratigraphy.

The final ratification will be made by the executive committee of the International Union of Geological Sciences. **Classical language status :**

Why in News?

A proposal for granting Classical status to Marathi Language was received from Marathi Language Department, Government of

Maharashtra. The said proposal was placed before the Committee of Linguistic Experts for its consideration.

What is a Classical language?

- In 2004, the [Government of India](#) declared that languages that met certain requirements could be accorded the status of a "Classical Language in India".
- Over the next few years, several languages were granted the Classical status, and demands have been made for other languages, including [Marathi](#).

Languages thus far declared to be Classical:

- [Tamil](#) (in 2004),
- [Sanskrit](#) (in 2005),
- [Kannada](#) (in 2008),
- [Telugu](#) (in 2008)
- [Malayalam](#) (in 2013),
- [Odia](#) (in 2014).

Criterion for inclusion in List:

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

Benefits

As per Government of India's Resolution No. 2-16/2004-US(Akademies) dated 1 November 2004, the benefits that will accrue to a language declared as a "Classical Language" are:

1. Two major international awards for scholars of eminence in Classical Indian Languages are awarded annually.

2. A Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Languages is set up.
3. The [University Grants Commission](#) will be requested to create, to start with at least in the Central Universities, a certain number of Professional Chairs for Classical Languages for scholars of eminence in Classical Indian Languages.

GS-2

Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2010;

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019, paving the way for the legislation to be introduced in the upcoming session of Parliament.

About the bill:

- The Bill, which would replace the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Second Ordinance, 2019, once passed, would put a curb on the practice of talaq-e-biddat, or instant triple talaq.
- The Bill would ensure gender equality and gender justice to Muslim women. The Bill would also help in protecting the rights of married Muslim women and prevent [divorce](#) by practice of 'talaq-e-biddat' by their husbands.
- The Bill will be introduced in the forthcoming session of the Parliament," the Centre said.
- The Bill declares the practice of triple talaq void and illegal, making it punishable by three years in jail and a fine. It also provides for payment of subsistence allowance to married Muslim women and dependent children.

The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Bill, 2019

Why in news?

Taking forward decisions made in the last months of the previous NDA government, the Centre has decided to introduce a Bill on faculty

recruitment in central educational institutions in the coming session of Parliament.

Details:

- The legislation would provide for 10% reservation for economically weaker sections (EWS) and restore an older system of reservation which would allow full representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes.
- The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Bill, 2019, was approved by the Cabinet on Wednesday, and will allow filling up of more than 7,000 existing vacancies by direct recruitment, according to an official statement.
- The Bill will replace an ordinance approved by Cabinet in March, just before the Lok Sabha elections, which restored the earlier "200-point roster system" considering the university or college as a single unit for the purpose of faculty reservations.

Background:

- This had been a long-standing demand of Dalit and Adivasi activists and political parties, with a threat of electoral consequences if denied.
- They had complained that the "13-point roster system" considering each department as a separate unit, which was mandated by a controversial Allahabad High Court judgement in April 2018 and upheld by the Supreme Court in January 2019, effectively made reservations negligible.

Benefits of the Bill:

- The new Bill will also pave the way for implementation of the 103rd Constitutional Amendment passed by Parliament in January, mandating a 10% quota in jobs and educational institutions to economically backward sections in the general category.
- This is over and above the older reservations for SC, ST and OBC communities.
- The new Bill is "expected to improve the teaching standards in the higher educational institutions by attracting all eligible talented

candidates belonging to SCs/STs/SEBCs/EWS” categories, the government said.

OBC sub-categorisation commission

- The Cabinet also approved a two-month extension to the commission for examining sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) so that it could consult States and Union Territories on the issue before submitting its report..
- The extension of the tenure of the commission would enable it to evaluate the issue of sub-categorisation of OBCs in the Central list based on wider consultations with various stakeholders.
- It will enable the commission to submit a comprehensive report on the issue,” the government said in a statement.
- Formed in 2017, the commission is looking at the issue of distribution of benefits of reservation among communities in the OBC category.

Foreigners Tribunals

Why in News?

The Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 was issued by the Central Government under Section 3 of The Foreigners Act, 1946.

Features of the Bill:

- It is applicable to the whole country. Major amendments in the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 were undertaken in 2013. The last amendment was issued in May, 2019.
- All these orders are applicable to the whole country and are not specific to any state.
- Therefore, there is nothing new in this regard in the latest amendment of May 2019.
- The May 2019 amendment only lays down the modalities for the Tribunals to decide on appeals made by persons not satisfied with the outcome of claims and objections filed against the NRC.
- Since NRC work is going on only in Assam, therefore, the aforementioned Order, issued on 30th May, 2019 is applicable only to Assam as on date for all practical purposes.
- This Amendment Order also provides for reference by District Magistrate to the Tribunal for its opinion as to whether the

Appellant is a “foreigner” or not within the meaning of the Foreigners Act, 1946.

Since the Foreigners Tribunals under this order have been established only in Assam and in no other state of the country, this amendment in effect is going to be relevant only to Assam at present.

Employees’ State Insurance (ESI) Act:

Why in News?

Starting July 1, both employer’s and employee’s contribution under the Employees’ State Insurance (ESI) Act, which gives insured workers medical benefits among other facilities, would be reduced, the Centre said on Thursday.

Details:

- The total contribution towards ESI was reduced from 6.5% of an employee’s wages to 4%, with the employer’s share cut to 3.25%, from 4.75%, and the employee’s contribution lowered to 0.75% of wages, from 1.75%, the government announced.

Significance:

- This would benefit 3.6 crore employees and 12.85 lakh employers,” the Labour and Employment Ministry said in a statement. “
- The reduced rate of contribution will bring about a substantial relief to workers under the ESI scheme and bring more and more workforce into the formal sector,” it added.
- The financial liability on employers would also be reduced, leading to improved viability of the establishments, increased ease of doing business and likely improved compliance with the Act, the government said, adding that the current rates had been in place since January 1, 1997.
- We will be able to ensure better compliance and encourage establishments to bring more people under the scheme.

Coverage of Scheme:

- The number of people insured under the scheme increased to 3.6 crore in 2018-2019, from 2.1 crore in 2015-2016, with the total

contribution received climbing to ₹22,279 crore, from ₹11,455 crore, government data show.

- The number of employers in the scheme increased from 7.83 lakh in 2015-2016 to 8.98 lakh in 2016-2017, then to 10.33 lakh in 2017-2018 and to 12.85 lakh in 2018-2019.

[Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\) Summit:](#)

[Why in News?](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday met Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) [Summit](#) in Bishkek.

About the SCO?

- The SCO is a China-led 8-member economic and security bloc with India and Pakistan being admitted to the grouping in 2017.
- The **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**, or **Shanghai Pact**, is a [Eurasian political](#), [economic](#), and [security](#) alliance, the creation of which was announced on 15 June 2001 in [Shanghai, China](#) by the leaders of [China](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Russia](#), [Tajikistan](#), and [Uzbekistan](#); the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Charter, formally establishing the organisation, was signed in June 2002 and entered into force on 19 September 2003.
- The original five nations, with the exclusion of Uzbekistan, were previously members of the Shanghai Five group, founded on 26 April 1996. Since then, the organisation has expanded its membership to eight countries when [India](#) and [Pakistan](#) joined SCO as full members on 9 June 2017 at a [summit](#) in [Astana, Kazakhstan](#).

Working areas of Cooperation:

- The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO, it meets once a year and adopts decisions and guidelines on all important matters of the organisation.
- Military exercises are also regularly conducted among members to promote cooperation and coordination against terrorism and other external threats, and to maintain regional peace and stability.

- Criticisms of the SCO include that it is used by member states to shield each other from international criticism regarding human rights violations.
- The SCO is widely regarded as the "alliance of the East", due to its growing centrality in [Asia-Pacific](#), and has been the primary security pillar of the region.
- It is the largest regional organisation in the world in terms of [geographical coverage](#) and [population](#), covering three-fifths of the [Eurasian continent](#) and nearly half of the human population.

Star of Jerusalem medal:

Why in News?

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has conferred an Indian national with the Star of Jerusalem medal, one of the highest honours given to foreign nationals by the Palestinian Authority.

Why was the award given?

- The Palestinian President said the Ansari family's presence in the old city of Jerusalem reflects the strong traditional ties between Indian and Palestinian people.
- Sheikh Munir Ansari is the Director of Indian Hospice, a unique and historic monument in the heart of the Holy city, which has become a symbol of India's heritage and presence in the old city of Jerusalem going back to over 800 years.
- The Indian hospice has been under the direct supervision of a representative from India since 1924.

Background:

- In the 12th century, Baba Farid, the famous sufi saint from Punjab visited Jerusalem on pilgrimage and prayed in seclusion for 40 days at the current site of the Hospice.
- It later became a pilgrimage site for Indian pilgrims visiting Jerusalem and was dedicated as a charitable waqf property in trust for a pious purpose.
- The place where Baba Farid is said to have prayed has become a major attraction for Indian tourists visiting Jerusalem.

- Almost every prominent Indian leader who has visited the region has paid a visit to the site and the hospice continues to host Indians visiting the Holy Land.
- The hospice also received a grant from the Ministry of External Affairs for its renovation.

Fifth Governing Council Meeting of NITI Aayog Concludes

Context:

The fifth meeting of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog was held under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at Rashtrapati Bhawan today. .

Significance:

- The Prime Minister highlighted the importance of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog as a platform to inspire cooperative federalism, stressing the need to collectively combat poverty, unemployment, drought, pollution, pockets of under-development and all such factors that constrain India's progress. He emphasized that the goal is to realize the potential of this great country, to create a New India by 2022 and a USD five trillion economy by 2024.

On the Agenda before the Fifth Council Meeting were the following items:

1. Rain-Water Harvesting
2. Drought Situation and Relief Measures
3. Aspirational Districts Programme – Achievements And Challenges
4. Transforming Agriculture: Need For Structural Reforms With Special Emphasis On:
 1. Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act
 2. Essential Commodities Act (ECA)
5. Security Related Issues with Specific Focus On LWE Districts

About the Governing Council of NITI Aayog

- The Governing Council of NITI Aayog comprises the Prime Minister of India, Chief Ministers of all the States and Union Territories with Legislatures and Lt. Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and

four Union Ministers as ex-officio members and three Union Ministers as Special Invitees.

- It is the premier body tasked with evolving a shared vision of national development priorities, sectors and strategies with the active involvement of States in shaping the development narrative.

Earlier Meetings:

- The First Meeting was held on 8 February 2015, at which the Prime Minister laid down the key mandates of NITI Aayog such as fostering cooperative federalism and addressing national issues through active participation of the States.
- The Second Meeting of the Governing Council took place on 15 July 2015 and the Third Meeting was held on 23 April 2017, which laid down milestones in shaping the country's development agenda through strategy and vision documents.
- The Fourth meeting of the Governing Council was held on 17 June 2018 and included reviewing measures taken for doubling farmers' income and progress made under flagship schemes such as the Ayushman Bharat, POSHAN Abhiyaan and Mission Indradhanush.

Mandate of Aayog:

- The NITI Aayog has been mandated with fostering cooperative federalism through structured support initiatives and mechanisms with the States on a continuous basis, recognizing that strong States make a strong nation.
- It seeks to design and assist the implementation of strategic, long-term policy frameworks and programme initiatives, and also monitor their progress and efficacy.
- The Governing Council, which embodies these objectives of cooperative federalism, presents a platform to discuss inter-sectoral, inter-departmental and federal issues in order to accelerate the implementation of the national development agenda, in the spirit of Ek Bharat, Shrestha Bharat.

Kimberley Process Intersessional Meeting

Why in News?

The Intersessional meeting of Kimberley Process (KP) is being hosted by India from 17th to 21st June, 2019 in Mumbai.

India and the KPCS:

- India is one of the founder members of Kimberley Process Certification Scheme and is the Chair of Kimberley Process for the year 2019 with Russian Federation as Vice Chair.
- India had earlier chaired KPCS in the year 2008.
- At present, KPCS has 55 members representing 82 countries including EU with 28 members.
- The Kimberley Process is chaired, on a rotating basis, by participating countries. KP Vice-Chair is generally elected by KP Plenary each year, who becomes the Chair in the next year.
- Since 2003, India has been actively participating in the KPCS process and is a member of all Working Groups of KP (except for Working Group on Artisanal and Alluvial Production, WGAAP).
- Department of Commerce is the nodal Department and Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) is designated as the KPCS Importing and Exporting Authority in India.
- GJEPC is responsible for issuing KP Certificates and is also the custodian of KP Certificates received in the country.

What is KP?

- The Kimberley Process is a joint initiative involving Government, international diamond industry and civil society to stem the flow of Conflict Diamonds.
- Conflict Diamonds means rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance conflict aimed at undermining legitimate governments.
- It is also described in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions.

Background:

- In 1998, certain rebel movements in Africa (Sierra Leone, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia) were selling, among other things, illegally obtained diamonds – known as Conflict Diamonds – to fund their wars against legitimate governments.
- With a view to find ways to stop trade in Conflict Diamonds, world's diamond industry, United Nations, Governments and leading NGOs came together and in November 2002 at Interlaken, Switzerland, where the final draft of the Kimberley Process measures was ratified by more than fifty countries.
- The KPCS came into effect from 1st January, 2003 and evolved into an effective mechanism for stopping the trade in Conflict Diamonds.

Functioning of KPCS

In accordance with the KP core document, the work of the Kimberley Process is carried out through the following six Working Groups and Committees:-

- **Working Group on Monitoring (WGM)** - Assigned the task of carrying out a review of the working of the scheme in each participant country through review visit/review missions and gives its recommendations.
- **Working Group on Statistics (WGS)** - Collects data in respect of export, import and production of rough diamonds in the participant countries.
- **Working Group on Diamond Experts (WGDE)** - Solves technical problems in the implementation of the KPCS like proposing changes to the 'Harmonised System Codes' for rough diamonds to World Customs Organisation and harmonisation of valuation methodologies.
- **Working Group on Artisanal and Alluvial Production (WGAAP)** - To promote more effective internal controls on the production and trade of alluvial diamonds.
- **Committee on Participation and Chairmanship (CPC)** - Assists the Chair of the Kimberley Process in handling the admission of new participants and advises if a participant fail to comply with minimum requirements. It also reviews and assesses candidates for the position of Vice-Chair and presents its recommendation/findings at the plenary meeting. The participant selected as Vice-Chair becomes Chair the following year.
- **Committee on Rules and Procedure (CRP)** - KP rules and procedure are devised and modified by the Committee.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojna

Why in News?

Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shri Narendra Singh Tomar chaired a meeting with Agriculture Ministers of all States/UTs via Video Conference today and discussed the implementation of three key schemes of Government of India namely Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojna (PM-Kisan), Pension Scheme for Small and Marginal Farmers and Kisan Credit Card Campaign.

