

OFFICERS' Pulse

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Coverage.

The Hindu
PIB
Yojana
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At a Glance & In Depth.

Polity and Social Issues
Economy
International Relations
Environment
Science and Tech
Culture..



CURRENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY

THE PULSE OF UPSC AT YOUR FINGER TIPS.



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News @ a glance

POLITY and SOCIAL ISSUES

1. ED to move Interpol for Red Notice on Zakir Naik

What is the Directorate of Enforcement (ED)?

- Directorate of Enforcement is a non-statutory, **specialized financial investigation** agency under the **Department of Revenue**, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, which enforces the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) & Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA).
- Apart from investigating and prosecuting the cases of money laundering and FEMA act, it also gives the cooperation to foreign entities in the matter of money laundering and restoration of assets.

What is money laundering?

- It is the process of converting the *bad money* obtained from illegal activities like terrorism, drug trafficking, etc into clean money i.e., to show it was obtained from legal means.

What is Interpol?

- Interpol (International Criminal Police Organisation) is Lyon, France based organization which works as global police and helps in mitigating Global terrorism, cybercrimes and organized and emerging crimes. 194 countries are members.
- Every country has a coordinating agency to work for Interpol. This agency helps Interpol in their investigation and data collection. In India, CBI is the coordinating agency of Interpol.
- The General Assembly of Interpol is a governing body and it brings all countries together **once a year** to make decisions.

- It issues different notices which help in coordinating the countries to find and prosecute the criminal.

Types of Interpol notices:

- **Red notice:** Seek the location and arrest of wanted persons with a view to extradition or similar lawful action.
- **Blue notice:** Collect additional information about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime.
- **Green notice:** Provide warnings and intelligence about persons who have committed criminal offenses and are likely to repeat these crimes in other countries.
- **Yellow notice:** Help locate missing persons, often minors, or to help identify persons who are unable to identify themselves.
- **Black notice:** Seek information on unidentified bodies.
- **Orange notice:** Warn of an event, a person, an object or a process representing a serious and imminent threat to public safety.
- **Purple notice:** Seek or provide information on *modi operandi*, objects, devices and concealment methods used by criminals.
- **The INTERPOL-United Nations Security Council Special Notice:** Issued for individuals and entities that are subject to sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Why in News?

- ED is trying to bring Zakir Naik, who has absconded to Malaysia and is not appearing for the cases of Money laundering in India.
- ED wants Interpol to issue Red Notice in the name of Naik so that he can be extradited and tried in India. Malaysia is a

member of Interpol and India has an extradition policy with Malaysia.

- Recently there is also a recommendation to move ED to Home ministry. Since it deals with cases overlapping with IPC, narcotic drugs act and Passport act, the officials at the finance ministry, to which ED is part of, lack the expertise.

2. Row over State Flag Day in Kashmir

Why in the news?

- A local party in Jammu & Kashmir was not allowed to celebrate state flag day. Jammu and Kashmir state flag was adopted by the constituent assembly of J&K on June 7, 1952.

Constitutional Provisions regarding flag:

- Under the Constitution, a flag is not enumerated in the Seventh Schedule.
- But Article 51A under Fundamental Duties ordains that every citizen shall abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the national flag, and the national anthem.
- There is no other provision regulating hoisting of flags, either by the States or by the public.
- It is clear that there is no prohibition under the Constitution to hoist any flag other than the national flag.

Legislation regarding flag:

- Parliament has framed legislation regulating the hoisting of the national flag.
- One is the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950. The other is the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.
- Under the 1971 Act, there is no prohibition against any State hoisting its own flag. What is prohibited under this Act is insulting the national flag by burning it, mutilating it, defacing it, etc.
- In India, State boundaries are demarcated on the basis of linguistic homogeneity.
- This has naturally generated aspirations in the States for promoting their own languages and cultures.

- It is, therefore, natural for them to have symbols to recognise, protect and promote their own languages and cultures

State Flags:

- Two states in India have their own state flags i.e., Jammu and Kashmir and Karnataka
- The conditions which are followed while hoisting state flag is. 1) it is not hoisted from the same masthead as of National flag and 2) it is not hoisted higher than the national flag,

3. Marriage steals childhood: UNICEF

Why in News?

