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CURRENT AFFAIRS

MONTHLY

THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT
YOUR FINGER TIPS.



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SCHEMES

1. ICDS Scheme

About ICDS:

- Launched on 2nd October, 1975, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme represents one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care and development.
- It is implemented by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**.

Beneficiaries

- The scheme is targeted at
 - children upto the age of 6 years,
 - pregnant and lactating mothers and
 - women 16–44 years of age.
- The scheme is aimed to improve the health, nutrition and education of the target community.

Services under ICDS

- The ICDS Scheme offers a package of six services, viz.
 - Supplementary Nutrition
 - Pre-school non-formal education
 - Nutrition & health education
 - Immunization
 - Health check-up and
 - Referral services

Why in News?

- NITI Aayog has prepared a draft working paper to revamp the ICDS scheme in urban areas.

2. Atal Pension Yojana

About the scheme

- Atal Pension Yojana (APY) is a pension scheme for workers in the **unorganised sector** like personal maids, drivers, gardeners etc. It was launched in 2015.

- APY aims to help these workers save money for their old age while they are working and guarantees returns post retirement.
- APY is administered by the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)**.
- The scheme also promises a **co-contribution by the Central Government of 50%** of the subscriber's contribution or Rs. 1,000 per annum, whichever is lower. The Government co-contribution is available for those who are not covered by any Statutory Social Security Schemes and is not an Income Tax payer.

Eligibility

- A person is eligible for the Atal Pension Yojana if they are:
 - An Indian citizen
 - Have a valid bank account
 - Are between **18 and 40 years of age**.

What is the monthly contribution?

- APY is a periodic contribution based pension plan and promises a minimum guaranteed monthly pension of Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000 at the age of 60 years depending on the contributions by the subscribers.

Why in News?

- The Finance Ministry is considering a proposal to relax the maximum monthly pension paid under the Atal Pension Yojana to Rs 10,000 and raise the maximum age limit for enrolling in the scheme to 50 years.

3. NIRVIK scheme

About the scheme

- The NIRVIK scheme, also called the Export Credit Insurance Scheme (ECIS), aims to provide **enhanced insurance cover and reduce premium for small exporters**. It also simplifies procedures for their claim settlements.
- The scheme enhances the insurance guarantee cover up to 90% of the principal and interest. At present, the Export Credit Guarantee Corporation provides credit guarantee of up to 60% loss.



What's in the news?

- The government has announced NIRVIK (Niryat Rin Vikas Yojana) scheme.

4. Swarna Jayanti Fellowships

About the programme

- Under Swarna Jayanti Fellowships scheme, a selected number of young scientists, with proven track record, are provided special assistance and support to enable them to pursue **basic research in frontier areas of science and technology**.

Why in News?

- Fourteen Indian scientists under 40 years of age were awarded the prestigious Swarna Jayanti Fellowships for 2018-19.
- The fellows, selected on the basis of their past work, innovative research idea and the potential to make an impact on R&D in the respective disciplines, will get a **monthly fellowship of Rs 25,000** and an **annual research grant of Rs 5 lakh**, for the next five years, in addition to their salary.

INITIATIVES

1. Street Lighting National Programme & UJALA

About SLNP

- The SLNP is a government scheme launched in 2015 to promote energy-efficiency in India by **replacing conventional street lights with energy efficient LED lights.**
- By March 2020, SLNP aims to replace 1.34 crore conventional streetlights in India with smart LEDs.
- **Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)**, a joint venture of PSUs under the **Ministry of Power**, is the implementing agency for SLNP.

UJALA

- UJALA scheme launched in 2015 aims to promote efficient use of energy at the **residential level**, enhance the awareness of consumers about the efficacy of using energy efficient appliances and aggregating demand to reduce the high initial costs thus facilitating higher uptake of LED lights by residential users.
- SLNP is the world's largest streetlight replacement programme and UJALA is the world's largest domestic lighting project.
- **Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)** is the implementing agency for UJALA.

Why in News?

- The UJALA & Street Lighting National Programme completed five years.

2. MANI

What is it?

- "Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI)" is a mobile app to **help visually-impaired people to identify the denomination of currency notes.**

- The application can scan the currency notes using the camera of the mobile phone.
- It also gives audio output in Hindi and English.
- The application also works offline once installed.

What's in the news?

- **The RBI** has launched the 'MANI' mobile app.

3. Bharat Parv 2020

About Bharat Parv:

- The objective of Bharat Parv is to encourage people to visit different tourism places of the country and to inculcate the spirit of 'Dekho Apna Desh'.
- It is organised by the **Ministry of Tourism.**
- Bharat Parv have many attractions for public like display of Tableaux of the Republic Day parade, performance by armed forces bands, tourism theme pavilion by State Governments/ Union Territory Administrations and line Ministries, handicraft & Handloom Stalls etc.

Why in News?

- Recently, Bharat Parv 2020 was celebrated at Red Fort ground in New Delhi.
- The theme of this year's Bharat Parv is 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' and 'Celebrating 150 Years of Mahatma Gandhi.

4. Bru Refugee Crisis

Who are the Brus?

- Bru or Reang is a community indigenous to Northeast India, living across **Tripura, Mizoram and southern Assam.**
- In **Mizoram**, they have been targeted by groups that do not consider them indigenous to the state. They are ethnically different from the majority Mizos, with their own distinct language and dialect.

Background:

- Clashes in 1995 with the Mizos led to the demand for the removal of the Brus, perceived to be non-indigenous, from Mizoram's electoral rolls. This led to an armed movement by a Bru outfit, which killed a Mizo forest official in 1997.
- The retaliatory ethnic violence led to nearly 37,000 Brus fleeing several districts of Mizoram and were accommodated in relief camps in **Tripura.**
- Since then, 5,000 have returned to Mizoram in eight phases of repatriation, while 32,000 still live in six relief camps in North Tripura as the majority of the community members refused to go back to Mizoram.

Why in News?

- An historic agreement was signed between Bru leaders and the governments of India, Tripura, and Mizoram which **gives the Bru the choice of living in either state (Tripura or Mizoram).**

Highlights of the new agreement:

- All Bru currently living in temporary relief camps in Tripura will be settled in the state, if they want to stay on. They would be given aid from the Centre to help with their rehabilitation through a package of around Rs 600 crores.
- These people would get all the rights that normal residents of the States get and they would now be able to enjoy the

benefits of social welfare schemes of the Centre and State governments.

5. BIS Hallmarking

About Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)

- BIS is the **National Standard Body of India** established under the **BIS Act 2016.**
- It functions under the aegis of the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.**
- Its mandate includes harmonious development of the activities of standardization, marking and quality certification of goods and for other relevant matters.
- BIS has its headquarters at New Delhi and it has five Regional Offices.

About BIS Hallmark

- The process of certifying the purity of gold by BIS is called hallmarking.
- There are two principle objectives of the hallmarking scheme:
 - To protect the public against adulteration
 - To obligate manufacturers to maintain legal standards of fineness/purity

Why in News?

- BIS Hallmarking has been made mandatory for gold ornaments from January 15, 2021.
- Instead of ten grades earlier, registered jewellers will be allowed to sell jewellery and artefacts only in three grades of gold -- 14, 18 and 22 carat.

6. Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers Act 2013

Main features of the Act

- The **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**, prohibits the employment of manual scavengers, the manual cleaning of sewers and septic

tanks without protective equipment, and the construction of insanitary latrines.

- It seeks to rehabilitate manual scavengers and provide for their alternative employment.
- Each occupier of insanitary latrines shall be responsible for converting or demolishing the latrine at his own cost. If he fails to do so, the local authority shall convert the latrine and recover the cost from him.
- The **District Magistrate** and the **local authority** shall be the implementing authorities.
- Offences under the Act shall be **cognizable and non-bailable**.
- **National Commission for Safai Karamcharis** would monitor implementation of the Act and enquire into complaints regarding contravention of the provisions of the Act.

About National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK)

- NCSK was constituted in 1994 as a **statutory body** under the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993, for a period of three years i.e. up to 31st March, 1997.
- With the lapsing of the 1993 Act, the Commission is acting as a **Non-Statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** whose tenure is extended from time to time through Government Resolutions.
- NCSK looks into matters concerning the Safai Karamcharis' welfare and makes recommendations to the government.
- **Note:** Safai Karamchari means a person engaged in, or employed for any sanitation work and includes his/her dependants.

Why in News?

- The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis reviewed the implementation of Prohibition of

Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

- NCSK flagged that of the 926 deaths inside sewers in the country, from 1993 till December 31, 2019, families of 172 victims were yet to receive compensation.

7. Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas

About PBD:

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated on 9th January every year **to mark the contribution of Overseas Indian community in the development of India**.
- The day commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to Mumbai on 9 January 1915.
- It is celebrated **once in every two years** to strengthen the engagement of the overseas Indian community with the Government of India and reconnect them with their roots.

Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award

- The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) is the highest honour conferred on overseas Indians.
- PBSA is conferred by the President of India as a part of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Conventions.

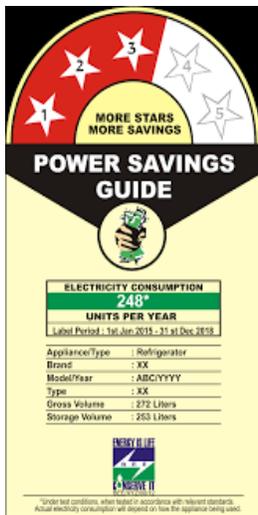
Why in News?

- Indian embassies in different countries celebrated Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas on January.

8. Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) star rating

About BEE Star Rating

- Star ratings are provided by the BEE to all the major kinds of appliances in the form of labels. These star ratings are given out of 5 and they provide a basic sense of how energy efficient each product is, just in a single glance.



- The manufacturers are officially required to put these labels as per the **Standards and Labelling Program introduced in 2006**.
- Appliances which need to have an energy rating label **mandatorily** are Frost-free refrigerator, Tubular Fluorescent Lamps, Room Air-Conditioners, Distribution Transformer, Colour TV, CST AC, Direct Cool Refrigerator and Electric Geyser.
- The appliances with the lowest energy consumption in a product category are given the most stars and those with the highest energy consumption are given the least.