About the Schemes:

- The PM-Kisan Yojna is an income support scheme for farmers. It is a 100% central sector scheme which will give farmers Rs. 6000/- per year in 3 equal instalments.
- From 01.04.2019, the scheme has been extended to cover all farmers, the total beneficiaries will be 14.5 crores.
- The pension scheme for small and marginal farmers will provide a social security net for all such farmers.
- Under this scheme a minimum fixed pension of Rs 3000 per month will be provided to the eligible small and marginal farmers subject to certain exclusion causes on attaining the age of 60 years.
- The scheme aims to cover around 5 crore beneficiaries in the first three years. It will be a voluntary and contributory pension scheme with entry age of 18 to 40 years.
- The beneficiary can opt to become member of the scheme by subscribing to a pension fund.
- The beneficiary would be required to contribute Rs. 100 per month at median entry age of 29 years.
- The Central government shall also contribute to the Pension Fund in equal amount. Contribution shall be made to a Pension Fund managed by the LIC which will be responsible for the pension pay out. Under the scheme farmers can also opt to allow contribution to be made directly from the benefits drawn from the PM-KISAN scheme.
- There will be an online grievance redressal system for complete transparency
- The Kisan Credit Card was introduced in 1998, presently there are 6.92 crore live KCCs against 14.5 crore operational landholdings.

World Food India:

Why in News/

Union Minister for Food Processing Industries Smt Harsimrat Kaur Badal has today said that World Food India 2019 will be the biggest gathering of all global and domestic stakeholders in Food Processing Sector.

About the Event:

- **WFI 2019 will be held from 1-4th November 2019 in New Delhi** and will position India as Food Processing Destination of the World.

- World Food India 2019 shall consist of several top level seminars, investment opportunities, exhibitions, high level CEO roundtables, country sessions, B2B and B2G networking etc.
- For the year 2019, the Ministry is targeting to partner with at least 15 countries and participation from at least 80 countries.
- **The tagline of the event will be “Forging Partnerships for Growth”.**

Background:

- 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 and received wide success.
- The event created Brand India in global food map by positioning India as a World Food Factory.
- It was for the first time in India that all major policy makers and top industrialists across the globe in Food Processing Industries were together under one roof.

MNREGA Report:.

Why in News?

The gap between the number of households that demanded jobs and the number met in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural [Employment Guarantee Scheme \(MGNREGS\)](#) widened marginally in the financial year 2018-19.

Details:

- In at least nine States the wage rates paid were below the minimum assured in FY18, according to a report published by the Centre for Policy Research.
- In FY19, only 4.5 crore households (HH) were provided with jobs through the scheme — 70 lakhs less than the demand.

About MNREGA:

- **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005** (or, NREGA [No 42](#), later renamed as the "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act", MGNREGA), is an [Indian labour law](#) and [social security](#) measure that aims to guarantee the '[right to work](#)'.

- It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

History:

- The act was first proposed in 1991 by [P.V. Narasimha Rao.\[3\]](#) It was finally accepted in the parliament and commenced implementation in 625 districts of India. Based on this pilot experience, NREGA was scoped up to cover all the districts of India from 1 April 2008.
- The statute is hailed by the government as "the largest and most ambitious social security and public works programme in the world".
- In its World Development Report 2014, the World Bank termed it a "stellar example of rural development".

Objectives:

- The MGNREGA was initiated with the objective of "enhancing livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year, to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work".
- Another aim of MGNREGA is to create durable assets (such as roads, canals, ponds and wells).
- Employment is to be provided within 5 km of an applicant's residence, and minimum wages are to be paid. If work is not provided within 15 days of applying, applicants are entitled to an unemployment allowance. Thus, employment under MGNREGA is a legal entitlement.

Implementation:

- MGNREGA is to be implemented mainly by [gram panchayats](#) (GPs).
- The involvement of contractors is banned. Labour-intensive tasks like creating infrastructure for water harvesting, drought relief and flood control are preferred.[\[citation needed\]](#)

The law provides many safeguards to promote its effective management and implementation.

The act explicitly mentions the principles and agencies for implementation, list of allowed works, financing pattern, [monitoring and evaluation](#), and most importantly the detailed measures to ensure transparency and accountability

[One nation , One Election:](#)

Why in News?

Left parties have opposed the idea of ‘one nation, one election’ proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling it undemocratic and against the principle of federalism.

About ONOE:

PM Modi calls for all-party meet on ‘one nation, one election’.

Simultaneous elections refer to holding elections to Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayats and Urban local bodies simultaneously, once in five year.

Problems associated with frequent elections:

- The massive expenditure that is currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections.
- The policy paralysis that results from the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during election time.
- Impact on delivery of essential services.
- Burden on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time.
- Frequent elections affect policymaking and governance as the government is trapped in short-term thinking.
- It also destabilises duly-elected governments and imposes a heavy burden on the exchequer.
- It also puts pressure on political parties, especially smaller ones, as elections are becoming increasingly expensive.
- The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) which comes into force with the announcement of poll dates, prevents government from announcing any new schemes, make any new appointments, transfers and postings without the approval of election

commission. This brings normal work of the government to a standstill.

- It also increases the cost of management to the election commission.

Merits of Simultaneous elections:

- Governance and consistency: The ruling parties will be able to focus on legislation and governance rather than having to be in campaign mode forever.
- Reduced Expenditure of Money and Administration: The entire State and District level administrative and security machinery will be busy with the conduct of elections twice in a period of five years as per the current practice. Expenditure can be reduced by conducting simultaneous elections.
- Continuity in policies and programmes.
- Efficiency of Governance: Simultaneous elections can bring the much-needed operational efficiency in this exercise. Populist measures by governments will reduce.
- Simultaneous elections can also be a means to curb corruption and build a more conducive socio-economic ecosystem.
- The impact of black money on the voters will be reduced as all elections are held at a time.

Issues in simultaneous elections?

- The biggest challenge is achieving political consensus, which seems to be “chimerical”.
- Regional parties will be more opposed to the idea than national parties because there is always a tendency for voters to vote the same party in power in the state and at the Centre in case the Lok Sabha polls and the state elections are held together.
- Also, according to IDFC, there is a 77% chance that the Indian voter will vote for the same party for both the state and Centre when elections are held simultaneously.

For simultaneous elections to be implemented, Changes to be made in Constitution and Legislations:

Amendments needed in the following articles:-

- Article 83 which deals with the duration of Houses of Parliament need an amendment
- Article 85 (on dissolution of Lok Sabha by the president)
- Article 172 (relating to the duration of state legislatures)
- Article 174 (relating to dissolution of state assemblies)
- Article 356 (on President's Rule).
- The Representation of People Act, 1951 Act would have to be amended to build in provisions for stability of tenure for both parliament and assemblies. This should include the following crucial elements:
 - Restructuring the powers and functions of the ECI to facilitate procedures required for simultaneous elections
 - A definition of simultaneous election can be added to section 2 of the 1951 act.

12th ReCAAP ISC capacity building workshop

Why in News?

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) will be co-hosting 12th Capacity Building workshop with Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) Information Sharing Centre (ISC) here on June 19-20, 2019.

What is RECAAP?

- 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. India played an active role in the setting up and functioning of ReCAAPISC along with Japan and Singapore.
- Union Government has designated ICG as the focal point within India for ReCAAP. India has hosted this workshop earlier in November 2011 at Goa and December 2017 at New Delhi.

Areas of Cooperation:

- 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.

Aim of Workshop:

- 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.

UN Report on open defecation

Why in News?

India has made great gains in providing basic sanitation facilities since the start of the millennium, accounting for almost two thirds of the 650 million people globally who stopped practising open defecation between 2000 and 2017.

However, a monitoring report by UN organisations released on Tuesday also shows that there has been absolutely no growth in the population with access to piped water facilities over that period, while large inequalities remain between rural and urban areas.

Salient observations of Report:

- As for drinking water, the Joint Monitoring Programme report by UNICEF and WHO shows that India has increased the percentage of its population with access to a protected drinking water source less than 30 minutes away, from 79% in 2000 to 93% in 2017.
- However, the percentage of households getting piped water has remained stagnant at 44% over the 17-year period.
- With regard to sanitation, India's record has been better. The country is responsible for almost single-handedly dragging the world towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal of ending open defecation.

- The South Asian region, including India, accounted for almost three-fourths of the population who stopped defecating in the open between 2000 and 2017, according to the report.
- Of the 2.1 billion people who gained access to basic sanitation services over this time period globally, 486 million live in India.

Importance of Sanitation:

- The human right to sanitation implies that people not only have a right to a hygienic toilet but also have a right not to be negatively affected by unmanaged faecal waste.
- This is most relevant to poor and marginalized groups who tend to be disproportionately affected by other people's unmanaged faecal sludge and sewage," says the report, highlighting inequalities beyond toilet access.

Urbanisation & its Effects:

How urbanisation of cities in the last decade can sharply increase the local temperature has been well documented by a recent study undertaken by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar.

Observation in Odisha:

- Blame it on increased urbanisation, the local surface temperature in large cities in Odisha — Cuttack and Bhubaneswar — has increased by as much as 40-50% during the period 2001-2010.
- While temperature has increased by about 0.9 degree C due to regional warming, which is a global phenomenon, urbanisation or changes in land use and land cover alone has contributed 40-50% of that increase in these cities.
- In other words, there has been a 0.5 degree C increase in absolute local temperature in large cities in the State during the period 2001 to 2010 solely due to urbanisation.
- In the case of smaller cities and town in the State of Odisha, the change in local warming caused by urbanisation or changes in land use and land cover has been about 25%.

Thirty-year data

- The team used 30 years of surface temperature measurements taken from over 22 sites over the state of Odisha coupled with Earth Observation data and model output to explore the effect of land use land cover and its changes.
- The 0.5 degree C increase in local temperature in Bhubaneswar can be traced back to rapid urbanisation of the city in about 15 years.

Cropping patterns

- The study shows that across the State of Odisha, changes in cropping pattern and urbanisation have together had a clear effect on long term temperature changes. For instance, the cropping pattern has seen a clear shift from Kharif crops (July-October) to Rabi crops (October-March).
- Compared with 2004, Kharif crop cultivation area in 2010 had reduced by 28,000 sq. km, whereas there has been an increase of 38,000 sq. km in Rabi crop cultivation area during the same period.

Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana

Why in News?

The government's flagship health insurance scheme Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) — is now undergoing a price review of the over 1,000 medical packages being offered to patients.

Why is it being done?

- The Indian Medical Association has long been demanding a “reasonable and fair package rate” under Ayushman Bharat while consultants such as PricewaterhouseCoopers had said the rates were not sustainable for quality healthcare.
- The government has set up committees of leading doctors from across the country to review the cost of nearly 1,300 medical packages.
- This is done to ensure sustainability and quality healthcare.

Salient Features of Scheme:

Ayushman Bharat consists of two major elements.

1. National Health Protection Scheme

- Ayushman Bharat-National Health Protection Scheme, which will cover over 10 crore (one hundred million) poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore (five hundred million) beneficiaries) providing coverage up to 5 lakh rupees (\$7,100) per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public or private empaneled hospitals across the country.
- It will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.
- One of the core principles of Ayushman Bharat - National Health Protection Mission is to co-operative federalism and flexibility to states.
- For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC) at apex level Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister. States would need to have State Health Agency (SHA) to implement the scheme.
- Covering almost all secondary and many tertiary hospitalizations (except a negative list).[\[6\]](#)

2. Wellness centres

- Rs 1200 crore (\$170 million) allocated for 1.5 lakh (150,000) health and wellness centres, Under this 1.5 lakh centres will be setup to provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services, apart from free essential drugs and diagnostic services.
- The government will upgrade existing Public Health Centres to Wellness Centres. The welfare scheme has been rolled out on August 15, 2018.

- Further, Contribution of private sector through CSR and philanthropic institutions in adopting these centres is also envisaged

Protection of [Children](#) from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012:

Context:

A total of 36,022 cases were registered in 2016 under the Protection of [Children](#) from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. .

Performance of various States:

- According to the annexure given by Ms. Irani, Uttar Pradesh had the most number of cases registered in 2016, with 4,954 cases. Maharashtra came a close second with 4,815 cases, followed by Madhya Pradesh with 4,717 cases.
- Uttar Pradesh, though, has seen a drop in the number of cases in three years. In 2014, over 8,000 cases were reported. That number fell by almost 40% by the time 2016 ended. Maharashtra, on the other hand, has seen an increase, from 3,926 to 4,815 cases.
- When it comes to cases closed, Madhya Pradesh had the highest rate -- with over 50% of cases being closed, as opposed to West Bengal, where only 10% of cases were closed in 2016.
- In Manipur, although the number of cases registered were only 136, the number closed was only 11. Arunachal Pradesh too has dismal numbers when it comes to cases closed -- only one of 169 cases.
- The closure rate of POCSO cases was just 31% across States and Union Territories in 2016, a slight improvement since 2014, when only 22% of the cases were disposed of.

About the Act:

What is POCSO Act 2012 ?

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012 is applicable to the whole of India. The POCSO Act 2012 defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years and provides protection to all children under the age of 18 years from sexual abuse. It also intends to protect the child through all stages of judicial process and gives paramount importance to the principle of "best interest of the child".

ASEAN :

Why in News?

Southeast Asian leaders have pressed their call for self-restraint in the disputed South [China](#) Sea after a new incident and renewed their alarm over the U.S.-China trade war with one warning it may spiral out of control.

The long-raging territorial conflicts and the protracted dispute between the two global economic powerhouses are high on the agenda of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations leaders meeting Sunday in an annual summit in the Thai capital of Bangkok.

About ASEAN:

- The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations** (is a [regional intergovernmental organization](#) comprising ten countries in [Southeast Asia](#), which promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates [economic](#), [political](#), [security](#), [military](#), [educational](#), and [sociocultural](#) integration among its members and other countries in Asia.
- It also regularly engages other countries in the [Asia-Pacific](#) region and beyond.

- A major partner of [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation](#), ASEAN maintains a global network of alliances and dialogue partners and is considered by many as a global powerhouse, the central union for cooperation in [Asia-Pacific](#), and a prominent and influential organization.
- It is involved in numerous international affairs, and hosts diplomatic missions throughout the world

Members:



NGOs for promotion of road safety

Context:

Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has launched a scheme for grant of financial assistance to NGOs for administering “Road Safety Advocacy” in the last FY 2017-18.

About the Scheme:

- Under this Scheme, proposals for road safety advocacy programmes through 203 different Non-Governmental Organisations(NGOs) / Trusts / Cooperative Societies have been sanctioned in FY 2017-18.

- As per the scheme provisions, financial assistance for a road safety programme is Rs.five lakh.
- The scheme does not provide for any advance payment and financial assistance is reimbursement only after the successful completion of the programme.
- There are adequate safeguard in the scheme to ensure proper utilization of funds, such as:-
- No advance payment is released to any agency.
- Registration of the NGO on Darpan Portal.

Who will run the Scheme?

- The scheme is administered through a Project Management Unit (PMU) for scrutiny of proposals and further physical verification of the road safety programme conducted by agencies is also made by PMU.

“Healthy States, Progressive India” Report

Why in News?

NITI Aayog will release the second edition of “Healthy States, Progressive India” in the capital tomorrow on 25.6.2019.

Focus of Report:

- The Round-II report focuses on measuring and highlighting the overall performance and incremental improvement over a two-year period (2016-17 and 2017-18) in the States and UTs.
- It takes a comprehensive look at health in terms of Health Outcomes, Governance and Processes and impact of policy interventions.
- The report has been prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and with technical assistance from the World Bank.

First round of the Health Index:

- In February 2018, the first round of the Health Index (referred to as 2017 Health Index) was released, which measured the annual and incremental performance of the States and UTs over the period of 2014-15 (base year) to 2015-16 (reference year).
- Among the Larger States, Kerala, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu ranked on top in terms of overall performance, while Jharkhand, Jammu &

Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh were the top three ranking States in terms of annual incremental performance.

- Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh showed the maximum gains in improvement of health outcomes from base to reference year in indicators such as Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR), Under-five Mortality Rate (U5MR), full immunization coverage, institutional deliveries, and People Living with HIV (PLHIV) on Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART).
- Among Smaller States, Mizoram ranked first followed by Manipur on overall performance, while Manipur followed by Goa were the top ranked States in terms of annual incremental performance.
- Among UTs, Lakshadweep showed both the best overall performance as well as the highest annual incremental performance.
- Lakshadweep showed the highest improvement in indicators such as institutional deliveries, tuberculosis (TB) treatment success rate, and transfer of National Health Mission (NHM) funds from State Treasury to implementation agency.

Draft National Policy on Domestic Workers

Context:

A draft National Policy on domestic workers is under consideration of the Central Government.

Salient features of the draft policy:

- i. Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations
- ii. Domestic workers will have the right to register as workers. Such registration will facilitate their access to rights & benefits accruing to them as workers.
- iii. Right to form their own associations, trade unions
- iv. Right to have minimum wages, access to social security, protection from abuse, harassment, violence
- v. Right to enhance their professional skills
- vi. Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation
- vii. Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals, etc.
- viii. Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of concerned placement agencies

Background:

- The Central Government has enacted the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 for providing social security to all unorganized workers including domestic workers.
- The Act provides formulation of social security schemes viz. life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits & old age protection by the central Government.
- The state Government are mandated under the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 to formulate suitable welfare schemes for unorganized sector workers including domestic workers relating to provident fund, employment injury benefits housing, education schemes for children, skill up gradation of workers, financial assistance & old age homes.

Child Labour :

Steps Taken by the Govt.

Child Labour is an outcome of various social-economic problems such as poverty, economic backwardness and illiteracy. Government is following a holistic and multi-pronged strategy for elimination of child labour completely.

- The Government has amended the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 and enacted Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 which inter-alia covers:
 1. complete prohibition on employment or work of children below 14 years of age in all occupations and processes;
 2. linking the age of the prohibition of employment with the age for free and compulsory education under Right to Education Act, 2009;
 3. prohibition on employment of adolescents (14 to 18 years of age) in hazardous occupations or processes and making stricter punishment for the employers contravening the provisions of the Act.
- Subsequent to the amendment in Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986, Government has framed Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2017.
- The Government is also implementing the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme for rehabilitation of child labour.

About the Scheme:

- Under the NCLP Scheme, children in the age group of 9-14 years are rescued/withdrawn from work and enrolled in the NCLP Special Training Centres, where they are provided with bridge education, vocational training, mid day meal, stipend, health care, etc. before being mainstreamed into formal education system. Children in the age group of 5-8 years are directly linked to the formal education system through a close coordination with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

APEDA :

Why in News?

Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) in association with North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC) organised the second Conference cum International Buyers-Sellers Meet in Imphal, Manipur on 19th June 2019.

Background:

- India's total agricultural product exports is valued at 38 billion USD for the financial year 2017-18, out of which 50% is contributed through APEDA's products. .
- This conference in Imphal provided a platform for B2B and B2G meetings with international buyers, exporters and progressive farmers / growers to explore opportunities and prospects from the North East Region particularly from Manipur.

About APEDA:

- APEDA, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industries, promotes export of agricultural and processed food products from India.
- In its endeavour to promote export of agricultural products from NER, APEDA has been organising various buyers- sellers meets to facilitate market linkages of the exporters with international buyers.
- The first international buyers – sellers meet for NER was organized by APEDA in Guwahati in March this year.

Major Functions:

- APEDA is conducting regular promotional activities in the area of agriculture exports.

- It provides support to exporters to set up infrastructure like pack houses and cold storages.
- APEDA also helps exporters to exhibit their products in several national and international expos and exhibitions.

Atal Pension Yojana:

Why in News?

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) has submitted a proposal to increase the limit of pension and age under Atal Pension Yojana (APY). The same is under examination in consultation with PFRDA.

About APY:

- **Atal Pension Yojana (previously known as Swavalamban Yojana)** is a government-backed pension scheme in [India](#) targeted at the [unorganised sector](#).
- It was mentioned in the [2015 Budget speech](#) by Finance Minister [Arun Jaitley](#).
- It was launched by Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) on 9 May in [Kolkata](#).
- As of May 2015, only 20% of India's population has any kind of pension scheme, this scheme aims to increase the number.

Main features of scheme:

- In Atal Pension Yojana, for every contribution made to the pension fund, The [central government](#) would also co-contribute 50% of the total contribution or ₹1,000 (US\$14) per annum, whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber account, for a period of 5 years.
- The minimum age of joining APY is 18 years and maximum age is 40 years.
- The age of exit and the start of pension would be 60 years. Therefore, a minimum period of contribution by the subscriber under APY would be 20 years or more.
- The national [Aadhaar](#) ID number is the primary "[know your customer](#)" document for identification of beneficiaries, spouses, and nominees to avoid entitlement-related disputes in the long-term.

- The subscribers are required to opt for a monthly pension from ₹1,000 (US\$14) to ₹5,000 (US\$72) and ensure payment of the stipulated monthly contribution regularly.
- The subscribers can opt to decrease or increase pension amount during the course of the accumulation phase, as per the available monthly pension amounts. However, the option to switch is only provided once a year during the month of April.
- This scheme will be linked to the bank accounts opened under the [Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana](#) scheme and the contributions will be deducted automatically. Recently Centre has allowed small finance Banks to offer APY.

Eligible beneficiary:

- Atal Pension Yojana(APY) is open to all citizens of India between 18-40 years of age.
- Accordingly, Mudra beneficiaries, Self Help Group (SHG) members and Anganwadi workers who are citizen of India and fall between 18-40 years of age are eligible to join APY.

A Report on Malnutrition :

Almost one in three Indian [children](#) under five years will still be stunted by 2022 going by current trends, according to an analysis of the country's food and nutrition security released on Tuesday.

Over the last decade, child stunting — which is a measure of chronic malnutrition — has reduced at a rate of about 1% per year, the slowest decline among emerging economies.

At this rate, 31.4% of children will still be stunted by the 2022 deadline. India must double its rate of progress to reach the target of 25% by that time, says the report.

Analysis of progress

- The report, which is a baseline analysis of the country's progress in achieving the second Sustainable Development Goal to end hunger, was prepared by the UN World Food Programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

- Foodgrain yields have risen 33% over the last two decades, but are still only half of 2030 target yields, says the report.
- Even so, the Indian farmer is producing more foodgrains than ever before, making the country self-sufficient in this regard.
- Unfortunately, the consumer's access to rice, wheat and other cereals has not increased at the same rate, due to population growth, inequality, food wastage and losses, and exports.
- As a result, the average per capita consumption of energy among the poorest 30% of the population is 1811 kilo calories, much lower than the norm of 2155 kilo calories per day.

Variation Between States:

- The signs of unequal access are starkest among children.
- In States like Bihar (48%) and Uttar Pradesh (46%), almost one in two children are stunted, while it is only one in five children in Kerala and Goa (20% each).
- There are high rates of stunting among children in the poorest wealth quintile (51.4%), Scheduled Tribes (43.6%) and Scheduled Castes (42.5%), and children born to mothers with no education (51%).

India and UNSC membership:

Context;

India has won the unanimous support of all countries in the 55-member Asia-Pacific Group at the [United Nations](#) in support of its bid for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC) for a two-year term in 2021-22.

The development is particularly significant given that [Pakistan](#) and China, both countries with which India has had diplomatic challenges at the UN, supported the move.

Election Process;

- No challenges to India's candidacy are expected with regard to acquiring the support of other UN members.
- India will need the vote of two-thirds of the 193 UN General Assembly members to win a non-permanent seat on the UNSC.

Earlier Membership:

- India has already held a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for seven terms: 1950-1951, 1967-1968, 1972-1973, 1977-1978, 1984-1985, 1991-1992 and 2011-2012.
- It announced its candidacy for the 2021-22 seat at the end of 2013, with Afghanistan, a potential contender, withdrawing its nomination to accommodate India's candidacy based on the "long-standing, close and friendly relations" between the two countries, as per what Afghanistan's UN mission had said at the time.
- India has been keen to hold the seat in 2021-22 to coincide with the 75th anniversary of Independence in 2022.

About Non-Permanent membership:

- Each year, the **General Assembly elects five non-permanent members** (out of ten in total) for a two-year term. The ten non-permanent seats are distributed on a regional basis:
 - five for African and Asian countries;
 - one for Eastern European countries;
 - two for Latin American and Caribbean countries;
 - two for Western European and other countries.
- Article 23 of the **UN Charter** concerns the composition of the Security Council.

Jal Shakti Abhiyan:

Why in news?

The Centre is set to initiate the Jal Shakti Abhiyan to ramp up rain [water harvesting](#) and conservation efforts in 255 water-stressed districts from July 1, in line with the government's promise to focus on water.

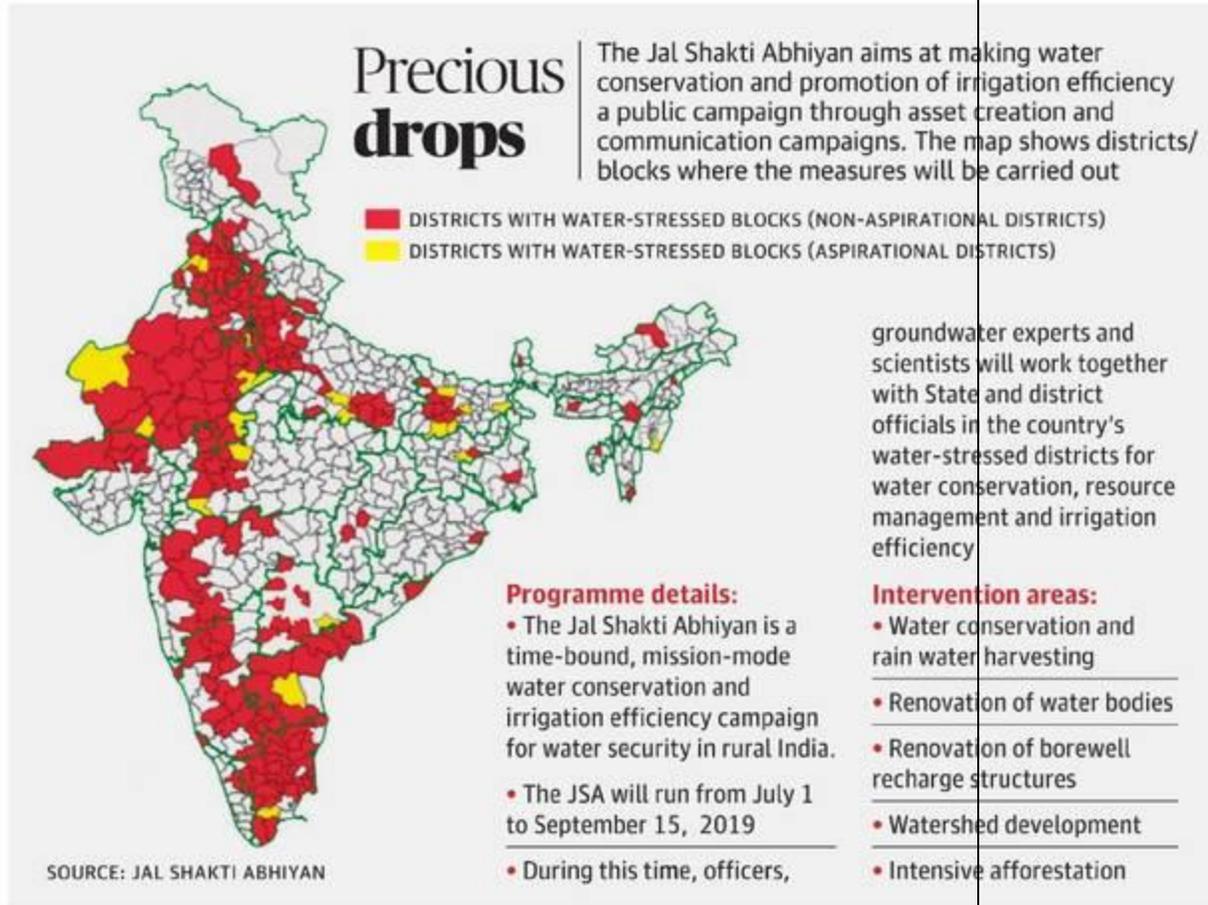
About the Campaign:

- The campaign seems to 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.

- 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.
- 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.

Aim of Abhiyaan:

- The Jal Shakti Abhiyan would aim to accelerate water harvesting, conservation and borewell recharge activities already being carried out under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and the Integrated Watershed Management Programme of the Rural Development Ministry.
- Progress would be monitored in real time through mobile applications and an online dashboard at indiawater.gov.in.
- 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.



Malnutrition Challenge in India:

Context:

As per the report of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) – 4 conducted by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2015-16, 35.7% children under 5 years of age are underweight, 38.4% are stunted and 58.5% are anemic. Further, 22.9% women (15-49 years of age) have chronic energy deficiency (BMI less than 18.5) and 53% are anemic.

Steps taken by Govt.:

- The Government has accorded high priority to the issue of malnutrition and is implementing several schemes/programmes to address various aspects related to nutrition.
- This Ministry is implementing POSHAN Abhiyaan, Pradhan MantriMatruVandanaYojana, Anganwadi Services and Scheme for Adolescent Girls under the Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services Scheme as direct targeted interventions to address the problem of malnutrition in the country.

The monitoring systems in-built in the schemes are as under:

- NITI Aayog undertakes periodic monitoring and evaluation of POSHAN Abhiyaan through their 'Technical Unit' for assessing the impact of the programme.
- In order to ensure regular monitoring and review of all sectoral programmes under **POSHAN Abhiyaan**, a National Nutrition Resource Centre – Central Project Monitoring Unit (NNRC–CPMU) has been constituted.
- The **Pradhan MantriMatruVandanaYojana** is implemented through web based Management and Information (MIS) Software, viz., Pradhan MantriMatruVandanaYojana-Common Application Software (PMMVY-CAS) which is used as an effective tool for regular monitoring
- The **Anganwadi Services Scheme** has an in-built monitoring system since its inception to track the physical progress of the scheme in respect of various input process, output and impact indicators through a standardized Management Information System (MIS).

Exploitation of Domestic Workers:

Why in News?

The discussions are underway regarding a National Policy for Domestic Workers as per information obtained from Ministry of Labour and Employment.

The salient features of which are as under:

- I. Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations;
- II. Registration of Domestic workers;
- III. Right to form their own associations / unions;
- IV. Right to have minimum wages, access to social security, protection from abuse, harassment, violence;
- V. Right to enhance their skills;
- VI. Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation;
- VII. Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals, etc. for Grievance Redressal.
- VIII. Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of placement agencies.

Measures taken by Govt.:

- The Government has enacted the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008 to provide for the welfare of unorganized workers.
- It deal with matters relating to life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits, old age protection and any other benefit as may be determined.
- In addition, the Central Government has recently converged the social security schemes of Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana (AABY) with Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY)
- These provide life and disability coverage to the unorganized workers for the age group of 18 to 50 years depending upon their eligibility.

About PMJJBY:

- Converged PMJJBY gives coverage of Rs.2.0 lakh on death at a premium of Rs.330/- per annum.
- Further converged PMSBY gives coverage of Rs.2.0 lakh on accidental death and disability at a premium of Rs.12/- per annum.
- These converged schemes are being implemented by Life Insurance Corporation of India.
- The annual premium is shared on 50:50 basis by the Central and State Governments.