- To mark the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF brought an in-depth analysis of child marriages around the world.

The following are some of the key points of the report:

1. An estimated 115 million boys and men around the world were married as children
2. 1 in 5 children, or 23 million, were married before the age of 15.
3. The Central African Republic has the highest prevalence of child marriage among males (28 percent), followed by Nicaragua (19 %) and Madagascar (13 percent).
4. Girls remain more affected, with 1 in 5 young women aged 20 to 24 years old married before their 18th birthday, compared to 1 in 30 young men.
5. Children most at risk of child marriage come from the poorest households, live in rural areas, and have little to no education.
6. Child grooms are forced to take on adult responsibilities for which they may not be ready. Early marriage brings early fatherhood, and with it added pressure to provide for a family, cutting short education and job opportunities.

4. The merits of a free ride

What is the step taken?

- Recently Delhi Govt has decided to make commute free for women in public transport and metro.

Will free giving work?

- Many studies have shown that there is a direct link between choice of work and commuting facilities and fares. Hence the move will help in empowerment of women.
- Public transport like metro has great effect to in fuel cost saving and protection of environment.
- But this may also increase the fare for the other passengers travelling.

Is this the complete solution for women?

- Making free public transport to women doesn't mean that everything will be safe. In addition to the above move, critical infrastructure like street lights, cctv, women guards etc. will make wonders in women empowerment.

5. Draft National Education Policy 2019

- After the national education policy 1986, to evolve with time and competition, the government at the recommendation of the **Dr. Kasturirangan committee** have brought the draft national education policy 2019.

Major highlights of the draft policy are:

- A New Education Policy is focussed on quality education, innovation, and research.
- The Draft Policy is built on the foundational pillars on *Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability*.
- To rename the Ministry of Human Resource Development as the **Ministry of Education (MoE)**.
- Reconfiguration of the curricular and pedagogical structure is proposed.
- There will be no hard separation of learning areas in terms of curricular, co-curricular or extracurricular areas.
- Subjects like arts, music, crafts, sports, yoga, community service, etc will be part of the curricula.

- The policy calls for an **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)** as an integral part of school education.
- The committee recommends amendment in Right to Education Act 2009 to cover children of **ages 3 to 18** (currently, 6-14).
- A **5+3+3+4 curricular** and pedagogical structure based on **cognitive and socio-emotional developmental stages** of children was proposed. These include
 - Foundational Stage (age 3-8 yrs): 3 years of pre-primary plus Grades 1-2
 - Preparatory Stage (8-11 years): Grades 3-5
 - Middle Stage (11-14 years): Grades 6-8
 - Secondary Stage (14-18 years): Grades 9-12
- The policy also seeks to reduce content load in the school education curriculum.
- Schools will be re-organized into **school complexes**.
- **Teacher education** - The committee proposes for transformation in teacher education by shutting down sub-standard teacher education institutions and by moving all teacher preparation/education programs into large multidisciplinary universities/colleges.
- A 4-year integrated stage-specific B.Ed. program will be made minimum degree qualification for teachers.
- **Higher education Institutions**- they will be restructured as three types -
 1. Type 1: Focused on world-class research and high quality teaching
 2. Type 2: Focused on high quality teaching across disciplines with significant contribution to research
 3. Type 3: High-quality teaching focused on undergraduate education
- This will be driven by two Missions - **Mission Nalanda & Mission Takshashila**.
- There will be re-structuring of Undergraduate programs such as BSc, BA, BCom, BVoc of 3 or 4 years duration and having multiple exits and entry options.
- A new apex body **Rashtriya Shiksha Ayog** is proposed. This body will also coordinate efforts between the Centre and states.