About BEE:

- BEE is a **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Power**.
- It assists in developing policies and strategies with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy.
- BEE coordinates with designated consumers, designated agencies, and other organizations to identify and utilize the existing resources and infrastructure, in performing the functions assigned to it under the **Energy Conservation Act, 2001**.

Why in News?

- The Central Government in consultation with the Bureau of Energy Efficiency has notified new energy performance standards for Room Air Conditioners.
- The new standards make it mandatory for all brands and types of star labelled Air Conditioners to have 24 degree Celsius as the default temperature from January 1, 2020.

9. Bhuvan Panchayat 3.0

About Bhuvan portal

- Bhuvan is the national Geo-portal developed and hosted by **ISRO** comprising Geo Spatial Data, Services and Tools for Analysis. It was launched in 2009.
- It was developed for database visualization, data analytics, generation of automatic reports, model based products and services for the benefit of **Gram Panchayat members and other stakeholders belonging to the gram panchayats**.
- The portal is a part of the advanced **Space-based Information Support for Decentralised Planning (SISDP) project** which strives to assist Gram Panchayats at grassroot level with basic planning inputs derived from satellite data for preparing developmental plans, its implementation and monitoring the activities.

Why in News?

- Government has launched the third version of the Bhuvan portal.
- Under the Bhuvan Panchayat web portal 3.0, ISRO will collaborate with the gram panchayat members and stakeholders to understand their data requirements.
- For the first time, a thematic database on a **1:10,00 scale for the entire country** is available with integrated high resolution satellite data for planning.

10. Mission Purvodaya

About Mission Purvodaya

- Purvodaya in the steel sector is aimed at driving **accelerated development of Eastern India through establishment of integrated steel hub.**
- The proposed Integrated Steel Hub, encompassing Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Northern Andhra Pradesh, would serve as a torchbearer for socio-economic growth of Eastern India.
- The objective of this hub would be to enable swift capacity addition and improve overall competitiveness of steel producers both in terms of cost and quality. The Integrated Steel Hub would focus on 3 key elements:
 - Capacity addition through easing the setup of Greenfield steel plants
 - Development of steel clusters near integrated steel plants as well as demand centres
 - Transformation of logistics and utilities infrastructure which would change the socio-economic landscape in the East.

Why in News?

- Government has launched Mission PURVODAYA.

11. HSN Code

About HSN code

- Every traded product is categorised under an HSN code (**harmonised system of nomenclature**)—the global systematic classification of goods.
- Imports termed 'others' do not have HSN codes and are tagged along with parts and accessories of categorised goods.

Why in News?

- Concerned over rise in imports in the 'others' category, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said that within a month, high duty will be imposed on all products categorised as 'others' if the importers do not carry the specific globally-accepted HSN tariff code.
- Of over \$500 billion worth of imports in 2018-19, the 'others' category accounted for goods worth \$130 billion.

ENVIRONMENT

1. Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

About Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

- The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) lies at the trijunction of the three southern states of India – **Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.**
- It was the **first biosphere reserve** in India established in 1986.
- The NBR is biogeographically part of the **Indo-Malayan realm.**
- The Reserve is home to moist, dry, evergreen and montane (shola) tropical forests.
- The Nilgiri tahr, Nilgiri langur, slender loris, blackbuck, tiger, gaur and Indian elephant are some of the animals in NBR.
- **Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, Mukurthi National Park and Silent Valley** are the protected areas present within this reserve.
- Many of the **major tributaries of the river Cauvery** like **Bhavani, Moyar, Kabini and other rivers like Chaliyar, Punampuzha,** etc., have their source and catchment areas within the reserve boundary.

Why in News?

- Kerala forest and wildlife department is planning to adopt steps to arrest the rampant growth of invasive plants, especially **Senna spectabilis**, in the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

What are invasive species?

- An invasive species can be any kind of living organism—an amphibian, plant, insect, fish, fungus, or bacteria—that is not native to an ecosystem and causes harm.
- **Not all non-native species are invasive.** For example, most of the food

crops grown in India, including onion, potato and tomatoes are not native to the region.

- To be invasive,
 - a species must adapt to the new area easily
 - it must reproduce quickly
 - it must harm the economy, or the native plants and animals of the region
- Some of the most serious invasive species in India are *Alternanthera philoxeroides*, *Cassia uniflora*, *Chromolaena odorata*, *Eichhornia crassipes*, *Lantana camara*, *Parthenium hysterophorus* and *Prosopis juliflora*, etc.

What is *Senna spectabilis*?

- It is an extremely fast-growing invasive species from tropical America.



- Its thick foliage arrests the growth of other indigenous tree and grass species and causes food shortage for the wildlife population, especially herbivores. Also, wildlife will not feed on the leaf of the tree as it is not palatable for them.
- The **allelochemicals** produced by this plant adversely affect the germination and growth of the native species

2. HCFC-141 b

What is HCFC-141 b?

- Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b is a chemical used by foam manufacturing enterprises and one of the most potent **ozone depleting chemicals** after Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).
- (HCFC)-141 b is used mainly as a blowing agent in the production of rigid polyurethane (PU) foams.

Why in News?

- India has successfully completed the phasing out of Hydrochlorofluorocarbon-141 b.

Related information

About Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs)

- These are gases used worldwide in refrigeration, air-conditioning and foam applications, but they are being phased out under the **Montreal Protocol** since they deplete the ozone layer.
- HCFCs are both **ozone-depleting substances** and powerful **greenhouse gases**: the most commonly used HCFC is nearly 2,000 times more potent than carbon dioxide in terms of its global warming potential (GWP).

About Montreal Protocol

- It seeks to cut the production and consumption of ozone depleting substances in order to protect the earth's fragile ozone layer.
- It came into force in 1989 and **aims to phase out HCFCs by 2030**.
- The Montreal Protocol is signed by 197 countries (including **India**)– the first treaty in the history of the United Nations to achieve **universal ratification** – and is considered by many the most successful environmental global action.
- In 2016, Parties to the Montreal Protocol adopted the **Kigali amendment** to phase down production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) worldwide.

3. Ramsar Convention

About Ramsar Convention

- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance signed in 1971, is an international treaty for the **conservation and sustainable use of wetlands**. It is the only global treaty that focuses specifically on wetlands.
- Today 171 nations are signatories (including **India**) to the Ramsar Convention. A contracting party agrees to nominate at least one wetland in its territory to the List of Wetlands of International Importance based on enumerated criteria.
- In addition, contracting parties agree to manage all their wetlands based on the concept of “**wise use**.” Wise use means the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland and allowance of sustainable use for the benefit of people and the environment.

What are Wetlands?

- A wetland is a land area that is saturated with water, either permanently or seasonally, and it takes on the characteristics of a distinct ecosystem
- The Ramsar Convention defines wetlands as "areas of marsh, fen, peatlands or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water, the depth of which at low tide **does not exceed six metres**".
- **Five major wetland types are generally recognized:**
 - marine (coastal wetlands including coastal lagoons, rocky shores, and coral reefs);
 - estuarine (including deltas, tidal marshes, and mangrove swamps);

- lacustrine (wetlands associated with lakes);
 - riverine (wetlands along rivers and streams); and
 - palustrine (meaning “marshy” - marshes, swamps and bogs).
- The definition of wetlands is very broad and includes ponds, water storage areas, low-tide coastal zones and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and salt pans.

About Montreux record:

- The Montreux Record is a register of wetland sites on the List of Ramsar wetlands of international importance where **changes in ecological character** have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.
- It is maintained as **part of the Ramsar List**.
- Currently **Keoladeo National Park** and **Keibul lamjao national park** are being kept under the record for taking appropriate steps for ecological restoration.

Why in News?

- 10 more wetlands in India have been declared as Ramsar sites.
- The new Ramsar sites of India are in three states — Uttar Pradesh (Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and Sarsai Nawar), Maharashtra (Nandur Madhameshwar) and Punjab (Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal).
- With this, a total of **37 sites** in the country have been recognised under the international treaty.

4. Irrawaddy dolphins

Irrawaddy Dolphins

- Irrawaddy dolphins are found in coastal areas in South and Southeast Asia, and in three rivers: the Ayeyarwady (Myanmar), the Mahakam (Indonesian Borneo) and the Mekong (a trans-boundary river in Southeast Asia).
- The Irrawaddy dolphin is not a true river dolphin, but an oceanic one that lives in **brackish water** near coasts, river mouths and in estuaries.
- It is categorised as **Schedule-I** animal under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- As per IUCN Red List, it is classified as **endangered**.
- In India, Irrawaddy dolphins are mostly found in Chilika Lake of Odisha.



About Chilka Lake:

- Chilika Lake is the **largest brackish water lagoon** in the country, situated in Odisha.
- In 1981, Chilika Lake was designated the first Indian wetland of international importance under the **Ramsar Convention**.
- The lake became a part of **Montreux Record** in 1993 due to siltation which was choking the mouth of the river. After carrying out the restoration work, it was removed from the Montreux Record in 2002.
- **The Nalaban Island** within the lake is notified as a Bird Sanctuary under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Why in News?

- In a recent Dolphin Census in Chilika lake, direct sighting of 146 Irrawaddy dolphins has been reported.
- **Hydrophone monitoring technique** was used to detect dolphins for the census.
- A hydrophone is a microphone designed to be used underwater for recording or listening to underwater sound.

5. African Cheetah in India

Asiatic Cheetah

- Asiatic cheetah is classified as a “**critically endangered**” species by the IUCN Red List, and is believed to survive only in **Iran**.
- Asiatic cheetahs were once widespread across India but were eradicated in the country as they were hunted for sport.
- In 1952, Asiatic cheetah was **declared extinct** from India.
- Asiatic cheetahs are almost identical in appearance to their better known African cousins. However, there are subtle differences.
 - The Asiatic cheetah is slightly smaller and paler than its African cousin.



African cheetah

Asiatic cheetah

African Cheetah

- The African cheetah is spread out across Africa from Northwest Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa. With a bigger territory, the African cheetahs

have higher populations compared to Asiatic cheetahs.

- They are categorised as **Vulnerable** in the IUCN Red List.