Benefit of BBBP scheme to Daughters of Poor Women:

Context:

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme aims to address the critical issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR).

The specific objectives of the scheme are:

- i. prevent gender biased sex selective elimination
- ii. ensure survival and protection of the girl child
- iii. ensure education and participation of the girl child through coordinated and convergent efforts.

Salient Features:

- Out of 640 districts (as per Census 2011), 405 districts are selected under Multi-sectoral intervention and advocacy & media campaign,

while remaining 235 districts are covered under advocacy & media campaign only.

- BBBP scheme has provision for awards and recognitions but no provision for direct individual cash transfer for any strata of society including daughters of poor women.
- It is not a DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) scheme.
- Under the scheme, combined data of urban and rural areas are considered for the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB).

Performance of the Scheme:

- The latest reports of Health Management Information System (HMIS) of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) for the time period between F.Y. 2015-16 and F.Y. 2018-19, reveal that SRB is showing improving trends from 923 to 931, which include urban areas as well as rural areas of the country

Achievements Under Skill Development Programme :

Schemes:

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) 2016-20 is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

It is being implemented with an objective to provide skilling to one crore prospective youth under Short Term Training (STT) courses and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) across the country for four years i.e. 2016-2020.

Main Features of Scheme:

- Under PMKVY 2016-20, focus on employment has been significantly enhanced and candidates have been placed in various sectors and industries.
- TPs are mandated to organize Placement/Rozgar Melas every six months with support from the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) and to ensure the participation of local industry. Scheme also incentivizes TCs/TPs for facilitating placement of the trained candidates.
- Further, the reimbursement of last 20% of training payout to TCs is linked with the placement (wage employment or self employment) of the candidate.
- Additionally, post placement support of Rs. 1500 per month per trainee is applicable for special group (women candidates and

persons with disability) and special areas (LWE, North East region and J&K) for 2 or 3 month post training depending on placement within or outside the district of the domicile of the candidate.

Progress made:

- Due to the above mentioned initiatives, the reported placement under PMKVY 2016-20 is approximately 57%.
- Further, the third party impact evaluation of PMKVY 2016-20, conducted by independent body, has observed that 17% of the students enrolled under PMKVY 2016-20 prefer to go for higher studies than getting into employment.

Ministry has also undertaken various measures to encourage greater participation of industry in skilling ecosystem to improve employment outcomes. Employer led skill development is also being promoted to further improve placements rates under PMKVY 2016-20.

Schemes to Reduce IMR and SBR

Public Health is a State subject. However, to reduce infant mortality and still birth, various programmes and schemes under National Health Mission are implemented by States/ UTs as follows:

- Promotion of Institutional deliveries through cash incentive under **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) and Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK)** entitles all pregnant women (PW) delivering in public health institutions to free ante-natal check-ups, delivery including Caesarean section, post-natal care and treatment of sick infants till one year of age.
- **India Newborn Action Plan (INAP)** was launched in 2014 to make concerted efforts towards attainment of the goals of “Single Digit Neonatal Mortality Rate” and “Single Digit Still birth Rate,” by 2030.
- **Mothers’ Absolute Affection (MAA)** programme for improving breastfeeding practices through mass media campaigns and capacity building of health care providers in health facilities as well as in communities.
- **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)** is supported to provide vaccination to children against life threatening diseases such as Tuberculosis, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Polio, Tetanus, Hepatitis B, Measles, Rubella, Pneumonia and Meningitis caused by HaemophilusInfluenzae B. .

- **LaQshya** a Labour Room quality improvement programme is implemented in over 2100 health facilities across the country including medical colleges.
- **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)** is implemented to provide fixed-day assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care universally to all pregnant women on the 9th of every month.
- **Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)** for health screening, early detection of birth defects, diseases, deficiencies, development delays and early intervention services has been operationalized to provide comprehensive care to all the children in the age group of 0-18 years in the community.

Targets:

- Under National Health Policy, 2017, Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) target for the year 2019 is 28 per 1000 live births and Still Birth Rate is Single Digit by 2025.
- As per latest Sample Registration System bulletin of Registrar General of India, the Infant Mortality Rate is 33 per 1000 live births at National level in 2017 and Still Birth rate is 4 per 1000 birth in 2016 .

What is IMR?.

- Infant mortality is the death of young children under the age of 1. This death toll is measured by the infant mortality rate, which is the number of deaths of children under one year of age per 1000 live births.
- **Stillbirth** is typically defined as [fetal](#) death at or after 20 to 28 weeks of [pregnancy](#) (depending on the source).
- It results in a baby born without [signs of life](#)

Mera Aspataal:

Why in News?

Celebrating Doctors' Day (July 1) at a time when assaults on doctors at workplaces is seeing a spike across the country, the Union government's unique patient feedback service app — 'Mera Aspataal' — has thrown up some interesting data.

It indicate that the major cause of dissatisfaction among the patients includes poor behaviour of hospital staff, high cost of treatment and lack of cleanliness in medical centres.

Survey Report:

- Of those surveyed, 75% of the patients said they were satisfied and the remaining not satisfied.
- While 39% responded saying they were unhappy because of staff behaviour, 17% felt the cost of treatment was high and 12 % expressed dissatisfaction over the lack of cleanliness in hospitals.

About the App:

- Mera Aspataal (My Hospital) is a Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (GOI) initiative to capture patient feedback on the services received from both public and empanelled private health facilities.
- It works through multiple communication channels, including Short Message Service (SMS), Outbound Dialling (OBD), a mobile application, and a web portal.
- The application allows feedback to be consolidated, analysed and disseminated on a frequently updated dashboard.
- Analysed data will be used to improve quality of services in healthcare facilities.
- Thus My Hospital aligns with the citizen-centric MyGov platform of GOI which allows patients to connect with the healthcare providers and policymakers and to have their opinion heard and acted upon.
- Launched in 2016, the app has seen a scale-up, reaching to 2.1 million patients from 29 States and Union Territories, with more than 27.4 million patients being contacted (January 2018-April 2019) through text messages and phone calls for providing feedback.

Central educational institutions (reservation) Bill:

What is this Bill?

The government promulgated an Ordinance with the same name on March 7, 2019. This Ordinance will be repealed before the Bill is introduced in [Parliament](#).

This Bill is to ensure reservations in teaching positions in central institutions for persons from Scheduled Castes/Tribes, socially and

economically backward classes, and those from economically weaker sections.

Why was an Ordinance passed?

- Last year, the University Grants Commission announced that an individual department will be considered as the base unit to calculate the number of teaching posts to be reserved, based on an Allahabad High Court order from 2017.
- Former Human Resource Development Minister Prakash Javadekar had said in Parliament that the government was willing to bring an Ordinance if its review petition on this directive, filed in the Supreme Court, was rejected.
- The Supreme Court rejected the review petition, and the government passed an Ordinance.
- According to this Ordinance, the system will revert to a 200-point roster. This was also endorsed by student and teacher organisations across the country.

Why is this coming up only now?

- According to the HRD Ministry, there are more than 7,000 teaching jobs lying vacant in central educational institutions. This Bill is aimed at filling those vacancies.
- The Bill also serves the purpose of fulfilling the demands of people from these sections, for their rights as mentioned in the Constitution.

How will recruitment happen?

- According to the provisions of this Bill, [teachers](#) will be given jobs through direct recruitment.
- This means that the process of recruitment would be by inviting applications from those eligible to teach in a Central institution, as against public advertisement.

Are all Central institutions included in this Bill?

- No, there are exceptions. Those institutes deemed as institutions of excellence, and of national and strategic importance will not come under this law.
- These institutions are — Homi Bhabha National Institute (and all its constituent units), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, North-Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Science, National Brain Research Centre, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Physical Research Laboratory, Space Physics Laboratory and Indian Institute of Remote Sensing.
- Minority institutions are also left out of this Bill.

Scheme for Trans-disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy (STRIDE)

Why in News?

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has approved a new scheme - 'Scheme for Trans-disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy' (STRIDE).

About the Scheme:

- Broadly, STRIDE will provide support to research projects that are socially relevant, locally need-based, nationally important and globally significant.
- STRIDE shall support research capacity building as well as basic, applied and transformational action research that can contribute to national priorities with focus on inclusive human development.
- STRIDE shall support creation, development and integration of new ideas, concepts and practices for public good and strengthening civil society.

Benefits Expected:

- STRIDE scheme will strengthen research culture and innovation in colleges and Universities and help students and faculty to contribute towards India's developing economy with help of collaborative research.
- Focus on Humanities and Human Sciences will boost quality research on Indian languages and knowledge systems.

STRIDE Objectives:

1. To identify young talent, strengthen research culture, build capacity, promote innovation and support trans-disciplinary research for India's developing economy and national development.
2. To fund multi institutional network high-impact research projects in humanities and human sciences.

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) In India:

A Report:

According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) report entitled "India: Health of the Nation's States", Contribution of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) to total death in the Country was 61.8% in 2016, as compared to 37.9% in 1990. Tuberculosis is a Communicable Disease.

Causes:

- Risk factors for NCDs inter alia include ageing, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, high blood pressure, , high blood sugar, high cholesterol and overweight.

Steps taken by Govt.

Though public health is a State subject, Central Government supplements the efforts of the State Governments.

- National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) is being implemented under the National Health Mission (NHM).
- The objectives of the programme include health promotion activities and opportunistic screening for common Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) including cancer.
- Population based screening of common NCDs, i.e. diabetes, hypertension and cancers (Oral, Breast and Cervical cancer) has also been initiated under National Health Mission (NHM).
- To enhance the facilities for tertiary care of cancer, the Central Government is implementing Strengthening of Tertiary Care Cancer facilities scheme to support setting up of State Cancer Institutes (SCI) and Tertiary Care Centres (TCCC) in different parts of the country.
- Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT) Deendayal outlets have been opened at 159 Institutions/Hospitals

with an objective to make available Cancer and Cardiovascular Diseases drugs and implants at discounted prices to the patients.

- Jan Aushadhi stores are set up by Department of Pharmaceuticals to provide generic medicines at affordable prices.

National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Why in News?

UN experts on Wednesday warned that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam could render millions of citizens stateless and create instability in India. A panel of three experts said the exercise has increased hate speech against minorities in social media and built a climate of racial hatred.

About NRC:

- The **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** a register containing names of all genuine [Indian](#) citizens. The register was first prepared after the 1951 Census of India. [Census of India](#).
- The NRC is now being updated in Assam to include the names of those persons (or their descendants) who appear in the NRC, 1951, or in any of the [Electoral](#) Rolls up to the midnight of 24th March, 1971 or in any one of the other admissible documents issued up to mid-night of 24th March, 1971, which would prove their presence in Assam or in any part of India on or before 24th March, 1971.

Background:

- The update process of NRC started in the year 2013, when the Supreme Court of India passed orders for its update.
- Since then, the Supreme Court (bench of Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi and Rohinton Fali Nariman) have been monitoring it continuously.
- The entire project is headed by the State Coordinator of National Registration, Assam, Mr Prateek Hajela under the strict monitoring of Supreme Court of India.

Purpose of NRC

- The purpose of NRC update is to identify Indian citizens from amongst all the residents of Assam thereby leading to identification

of illegal migrants residing in Assam, who entered Indian territories after the midnight of 24th March 1971 and to determine the citizenship of the applicants who have applied for inclusion of their names in the updated NRC.

[Childrens and Substance Use:](#)

Why in News?

Nearly 26 lakh children in the country are addicted to “sedatives and inhalants,” Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thawar Chand Gehlot informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Details:

- Alcohol was the most common psychoactive substance used by Indians followed by cannabis and opioids.
- Over 16 crore people in the country consume alcohol, around 3.1 crore use Cannabis and about 77 lakh people take opioids.
- “More than 5.7 crore alcohol users, 72 lakh cannabis users and about 77 lakh opioid users are addicted and need help.

[National survey](#)

- The findings were part of a national household survey conducted by the Ministry in 2018.
- The survey also indicates that around 1.18 crore people between the age group of 10 and 75 are taking sedatives and 77 lakh are using inhalents.
- Children and adolescents were found to be using inhalents more than others.
- During the survey, over two lakh households were visited in 186 districts of the country and a total of 4,73,569 individuals were interviewed, he added.
- The government was also conducting a survey in 10 cities across the country to assess the pattern and profile of substance use among school and college students. The report was expected by November this year.

[The Baloch Liberation Army :](#)

Why in News?

The U.S. on July 2 designated the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) as a terror organisation. “The BLA is an armed separatist group that targets security forces and civilians, mainly in ethnic Baloch areas of [Pakistan](#),” said the U.S. State Department in a statement.

History:

- In the seven decades of the Baloch movement, the BLA has survived the longest.
- It is borne out of the tradition of armed militants who were earlier indirectly supported by the Marri, Bugti, Mengal and other clans or sardars.
- The Baloch movement was influenced by the Soviet Union and radical Marxist ideology in the past and some of their leaders were trained by Moscow.
- The BLA continues to draw from the same revolutionary spirit but has added that to the younger generation of fighters.

[Who are their leaders?](#)

- While it is well-known that several overground Baloch leaders are sympathetic to the organisation, the overground tribal leaders do not flaunt ties with the organisation as it has been banned by Pakistan since 2006. The BLA has maintained a fluid leadership pattern.

[What's its ideology?](#)

- BLA rebels claim that Pakistan has been exploiting the resources of the Province without giving the due share to the locals and the indigenous Baloch tribes.
- In recent years, the BLA has emerged as a movement with a network of supporters in both urban and rural areas of Balochistan, and has created a space for itself away from the traditional hold of the sardars of tribes.
- BLA rebels have claimed that they are aiming for both freedom from Pakistan and internal reform of the Baloch society.

- They are opposed to the traditional sardar or Kawailey system at home.
- As a result of its non-traditional approach, BLA has become more popular among young and educated Balochis.

What are India's ties with Baloch rebels?

- It is established that BLA commanders, in the past, had sought medical treatment in India's hospitals, often under disguise or with fake identity.
- In one such case, a militant commander in charge of Khuzdar city was based in Delhi for at least six months in 2017 when he underwent extensive treatment for kidney-related ailments.
- Pakistan has blamed India for supporting the Baloch rebels.
- It is known that the Baloch sardars like the late Akbar Bugti and Ghaus Bukhsh Bizenjo maintained warm personal ties with various Indian political figures. However, visits by militants are often under assumed identities unlike those by prominent well known leaders.

What does the U.S. ban mean?

- Pakistan is expected to make it difficult for commanders and module chiefs of the BLA to travel in the region.
- The fighters are also likely to find fund-raising more difficult.
- In a communication to The Hindu, Baloch rebels, however, have indicated that they are planning to intensify the struggle against Pakistan as they remain "the most popular" militant organisation in Balochistan despite Pakistan military's crackdown.

GS-3

NDMA conducts training programme for CBRN emergencies

Context:

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is conducting a basic training programme at the Deendayal Port Trust in Kandla, Gujarat.

About the Programme:

- The five-day training programme, aimed at increasing the awareness and enhancing the preparedness of Seaport Emergency Handlers (SEHs) to respond to CBRN emergencies at the seaports, started on June 10, 2019.
- This is the fourth in a series of such programmes that will be conducted at various seaports across the country to enable SEHs to respond suitably till the arrival of specialised response teams.
- Earlier this year, three batches of SEHs were trained at Mangalore, Kochi and Navi Mumbai.
- CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) threats emanate at seaports due to arrival, storage and transportation of a large amount of chemical, petrochemical and other CBRN agents.