- The **National Research Foundation**, an apex body, is proposed for creating a strong research culture.
- Separate and independent institutions for four functions of Standard Setting, Funding, Accreditation, and Regulation.
- **National Higher Education Regulatory Authority** will be the **only regulator** for all higher education including professional education.
- **UGC** is to be transformed into **Higher Education Grants Commission (HEGC)**.
- The private and public institutions will be treated on par, and **education will remain a 'not for profit' activity**.
- The policy called for the proper implementation of the **three-language formula** (dating back to 1968) in schools across the country.
- Accordingly, students in Hindi-speaking states should learn a modern Indian language, apart from Hindi and English.
- In non-Hindi-speaking states, students will have to learn Hindi along with the regional language and English.
- The controversial three language provision was, however, dropped & revised after protests against it in many states.
- Now govt has clarified that student is independent to choose any for 3 languages.
- Language - Promotion of Indian and classical languages and setting up three new National Institutes for **Pali, Persian and Prakrit** were proposed.
- **Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI)** has been recommended.

6. Starting at three: On RTE progress

Why in news?

- Draft NEP 2019 has asked to pull children between 3-6 years into RTE act.

What are the positive aspects?

- The pedagogical view is that the pre-school phase is crucial to stimulate a child's curiosity and help her prepare for schooling at age six.

- It will help to imbibe both nutritional as well as educational security to the growing minds.
- Anganwadis will be pulled from Ministry of Women and Child Development to Ministry of HRD.

What are the challenges?

- RTE was adopted in 2010, but only 12.7% schools follow the RTE.
- The expenditure on education is very less.
- We spend only 2 -3 % of Budget. Experts say that 6% of the budgetary support can bring transformative changes.
- Since education is in concurrent list, it needs greater cooperation among states and center.
- State governments will have to fill teacher vacancies and ensure that the training of recruits is aligned to scientific, child-oriented teaching methods.

Way-forward

- Education reform is vital to prepare for a future in which cutting-edge skills will be necessary for continued economic progress.
- Changes to the RTE Act that will prepare all children for a more productive schooling phase can help make India's educational system morally fair and more egalitarian.

7. All States, Union Territories can now set up Foreigners Tribunals

What are tribunals?

- It is a quasi-judicial body established to settle certain types of dispute.

Why in news?

- The Minister of Home Affairs has amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 to empower **District Magistrates of all states** to set up Tribunals which can declare whether a person detained is a foreigner or not.

What was the earlier system?

- Earlier only the central Govt was empowered to set up tribunals.
- Foreigner tribunals were unique to Assam to resolve the NRC issue.

- In other states, the detained person was taken to a local court and after completing the sentence, he was deported back to his country.

8. A dismissed teacher can file a writ plea for her rights: SC

What are writs?

- According to article 32 of the Indian constitution, any citizen of India can approach directly to the Supreme court through writs if his/her fundamental rights are violated.
- One can even approach the High Court under Article 226 for the same.
- There are five different writs a citizen can exercise.
- They are Habeas Corpus (to check the authenticity of the detention), Mandamus (to ask the public official to do his work), Certiorari (to quash or change the verdict of the lower court), Prohibition (to stop the lower court to take up the certain case) and Quo warranto (check with what warranty an official is holding the office).

Why in the news?

- In **Marwari Balika Vidyalaya vs Asha Srivastava** case, the Supreme Court has upheld the verdict of Calcutta high court that a teacher who is illegally dismissed of private unaided school can use writ petition to protect her fundamental rights.
- The SC said that schools do public service whether they are private or public. The employees of private must not be unfairly treated only because they fall in the non-public domain.

9. Disaster Management

Why in the news?

- The cyclone VAYU is expected to make landfall in Gujarat. Hence there was a meeting of the Home ministry as well as the national crisis management committee. Let us understand the structure and role of disaster management in the country.