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court lifted its stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis.
- **Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary** in Madhya Pradesh is most likely to be selected as the new home for these mammals.

Why do conservationists want to reintroduce cheetahs?

- A section of conservationists has long advocated the reintroduction of the species in the country.
- They argue that introductions of large carnivores have increasingly been recognised as a strategy to conserve threatened species and restore ecosystem functions.
- The cheetah is the only large carnivore that has been extirpated, mainly by over-hunting in India in historical times. India now has the economic ability to consider restoring its lost natural heritage for ethical as well as ecological reasons.

6. Yellow rust disease

What is it?

- Yellow rust is a **fungal disease** which mainly affects **wheat** crops.
- It turns the crop's leaves into a yellowish colour and stops photosynthesis activity, which eventually could result in a drop of wheat crop productivity.

Why in News?

- The detection of yellow rust disease in the wheat crop in sub-mountainous parts of Punjab and Haryana has raised anxiety among farmers.

7. Extended producer responsibility

Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016

- The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 aim to:
 - **Increase minimum thickness** of plastic carry bags from 40 to 50 microns and stipulate minimum thickness of 50 micron for plastic sheets also to facilitate collection and recycle of plastic waste
 - Expand the jurisdiction of applicability from the municipal area to **rural areas**, because plastic has reached rural areas also
 - To bring in the responsibilities of producers and generators, both in plastic waste management system and to introduce collect back system of plastic waste by the producers/brand owners, as per **extended producers responsibility**
 - To introduce collection of **plastic waste management fee** through pre-registration of the producers, importers of plastic carry bags/multilayered packaging and vendors selling the same for establishing the waste management system
 - To **promote use of plastic waste for road construction** as per Indian Road Congress guidelines or **energy recovery, or waste to oil etc.** for gainful utilization of waste and also address the waste disposal issue;

Why in News?

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) asked e-commerce giants Amazon and Flipkart to fulfil their extended producer responsibility under the Plastic Waste Management Rules,

2016 and to establish a system for collecting back the plastic waste generated due to the packaging of their products.

About CPCB:

- The Central Pollution Control Board is a **statutory organisation** under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It was constituted in 1974 under the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.**
- Further, CPCB was entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. It also provides technical services to the Ministry of Environment and Forests of the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The mandate of the CPCB is to set environmental standards in India, lay down ambient standards and coordinate the activities of State Pollution Control Boards.

8. Coastal Regulation Zone

About CRZ

- The coastal regulation zone, or CRZ refers to regions in the proximity of India's 7000-km long shoreline where buildings, tourism facilities, industrial projects, residential facilities etc are highly regulated.
- To manage human activities and also protect the fragile ecosystem of areas such as coastlines, wetlands, eusturies, near the coasts, the government came up with CRZ rules in 1991 under the **Environment Protection Act 1986.** Subsequent amendments came in 2011 and 2018.
- CRZ rules subdivide the zone into regions, with varying leeway for infrastructure development, depending on population and ecological sensitivity.

- There are 4 different types of zones:
- **(CRZ-1):** It includes the most ecologically sensitive areas and according to current laws it can't be used for tourism activities and infrastructure development but can be used for defence, strategic and rare public utilities projects.
- **(CRZ-II):** Urban areas that have already been developed up to the shoreline.
- **(CRZ-III):** Mainly Rural areas that are relatively undisturbed and those which do not belong to either Category I or II.
- **(CRZ-IV):** Includes the water area covered between the Low Tide Line and 12 nautical miles seaward.

Salient features of the CRZ Notification, 2018

- It was based on the recommendations of a committee headed by **Dr. Shailesh Nayak**.



Index

- CRZ I A: Eco-sensitive areas
- CRZ I B: Inter-tidal areas
- CRZ II: Areas which have been developed up to or close to the shore
- CRZ III A: CRZ-III areas, where the population density is more than 2,161 sq km as per 2011 Census
- CRZ III B: Areas with population density of less than 2,161 per sq km, as per 2011 Census
- CRZ IV A: 12 nautical miles from the Low Tide Line towards the sea
- CRZ IV B: Tidal influenced waterbodies
- NDZ: 50 metres from High Tide Line in CRZ III A areas, 200 m from HTL in CRZ-III B areas

- It permits nature trails and eco-tourism activities in CRZ-1 regions provided they conform to state-approved coastal zone management plans.
- The new rules have mandated that for tidal influenced water bodies, CRZ will be between the **High Tide Line to 50**

metres, instead of the earlier 100 metres.

- A **No Development Zone (NDZ) of 20 meters** has been proposed to be stipulated for all Islands close to the mainland coast and for all Backwater Islands in the mainland.
- For CRZ-III (Rural) areas, two separate categories have now been stipulated:
 - **CRZ-III A** - These are densely populated rural areas with a population density of 2161 per square kilometre. Such areas shall have a **NDZ of 50 meters** from the HTL as against 200 meters from the High Tide Line stipulated in the CRZ Notification, 2011.
 - **CRZ-III B** - Rural areas with a population density of below 2161 per square kilometre. Such areas shall continue to have an **NDZ of 200 meters** from the HTL.
- **Temporary tourism facilities** such as shacks, toilet blocks, change rooms, drinking water facilities etc. have now been permitted in Beaches. Such temporary tourism facilities are also now permissible in the NDZ of the CRZ-III areas. However, a minimum distance of 10 m from HTL should be maintained for setting up such facilities.
- Only those projects located in CRZ-I and CRZ-IV shall require **MoEF clearance**. All other projects shall be considered by Coastal Zone Management Authorities (CZMAs) in the **states and union territories**.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has relaxed CRZ rules to help States construct infrastructure and enable them to receive 'Blue Flag' certification.

- They have permitted activities required for the Blue flag in the CRZ, including Islands, subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from HTL (High Tide Line).
- In 2019, the Ministry selected 13 beaches in India which will aspire to get a blue flag certificate.

What is Blue Flag Certification?

- The Blue Flag certification is given to environmental- friendly, clean beaches, marinas which are equipped with amenities of international standards for tourists.
- There are 33 environment and tourism-related conditions for Blue Flag Certification. Few of them include, having proper waste disposal systems, availability of clean water for tourists, disabled friendly etc.
- The Blue Flag Programme for beaches and marinas is run by **FEE (the Foundation for Environmental Education)** – a Copenhagen based international, non governmental, non-profit organisation.
- Indian beaches are being developed by the **Society for Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM)** according to the Blue Flag certification standards.

9. Green Credit Scheme

About Green credit Scheme

- It is Scheme for reforestation.
- The scheme allows Forest to be traded as commodity.
- It allows the Forest Department to outsource one of its responsibilities of reforesting to non-government agencies.

What is the current system?

- **Forest Conservation Act, 1980** mandates that whenever industries divert forest land for non-forestry

purposes, equivalent non-forest land must be identified for compensatory afforestation.

- In addition to this, industries must pay the State Forest Department the current economic equivalent — called **Net Present Value** — of the forest land.
- It is then the Forest Department's responsibility to grow appropriate vegetation that, over time, would grow into forests.

What is the issue?

- Industries have often complained that they find it **hard to acquire appropriate non-forest land**, which has to be contiguous to existing forest.

How does the new scheme address this issue?

- The proposed 'Green Credit Scheme' allows agencies — they could be private companies, village forest communities — to identify land and begin growing plantations.
- After three years, they would be eligible to be considered as compensatory forest land if they met the Forest Department's criteria.
- An industry needing forest land could then approach the agency and pay it for parcels of such forested land, and this would then be transferred to the Forest Department and be recorded as forest land.
- Thus, in essence, the **scheme allows "forests" to be traded as a commodity.**

Benefits of the proposed scheme

- Such a scheme will encourage plantation by individuals outside the traditional forest area and will help in meeting international commitments such as sustainable development goals and **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** to the Paris deal.
- *(Refer Pulse November edition for details on Paris deal & India's NDCs for the deal)*

Criticisms

- However, the proposed scheme is criticised by environmentalists as it does not solve the core problems of compensatory afforestation.
- They claim that it creates problems of privatising multi-use forest areas as monoculture plantation plots and the scheme treats forests as a mere commodity without any social or ecological character.

Why in News?

- The Forest Advisory Committee has recommended the 'Green Credit Scheme'.
- It should be approved by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for implementation.

What is the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC)?

- FAC is a **statutory body** of the Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change formed under the **Forest Conservation Act of 1980**.
- It considers questions on the diversion of forest land for non-forest uses such as mining, industrial projects, townships and advises the government on the issue of granting forest clearances.

10. New Wetland Conservation Rules

About Wetland Conservation Rules

- These rules are framed by Union government through the provisions of the **Environment protection act 1986**.
- The Centre has notified a new set of rules under the head Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 replacing the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2010.

- Nearly two and a half years after it had notified the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 for conservation and management of wetlands in the country, the Indian government's Environment Ministry has now come out with guidelines to support state governments in the implementation of the rules.

Major provision of the new rules

- The new Wetland Conservation Rules prohibits setting up or expansion of **industries and disposal of construction and demolition waste** within the wetlands.
- Each state and Union Territory will have to **set up an authority** that will define strategies for conservation and wise use of wetlands within their jurisdiction.
- The Ministry has also created a **web portal** for sharing information regarding the implementation of Wetlands Rules where the central government, state governments are required to upload all relevant information and documents pertaining to wetlands in their jurisdiction.

What's in the news?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified the new Wetland Conservation Rules.

11. Australian Bushfire

What is a bushfire?

- Bushfires are a type of wildfire that occurs in the bush (collective term for forest, scrub, woodland or grassland of Australia, New Zealand).
- These fires are particularly common in areas that experience hot, dry weather, like Australia, Greece, Africa and parts of the USA, like California.

Why in News?

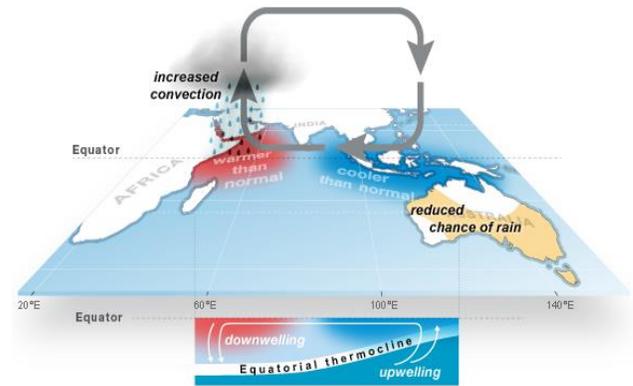
- Australia faced devastating bushfires on a scale that is unprecedented anywhere in the world.