About NDMA:

- **National Disaster Management Authority**, abbreviated as **NDMA**, is an agency of the [Ministry of Home Affairs](#) whose primary purpose is to coordinate response to [natural](#) or [man-made disasters](#) and for capacity-building in disaster resiliency and crisis response.
- NDMA was established through the [Disaster Management Act](#) enacted by the [Government of India](#) in 23 December 2005.
- The [Prime Minister](#) is the ex-officio chairperson of the same.
- The agency is responsible for framing policies, laying down guidelines and best-practices and coordinating with the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) to ensure a holistic and distributed approach to disaster management.

Functioning:

- It is headed by a nine-member board chaired by the Prime Minister of India.
- The remainder of the board consists of members nominated based on their expertise in areas such as planning, infrastructure management, communications, meteorology, and natural sciences.
- The day-to-day management of the agency is overseen by the office of the Vice Chair.

NDMA is operationally organized into the following divisions:

- Policy & Planning
- Mitigation
- Operations & Communications
- Administration
- Capacity Building

Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV):

Why in News?

The [Defence](#) Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Wednesday conducted the maiden test of an indigenously developed Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV) along with several technologies on Wednesday morning.

Details:

- The DRDO launched a technology demonstrator vehicle to prove a number of critical technologies for futuristic missions from Dr Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha.
- The missile was successfully launched at 1127 hours and it was tracked by various radars, telemetry stations and electro optical tracking sensors through its course.
- The test was undertaken to validate several technologies including the HSTDV, a Defence source said.
- Some technologies have been validated while some remained inconclusive of which the data is being analysed," the source added.
- In the test, a missile with the technology demonstrator vehicle mounted on it is launched and the vehicle is released only after the missile reaches a certain altitude and velocity.

Use of SCRAMJET tech:

- Under this project, we are developing a hypersonic vehicle that will be powered by a scram-jet engine.
- This is dual-use technology, which when developed, will have multiple civilian applications.
- It can be used for launching satellites at low cost.
- It 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.

Flying Vehicle:

Contex:

A transportation company is betting its sleek new hydrogen-powered electric flying vehicles will someday serve as taxis, cargo carriers and ambulances of the sky, but experts say they will have to clear a number of regulatory hurdles before being approved for takeoff years in the future.

Design:

- With six rotors on the roof and seats inside for five people, a passenger model of the Skai (pronounced “sky”) unveiled on Wednesday near Los Angeles resembles an oversized drone crossed with a luxury SUV.
- Like a drone, the vehicle from Alaka’i Technologies takes off and lands vertically.
- It’s one of many similar electric flying crafts in production, including prototypes from Boeing and Airbus that made successful test flights this year, according to Vertical Flight Society, an industry group.
- Most are powered by batteries, which can add a lot of weight.
- The Skai instead uses very light hydrogen fuel cells to run its rotors, giving it a range of 644 km and the capacity to carry 454 kilograms in people or freight.
- It would be flown by an on-board pilot using a pair of joysticks, but the technology exists to eventually fly it remotely and even autonomously.

[SBI Report on growth:](#)

Context:

State Bank economists have opined that an easy monetary policy will be ineffective to push the sagging growth engine and that what is needed is more direct and quicker fiscal measures.

Details of Report:

- The financial system is “in need for some serious repair” and the government should use the forthcoming budget for the same.
- An easy monetary policy with a reasonable tight fiscal deficit will be ineffective in addressing the existing demand slowdown,” they said in a note on Wednesday.
- Support from the monetary policy — the RBI cut its key rates for the third time in 2019 and also changed the policy stance to accommodative last week to a nine-year low — is most welcome, the report said, underlining the need for help on the fiscal front.
- “Fiscal channel is more direct and quicker and financial system is in need of some serious repair,” the report said, adding “the government would do better with reasonable fiscal deficit assumptions and should be very clear of the fiscal consolidation path.”

Plummeting growth:

- Growth plummeted to a nearly five-year low at 5.8% for the March quarter, pulling down the full-year GDP for FY19 to a low 6.8%.
- Questions have also been asked about the growth numbers by Former Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramaniam, who said the growth numbers during the Modi government’s first innings till FY17 had been inflated by a whopping 2.5 percentage points.
- The ongoing crisis in the non-banking finance companies, which constitute up to a fifth of the overall lending in the economy, according to some watchers, needs immediate attention to revive the fortunes of the financial system.
- The note warned there were some “limiting factors” like the Food Corporation’s massive borrowings from the National Small Savings Funds, which is already in excess of ₹2 lakh crore or 1 percent of GDP.

Black-crested Bulbul

Why in News?

The black-crested Bulbul was spotted after several years in Dudhwa as the counting of birds during summer season was held last week.

Details:

- Experts from Katarniaghat Foundation, Ruhelkhand Nature Club and WWF-India apart from Dudhwa nature guides visited a number of locations inside Dudhwa National Park and Kishanpur wildlife sanctuary.
- The experts photographed the winged species and recorded their data.”
- The data collected by counting teams would be compiled and analysed in next few days to ascertain the number of bird species found in Dudhwa.

About the Bird:

- The black-crested Bulbul is a bird species with a black head and deep yellow body.
- The sighting of black-crested Bulbul after several years has come as a great joy for the authorities and bird lovers.

[New species of birds:](#)

- Notably enough, during the winter bird-count, the experts had sighted five new species of birds in Dudhwa which included Maroon Oriole, Eurasian sparrow hawk and short-eared eagle owl.
- The summer bird count helped to discover the native bird species in Dudhwa as in winter migratory birds also join here.”
- Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, which is located on the India-Nepal border, is home to over 450 bird species, tigers, leopards, wild elephants, swamp deer, one-horned rhinos besides hundreds of other wild animals and reptiles.
- Its rich [wildlife](#), massive forest cover and fabulous flora and fauna attracts tourists and wildlife research scholars every year.

India's Space Mission:

Context:

India plans to have its own space station, and modalities for it will be worked out after the first manned mission, Gaganyaan, scheduled for August 2022, K. Sivan, Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

About the Proposal:

- The proposed space station is envisaged to weigh 20 tonnes and serve as a facility where astronauts can stay for 15-20 days, and it would be placed in an orbit 400 km above earth.
- The time frame for launch is 5-7 years after Gaganyaan, he added.
- The ISRO would also join the international space community for a manned mission to moon and beyond.

Gaganyaan on track

- A Gaganyaan National Advisory Council has been created with members from different institutions and industries to oversee and advise on the mission.
- Selection of 2-3 crew members for Gaganyaan would be done in six month and added that they would then undergo training for 1-1.5 years after that.
- The initial phase of training would be in India and the advanced stage would be done abroad as the requisite facilities did not exist here and the project was on a short timeline.
- A GSLV Mk-III launch vehicle would be used to launch the Gaganyaan. Prior to that, two unmanned missions would be undertaken, one in December next year and the second, six months after that.
- The Gaganyaan mission aims to send a 2-3 person crew to space for a period of seven days.
- The spacecraft would be placed in a low earth orbit of 300-400 km.

After Chandrayaan-2, ISRO has set its sights on two interplanetary missions. Mission Aditya-L1 is scheduled for next year to study the Sun's corona, which effects climate on earth, and another mission to study Venus in 2-3 years.

Financial Action Task Force:

Why in News?

The Paris-headquartered FATF has asked Pakistan to explain whether it has launched any investigation into the \$7 million allocated to maintain schools, madrasas, clinics and ambulances originally operated by terror groups like LeT, JeM, and LeT fronts Jamat-ud-Dawah and Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation.

JuD and FIF are founded by terror mastermind Hafiz Saeed.

Grey'-listed

- In June 2018, Pakistan was placed in the 'Grey' list and given a 27-point action plan by FATF.
- This plan was reviewed at the last plenary in October 2018 and for the second time in February this year, when the country was again put into the 'Grey' list after India submitted new information about Pakistan-based terrorist groups.
- The FATF continuing Pakistan in the 'Grey' list means its downgrading by IMF, World Bank, ADB, EU and also a reduction in risk rating by Moody's, S&P and Fitch. This will add to the financial problems of Pakistan, which is seeking aid from all possible international avenues.

About FATF:

- The **Financial Action Task Force (on Money Laundering) (FATF)**, also known by its [French](#) name, **Groupe d'action financière (GAFI)**, is an [intergovernmental organization](#) founded in 1989 on the initiative of the [G7](#) to develop policies to combat [money laundering](#).
- In 2001 its mandate expanded to include [terrorism financing](#).
- It monitors progress in implementing the FATF Recommendations through "peer reviews" ("mutual evaluations") of member countries. The FATF Secretariat is housed at the [OECD](#) headquarters in [Paris](#).

Members of FATF

- As of 2018 there are 36 Member countries of FATF and policies drafted by FATF are highly regarded and treated as law.
- Starting with its own members, the FATF monitors countries' progress in implementing the FATF Recommendations; reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures; and, promotes the adoption and implementation of the FATF Recommendations globally.
- Countries are subjected to evaluation by FATF to see that they are upholding laws and regulations enforced by FATF.

International Pulsar Timing Array

Why in News?

The city-based National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA) is all set to host the five-day annual International Pulsar Timing Array (IPTA) meet from June 17 to 21.

The meet is a collaboration of radio astronomers from a dozen countries across the globe.

- The IPTA is a collaboration of radio astronomers from a dozen countries across the globe.
- It uses more than 12 radio telescopes all over the world with an aim to detect ultra-low frequency gravitational waves.
- More than 40 expert international astronomers and 30 international students are expected to participate in the event, besides several Indian participants.
- “The upgrade of the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) in Pune and the Ooty Radio Telescope (ORT) has helped us meet the parameters for being a full member of the IPTA.
- The current status of the quest for ultra-low frequency Gravitational Waves and the roadmap for future technical and scientific challenges is to be the main focus of the meeting.

Significance of Waves:

- These waves are wrinkles in space-time produced by two massive black holes, each revolving around the other.
- Such black holes, which weigh billion times more than our Sun, are found in the centres of colliding galaxies.
- These waves affect radio pulses from 10km size stars called radio pulsars by changing ever so slightly the period of radio pulsation of these stars.
- Measuring these periods to a precision of 10 seconds of a nano-second may help the IPTA experiment to discover Gravitational Waves with a period of about a billionth of a second.

Greenhouse Gas Emission:

Why in News?

EU leaders will this week discuss setting a target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, European officials said on Monday, following elections that highlighted climate change fears.

Matters of Discussion:

- European Union leaders meeting on Thursday and Friday in Brussels will debate the 2050 target of “climate neutrality” that the environmental group WWF says now has the support of 16 of the EU’s 28 countries.
- The EU must lead the way, by engaging in an in-depth transformation of its own economy and society to achieve climate neutrality,” according to the draft.
- The draft contained a footnote, saying the wording may be adjusted to reflect the results of the summit debate, which an EU source said would focus on the 2050 target.
- The source said that a number of EU countries want more debate on financing the shift from an economy running on fossil fuels, especially those in eastern Europe, to one driven by clean energy.

Sixteen ‘on board’

- The World Wildlife Fund said Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the

Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Britain are “on board” for the 2050 goal.

- The British government last week presented draft legislation to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050.
- Under the 2015 Paris climate change treaty, the EU pledged to reduce its carbon emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030

Combating desertification: India;s Role:

Context:

Speaking at an event in New Delhi on the occasion of World Day to combat desertification and drought Shri Javadekar announced that India will be hosting the fourteenth session of Conference of Parties (COP - 14) from 29th August – 14th September 2019.

The Union Minister further highlighted that with about 30% of country’s total geographical area being affected by land degradation; India has high stakes and stands strongly committed to the Convention.

Measures taken:

- The Union Minister also launched a flagship project on enhancing capacity on forest landscape restoration (FLR) and Bonn Challenge in India, through a pilot phase of 3.5 years implemented in the States of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland and Karnataka.
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in partnership with The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), through this flagship project aims to develop and adapt best practices and monitoring protocols for the Indian states and build capacity within the five pilot states on FLR and Bonn Challenge.
- This will be eventually scaled up across the country through subsequent phases of the project.

About Bonn Challenge:

- The Bonn Challenge is a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world’s deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.
- At the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) 2015 in Paris, India also joined the voluntary Bonn Challenge pledge to bring into

restoration 13 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by the year 2020, and additional 8 million hectares by 2030. India's pledge is one of the largest in Asia.

- United Nations has 3 Rio Conventions namely, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

Background:

- Established in 1994, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the only legally binding international agreement linking environment and development issues to the land agenda.
- In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly declared 17 June the "World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought" to promote public awareness and the implementation of the UNCCD in the desertification affected countries.
- India is hosting the Fourteenth session of Conference of Parties (COP - 14) from 29th August - 14th September 2019 at India Expo Mart Limited, Greater Noida. One of the primary functions of the COP is to review reports submitted by the Country Parties detailing how they are carrying out their commitments. India will take-over the COP presidency from China for two years until the next COP is hosted in 2021.

Plastic pollution;

Why in News?

Group of 20 environment ministers agreed on Sunday to adopt a new implementation framework for actions to tackle the issue of marine plastic waste on a global scale, the Japanese government said after hosting the two-day ministerial meeting.

Environment and energy ministers of the Group of 20 major economies met this weekend in Karuizawa, northwest of Tokyo, ahead of the G20 summit in Osaka, western Japan, on June 28-29.

Issues to be discussed:

- One of the top issues was ocean plastic waste as images of plastic debris-strewn beaches and dead animals with stomachs full of

plastic have sparked outrage, with many countries banning plastic bags outright.

Framework to address the Issue:

- The new framework is aimed at facilitating further concrete action on marine waste, though on a voluntary basis, after the G20 Hamburg Summit in Germany adopted the “G20 action plan on marine litter” in 2017.
- Under the new framework, G20 members will promote a comprehensive life-cycle approach to prevent and reduce plastic litter discharge to the oceans through various measures and international cooperation.
- They will also share best practices, promote innovation and boost scientific monitoring and analytical methodologies.

Japan plans to host the first meeting under the new framework this autumn when officials of environment ministers in the G20 countries are due to meet for the G20 Resource Efficiency Dialogue.

Black tiger shrimps

Why in News?

Ending a decade’s slide in the production of black tiger shrimps, [Kerala](#) is experiencing a comeback of the top healthy seafood, thanks to a much-needed initiative of the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) launched earlier this year.

What has been done?

- The MPEDA’s efforts to revive the production of black tiger shrimps on a mass sale of its seeds have been receiving encouraging feedback, according to authorities with the statutory body that functions under the Union Governments Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- The mass sale of seeds since the past 100 days shows a rapidly growing interest among the farmers to raise the disease-free variety.
- The Kochi-headquartered MPEDA had on February 18 begun supplying black tiger shrimp seeds from its new multi-species [aquaculture](#) complex (MAC) at Vallarpadam.

- Today, the black tiger prawn supplied from the nine-acre MAC has been showing 'excellent' performance in various parts of the State.

Background:

- It was from 2010 that the black tiger shrimp, an endemic species to south-east Asia, began to face a slump in its traditional reputation as a major variety of cultivated shrimp item in India.
- That was after aquaculture farmers in the country began to focus on growing the exotic vannamei species of shrimps in a big way.