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)

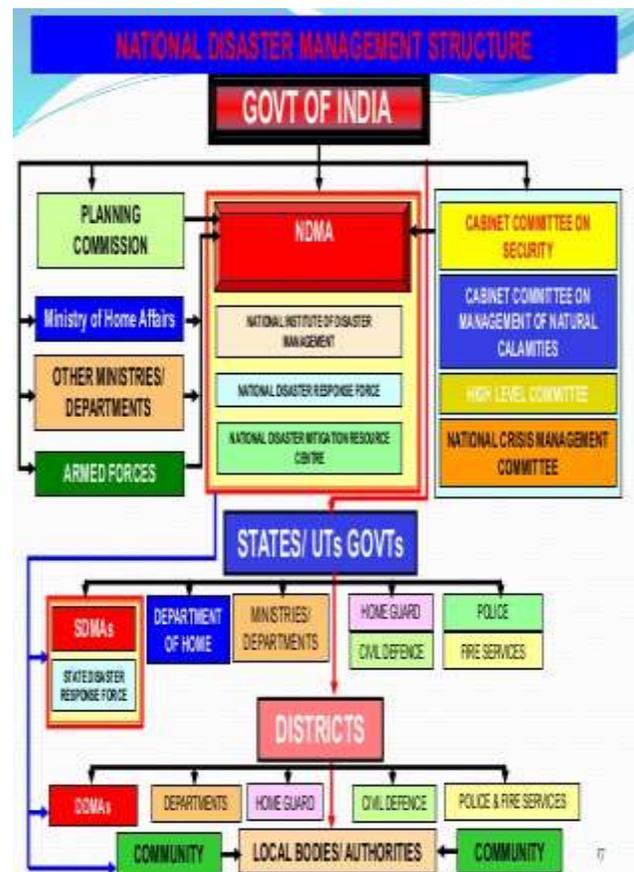
- This is apex authority to look after the disaster management in the country. It is a statutory body under the Disaster Management Act. It is headed by **PRIME MINISTER** of INDIA. It is mandated to lay down the policies, plans, and guidelines for Disaster Management to ensure a timely and effective response to disasters.

National Crisis Management Committee

- It is headed by **CABINET SECRETARY** and this body looks after the effective implementation of the plans formed for mitigation and management of the disaster.

National Disaster Relief Force (NDRF)

- This special force was created under Disaster Management Act. At present, NDRF has strength of 12 Battalions with each Battalion consisting of 1149 personnel.
- It comes under the Ministry of **Home Affairs**.



10. National Investigation Agency

What is NIA?

- NIA – National Investigation Agency is the Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in India. Its statutory body under NIA Act 2008.
- The NIA aims to set the standards of excellence in counter terrorism and other national security related investigations at the national level by developing into a highly trained, partnership oriented workforce. NIA aims at creating deterrence for existing and potential terrorist groups/individuals.
- **It aims to develop as a storehouse of all terrorist related information.**

What is a Hawala System?

- The hawala system refers to **an informal channel** for transferring funds from one location to another through service providers—known as hawaladars—regardless of the nature of the transaction and the countries involved.

Why in the news?

- National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a Rajasthan resident from the Jaipur airport after he was deported from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who was involved in terror funding and hawala system.

11. Navy hosts information sharing workshop

Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region

- IFC-IOR is established with the vision of strengthening maritime security in the region and beyond, by building a common coherent maritime situation picture and acting as a maritime information hub for the region.
- Head Quarters – Gurugram
- Jointly administered by the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard.
- Establishment of IFC- IOR would ensure that the entire region is benefited by mutual collaboration and exchange of information and understanding the

concerns and threats which are prevalent in the region.

Why in News?

- The Indian Navy is hosting a maritime information sharing workshop under the aegis of the Information Fusion Centre — Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram

12. Sahitya Akademi awards

What is Sahitya Akademi award

- It is a literary honor annually conferred by Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of letters, on writers of outstanding works in any of the twenty four major Indian languages including English language.
- This award was instituted in 1954, comprises a plaque and a cash prize of Rs. 10,000. This is the second highest literary honor, after Jnanpith Puraskar centered by the Govt. of India.

Why in news?

- Twenty-two writers across languages were selected for Sahitya Akademi's Bal Sahitya Puraskar 2019
- The Akademi also selected 23 writers for the Yuva Puraskar 2019. This award is given to writers aged below 35.

13. Saving childhoods, World Day against Child Labour

What is it?

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) launched the World Day against Child Labour in 2002 to focus attention on the global extent of child labour and the action and efforts needed to eliminate it.

Where does India stand?