How common are forest fires in Australia?

- Australia is known to be the most fire-prone of all continents. This is mainly because Australia is also the **driest inhabited continent**. Almost 70 per cent of its area comprises arid or semi-arid land, with average annual rainfall less than 350 mm.
- Bushfires are a regular feature in Australia's calendar often triggered by natural causes such as lightning strikes. But this year's fires have been aggravated by an impending drought and record high temperatures.

Why are exorbitant bushfires this year?

- 2019 happened to be the **warmest and driest year** for the country since 1900. Daytime temperatures were, on an average, 2°C higher than normal, while average rainfall for the country was 40% below normal. **Heat and dryness** are the key preconditions for the ignition and spread of forest fires.
- Australia is in the midst of a **prolonged drought**, now spreading to three consecutive years.
- The problem has been compounded by the presence of one of the strongest-ever **positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)** events.
 - The IOD, which refers to the difference in sea-surface temperatures in the eastern and western Indian Ocean, either aids or cuts off moisture supply to Australia, depending on whether the western Indian Ocean is cooler or the eastern.
 - This year, the eastern Indian Ocean has been unusually cold, and that contributed to the rainfall deficiency over Australia.



Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD): Positive phase

© Commonwealth of Australia 2013.

- Another indicator of the extent of dryness this year is the **condition of soil moisture** which is at historic lows in the areas most affected by the fires.

- Scientists also point to a rare phenomenon over Antarctica known as **sudden stratospheric warming** — temperatures were 30°C to 40°C higher than normal in the region 10 to 50 km from Earth's surface — as yet another extraordinary weather event that could have contributed to the unusual heat and dryness in Australia.

Can it be attributed to climate change?

- There is strong evidence to indicate that nearly all the drivers of the extraordinary heat and dryness in Australia such as the warming trend that made 2019 the warmest year on record for Australia, the prolonged drought, severe rainfall deficiencies, the strongly positive IOD and low soil moisture can all be attributed to climate change.

Effects on Australian Biodiversity

- Australia has extraordinarily high levels of biodiversity and is **one of 17 countries with 'megadiversity'** of plant, insect and animal life.
- In terms of hectares burnt the Australian fires are the **largest to affect any of the megadiverse countries**—that is, larger than the 2019 Amazon and 2019 Californian fires.
- On this biodiversity measure alone, the scale of these bushfires is unprecedented anywhere in

the world. Australia has lost at least a billion birds, mammals and reptiles this bushfire season.

Related information

What is sudden stratospheric warming?

- Sudden stratospheric warming occurs when rapid warming begins high up in the stratosphere — the second major layer of Earth's atmosphere.
- The events typically start towards the end of winter, when mountains or the contrast between warm ocean temperatures and cold land masses generate continental-scale atmospheric disturbances known as **Rossby waves**. If these are large enough, they can reach into the stratosphere and break like a wave over a beach, compressing and warming the air in the stratosphere above the pole.
- While sudden stratospheric warming is common and occurs every second year on average in the northern hemisphere associated with cold weather, it is a **rarity in the southern hemisphere**.
- This rare phenomenon occurred in the southern hemisphere during **October 2019** and spiked temperatures in the South Pole by more than 40 degrees Celsius. It also led to record-breaking warm temperatures in Australia by triggering hot, dry winds across Australia.

ORGANISATIONS

1. Central Adoption Resource Authority

About CARA

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a **statutory body of the Ministry of Women & Child Development** established in 1990.
- It functions as the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate **in-country and inter-country adoptions**.
- CARA is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in accordance with the provisions of the **Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993**, ratified by India in 2003.
- Indian citizens can adopt in India under three major legislations:
 - **The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956** which is applicable to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs.
 - **The Guardian and Wards Act of 1890** assist other religions i.e. Muslim, Parsi, Christian and Jews in adoption as there are no concrete provisions under their personal laws.
 - **The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act of 2015** covers the rehabilitation and social reintegration for orphan children and also allows secular adoption whereby without any reference to the community or religious persuasions of the parents or the child concerned.

Why in News?

- The Central Adoption Resource Authority has begun a nationwide capacity building programme for social workers who help assess the suitability

of the adoptive family and prepare a child for a new home.

2. Blue Dot Network

What is the Blue Dot network?

- The Blue Dot network (BDN) was jointly launched by **the US, Japan and Australia** in 2019 in Thailand.
- It is meant to be a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to bring governments, the private sector and civil society together to **promote high quality, trusted standards for global infrastructure development**, with a special emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region.

Significance of BDN

- BDN is seen as a part of the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, which is aimed at countering China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- However, unlike the BRI, the **BDN would not offer public funds or loans for projects**.
- The BDN network seeks to set up a **globally recognised certification system for infrastructure projects** based on different parameters such as viable funding arrangements, environmental soundness and high labour standards, so as to shore up quality infrastructural investments.
- **India is not a member of both the BDN and China's BRI.**

Why in News?

- Some US officials conveyed their hope that India would join the U.S.-led Blue Dot network.

3. World Trade Organization

About WTO

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an intergovernmental organization that

is concerned with the regulation of international trade between nations.

- The WTO officially commenced on 1 January 1995 under the **Marrakesh Agreement**, signed by 123 nations on 15 April 1994, replacing the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**, which commenced in 1948.
- It is the largest international economic organization in the world.
- The WTO deals with regulation of **trade in goods, services and intellectual property** between participating countries by providing a framework for negotiating trade agreements and a dispute resolution process aimed at enforcing participants' adherence to WTO agreements, which are signed by representatives of member governments ratified by their parliaments.
- The WTO prohibits discrimination between trading partners, but provides exceptions for environmental protection, national security, and other important goals.
- Trade-related disputes are resolved by independent judges at the WTO through a dispute resolution process.

Dispute resolution mechanism of the WTO

- According to the procedure established by the WTO, the first step to resolve a trade dispute is engaging in the **consultation process**.
- If two trading partners having a dispute could not resolve at that level, one of them can ask for a settlement of the **Dispute Settlement Body (DSB)** for hearing.
- The DSB's ruling can be challenged at the **appellate body**, the highest court for global trade disputes.

WTO's Appellate Body

- The Appellate Body is a standing committee of **seven members** that presides over appeals against judgments passed in trade-related disputes brought by WTO members.
- Members of the Appellate Body have four-year terms.
- In the selection process, WTO members follow the **consensus principle**, which means that the nomination of the Appellate Body members can only proceed smoothly with the agreement of all 164 members of the WTO.
- The Appellate Body **must have at least three sitting members** to hear an appeal.

Why in News?

- The Appellate Body has become dysfunctional because of the United States' refusal to approve the appointment of new members to the body.
- Consequently, the Appellate Body is left with only one member, who will not be able to deliver any rulings on pending trade disputes as a minimum of three members is required to adjudicate any dispute.

4. Asian Development Bank

About ADB

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) was founded in 1966 with the primary mission of fostering growth and cooperation among countries in the Asia-Pacific Region.
- It is headquartered in **Manila, Philippines**.
- At present, ADB comprises 68 members (including **India**)- of which 49 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.
- The ADB was **modeled closely on the World Bank**, and has a similar weighted

voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.

- The two largest shareholders of the ADB are the **US and Japan**.
- ADB is an official United Nations Observer.

Why in News?

- In its latest **Asian Development Outlook 2019**, the ADB has slashed India's GDP growth to 5.1% for FY19, down from 6.5%. The bank has also cut

its FY20 forecast to 6.5%, down from 7.2%.

- The downward revision comes on the back of risk aversion and a credit crunch in the economy resulting from the IL&FS crisis in August 2018.
- The report also cited slumping consumption due to slow job growth and rural distress aggravated by a poor harvest as factors weighing down on the Indian economy.

FLORA & FAUNA

1. Chinese paddlefish

About the fish:

- The Chinese paddlefish (*Psephurus gladius*) was an iconic species, measuring up to 7 m in length, dating back from 200 million years ago. Its ancestral home was the Yangtze River.
- They were commonly caught in the Yangtze throughout the 1970s and the erection of the Gezhouba Dam in 1981 effectively halved its population.
- The last verifiable sighting of a paddlefish occurred in 2003.

Why in News?

- The Chinese Paddlefish becomes the first extinct species of 2020 according to the IUCN Red List criteria.

Criteria to be declared as extinct

- The **IUCN Red List of Threatened Species** is considered as the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species. It uses a set of quantitative criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species.

- The Red List consists of **Nine categories** such as *NOT EVALUATED, DATA DEFICIENT, LEAST CONCERN, NEAR THREATENED, VULNERABLE, ENDANGERED, CRITICALLY ENDANGERED, EXTINCT IN THE WILD* and *EXTINCT*.