About MPEDA;

- The **Marine Products Export Development Authority** (MPEDA) is a [Government of India](#) company headquartered at [Kochi](#). It was constituted on 20 April 1972, under the Marine Products Export Development Authority Act 1972 (No.13 of 1972).
- The role envisaged for the MPEDA under the statute is comprehensive - covering fisheries of all kinds, increasing exports, specifying standards, processing, marketing, extension and training in various aspects of the industry.
- MPEDA functions under the [Department of Commerce](#), [Government of India](#) and acts as a coordinating agency with different Central and State Government establishments engaged in fishery production and allied activities

Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP):

Why in News?

Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP), claimed as the world's largest multi-stage and multi-purpose lift irrigation scheme, was inaugurated by Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Reddy at Medigadda where the first barrage of the project is located in Jayashankar-Bhupalapally district on Friday.

About the Project:

- The project is intended to irrigate over 37 lakh acres of new and existing ayacut, providing drinking water to Hyderabad and villages en route and supplying water for industrial needs by lifting 195 tmc

ft of water from the Godavari at 2 tmc ft a day during the flood season.

- By lifting one more tmc ft water a day later, the government plans to bring another 8 lakh acres under irrigation.
- **Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project [KLIP]** is a multi-purpose [irrigation](#) project on the [Godavari River](#) in [Kaleshwaram, Bhoopalpally, Telangana](#), India.
- This is world's largest multi-stage lift irrigation project.
- Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project starts at the confluence point of [Pranahita River](#) and Godavari River i.e, at Kaleshwaram village in Telangana.
- Pranahita river in itself is a confluence of various other smaller tributaries like Wardha, Penganga and Wainganga Rivers.
- It is estimated that Pranahita river has an annual average flow of 280 TMC.
- It remains untapped as its course is principally through the dense forests and other ecologically sensitive zones such as wild life sanctuaries.

Controversies

- This project is facing several criticisms.
- First, the main criticism is aimed at its economic viability, measured in terms of return on investment. Setting aside the fixed costs, the operating costs involve heavy expenditures on maintaining the pumping stations and the cost of electricity to run the pumps.
- Unless the agricultural benefits accrued to the farmers are at least twice as much - if not more - critics feel the project is not justified. Second, is there enough flow in the river to meet the expectations?

Side Pocketing:

What is the side pocketing rule?

- Simply put, side pocketing is a framework that allows mutual funds to segregate the bad assets in a separate portfolio within their debt schemes.
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) introduced the framework in December — primarily triggered by the IL&FS fiasco — after it emerged that many fund houses have huge exposure to

the beleaguered entity and could potentially take a huge hit on their net asset value thereby affecting investor returns.

How does it work?

- The capital markets regulator has laid down that such a portfolio can be created only if there is a credit event at the issuer level in the form of downgrade of a debt or money market instrument to 'below investment grade' or subsequent downgrades from such levels.
- In other words, if a debt instrument is downgraded to default rating by credit rating agencies, then the fund house has the option to create a side pocket so that good assets can be ring-fenced.

How does it benefit investors?

- Side pocketing segregates the bad assets from the good ones.
- All existing investors in the scheme are allotted equal number of units in the segregated portfolio as held in the main portfolio and no redemption or subscription is allowed in the segregated portfolio.
- Thereafter, the units have to be listed on a stock exchange within 10 days to facilitate exit of the unit holders.
- Effectively, this makes the price discovery of the bad assets a transparent procedure with investors having the freedom of either selling it at prevailing price or holding it if they expect the value to recover in future.

Can the side pocket rule be misused?

- When side pocketing was introduced, a section of market participants felt that it could be misused by fund houses to hide their bad investment decisions.
- SEBI, however, has put in place checks and balances to minimise any such misuse.
- The regulator has said that trustees of all fund houses will have to put in place a framework that would negatively impact the performance incentives of fund managers, chief investment officers

(CIOs), etc. involved in the investment process of securities under the segregated portfolio.

- So, fund managers know that any creation of such side pocket in the future would also affect their own appraisals and incentives. Further, SEBI has also said that side pocket should not be looked upon as a sign of encouraging undue credit risks as any misuse of the option would be considered serious and stringent action can be taken

RBI Committee:

Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in consultation with the government, has set up a six-member committee to review the economic capital framework of the [central bank](#).

Members:

- Former RBI Governor Bimal Jalan will be the committee's chairman and former Deputy Governor Rakesh Mohan deputy chairman.
- The other members are Economic Affairs Secretary Subash Chandra Garg, RBI Deputy Governor N.S. Vishwanathan and two board members of the RBI — Bharat Doshi and Sudhir Mankad.
- Dr. Jalan was the Governor of the RBI between November 1997 and September 2003.

About the Committee:

- The committee would submit its report within 90 days from the date of its first meeting, the RBI said in a statement on Wednesday.
- The terms of reference of the committee would be to review status, need and justification of various provisions, reserves and buffers presently provided for by the RBI, keeping in mind 'public policy mandate of the RBI, including financial stability considerations.'

Global best practices

- The committee will also review best practices followed by the central banks globally in making assessment and provisions for risks, to which central bank balance sheets are subjected.

- The panel would also suggest an adequate level of risk provisioning that the RBI needs to maintain, and to determine whether it is holding provisions, reserves and buffers in surplus or deficit of the required level.
- The committee would also propose a suitable profit distribution policy taking into account all the likely situations of the RBI, including holding more provisions than required and the RBI holding less provisions than required, the statement said.

Background:

- After the government started pushing the central bank to review its economic capital framework, the RBI board, at its meeting on November 19, decided to set up a committee to review the issue.
- The economic capital issue was a bone of contention, among other issues, between the central bank and the Finance Ministry.
- **Chikungunya:**
- **Why in News?**

The Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), which functions under the Department of Biotechnology, has entered into a non-exclusive license for product commercialisation after having successfully developed antibodies against the Chikungunya viral (CHIKV) infection.

Significant impact

- Generation of antibodies has had significant impact on the progress of CHIKV-based research.
- It will help researchers unravel myriad aspects of virus pathogenesis. Moreover, with greater light shed upon the CHIKV infection biology using these antibodies, research communities are now a step closer to developing efficacious antivirals and other control strategies against the Chikungunya virus.
- “With no prior antibodies reported against CHIKV, Dr. Chattopadhyay’s group was the first to develop and characterize novel, highly sensitive and specific polyclonal antibodies against the non-structural proteins - nsP1, nsP3 and nsP4 of CHIKV.
- Furthermore, her laboratory has also developed and characterized a monoclonal antibody against nsP2 of CHIKV.

Lack of information

- The molecular virologist, who has 20 years of experience in the field, and her team, started working on this aspect as there was hardly any information on the basic mechanisms underlying CHIKV virus infection and pathogenesis.

ILS sources said the antibodies against CHIKV were receiving a tremendous response, and were being purchased by research laboratories across world.

Make in India' Initiative

Context:

'Make in India' programme is being used by the Government for defence procurements by categorising the capital acquisition proposals under 'Buy (Indian-IDDM)', 'Buy (Indian)', 'Buy and Make (Indian)', 'Make' and 'Strategic Partnership Model' categories of Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP)-2016.

Focus of DPP:

- DPP -2016 focuses on institutionalising, streamlining and simplifying defence procurement procedure to give a boost to 'Make in India' initiative of the Government of India.

In pursuance of 'Make in India' initiative of the Government, following measures have been taken to achieve substantive self-reliance in defence production: -

- Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) has been revised in 2016 wherein specific provisions have been introduced for stimulating growth of the domestic defence industry.
- A new category of procurement '**Buy {Indian-IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)}**' has been introduced in DPP-2016 to promote indigenous design and development of defence equipment.
- Government has notified the '**Strategic Partnership (SP)**' Model which envisages establishment of long-term strategic partnerships with Indian entities through a transparent and competitive process, wherein they would tie up with global

Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to seek technology transfers to set up domestic manufacturing infrastructure and supply chains.

- Government has decided to establish two **defence industrial corridors** to serve as an engine of economic development and growth of defence industrial base in the country.
- These are spanning across Chennai, Hosur, Coimbatore, Salem and Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu and spanning across Aligarh, Agra, Jhansi, Kanpur and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh (UP).
- An innovation ecosystem for **Defence titled Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX)** has been launched in April 2018.
- **iDEX** is aimed at creation of an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging Industries including MSMEs, Start-ups, Individual Innovators, R&D institutes and Academia and provide them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D which has potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs.
- The Ministry has instituted a new framework titled '**Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti**' which aims to provide boost to the IPR culture in indigenous defence industry.
- **FDI Policy** has been revised and under the revised policy, FDI is allowed under automatic route upto 49% and beyond 49% through Government route wherever it is likely to result in access to modern technology or for other reasons to be recorded.
- Government has set up the **Technology Development Fund (TDF)** to encourage participation of public/private industries especially MSMEs, through provision of grants, so as to create an eco-system for enhancing cutting edge technology capability for defence applications.

National Policy on Bio-Fuel

Background:

- The National Policy on Biofuels-2018 notified on 8.6.2018, inter-alia, allows production of ethanol from damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice etc. which are unfit for human consumption.
- The policy also allows conversion of surplus quantities of food grains to ethanol, based on the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.

- Use of damaged foodgrains and surplus foodgrains for production of ethanol will increase its availability for Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme.

Target of the Policy:

- The National Policy on Biofuels-2018 approved by the Government envisages an indicative target of 20% blending of ethanol in petrol and 5% blending of bio-diesel in diesel by 2030.
- Under EBP programme, ethanol blending in petrol is being undertaken by the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) in whole country except island Union Territory (UT) of Andaman Nicobar and Lakshadweep wherein, OMCs blend up to 10 % ethanol in petrol under the EBP Programme.
- Further, Government has approved Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana to provide Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to Second Generation bio-ethanol manufacturing projects to increase availability of ethanol for EBP programme.

Government has decided to leapfrog directly to BS-VI quality w.e.f. 1st April, 2020 in the entire country.

Considering the rise in environmental pollution in National Capital Region, Government has started supply of BS-VI auto fuel in National Capital Territory of Delhi from 1st April, 2018.

GST EVASION

Why in News?

The Government proposes to integrate a FASTag Bank Mechanism with e-way bill and Logistic Data Services to track movement of goods and check GST evasion.

How will this be done?

- The Government is contemplating integration of E-Way Bill mechanism of GST with FASTag System of National Highway Authority of India (NHAI).
- The aspect of Logistic Databank integration with FASTag System is being examined.
- A Committee of Officers comprising of officers from Central Government, State Governments, GSTN (Goods and Services Tax Network), NIC (National Informatics Centre), GST Council, to

examine the issue of use of RFID data for strengthening of E-Way Bill mechanism under GST, was formed by GST Council.

Further, with regard to integration of FASTag with LDB, a committee comprising of Central Board and Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), NHAI & its associates, NPCI, GSTN, NIC, Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (DMICDC) & its associates was formed to examine the feasibility of the same.

[Special Economic Zones \(Amendment\) Bill:](#)

Why in News?

The [Lok Sabha](#) on Wednesday passed the Special Economic Zones (Amendment) Bill, 2019, making a trust or any entity notified by the Central government eligible for consideration of grant of permission to set up a unit in special economic zones.

About the Bill:

- It amends the Special Economic Zones Act, 2005 and replaces an Ordinance that was promulgated on March 2, 2019.
- The Act provides for the establishment, development and management of Special Economic Zones for the promotion of exports.
- The Bill had paved the way for trusts to set up units in these zones
- **Definition of person:** Under the Act, the definition of a person includes an individual, a Hindu undivided family, a company, a co-operative society, a firm, or an association of persons. The Bill adds two more categories to this definition by including a trust, or any other entity which may be notified by the central government.

What is a SEZ?

- A **special economic zone (SEZ)** is an area in which the business and trade laws are different from the rest of the country.
- SEZs are located within a country's national borders, and their aims include increased trade balance, employment, increased investment, job creation and effective administration.

- To encourage businesses to set up in the zone, financial policies are introduced.
- These policies typically encompass investing, [taxation](#), trading, quotas, [customs](#) and [labour regulations](#).
- Additionally, companies may be offered [tax holidays](#), where upon establishing themselves in a zone, they are granted a period of lower taxation.

SEZ's in India:

- SEZs were introduced to [India](#) in 2000, following the already successful SEZ model used in China.
- Prior to their introduction, India relied on [export processing zones](#) (EPZs) which failed to make an impact on foreign investors.
- By 2005, all EPZs had been converted to SEZs.
- As of 2017, there are 221 SEZs in operation, with a further 194 approved for 2018.
- For developers to establish an SEZ in India, applications can be made to the Indian Board of Approval. Companies, partner firms, and individuals may also apply by completing Form-A which is available on the Department of Commerce's website.

Types of SEZ's:

- There are four types of SEZs in India, which are categorised according to size: Multi-sector (1,000+ hectares); Sector-specific (100+ hectares); Free Trade & Warehousing Zone (FTWZ) (40+ hectares); and Tech, handicraft, non-conventional energy, gems & jewellery (10+ hectares)

Committee for MSME:

Why in News?

A committee formed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), headed by former SEBI Chairman U.K. Sinha, has recommended a ₹5,000 crore distressed asset fund for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

About the Fund:

- The fund will assist units in a cluster where there is a change in the external environment such as plastic ban, which had resulted in large number of such entities becoming non-performing. “
- This would be of significant size which makes equity investments that help unlock debt or help revive sick units.
- It is a variation of venture capital fund , meant for equity investment of ₹1 lakh to ₹10 lakh in proprietary or partnership MSMEs, which will not or cannot list on the stock exchanges.
- “The structure would recognise that exits will not be big bang but through a percentage of revenues or profits over a period of 3-5 years.
- The onus of creating this fund would lie with the governmentt.

Other suggestions by Panel:

- The panel also suggested that the RBI should increase the limit for non-collateralised loans to ₹20 lakh, and this would address a significant proportion of the sector needs.
- In addition, it also suggested revision in loan limit sanctioned under MUDRA by the Finance Ministry to ₹20 lakh from ₹10 lakh.
- The committee has also recommended banks that wish to specialise in MSME lending, their sub-targets for farm loans under the priority sector lender could be waived off, and instead can be given a target for loans to the SME sector.
- The targets, committee said, could be of 50% of the net bank credit for universal banks and 80% for small finance banks.
- Commercial banks have been suggested that they should develop customised products to assess the financing requirements based on expected cash flows moving away from traditional forms of assessment.

Current situation;

- At present, the overall priority sector lending target for a universal bank is 40% of their net bank credit and 75% for small finance bank.

Global warming:An effect in Himalayas:

Context:

Comparing data obtained by Cold War-era spy satellites with images from modern stereo satellites, scientists have shown that Himalayan glaciers have lost more than a quarter of their ice mass since 1975, with melting occurring twice as fast after the turn of the century as average temperatures rose.

Background:

- In the 1970s, at the height of the Cold War, the U.S. had deployed spy satellites that orbited the globe and took thousands of photographs, using a telescopic camera system, for reconnaissance purposes.
- Film recovery capsules would be ejected from the KH-9 Hexagon military satellites and parachuted back to Earth over the Pacific Ocean.
- More than four decades later, scientists are using those same images to show the devastating impact of a warming earth on the Himalayan glaciers.
- The overlapping images, each covering 30,000 square kilometres with a ground resolution of six to nine metres, have been pieced together to form digital elevation models of the Himalayas of that era.