Endangered Species: Categories and Criteria

	Population Reduction Rate	Geographic Range		Population Size	Population Restrictions	Extinction Probability (in the wild)
		Extent of Occurrence	Area of Occupancy			
Least Concern	A species that has a widespread and abundant population					
Near Threatened	A species that is likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future					
Vulnerable Species	30-50% population decline	<20,000 km ²	<2,000 km ²	<10,000 mature individuals	<1,000 mature individuals or an area of occupancy of <20 km ²	at least 10% within 100 years
Endangered Species	50-70% population decline	<5,000 km ²	<500 km ²	<2,500 mature individuals	<250 mature individuals	at least 20% within 20 years or 5 generations
Critically Endangered	≥80-90% population decline	<100 km ²	<10 km ²	<250 mature individuals	<10 mature individuals	at least 50% within 10 years or 3 generations
Extinct in the Wild	Only survives in cultivation (plants), in captivity (animals), or as a population well outside its established range					
Extinct	No remaining individuals of the species					

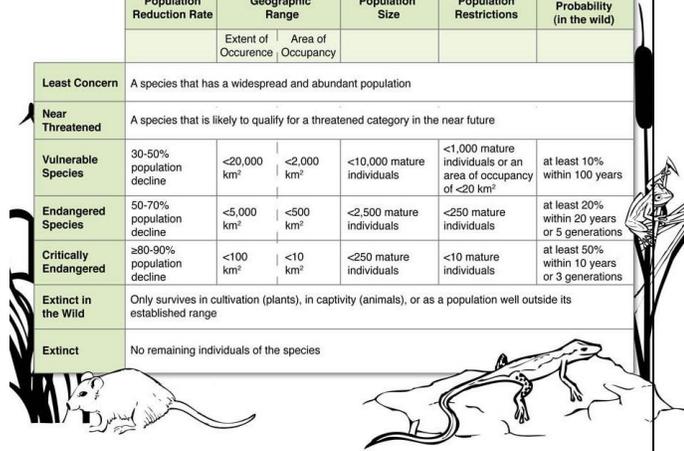


Image courtesy: www.nationalgeographic.org

ECONOMY

1. Carbon tax in India

About Carbon tax

- Carbon tax is a form of pollution tax. It levies a fee on the production, distribution or use of fossil fuels based on how much carbon their combustion emits.
- To prevent the overuse of high carbon intensive fuels, the government of India levy carbon tax on coal used in India – both domestic or imported. The tax currently stands at Rs.400/tonne.

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has proposed waiving carbon tax on coal.
- The waiver would improve the financial health of utilities and distribution companies, and help the power producers to install pollution-curbing equipment.

2. Interest rate Futures

What is an Interest Rate Futures?

- An Interest Rate Futures (IRFs) contract is an agreement to buy or sell a debt instrument at a **specified future date at a price that is fixed today**.
- The underlying security for IRFs is either Government Bond or T-Bill.
- It is a financial derivative that allows the holder to benefit from changes in interest rates.
- Simply put, IRFs are futures contracts wherein the underlying financial instrument pays interest.

Why in News?

- The **Metropolitan Stock Exchange (MSE)** has become the first stock exchange to get approval from Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to launch weekly interest rate futures contracts.
- Currently, both the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and the Bombay Stock

Exchange (BSE) offer trading facilities in such instruments but the contracts have a monthly tenor.

About MSE

- The Metropolitan Stock Exchange is one of India's eight stock exchanges recognised by the SEBI.
- It is headquartered in India's financial capital Mumbai.

3. DBFO Model

DBFO (Design, Build, Finance and Operate)

- DBFO is a PPP model for the creation of infrastructure facilities.
- In this model, the **private party assumes the entire responsibility** for the design, construction, finance, and operation of the project for the period of concession.

Why in News?

- Indian Railways has invited applications for selection of private parties to operate 150 passenger trains on 100 routes on design, build, and finance and operate basis, with a concession period of 35 years.
- The project work broadly includes designing, procurement, financing and operation and maintenance of passenger trains comprising a minimum of 16 coaches with the right to collect market-linked fares.

Need for private players

- The Railways expect to meet the huge unmet demand that led to loss of passenger business to other modes in recent times with additional private operators.
- According to a market assessment study, during 2017-18, total reserve passengers were 0.65 billion, whereas waitlisted passengers were 88.5 billion.

4. North-East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid

About the North-East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid

- The 1,656-km North-East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid will connect eight states of the North-Eastern region i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.
- It is being implemented by **Indradhanush Gas Grid**, a joint venture of state-owned GAIL India, Indian Oil Corp (IOC), Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), Oil India Ltd (OIL) and Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL).

Benefits of the pipeline Grid

- The pipeline will enable the supply of piped cooking gas to households and CNG to automobiles, besides fuel to industry.
- The pipeline grid would ensure reliability and uninterrupted natural gas supplies to the consumers which otherwise gets severely affected due to various reasons in this part of the country.
- Availability of natural gas across the region is expected to boost industrial growth without impacting the environment and would offer better quality of life to the people in general due to use of cleaner and green fuel.
- The move will boost exploration and production of gas in the region and help in early monetisation of natural resources.

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved a Rs. 5,559 crore **viability gap funding** for the proposed northeast gas grid.

What is viability gap funding?

- Viability Gap Funding (VGF) means a grant, one-time or deferred, provided to support infrastructure projects that are

economically justified but fall short of financial viability.

- The lack of financial viability usually arises from long gestation periods and the inability to increase user charges to commercial levels.

5. GOCO model

About Government Owned Contractor Operated (GOCO) model

- The GOCO model was one of the recommendations of the **Lt. Gen. DB Shekatkar (Retd.) committee** to enhance combat capability and re-balancing defence expenditure.
- Under the proposed GOCO model, the **assets owned by the government will be operated by the private industry for agreed upon terms.**

Advantages of the GOCO model

- It will bring in corporate culture, leading to efficiency and accountability.
- The GOCO model will also help the government to save on manpower.

Why in News?

- The Army has initiated the process of identifying potential industry partners to implement the GOCO model for its base workshops and ordnance depots.

6. Price Stabilisation Fund

About PSF

- Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) refers to any fund constituted for the purpose of **containing extreme volatility in prices** of selected commodities.
- The amount in the fund is generally utilised for activities aimed at bringing down/up the high/low prices say for instance, procurement of such products and distribution of the same as and when required, so that prices remain in a range.

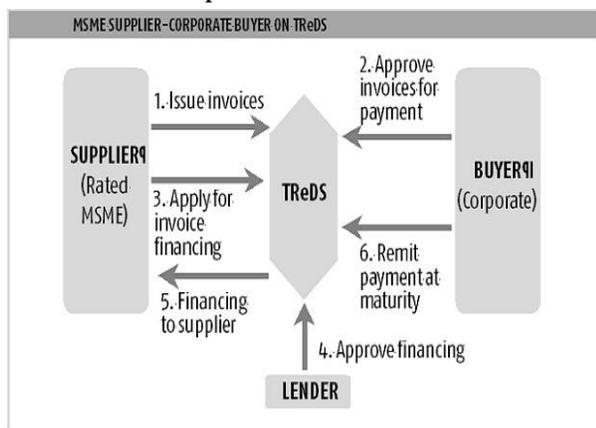
Why in News?

- The Central government has asked states to set up their own state-level Price Stabilisation Funds to deal with price volatility of important agri-horticultural commodities such as onion, potato and pulses.
- The Central government will provide financial assistance for such funds, which can be used for maintaining buffer stocks of price sensitive commodities by buying directly from farmers.

7. TReDS

About TReDS

- TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System) platform is an online mechanism for facilitating the financing of trade receivables of MSMEs through multiple financiers.
- TReDS aims to unplug the payment pipelines that's squeezing funding for small enterprises.
- **RXIL** is India's first TReDS platform operating since 2017. It is promoted by National Stock Exchange (NSE), Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), State Bank of India (SBI), ICICI Bank and Yes Bank.
- In 2018, the government mandated that companies whose turnover exceeds Rs 500 crore will have to be registered on the TReDS platform.



Why in News?

The government has ordered top PSUs to bring in their entire vendor network on to the TReDS platform.

8. 15th Finance Commission

About Finance Commission

- The Finance Commission is a **constitutional body** set up under **Article 280** of the Constitution.
- Under Article 280, the **President of India** is required to constitute a Finance Commission at an interval of five years or earlier.
- In November 2017, President of India constituted the 15th Finance Commission and appointed former Planning Commission member **NK Singh** as its chairman.

What are the qualifications for Members?

- The Finance Commission has a chairman and four members appointed by the **President**.
- The **Chairman** of the Commission is selected from among persons who have had **experience in public affairs**, and the **four other members** are selected from among persons who--
 - are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as Judges of a High Court; or
 - have special knowledge of the finances and accounts of Government; or
 - have had wide experience in financial matters and in administration; or
 - have special knowledge of economics

What are the functions of the Finance Commission?

- It is the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to—

- the distribution of tax proceeds between the Union and the States and the share of each state.
- the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India;
- the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;
- the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Municipalities in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;
- any other matter referred to the Commission by the President in the interests of sound finance.

Why in News?

- The 15th Finance Commission has submitted its interim report for the financial year 2020-21.
- The final report with recommendations for the 2021-26 period will be submitted by October 30, 2020.

Key recommendations for 2020-21 period

Devolution of taxes to states:

- The share of states in the centre's taxes is recommended to be **decreased from 42%** during the 2015-20 period to **41%** for 2020-21.
- The 1% decrease is to provide for the newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh from the resources of the central government.

Criteria for devolution:

- The FC reintroduced **performance-based incentives** to states on two

Criteria	14th FC 2015-20	15th FC 2020-21
Income Distance	50.0	45.0
Population (1971)	17.5	-
Population (2011)	10.0	15.0
Area	15.0	15.0
Forest Cover	7.5	-
Forest and Ecology	-	10.0
Demographic Performance	-	12.5
Tax Effort	-	2.5
Total	100	100

parameters — **demographic performance** and **taxation efforts**

- **Income distance** - is the distance of the state's income from the state with the highest income. States with lower per capita income would be given a higher share to maintain equity among states.
- The **Demographic Performance** criterion has been introduced to reward efforts made by states in controlling

their population. States with a lower fertility ratio will be scored higher on this criterion.

- **Forest and ecology** - share of dense forest of each state in the aggregate dense forest of all the states.
- **Tax effort:** This criterion has been used to reward states with higher tax collection efficiency.

Grants-in-aid

- In 2020-21, the following grants will be provided to states: (i) revenue deficit grants, (ii) grants to local bodies, and (iii) disaster management grants.

Recommendations on fiscal roadmap

- **Tax capacity:** In 2018-19, the tax revenue of state governments and central government together stood at around **17.5% of GDP**. The Commission

noted that tax revenue is far below the estimated tax capacity of the country.

- The Commission recommended: (i) broadening the tax base, (ii) streamlining tax rates, (iii) and increasing capacity and expertise of tax administration in all tiers of the government.
- **GST implementation:** The Commission highlighted some challenges with the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). These include: (i) large shortfall in collections as compared to original forecast, (ii) high volatility in collections, (iii) accumulation of large integrated GST credit, (iv) glitches in invoice and input tax matching, and (v) delay in refunds.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Small satellite Vehicles

What are Small Satellite Launch Vehicles?