Salient Observation:

- “Our observed annual mass losses suggest that of the total ice mass present in 1975, about 87% remained in 2000 and 72% remained in 2016,” the study’s authors wrote. “
- Similar mass loss rates were found across subregions and a doubling of the average rate of loss during 2000–2016 relative to the 1975–2000 interval.

Reasons Behind:

- The study goes on to assert that rising temperatures are responsible for the accelerating loss.
- This is consistent with the available multidecade weather station records scattered throughout HMA [High Mountain Asia which includes all mountain ranges surrounding the Tibetan Plateau].

It indicate quasi-steady mean annual air temperatures through the 1960s to the 1980s with a prominent warming trend beginning in the mid-1990s and continuing into the 21st century, with an average increase of 1° celsius since 2000. [Natural Language Translation](#)

Why in News?

The Ministry of Electronics and IT will soon place 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).

About the Proposal:

- The proposal is part of the 100-day action plan charted out by MeitY, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s instructions.
- The national mission on natural language translation 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.
- To overcome the language barrier, the government planned to set up an ecosystem which involved the Central and State agencies and start-ups.

Benefits of the Project:

- Start-ups can help expedite the work to build implementable solutions to help make research.
- Translation activities can also help generate employment for educated unemployed, he pointed out, adding that the mission would help not just students but also teachers, authors, publishers, translation software developers and general readers.

Other Important Points:

- The IT ministry is the lead agency for implementation of the mission along with the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Department of Science and Technology.
- The PM-STIAC is an overarching body that identifies challenges in certain areas of science and technology.
- It then creates a road map to deal with these challenges and presents the recommendations to the Prime Minister.
- Besides natural language translation, other missions identified by the body includes Quantum Frontier, Artificial Intelligence, National Bio-diversity mission, electric vehicles, BioScience for Human Health and deep ocean exploration.

Nuclear Wastes:

Why in News?

India has adopted “closed fuel cycle”, where spent nuclear fuel is regarded as a material of resource.

What does it Mean?

- Closed fuel cycle aims at reprocessing of spent fuel for recovery of Uranium and Plutonium and recycling them back to reactor as fuel.
- This finally leads to a very small percentage of residual material present in spent nuclear fuel requiring their management as radioactive waste.
- Safe management of radioactive waste has been accorded high priority right from the inception of our nuclear energy programme.

How is it Done?

- With the advent of new technologies based on partitioning of waste, emphasis is accorded to separation and recovery of these useful radio-isotopes so as to make use of the waste for various societal applications.
- Utmost emphasis is given to waste volume minimization, effective containment and isolation of radio-activity followed by near zero discharge of radioactivity to the environment.
- As a waste management philosophy, no waste in any physical form is released / disposed to the environment unless the same is cleared, exempted or excluded from regulations.

A comprehensive radioactive waste management is established taking into account the operational capability for the management of radioactive waste and an independent regulatory capability for its overview.

Threats from Nuclear waste:

- The transport of this waste poses an unacceptable risk to people and the environment
- Plutonium has been stated to be 'the most toxic substance on earth' and so hazardous that 'a speck can kill
- Most nuclear waste produced is hazardous, due to its radioactivity, for only a few tens of years and is routinely disposed of in near-surface disposal facilities (see above). Only a small volume of nuclear waste (~3% of the total volume) is long-lived and highly radioactive and requires isolation from the environment for many thousands of years.
- Even if put into a geological repository, the waste might emerge and threaten future generation
- There is a potential terrorist threat to the large volumes of radioactive waste currently being stored and the risk that this waste could leak or be dispersed as a result of terrorist action.

Use of Artificial Intelligence in Agriculture

Context:

Government has set a target of doubling of farmers' income by the year 2022. The Government has constituted an Inter-Ministerial Committee to examine issues relating to doubling of farmers' income and recommend a strategy to achieve doubling of farmers' income in real terms by the year 2022.

The committee has, inter-alia, appreciated the role of Digital Technology, which can play a transformational role in modernizing and organizing how rural India performs its agricultural activities.

Advantages:

- The technologies include Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics, Block chain Technology, Internet of Things etc.

- By use of the modern/advance technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) and giving accurate and timely information regarding crops, weather and insects etc. to the farmers may improve the crop productivity, reduce the risk and improve the income of the farmers.

Major technology interventions include: -

- i. Development of **Kisan Suvidha mobile application** to facilitate dissemination of information to farmers on the critical parameters viz., Weather; Market Prices; Plant Protection; input Dealers (Seed, Pesticide, Fertilizer) Farm Machinery; extreme weather alerts; Soil Health Card;
- With market information, farmers are better informed about markets to sell produce, prevailing market prices and quantity demanded in the market. Thus, they can make informed decisions to sell produce at the right price and right time.
 - Development of **'Farm Machinery package for Different Agro-Climatic Zones in India'** mobile application, which gives information on farm machinery package available for state-wise, agro-climatic zone wise, district-wise, cropping pattern wise and power source wise.
 - Development of **'My Ciphnet' mobile application** to help farmers to get precise information regarding the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) developed post-harvest technologies, products and machineries.
 - Development of **mKisan Portal** (www.mkisan.gov.in) for sending advisories on various crop related matter to the registered farmers through SMSs.
- i. Launching of **e-National Agriculture Market** initiative to provide farmers an electronic online trading platform.
 - ii. Introduction of **Soil Health Card Scheme** to assist State Governments in providing Soil Health Cards to all farmers across the country once in a cycle of 2 years. Soil health card provides information to the farmers on nutrient status of their soil along with recommendations on appropriate dosage of nutrients to be applied for improving crop productivity and soil fertility.
 - iii. Using **machine learning process** along with different computer algorithm for crop classification and area estimation.

The Government has also set up 713 Krishi Vigyan Kendras and 684 Agricultural Technology Management Agencies at district level for dissemination of technologies among farm community.

In addition, farmers are provided information through Focused Publicity Campaigns, Kisan Call Centres, Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres of entrepreneurs, Agri Fairs and exhibitions, Kisan SMS Portal, etc.

Black Money:

The story so far:

The Standing Committee on Finance recently came out with its report on the 'status of unaccounted income and wealth both inside and outside the country' in which, after consulting three premier think-tanks and doing multiple analyses using various methods, it came to the conclusion that there was no reliable way to quantify black money whether in India or abroad.

What is black money?

- There is no official definition of black money in economic theory, with several different terms such as parallel economy, black money, black incomes, unaccounted economy, illegal economy and irregular economy all being used more or less synonymously.
- The simplest definition of black money could possibly be money that is hidden from tax authorities. That is, black money can come from two broad categories: illegal activity and legal but unreported activity.
- Another major source of black money is income earned by companies that is routed through shell companies abroad, thereby evading tax authorities.

Why is it difficult to measure it?

- The very definition of black money makes it extremely difficult to quantify.
- How is the government supposed to measure the economic activity that is actively being hidden from it?
- According to the Standing Committee's report, the sectors that see the highest incidence of black money include real estate, mining,

pharmaceuticals, pan masala, the gutkha and tobacco industry, bullion and commodity markets, the film industry, and educational institutes and professionals.

- The estimates of the black money in the system provided by the Standing Committee vary from 7% of GDP to 120% of GDP, highlighting the wide variance in the methods of estimation.

What are some of the methods used?

One of the more popular methods is the monetary method.

- This method assumes that the existence of and changes in the share of unaccounted income is reflected in the stock or flow of money in the system.
- In other words, track the money in the economy and you'll get an idea of how much has not been accounted for.

Another method is the global indicator or input-based method.

- In this method, unaccounted income is modelled using a single universal variable with which it is assumed to be highly correlated, therefore these estimates are also called input-based estimates.
- Basically, the estimated level of activity in these indicators is compared to the reported level of GDP to arrive at an estimate of under-reporting..

A third method to measure black money is a straightforward survey.

- This one, however, requires voluntary information from people and businesses concealing their incomes and so is prone to inaccuracies.

How can the government curb black money?

There are several ways and the first is through legislative action.

- The government has already enacted several laws that seek to formalise the economy and make it necessary to report economic transactions.
- These include the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, the various GST Acts at the State levels, the Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign

Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015, the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, and the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act to name a few.

- Another method employed by the government to make it harder for transactions to be hidden is to mandate the reporting of PAN for transactions of more than ₹2.5 lakh, and the prohibition of cash receipts of ₹2 lakh or more and a penalty equal to the amount of such receipts if a person contravenes the provision.

The Income Tax Department has also started monitoring non-filers of income tax returns using third-party information to identify persons who have undertaken high value financial transactions but not filed their returns.

India and RCEP:

The story so far:

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which announced the idea of a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2012, is pushing stakeholders to conclude talks by the end of 2019 and take it forward.

India apart, Australia and New Zealand have raised concerns about joining such a partnership.

[What is RCEP and why does it matter for the world?](#)

- Billed as the world's biggest trade agreement, the RCEP of 10 ASEAN countries with its six free trade agreement (FTA) partners India, China, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea could well change the face of global trade as we know it.
- The RCEP includes countries that make up 45% of the world's population with 33% of its GDP, and at least 28% of all trade in the world today.
- If the RCEP is concluded, as ASEAN countries that are driving it hope it will be, by the end of this year, it will bring stability to an otherwise unpredictable world market.
- The worry is that it could also make world trade less flexible, putting members into a quasi-bloc with China at the helm.

- Most RCEP members also conduct substantial trade with the United States, and the ongoing U.S.-China trade war may force many of them to take sides, causing a geopolitical rift within the group even before it is fully formed.

Why has it taken so long to negotiate?

- While much has been agreed on, and all countries remain committed to concluding the RCEP agreement, the last-mile will only be crossed when all those concerns are met.
- In May this year, China proposed a plan to conclude the negotiations without the naysayers, i.e. take the ASEAN+3 (China, Japan and South Korea) into the agreement, while leaving space for India, Australia and New Zealand to join later.
- The Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, echoed the idea after the ASEAN summit last week, but the move was opposed by most in the grouping. As one ASEAN diplomat put it, given the size of India's market there is "no point without India in RCEP".
- For India, too, there are many reasons to stay in the deal. Apart from giving up the first mover's advantage, India would give up the chance to frame the grouping's rules and investment standards if it fails to join the RCEP at this stage.
- Staying out would also run counter to the Narendra Modi government's plans to ramp up its engagement with ASEAN countries through the "Act East" policy, as well as its hopes for maritime cooperation in the India-Pacific.

Why is India holding up the deal?

- India's chief concern with the RCEP is the fact that it needs to protect its economy from the flooding of cheap imports from China.
- Of all the countries in the RCEP, India is the only one not involved in any bilateral or multilateral negotiations for an FTA with China, and the worry for the government and industry is that an FTA within the RCEP will just become a cover for duty free trade into India for Chinese goods.
- RCEP negotiators have thus far agreed to allowing India a differential tariff ladder, for its FTA partners and its non-FTA partners (China, Australia and New Zealand) within the grouping.

- China wants zero tariffs for over 90 per cent tariff lines however, which could see low-cost “Made in China” goods kill locally manufactured goods.
- Several industry groups have already petitioned the government not to go ahead with the RCEP, including manufacturers of steel and aluminium, copper, pharmaceuticals and textile, which will be the worst hit in such a scenario.
- As a result, the government has been cautious about moving ahead. India has asked for strict “Rules of Origin” markings on all goods, so they don’t come in through a third country.

In addition, India wants to ensure the free flow of services (manpower) to RCEP countries as well, but has faced an uphill task as most countries tighten their immigration laws.

NPA accounts

What is It?

In terms of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), an asset becomes non-performing when it ceases to generate income for the bank.

As per the circular, a non-performing asset (NPA) is a loan or an advance where—

- a. in respect of a term loan, interest and/or instalments of the principal remain overdue for a period of more than 90 days;
- b. in respect of an Overdraft/Cash Credit, the account remains ‘out of order’;
- c. in respect of bills purchased and discounted, the bill remains overdue for a period of more than 90 days;
- d. in respect of agricultural loans, the instalment of principal or interest thereon remains overdue for—

- (i) two crop seasons for short-duration crops, and
- (ii) for one crop season for long-duration crops.

Steps taken to expedite and enable resolution of NPAs and recovery from NPA accounts, include, inter-alia, the following:

(1) **The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC)** has been enacted, which has provided for taking over the management of the affairs of the corporate debtor at the outset of the corporate insolvency resolution process.

(2) **Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act** has been amended to make it more effective, with provision for three months' imprisonment in case the borrower does not provide asset details and for the lender to get possession of mortgaged property within 30 days.

(3) Suits for recovery of dues are also filed by banks before **Debts Recovery Tribunals**. Six new Debts Recovery Tribunals have been established to expedite recovery.

(4) Under the PSB Reforms Agenda, PSBs have created **Stressed Asset Management Verticals** to focus attention on recovery, segregated monitoring from sanctioning roles in high-value loans, and entrusted monitoring of loan accounts of above Rs. 250 crore to specialised monitoring agencies for clean and effective monitoring, and created online end-to-end One-Time Settlement platforms for timely and better realisation.

Enabled by the above steps, Scheduled Commercial Banks have recovered Rs. 4,51,857 crore over the last four financial years, including record recovery of Rs. 1,50,789 crore during 2018-19.

National Common Mobility Card:

Why in News?

The National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) has been launched in India with the tagline of 'One Nation One Card'.

The High level Committee on Deepening of Digital Payments (CDDP) under chairmanship of Shri Nandan Nilekani has, inter-alia, also recommended that NCMC cards be usable at all transit locations.

All new metro, and transit payments should be made interoperable through NCMC.

About the Card:

- The NCMC card has 2 instruments on it – a regular debit card which can be used at an ATM, and a local wallet (stored value account), which can be used for contactless payments, without the need to go back to the server or additional authentication.
- It is envisioned that a single card will be usable for all local travel needs across the country. National Common Mobility Card is an open loop card, which can be used for all local travel needs in the country.
- This is aimed at low value payments for various segments e.g. Transit, Smart cities, Toll, Parking and other low value merchant payments, in addition to the normal day to day retail payments.
- The vision behind the introduction of this card is to have interoperability, based on open standards.

MoHUA has further informed that there is provision of storing money on the card, which can be used for contactless payments across various use cases like toll transit, parking etc.

Whaling resume in Japan:

Context:

Japan began its first commercial whale hunts in more than three decades on Monday, brushing aside outrage over its resumption of a practice that conservationists call cruel and outdated.

Background:

- The country's Fisheries Agency said it had set a cap for a total catch of 227 whales through the season until late December.
- The hunts come after Japan's withdrawal from the International Whaling Commission, a move slammed by anti-whaling activists but welcomed by Japanese whaling communities.
- Whaling has long proved a diplomatic flashpoint for Tokyo, which says the practice is a Japanese tradition that should not be subject to international interference.

About IWC:

- The **International Whaling Commission (IWC)** is an international body set up by the terms of the [International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling \(ICRW\)](#), which was signed in [Washington, D.C.](#), United States, on December 2, 1946 to "provide for the proper

conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry".

IWC on Whaling:

- In 1982 the IWC adopted a [moratorium](#) on commercial [whaling](#).
- Currently, [Japan](#), [Canada](#), and a number of other nations oppose this moratorium.
- The IWC allows non-zero whaling quotas for [aboriginal](#) subsistence and also member nations may issue 'Scientific Permits' to their citizens.
- Japan has issued such permits since 1986, Norway and [Iceland](#) whale under objection to the moratorium and issue their own quotas.
- In 1994, the [Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary](#) was created by the IWC.

Functions of IWC:

- The main duty of the IWC is to keep under review and revise as necessary the measures laid down in the Schedule to the Convention which govern the conduct of whaling throughout the world.
- These measures, among other things, provide for the complete protection of certain species; designate specified areas as whale sanctuaries; set limits on the numbers and size of whales which may be taken; prescribe open and closed seasons and areas for whaling; and prohibit the capture of suckling calves and female whales accompanied by calves.
- The compilation of catch reports and other statistical and biological records is also required.

Early Diagnosis of Heart Attack:

Why in News?

A cardiac biomarker — cardiac troponin I — that is widely used for early diagnosis of acute heart attack can now be detected in about three minutes and even when present at very low concentration. And the detection can be done at bedside.

This has become possible with the development of a microfluidic device by a team of researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad.

How does it work?

- The heart cells that get damaged during heart attack cause the expression of cardiac muscle proteins such as the biomarker cardiac troponin I, which get released into the blood.
- Detecting the biomaker in the blood serum helps in early diagnosis of heart attack.

Superior performance

- Commercially available assays have limitations in terms of both sensitivity and time taken for detection.
- These assays cannot detect when the biomarker is present at concentrations below 0.02 nanogram per ml and take a long time for detection.
- In contrast, the microfluidic device developed by the team from the Department of Biomedical Engineering at IIT Hyderabad can detect the biomarker even when the concentration is as low as 0.005 nanogram per ml.

Rapid detection

- The researchers have successfully integrated the microfluidic device with chitosan-coated nickel vanadate nanospheres to enable rapid detection and better sensitivity.

Bedside device

- Since the microfluidic device can be made tiny, detection of the biomaker can be made right at bedside..

BAN on GM CROPS

Context:

Bt. cotton is the only Genetically Modified (GM) crop approved in 2002 by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee of Ministry of

Environment, Forest and Climate Change for commercial cultivation in the Country and, therefore, cultivation of other unapproved GM crops are banned in India. Few incidences of suspected open cultivation of Bt. brinjal and HT cotton were reported in Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.

How are GM crops Controlled?

- There is a well established regulatory framework for approval of GM Crops under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 in the Country.
- Evaluation of each application of GM crop is done on a case-to-case basis after a thorough examination of health, environment, food and feed safety assessment studies as per prescribed guidelines, manuals and standard operating procedures stipulated by various regulatory agencies under the Rules, 1989 from time to time.
- The data generated by the applicants is reviewed at every step in the development process of GM crops by various Statutory Committees under the Rules, 1989 such as Institutional Biosafety Committee, Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation and Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee.

A series of guidelines and protocols have been issued by Department of Biotechnology and Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change relating to Genetically Modified Organisms and product thereof as under:

- i. Recombinant DNA Safety Guidelines, 1990
- ii. Revised Guidelines for Research in Transgenic Plants, 1998
- iii. Guidelines for the Safety Assessment of Foods Derived from Genetically Engineered Plants, 2008
- iv. Guidelines for the monitoring of Confined Field Trials of Regulated, Genetically Engineered (GE) Plants, 2008
- v. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Confined Field Trials of Regulated, Genetically Engineered (GE) Plants, 2008
- vi. Protocol for Food and Feed Safety Assessment of GE crops, 2008
- vii. Guidelines and Handbook for Institutional Bio-safety Committees (IBSCs), 2011
- viii. Environmental Risk Assessment of Genetically Engineered Plants: A Guide for Stakeholders, 2016
- ix. Guidelines for the Environmental Risk Assessment of Genetically Engineered Plants, 2016.
- x Risk Analysis Framework, 2016.

What are GM crops?

- **Genetically modified crops (GM crops)** are plants used in [agriculture](#), the [DNA](#) of which has been modified using [genetic engineering](#) methods.
- In most cases, the aim is to introduce a new [trait](#) to the plant which does not occur naturally in the species.
- Examples in food crops include resistance to certain pests, diseases, environmental conditions, reduction of spoilage, resistance to chemical treatments (e.g. resistance to a [herbicide](#)), or improving the nutrient profile of the crop.
- Examples in non-food crops include production of [pharmaceutical agents](#), [biofuels](#), and other industrially useful goods, as well as for [bioremediation](#).

Advantages:

- GM crops grown today, or under development, have been modified with various [traits](#). These traits include improved [shelf life](#), [disease resistance](#), stress resistance, [herbicide resistance](#), [pest resistance](#), production of useful goods such as biofuel or drugs, and ability to absorb toxins and for use in [bioremediation](#) of pollution.
- Recently, [research and development](#) has been targeted to [enhancement of crops](#) that are locally important in [developing countries](#), such as insect-resistant [cowpea](#) for Africa and insect-resistant [brinjal](#).

Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting

Why in News?

India has ratified the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (MLI), along with representatives of more than 65 countries.

What is It?

- The Multilateral Convention/MLI is an outcome of the OECD / G20 Project to tackle Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (the “BEPS Project”)

BEPS: It is a tax planning strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations where there is little or no economic activity, resulting in little or no overall corporate tax being paid.

- 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.

Effect of treaty:

- The MLI will modify India's tax treaties 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.
- The MLI will be applied alongside existing tax treaties, modifying their application in order to implement the BEPS measures.

When will it come in effect?

- The date of entry into force of the MLI for India is 1st day of October, 2019. In respect of the 22 treaty partners of India who have deposited the Instrument of Ratification on or before 30th June, 2019, entry into effect for India under MLI with respect to the DTAA shall be from financial year 2020-21 onwards.

National Food Security Act:

Context:

The stock of foodgrains in the Central Pool as on 1st June, 2019 was 741.41 lakh tons consisting of 275.81 lakh tons of rice and 465.60 lakh tons of wheat.

About NFSA:

- Government of India enacted National Food Security Act (NFSA) in July, 2013 which gives legal entitlement to 67% of the population (75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas) to receive highly subsidized foodgrains.
- Under the Act, foodgrain is allocated @ 5 kg per person per month for priority households category and @ 35 kg per family per month for AAY families at a highly subsidized prices of Rs. 1/-,

Rs. 2/- and Rs. 3/- per kg for nutri-cereals, wheat and rice respectively.

- Coverage under the Act is based on the population figures of Census, 2011.
- The Act is now being implemented in all 36 States/UTs and covers about 81.35 crore persons. The annual allocation of foodgrain under National Food Security Act and Other Welfare Schemes is about 610 Lakh Metric Tons.

Additional Coverage:

- The coverage of the sugar subsidy scheme introduced with effect from June, 2013, after de-regulation of sugar sector, targeted Below Poverty Line (BPL) population (inclusive of poorest of poor person in the country i.e. AAY families) and all the population of North Eastern States/ Special Category States/ Hilly States and Island Territories.
- Now, the NFSA is being universally implemented in the country.
- There is no identified category of BPL under the NFSA.
- However, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) beneficiaries are clearly identified.

Other Info:

In order to liquidate the excess stock of foodgrain in the Central Pool, Government of India avails the available options of disposal of the excess stock of foodgrain through Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) and Export on Government-to-Government basis, as export from public stockholding is not compliant to WTO norms.”

Linking of Organic Farming With Processing

Why in News?

Government of India has been promoting traditional farming in the States through dedicated Schemes, namely, Mission Organic Value Chain Development North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER) and Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) since 2015-16.

Salient features of the Scheme:

Under these schemes assistance is provided to the farmers for on-farm and off-farm input production/ procurement, creation of post harvest

infrastructure and connecting it through production to processing by the following ways :

- (i) **Market linkage** of producer clusters with some major agri-business, phytochemical and online grocery stores have been established under MOVCDNER.
- (ii) Providing incentives for infrastructure creation, storage, grading, packaging, branding, publicity, transportation, value addition, development of integrated value chain and organic fairs.
- (iii) Promoting formation of Farmer Producers Companies (FPCs)/ Organizations (FPOs)/ Clusters, thereby assisting member farmers to receive remunerative prices for their organic produce due to improved economies of scale, value addition and access to market for their organic produce.
- (iv) Government has launched a www.jaivikkheti.in portal acting both as a knowledge as well as marketing platform.

What is Organic Farming?

- **Organic farming** is an alternative agricultural system which originated early in the 20th century in reaction to rapidly changing farming practices.
- It is defined by the use of fertilizers of organic origin such as compost [manure](#), [green manure](#), and [bone meal](#) and places emphasis on techniques such as [crop rotation](#) and [companion planting](#).
- [Biological pest control](#), mixed cropping and the fostering of insect predators are encouraged.

Agricultural Landholdings Of India:

Salient Observation:

The number of small and marginal agricultural land holdings in the country (known as operational holdings) has registered a marginal increase in 2015-16 compared to 2010-11, according to the tenth agricultural census. This means that there are more people who now own smaller parcels of agricultural land.

- In a positive development, the percentage of land holders who are women has increased from 12.79% in 2010-11 to 13.87% in 2015-16, with a corresponding increase of 1.2 percentage points in the operated area.

This shows that more and more females are participating in the management and operation of agricultural lands,” according to a press release from the [Agriculture](#) Ministry.

- Small and marginal holdings (Below two hectares) constituted 86.21% of the total land holdings, an increase of 1.2 percentage points compared to 2010-11.
- However, the operated area (which includes any agricultural land, provided a part of it used for production) has shown a decline of 1.5%.
- It is noteworthy that marginal, small and medium land holdings constitute the lion’s share of operated area – large land holdings account for only 9% of the total operational area.
- The average size of operational holdings is highest in Nagaland (5 hectares) and lowest in Kerala (0.18 hectares).

Here's a breakdown of operational land holdings and area:

Classification	Range (ha)	2010-11 (mn.)	2015-16 (mn.)	% change
Small	<1	117.25	125.86	7.34%
Medium	1-4	19.72	19.3	-2.13%
Large	4-10	0.98	0.83	-15.31%

The above table shows that the number of small land holdings has registered an increase compared to the previous census, while the number of large land holdings has decreased.

Other Observations;

- The total number of land units used for agricultural production has shown a 5% increase in 2015-16 compared to 2010-11.

- The total number of operational holdings in the country has increased from 138 million in 2010-11 to 146 million in 2015-16.
- Uttar Pradesh is home to the largest number of land holders, constituting 16% of the total number.

Highlights of the Union Budget:

1. PAN and Aadhaar will become interchangeable. You can use your Aadhaar number to file your I-T Returns soon.
2. ₹5 lakh minimum limit announced for taxpayers. In view of rising income levels, those in the ₹2-5 crore and ₹5 crore-and-above brackets will see increase in effective tax rate by 3% and 7%, respectively.
3. GST rate on electric vehicles proposed to be lowered to 5%. Additional income tax deduction of ₹1.5 lakh on interest on loans taken to purchase electric vehicles.
4. Additional deduction of ₹1.5 lakh on loans up to March 31 2020 for buying affordable houses, giving ₹ 7 lakh benefit to home buyers.
5. Proposal to provide Aadhaar cards for NRIs with Indian passports, after their arrival in India, with no waiting period.
6. ₹20 coin coming up.
7. Excise duty on fuel hiked by ₹1.
8. To resolve the angel tax issue, startups will not be subject to any scrutiny in respect to valuation. Funds raised by startups will not require any scrutiny by the I-T department.
9. TDS of 2% on cash withdrawals exceeding ₹1 crore in a year from bank accounts, to discourage business payments in cash.
10. Period of exemption for capital gains arising from sale of house for investment in startups to be extended to March 31, 2021.
11. ₹70,000 crore in recapitalisation for public sector banks.
12. ₹1.05 lakh crore disinvestment target for the year.
13. TV channel to be launched for promoting startups and to help matchmaking for funds.
14. New national educational policy hopes to transform Indian education into one of the best in the world, with focus on bringing in foreign students.
15. ₹50 lakh crores proposed for Railway infrastructure.

16. By 2022, the 75th year of Independence, every single rural family, except those who are unwilling to take the connection, will have electricity and clean cooking facility.
17. Stress on zero-budget farming, which is a form of gardening as a self-sustainable practice, with minimum external intervention.
18. The pension benefit will be extended to 3 crore retail traders under PM Karam Yogi Maan Dhan Scheme. It requires only Aadhaar numbers and bank accounts.
19. ₹1 crore worth of loans proposed to MSMEs.
20. Investment by FIIs and FDIs in debt securities in infrastructure debt funds to be allowed. Minimum public shareholding in listed companies can be increased from 25% to 35%.
21. Global Investors Meet to happen in India.

Arctic Research:

Context:

In a couple of months, the German icebreaker RV Polarstern, a hulking ship will set out for the Arctic packed with supplies and scientific equipment for a year-long mission to explore the planet's frigid far north.

About the Mission:

- The icebreaker will be the base for scientists from 17 nations studying the impact of [climate change](#) on the Arctic and how it could affect the rest of the world.
- The mission's aim to understand global warming means there's no time for national rivalry, said Rex.
- By combining measurements on the ice with data collected from satellites, scientists hope to improve the increasingly sophisticated computer models for weather and climate predictions. “

Financing of the Mission:

The mission has received funding from U.S. institutions such as the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and NASA.

Background:

- The MOSAIC mission, which stands for Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate, comes about 125 years after Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen first managed to seal his wooden expedition ship, Fram, into the ice during a three-year expedition to the North Pole.
- Scientists now believe that the cold cap that forms each year is key to regulating weather patterns across the Northern Hemisphere.
- Mr. Rex cited the polar vortices that blasted cold air as far as Florida last winter and the early summer heat wave in Europe as prime examples of the impact.
- “The dramatic warming of the Arctic doesn’t stay in the Arctic.

Salt Adulteration:

Why in News?

Citing a report from U.S.-based West American Analytical Laboratories, Shiv Shankar Gupta, chairman of Godhum Grains and Food Products, accused some salt manufacturers in India of selling food-grade salt that contained high levels of potassium ferrocyanide. This caused a panic, which was aggravated by widespread sharing of the news item on social media.

Indeed, potassium ferrocyanide is being used in salt to give it anti-caking properties. But the answer to whether it is toxic is no!

Is it really dangerous?

- Firstly, while potassium cyanide is a toxic substance and releases the cyanide anion when consumed by a person, potassium ferrocyanide is not.
- In potassium ferrocyanide, the cyanide anion is strongly bonded to ferrous ion and hence does not get hydrolysed.
- Secondly, there is the factor known as the LD50 value. This is expanded as “Lethal Dose 50%”.
- LD50 is the amount of any chemical that can cause death in 50% of the group of animals that it enters by consumption or absorption through the skin.
- According to inorganic chemist Dr. Sayam Sengupta of IISER Kolkata, the LD50 value for common salt — sodium chloride — for rats is greater than 3 gram per kilogram body weight of the animal.

He points out that for potassium Ferrocyanide, LD 50 value is 3.6 gram per kilogram weight of the animal, when taken orally.

- As this indicates, the LD50 value of potassium ferrocyanide is almost the same as common salt.
- Thirdly, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has prescribed the levels of potassium ferrocyanide that can be used in salt.
- The allowed levels of potassium ferrocyanide in salt is 10 mg/kg. whereas the level in the Tata salt was found to be 1.90 mg/kg and that of Sambhar salt was found to be about 4.71 mg/kg, both within allowed levels.

Some countries such as the European Union have banned the use of potassium ferrocyanide as anti-caking agent. However, the analysis indicates that there is no reason to fear toxicity due to this chemical being used.