- The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) is a launch vehicle being developed by the ISRO with payload capacity to deliver **500 kg to Low Earth orbit or 300 kg to Sun synchronous orbit** for launching small satellites, with the capability to support multiple orbital drop-offs.
- SSLV has **three solid motor stages**, and can accommodate multiple satellites, albeit smaller ones.
- In December 2018, the **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC)** at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, completed the design for the vehicle. The maiden flight is expected in early 2020.

Why in News?

- ISRO announced that it will establish a launch port in Thoothukudi district in Tamilnadu exclusively to launch small satellite launch vehicle

2. Mission Shakthi

About Mission Shakthi

- In March 2019, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted 'Mission Shakthi', an **Anti-satellite (ASAT) missile test**.
- Under the test, DRDO successfully launched an interceptor missile to destroy a **low-earth orbit** satellite in space, in a 'hit-to-kill' mode. The test was done in the lower atmosphere to ensure that there is no space debris.
- India is only the **4th country** to demonstrate such a specialised and modern capability.

Need for ASAT

- The capability achieved through the Anti-Satellite missile test provides credible deterrence against threats to

our growing space-based assets from long range missiles, and proliferation in the types and numbers of missiles.

What is the international law on weapons in outer space?

- The principal international Treaty on space is the **1967 Outer Space Treaty**.
- India is a signatory to this treaty, and **ratified** it in 1982.
- The Outer Space Treaty prohibits only weapons of mass destruction in outer space, not ordinary weapons. Thus, India is not in violation of any international law or Treaty to which it is a Party.

Why in News?

- DRDO displayed the ASAT missile during the 71st Republic Day parade.

3. Vyommitra

What's in the news?

- ISRO unveiled 'Vyomamitra', a robot, at the inaugural session of the "Human Spaceflight and Exploration — Present Challenges and Future Trends" in Bengaluru.



Mission Gaganyaan

- Vyomamitra will simulate the human functions required for space before real astronauts take off for India's first human space mission, **Gaganyaan**.

- ISRO will send the human-resembling model in a space capsule around the end of 2020 or early 2021 to study how she — and later real astronauts — respond to living outside earth in controlled zero-gravity conditions.

4. Thirty Metre Telescope

What is it?

- The Thirty Meter Telescope is a new class of extremely large telescopes that will allow us to see deeper into space and observe cosmic objects with unprecedented sensitivity.



- With its 30 m prime mirror diameter, TMT will be three times as wide, with nine times more area than the largest currently existing visible-light telescope in the world.
- Once it is built, the TMT will become the **world's largest ground-based telescope operating at optical and infrared wavelengths**, allowing astronomers to study the outer reaches of the universe and study distant stars and exoplanets in much greater detail than is currently possible.

Who is building TMT?

- The Thirty Meter Telescope is being designed and developed by the TMT International Observatory LLC (TIO).
- The TIO is an international collaboration of research institutions and national governments including **India**.

Why in News?

- India has said it wants the TMT project to be moved out of the proposed site at **Mauna Kea**, a dormant volcano in Hawaii.
- The TMT project has been marred by protests for over a decade as the proposed site is considered sacred to indigenous Hawaiians.
- India, a partner in the construction of the TMT, wants to shift the project to an alternate site.

5. Truenat MTB

About Truenat MTB

- The Truenat TB test is a new molecular test that can **diagnose TB** in one hour as well as testing for resistance to the drug **rifampicin**. (Rifampin is an antibiotic used to treat or prevent TB)
- Truenat is developed by the **Goa-based Molbio Diagnostics**.
- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had assessed and validated the diagnostic tool.
- Truenat is robust and most suited for Indian conditions.
- Truenat is battery operated and portable, hence, it can be used in remote places.

Why in News?

- Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged that the India-made Truenat MTB has high accuracy to diagnose TB and to sequentially detect rifampicin resistance.
- According to WHO, the overall sensitivity of the Truenat MTB assay is 83% and specificity is 99%. In comparison, Xpert, which is also a molecular diagnostic test and has been widely used across the world, the sensitivity is 85% and specificity is 98%.

About TB

- Tuberculosis (TB) is an **airborne bacterial infection** caused by the

organism **Mycobacterium tuberculosis.**

- It primarily affects the lungs, although other organs and tissues may be involved.
- TB can be fatal, but in many cases, it is preventable and treatable.

6. GSAT-30 satellite

About GSAT-30

- The 3,357-kg satellite will **replace INSAT-4A** which was launched in 2005.
- The high-power satellite is equipped with **12 normal C band and 12 Ku band transponders.**
- GSAT-30's unique configuration provides flexible frequency segments and flexible coverage. The satellite will provide communication services to Indian mainland and islands through the Ku band and wide coverage over Gulf countries, a large number of Asian countries and Australia through the C band.

Applications

- GSAT-30 will provide DTH (direct to home) television services, connectivity to VSATs (that support working of banks') ATMs, stock exchange, television uplinking and teleport services, digital satellite news gathering and e-governance applications.
- The satellite will also be used for bulk data transfer for a host of emerging telecommunication applications.

About INSAT series

- The Indian National Satellite (INSAT) system is one of the largest domestic communication satellite systems in Asia-Pacific region with **nine operational communication satellites placed in Geo-stationary orbit.**
- Established in **1983** with commissioning of INSAT-1B, it initiated a major

revolution in India's communications sector and sustained the same later.

- The INSAT system provides services to telecommunications, television broadcasting, satellite newsgathering, societal applications, weather forecasting, disaster warning and Search and Rescue operations.

Why in News?

- ISRO successfully launched its latest communication satellite, GSAT-30, from French Guiana.

7. EMROK-IV/EMROK-O

About EMROK-IV/EMROK-O

- They are new antibiotics for acute bacterial skin and skin structure infections, including diabetic foot infections and concurrent bacteraemia.

Why in News?

- DCGI has approved these two new antibiotics.
- The drugs will target superbugs such as Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), which is a leading cause of rising antimicrobial resistance (AMR) among patients.
- Approval for the drug is significant because antimicrobial resistance, a term used for microorganisms developing resistance to antibiotics, is one of the major health problems globally.

Drugs Controller General of India

- Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) is a department of the CDSCO.
- DCGI is responsible for approval of licenses of specified categories of Drugs such as blood and blood products, I. V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.

About CDSCO

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) under the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**, is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India.

- Under the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**, CDSCO is responsible for
 - approval of Drugs,
 - conduct of Clinical Trials,
 - laying down the standards for Drugs,
 - control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country and
 - coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organizations.

REPORTS & INDICES

1. Democracy Index

About the Index

- The Democracy Index intends to measure the state of democracy across 165 independent states and two territories.
- It is published by the **Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)**, an organization that provides forecasting and advisory services to assist entrepreneurs, financiers, and government officials.
- The report ranks 165 independent states and two territories based on **five** categories:
 - Electoral process and pluralism;
 - Civil liberties;
 - The functioning of government;
 - Political participation; and
 - Political culture.

Why in News?

- EIU has released its 2019 Democracy Index.
- India dropped ten places in the 2019 Index to occupy 51st position. India's overall score fell from 7.23 in 2018 to 6.90 in the latest Index.
- Top-ranked Norway has been given an overall score of 9.87.

2. Global Social Mobility Index 2020

About the Index

- The Index is designed by the **World Economic Forum** to provide policy-makers with a means to identify areas for improving social mobility and promoting equally shared opportunities in their economies, regardless of their development.
- The Index assesses 82 economies on “10 pillars” spread across the following five key dimensions of social mobility:

- Health;
- Education (access, quality and equity, lifelong learning);
- Technology;
- Work (opportunities, wages, conditions);
- Protection and Institutions (social protection and inclusive institutions).

What is social mobility?

- Social mobility measures the movement in personal circumstances either “upwards” or “downwards” of an individual in relation to those of their parents. In absolute terms, it is the ability of a child to experience a better life than their parents.
- On the other hand, relative social mobility is an assessment of the impact of socio-economic background on an individual's outcomes in life.

Why in News?

- The World Economic Forum has released its first-ever Global Social Mobility Report.
- Denmark occupied the top-position in the Index.
- India has been ranked very low at 76th place out of 82 countries covered in the Index.
- The report also lists India among the five countries that stand to gain the most from a better social mobility score.

About WEF

- The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation.
- It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

Important Reports by WEF

- Global Competitiveness Report
- Global Risks Report
- Global Gender Gap Report

- Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report

3. Global Corruption Perception Index

About Corruption Perception Index:

- The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is an index published by **Transparency International**, an international non-governmental organization.
- The Index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people.
- It uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

Why in News?

- Transparency International has released its Corruption Perceptions Index 2019.
- With a score of 41, India's ranking in the CPI-2019 has slipped from 78 to 80 compared to the previous year.

4. World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 report

Highlights of the report

- Global unemployment has been roughly stable for the last nine years but slowing global economic growth means that, as the global labour force increases, not enough new jobs are being generated to absorb new entrants to the labour market.
- Due to slowing global economic growth, Global Unemployment is projected to increase by around 2.5 million in 2020.
- Currently, **working poverty** (defined as earning less than US\$3.20 per day in purchasing power parity terms) affects more than 630 million workers, or one in five of the global working population.

What's in the news?

- The **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** has released the

World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020 report.

- The report provides an overview of global and regional trends in employment, unemployment, labour force participation and productivity.

About ILO

- ILO was created in 1919, as part of the **Treaty of Versailles** that ended World War I.
- It became the **first specialized agency of the UN** in 1946.
- ILO is the **only tripartite U.N. agency** which brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men.
- India is a **founder member** of the ILO.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

5. State Energy Efficiency Index 2019

About the Index

- The State Energy Efficiency Index tracks the progress of Energy Efficiency initiatives in 36 States and Union Territories based on 97 significant indicators.
- The index is developed by the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)**.

Why in News?

- The Union Government released the State Energy Efficiency Index 2019.
- This latest index incorporates assessment of energy efficiency initiatives, programs and outcomes in five distinct sectors – buildings, industry, municipalities, transport, agriculture, and DISCOMs.

Highlights of the 2019 Index

- For rational comparison, States/UTs are categorised as **'Front Runner'**,

‘Achiever’, ‘Contender’ and ‘Aspirant’ based on aggregated Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES) required to meet the state’s actual energy demand (electricity, coal, oil, gas, etc.) across sectors.

- Haryana, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Puducherry and Chandigarh have been evaluated as progressive states/UTs in the latest Index.

6. World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020

About the report

- World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) is an annual report on expected trends in the global economy.
- The report is a joint product of the **United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** and the **five United Nations regional commissions.**

Why in News?

- World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020 (WESP) was released recently.

Highlights of the report

- GDP growth in India and few other large emerging countries may gain some momentum this year after the global economy recorded its lowest growth of 2.3 per cent in 2019 due to prolonged trade disputes.
- It lowered its GDP growth estimate for India to 5.7 per cent in the current fiscal (FY 2019-20) and lowered its forecast for the next fiscal to 6.6 per cent.

7. Annual Status of Education Report 2019

About ASER

- Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is an annual survey that aims to provide reliable estimates of children’s enrolment and basic learning levels in India.
- It is the **largest citizen-led survey** in India, conducted by education NGO **Pratham.**
- Unlike most other large-scale learning assessments, ASER is a **household-based** rather than school-based survey. This design enables all children to be included – those who have never been to school or have dropped out, as well as those who are in government schools, private schools, religious schools or anywhere else.

Why in News?

- ASER 2019 was released recently.
- The 2019 report is based on a survey conducted among children between 4 and 8 years in 26 rural districts across 24 States.

Highlights of the 2019 Report

- Just 37.4% of children below six are able to recognize at least letters and only 25.6% can do additions. Similarly, only 34.8% of children in Class II can read a text meant for the level below. And at Class III, only 50.8% can read texts meant for their juniors two levels below.
- The **lack of age-appropriate skills** in the early years is alarming as this can impact the entire education supply chain in India.
- A focus on the **“breadth of skills” and activities that strengthen cognitive skills** rather than formal subject-learning in the early years may generate substantial benefits for later academic performance.
- The government-run preschool system is losing out to private schools in terms of enrolment.

Learning levels

Five-year-old children in private schools fared better in learning tasks than those in govt. schools and anganwadis

% of students who completed the tasks	Govt. pre-school	Private kindergarten
COGNITIVE TASKS		
Sorting	77.5	87.2
Pattern recognition	43.4	49.9
BASIC LANGUAGE		
Picture description	63.7	76.6
Listening comprehension	23.5	40.4
BASIC MATHS		
Counting objects	36.8	57.6



The study also showed how a **better education level among mothers can lead to better outcomes among children** in preschools and early schools. Numeracy

skills among Class III children of illiterate mothers are much lower than those whose mothers had studied till Class XI or above.

- The findings also showed that **more girls are enrolled in government institutions and more boys in private institutions**. Among four-five year-old children, 56.8% of girls and 50.4% of boys were enrolled in government schools or preschools, whereas 43.2% of girls and 49.6% of boys were enrolled in private preschools or schools.

POLITY

1. Legislative Councils

Legislative Councils and their Composition

- Under **Article 168** of the constitution, states can have either one or two Houses of legislature.
- As per **Article 171**, the total number of Members in the Legislative council of a State **shall not exceed one third of the total number of Members** in the Legislative Assembly.
- Legislative Councils are **permanent Houses**, and like Rajya Sabha, one-third of their members retire every two years. The tenure of the members of the council is **six years**.
- The members of the Council are either nominated by the Governor of the state or are indirectly elected.
 - 1/3 of Members are elected by local bodies like a municipality or other local authorities,
 - 1/12 are elected by electorates consisting of graduates residing in the State,
 - 1/12 are elected by electorates consisting of persons engaged in teaching,
 - 1/3 are elected by the Members of Legislative Assembly and
 - The remaining 1/6 are nominated by the Governor.

Powers of legislative councils

- The constitution gives Councils **limited legislative powers**.
- Unlike Rajya Sabha which has substantial powers to shape non-financial legislation, Legislative Councils lack the constitutional mandate to do so. Legislative Assemblies have the power to override suggestions/amendments made to a legislation by the Council.
- As for money bills, **Article 198** allows the legislative council to make its

recommendations for amendments within 14 days of receiving the bill. However, the legislative assembly could accept or reject these recommendations.

- The State Council of Ministers is responsible to the Legislative Assembly alone and not to the Legislative Council. The members of the Legislative Council exercise some control over the State ministry by asking questions and supplementary questions to the ministers.

Why are they important?

- A second House of legislature is considered important for two reasons:
 - To act as a check on hasty actions by the popularly elected House (legislative Assembly) and,
 - It can ensure individuals who might not be cut out for the elections are able to contribute to the legislative process.

How many legislative councils are there in India?

- As of January 2020, six out of 28 states have a legislative council.
- The states with bicameral legislature include **Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh**. These states have both the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly.

Abolition of legislative councils

- **Article 169(1)** of the Constitution allows Parliament to either create or abolish a Council in a state if the Legislative Assembly of the State passes a **resolution** to that effect.
- The resolution must be by a majority of the total membership of the Assembly and by a majority of not less than **two-thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting**.

Criticisms on legislative councils

- The Legislative Councils have been criticised for being unnecessary and unrepresentative of the people.
- They are considered a burden on the state budget and cause delays in passing legislation.

Why in News?

- The Andhra Pradesh assembly passed a statutory resolution seeking to abolish the state legislative council.

2. Curative Petition

What is Curative Petition?

- Curative Petition is the **last judicial resort** available for redressal of grievances in court.
- A curative petition is a way to ask the court to review and revise their own decision even after a review petition is dismissed or used.

SC Judgement

- Every curative petition is decided on the basis of principles laid down by the Supreme Court in **Rupa Ashok Hurra Vs Ashok Hurra & another, 2002** which dealt with the question whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, after the dismissal of a review petition.
- The Supreme Court, in the case, held that in order to **prevent abuse of its process** and to **cure gross miscarriage of justice**, it may reconsider its judgements in the exercise of its inherent powers.
- For this purpose, the Court has devised what has been termed as a “curative” petition.

Conditions by the Supreme Court to entertain the curative petitions:

- In the 2002 judgement, the court ruled that a curative petition can be entertained if the petitioner establishes there was a **violation of the principles**

of natural justice, and that he was not heard by the court before passing an order.

- It will also be admitted where a **judge failed to disclose facts that raise the apprehension of bias.**
- The SC has held that curative petitions **must be rare** rather than regular, and be entertained with circumspection.
- A curative petition must be accompanied by certification by a senior advocate, pointing out substantial grounds for entertaining it. It must be first circulated to a bench of the three senior-most judges, and the judges who passed the concerned judgment, if available.
- Only when a majority of the judges conclude that the matter needs hearing should it be listed — as far as possible, before the same Bench.

Constitutional Provision

- The genesis of curative petition can be found in **Article 137** of the constitution which provides that the Supreme Court has the **right to review** any judgment rendered by it in the matter of laws and rules made pursuant to Article 145.
- Such a petition **must be filed within 30 days** of the date of the judgment or decision.

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court rejected curative petitions by two convicts in the Nirbhaya case.

3. Article 131

What is Article 131 of the constitution?

- Article 131 confers **exclusive jurisdiction** on the Supreme Court in disputes involving States, or the Centre on the one hand and one or more States on the other.
- It is “exclusive” because no other court can entertain such a dispute.

- For a dispute to qualify as a dispute under Article 131:
 - it has to necessarily be between Government of India and one or more States; or between two or more States; and
 - must involve a question of law or fact on which the existence of a legal right of the state or the Centre depends.

Why in News?

- Kerala challenged the constitutionality of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 in the Supreme Court Article 131 of the Constitution.

4. Eighth Schedule of the Constitution

About eighth schedule

- The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution consists of the following **22 languages**:- (1) Assamese, (2) Bengali, (3) Gujarati, (4) Hindi, (5) Kannada, (6) Kashmiri, (7) Konkani, (8) Malayalam, (9) Manipuri, (10) Marathi, (11) Nepali, (12) Oriya, (13) Punjabi, (14) Sanskrit, (15) Sindhi, (16) Tamil, (17) Telugu, (18) Urdu (19) Bodo, (20) Santhali, (21) Maithili and (22) Dogri.
- Of these languages, **14 were initially included in the Constitution.**
- Sindhi language was added in 1967.
- Thereafter three more languages viz., Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali were included in 1992. Subsequently Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali were added in 2004.

Benefits of getting included under the eighth schedule

- It will become mandatory for the government to spare the efforts to develop the scheduled language so that it grows and evolves into an effective means of communication.

- When included in the eighth schedule, **Sahitya Academy** will start recognizing the language and the books of the language will be translated in other languages recognized in India.
- **MPs and MLAs can start converse** in this language in state assemblies and parliament.
- Candidates will be able to write the **competitive exams** like Civil Services Exams conducted in the All India level in a scheduled language.

Why in News?

- Representations have been made to the government to include Tulu in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

About Tulu

- Tulu is a Dravidian language whose speakers are concentrated in two coastal districts of Karnataka and Kasaragod district of Kerala.
- The Census report of 2001 states that there are 18,46,427 native speakers of Tulu in India.
- The Tulu-speaking people are larger in number than speakers of Manipuri and Sanskrit, which have found their place in the eighth schedule.

5. Minority educational institutions

What is a minority educational institution?

- A minority educational institution is one that has been set up by **either a linguistic or a religious minority group**, to keep alive and foster what it considers its unique and special features.
- This may be recalling its past, its history, its education, or its texts.

Constitutional provisions for minority educational institutions

- **Article 30(1):** All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have

the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

- **(1A)** In making any law providing for the **compulsory acquisition of any property** of a minority educational institution, the State shall ensure that the amount fixed by or determined under such law for the acquisition of such property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed for these institutions.
- **(2)** The state shall not, in **granting aid to educational institutions**, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court held that the state is well within its rights to introduce a regulatory regime in the “national interest” to provide minority educational institutions with well-qualified teachers in order for them to achieve excellence in education.
- The apex court said the regulatory law should however balance the dual objectives of ensuring standard of excellence as well as preserving the right of the minorities to establish and administer their educational institutions.
- Referring to the 11-judge Bench decision in the **TMA Pai Foundation case**, the court said Article 30(1) was **neither absolute nor above the law**.

Context of the judgement

- The judgment came on a challenge to the validity of the West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act of 2008. The State Act mandated that the process of appointment of teachers in aided

madrasahs, recognised as minority institutions, would be done by a Commission, whose decision would be binding.

- The court concluded that the Act was not violative of the rights of the minority educational institutions on any count and upheld its validity.

6. Enemy Property

What is “enemy property”?

- In the wake of the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, there was migration of people from India to Pakistan. Under the Defence of India Rules framed under The Defence of India Act, 1962, the Government of India took over the properties and companies of those who took Pakistani nationality.
- Some **movable properties** too, are categorised as enemy properties.
- These “enemy properties” were vested by the central government in the **Custodian of Enemy Property for India**. The same was done for property left behind by those who went to China after the 1962 Sino-Indian war.
- The **Tashkent Declaration** of January 10, 1966 included a clause that said India and Pakistan would discuss the return of the property and assets taken over by either side in connection with the conflict.
- However, the Government of Pakistan disposed of all such properties in their country in the year 1971 itself.

How did India deal with enemy property?

- The **Enemy Property Act**, enacted in 1968, provided for the continuous vesting of enemy property in the **Custodian of Enemy Property for India**. The **central government**, through the Custodian, is in possession

of enemy properties spread across many states in the country.

- In 2017, Parliament passed **The Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2017**, which **expanded the definition of the term “enemy subject”, and “enemy firm”** to include the legal heir and successor of an enemy and the succeeding firm of an enemy firm.
- The thrust of the amendments was to guard against claims of succession or transfer of properties left by people who migrated to Pakistan and China after the wars. The amendments denied legal heirs any right over enemy property.
- The Custodian, with prior approval of the central government, may dispose of

enemy properties vested in him in accordance with the provisions of the Act, and the government may issue directions to the Custodian for this purpose.

Why in News?

- The government has decided to set up three high-level committees to dispose of over 9,400 enemy properties left behind by Pakistani and Chinese nationals which are vested in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India under the Enemy Property Act.
- The move is likely to fetch about Rs 1 lakh crore to the exchequer.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Operation Vanilla

What's in the news?

- Indian Navy has launched 'Operation Vanilla' to assist **Madagascar** which was affected by **Cyclone Diane**.
- Indian Navy Ship Airavat has been diverted to undertake humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions as part of 'Operation Vanilla'.



2. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

About the treaty

- The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament.
- It entered into force in 1970.
- Its 190 states-parties are classified into two categories: **nuclear-weapon states (NWS)**—consisting of the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom—and **non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS)**.

- Under the treaty, the five NWS commit to pursue general and complete disarmament, while the NNWS agree to forgo developing or acquiring nuclear weapons.
- Only four countries (South Sudan, **India**, Israel, and Pakistan) have not signed the treaty, and one country (North Korea) has signed and then withdrawn from the treaty.

Why didn't India join?

- The Treaty defines nuclear weapon states as those that had manufactured and detonated a nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January 1967.
- Thus, the spirit of the NPT creates a divide between countries that did develop nuclear power before 1967 and those that didn't develop nuclear power before 1967.
- Being a signatory to NPT means that the party state will cease all development of nuclear weapons and will open doors for inspection of its nuclear facilities by the **International Atomic Energy Agency**.
- The NPT, in India's opinion, doesn't explain the need for this distinction and loss of national sovereignty.

Why in News?

- Iran announced that it will consider withdrawing from the NPT if the dispute over its atomic programme goes before the UN Security Council.
- Recently, Britain, France and Germany launched a process charging Iran with failing to observe the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal, a move that could eventually see the Security Council reimpose international sanctions on the country.
- *(Refer Pulse June edition for details on Iran nuclear deal)*

Related information

Nuclear Suppliers Group

- Established in 1975, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) comprises 48 states that have voluntarily agreed to coordinate their export controls to non-nuclear-weapon states.
- The NSG governs the transfers of civilian nuclear material and nuclear-related equipment and technology.
- Full compliance with the obligations of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a **membership criteria** to join NSG.

China's blockade

- India has been trying, since 2008, to join the NSG, which would give India access to more sophisticated nuclear technology.
- However, China has repeatedly blocked India's entry into NSG as India is not a signatory to the NPT.
- It should be noted that members are admitted to NSG only by **consensus**.

3. Raisina Dialogue

About the Dialogue

- The Raisina Dialogue is a multilateral conference committed to addressing the

most challenging issues facing the global community.

- Every year, global leaders in policy, business, media and civil society are hosted in **New Delhi** to discuss cooperation on a wide range of pertinent international policy matters.
- The Dialogue is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials, as well as major private sector executives, members of the media and academics.
- The conference is jointly organised by the **Ministry of External Affairs** and the **Observer Research Foundation**.

Why in News?

- The Raisina Dialogue was hosted in New Delhi from January 14 to 16.
- During the event, a session on the Indo-Pacific was held. It included military or naval commanders from the **"Quad"** which is an informal strategic dialogue between the US, Japan, Australia and India.

ART & CULTURE

1. Savitribai Phule

About Savitribai Phule

- Savitribai Phule was an Indian social reformer, educationalist, and poet.
- She played an important role in improving women's rights in India. She is regarded as the mother of Indian feminism.

Some of her works:

- She worked to abolish the discrimination and unfair treatment of people based on caste and gender.
- She campaigned against child marriage and started the **Mahila Seva Mandal** to raise awareness about women's rights. She supported widow remarriage too.
- She and her husband, **Jyotirao Phule**, opened a school for women in Pune during 1848.
- Savitribai opened a clinic in 1897 for victims of the bubonic plague that spread across Maharashtra.
- She also set up "**Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha**" for pregnant rape victims and helped deliver and save their children.
- Savitribai Phule was also a prolific author and poet. She published **Kavya Phule** in 1854 and **Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar** in 1892, and also a poem entitled "**Go, Get Education**" in which she encouraged those who are oppressed to free themselves by obtaining an education.
- She is regarded as an important figure of the social reform movement in Maharashtra. All her efforts, though diverse, had a unanimous effect of posing a brave and pioneering challenge to the caste system and patriarchy.

Why in News?

- The Prime Minister paid tribute to Savitribai Phule on her jayanti.

2. Belum Caves

About Belum Caves

- The Belum Caves are located in Kurnool District, **Andhra Pradesh**.
- It is the **second largest caves** on the Indian Subcontinent after the **Krem Liat Prah caves** in **Meghalaya**.
- This cave system is known for its **speleothems** (mineral formations in caves), such as **stalactite** and **stalagmite formations**.
- Stalactites and stalagmites are types of mineral deposits found in caves that accrue through the processes of solution and deposition. Stalactites hang downwards from the ceiling of caves, whereas stalagmites rise upwards from the floor of a cave.
- This cave system was formed over the course of tens of thousands of years by the constant flow of underground water from the now-disappeared river Chitravathi.
- It is one of the centrally protected **Monuments of National Importance**.
- There are indications that Jains and Buddhists monks occupied these caves centuries ago. Many **Buddhists relics** were found inside the caves.



Why in News?

- The Belum Caves Festival was celebrated recently.

Monuments of National Importance

- **Archeological Survey of India (ASI)** declares specific sites as 'national importance' if the Site has remains of ancient artifacts if it has a monument, or the site is important for the access to the monuments.
- Under the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958**, ancient monuments or archaeological sites which are of historical, archaeological or artistic interest and which have been in **existence for not less than 100 years** may be declared as of national importance.
- The protection and maintenance of monuments declared as of national importance is taken up by the ASI by way of structural repairs, chemical preservation and environmental development around the monument which is a regular and on-going process.

3. Classical languages

Criteria for declaring a language as 'Classical' in India

- The guidelines for declaring a language as 'Classical' are:
 - 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.

How are the Classical languages promoted?

- Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages
- A Centre of Excellence for studies in Classical Languages
- The University Grants Commission is requested to create a certain number of Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages so declared.

Current status

- At present, **six languages** enjoy the 'Classical' status:
 - Tamil (declared in 2004),
 - Sanskrit (2005),
 - Kannada (2008),
 - Telugu (2008),
 - Malayalam (2013), and
 - Odia (2014).

Why in News?

- At the recently concluded Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan, a resolution was passed demanding the declaration of Marathi as a 'Classical' language.
- The Sammelan, an annual conference of Marathi writers, was started in 1878, and over the years has been headed by leading Marathi intellectuals, including Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade.

DEFENCE

1. K-4 missile

About K4



- India's K-4 is an **intermediate-range, nuclear-capable, submarine-launched ballistic missile**.
- The K-4 is capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear payloads in excess of 2,000 kilograms.
- Once inducted, these missiles will be the mainstay of the Arihant class of Strategic Strike Nuclear Submarines (SSBNs).

Why in News?

- India successfully test-fired the submarine-launched ballistic missile, K-4.
- The missile, developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**, has a **range of 3,500 km** and it will be able to bring almost all parts of Pakistan and several areas of China within its reach.

2. Sukhoi fighter jets

About Su-30 MKI



- The Sukhoi Su-30 MKI is a twin-seater fourth-generation multirole combat fighter aircraft.
- It was built by Russia's **Sukhoi Design Bureau** and licensed to India's **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited**.
- A variant of the Sukhoi Su-30, it is a heavy, all-weather, long-range fighter.

Why in News?

- The Indian Air Force inducted a squadron of Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter planes, with the capability to carry **BrahMos missiles**, at its Thanjavur air base, Tamil Nadu.

BRAHMOS Missile

- The BRAHMOS is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile that can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land with a **range of 290 km**.
- BrahMos gets its name from two rivers Indian river **Brahmaputra** and Russian river **Moskva**.
- It is a joint venture between the Russian Federation's NPO Mashinostroyeniya and India's DRDO.
- BrahMos with its **Mach 2.5-2.8 speed**, is one of the world's fastest cruise missiles.