- India ratified both fundamental conventions of ILO no. 138 and no. 182 in 2017 to pace up policy-making against child labour.
- It must be noted that India has done much against child labour. Article 21, article 24 and article 39 of the Indian constitution

take direct and indirect stances against child labour.

- But there is exact comprehensive data on the child labour in India. A
- According to the 2011 census, 3.9% of the children between 5-14 years are employed.

- India is still far to make a leap to achieve complete elimination of child labor in all types by 2025 under 8.7 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Economy

1. RBI cuts repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.75%

About MPC

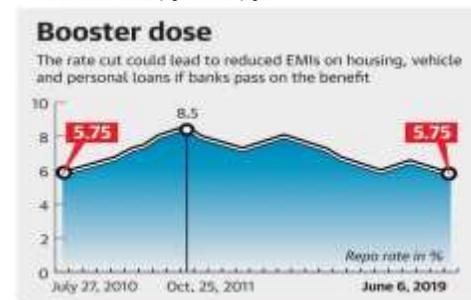
- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a committee of the RBI, headed by its Governor, which is entrusted with the task of fixing the benchmark policy interest rate (repo rate) to contain inflation within the specified target level.
- The MPC has six members
- RBI Governor (Chairperson), RBI Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, one official nominated by the RBI Board and remaining 3 members would represent the Government.
- The MPC takes decisions based on majority vote.
- In case of a tie, the RBI governor will have a second or casting vote.

What is Repo rate?

- Repo rate is the rate of interest which is applied by RBI to commercial banks when the latter borrows from RBI.
- Repo rate is used to control inflation.
- In the event of raising inflation, RBI increase repo rate which will act as a disincentive for banks to borrow from the central bank.
- This ultimately reduces the money supply in the economy and thus helps in arresting inflation.
- Similarly, if it wants to make it cheaper for banks to borrow money, it reduces the repo rate.

Why in News?

- The MPC has cut the policy repo rate by 25 bps (100 bps=1%) to 5.75% to address growth concerns.
- The rate cut could lead to reduced EMIs on housing, vehicle and personal loans if banks decide to pass on the benefit.
- The stance of the policy has also been changed from neutral to “**accommodative**”.
- The change in stance to “accommodative” means there is a possibility of further monetary easing in the months ahead.
- The RBI has also revised GDP growth projection for the current financial year from 7.2% to 7%.



Working group

- The RBI has also set up an internal working group to review liquidity management framework with a view to simplify the current framework.
- The RBI said the objective was also to clearly communicate the objectives, quantitative measures and toolkit of liquidity management by the RBI.

2. Lower leverage ratio may improve lending activity

What is a 'leverage ratio' for banks?

- The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS) introduced a leverage ratio in the 2010 Basel III package of reforms.
- The leverage ratio measures a bank's core capital to its total assets. The ratio uses tier 1 capital to judge how leveraged a bank is in relation to its consolidated assets. Tier 1 assets are ones that can be easily liquidated if a bank needs capital in the event of a financial crisis.
- The higher the tier 1 leverage ratio, the higher the likelihood of the bank withstanding negative shocks to its balance sheet. So, it is basically a ratio to measure a bank's financial health.
- Basel III established a 3 percent minimum requirement for the leverage ratio while it left open the possibility of making the threshold even higher for certain systematically important financial institutions.

Why in News?

- During its second bi monthly monetary policy meeting, the central bank has mandated leverage ratio of 3.5% for all the banks except for the domestic systemically important banks (D-SIBs), which will have a 4% ratio. The ratio was indicated to be 4.5% earlier.
- RBI's decision to bring leverage ratio for banks in line with Basel-III standards will improve the lendable resources, bankers said.

What is a domestic systemically important bank?

- D-SIB means that the bank is too big to fail. According to the RBI, some banks become systemically important due to their size, cross-jurisdictional activities, complexity and lack of substitute and interconnection.
- Banks whose assets exceed 2% of GDP are considered part of this group.
- Both public and private sector banks can be designated as D-SIB.

3. Banking system on the cusp of a transformation: Das

What's in the news?

- RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das in a speech at the National Institute of Bank Management, Pune, said that the banking system is on the cusp of a transformation, aided by recent policy measures to reduce vulnerabilities and improve its financial health.

Improving parameters

- There was a significant improvement in asset quality of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) in 2018-19 as the gross non-performing assets (NPA) ratio declined to 9.3% as on March 2019. It was 10.8% in September 2018 and 11.5% in March 2018.
- At the same time, there has been an improvement in the provision coverage ratio (PCR) of SCBs to 60.9% in March 2019 from 48.3% in March 2018 and 44% in March 2015.
- *(The PCR gives an indication of the provision made against bad loans from the profit generated. Higher the PCR, lower is the unexposed part of the bad debts)*
- There has been evidence of credit growth picking up after remaining subdued in the last few years.
- The capital adequacy ratio (CAR) of the banks, which were at 14.2%, remains well above the regulatory requirement of 9%.
- *(CAR is the ratio which protects banks against excess leverage, insolvency and keeps them out of difficulty. It is defined as the ratio of banks capital in relation to its current liabilities and risk weighted assets. CAR = (Tier I + Tier II + Tier III (Capital funds)) / Risk weighted assets)*

Capital infusion

- Mr. Das added that even though the government's capital infusion has helped PSBs improve their balance sheets, they should not become too dependent on this source. Depending upon individual situations, PSBs should access the capital market for mobilization of capital.

Priority to governance reforms

- The Governor said among the issues that would be addressed in the coming months, was that of governance reforms, which a 'first and foremost' priority was.
- It was important to enhance the quality and the stability of bank boards through further streamlining the appointment process, succession planning and compensation.

4. Industrial growth recovers, CPI inflation up

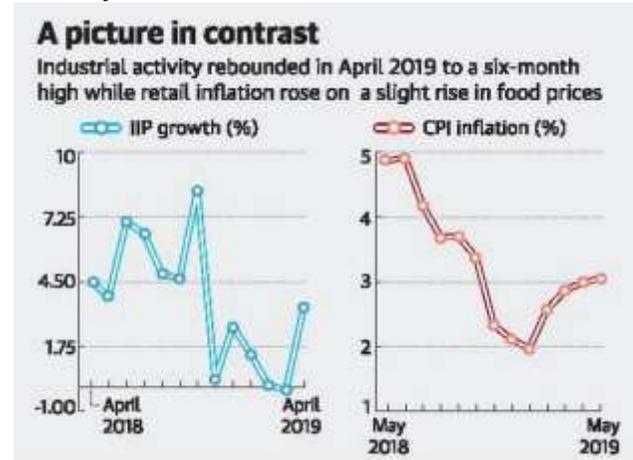
About CPI

- It is an index which measures the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer goods and services such as transportation, food and medical care.
- It is calculated by measuring price changes for each item in the predetermined basket of goods & services and averaging them.
- It is released by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation.
- The base year being used to calculate CPI in India is 2011-2012.

About IIP

- It is an index which details out the growth of various sectors in an economy such as mineral mining, electricity and manufacturing.
- Index of Industrial Production is compiled and published every month by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The current base year is 2011-2012.
- The Eight Core Industries comprise 40.27 per cent of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). These include –
 - a) Coal production (weight: 10.33 per cent)
 - b) Crude Oil production (weight: 8.98 per cent)
 - c) Natural Gas production (weight: 6.88 per cent)
 - d) Petroleum Refinery production (weight: 28.04 per cent)
 - e) Fertilizers production (weight: 2.63 per cent)
 - f) Steel production (weight: 17.92 per cent)

- g) Cement production (weight: 5.37 per cent)
- h) Electricity generation (weight: 19.85 per cent).



SOURCE: CMIE

Retail inflation at a 7-month high

- Retail inflation measured by the consumer price index (CPI) spiked to a seven-month high of 3.05% in May, data released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) showed. Retail inflation stood at 4.87% in May 2018.
- The rise is mainly due to costlier food items. As per the data, inflation in the food basket rose to 1.83% in May, higher than 1.1% in April.
- Retail inflation is a crucial data point, keenly watched by the RBI while deciding its monetary policy.

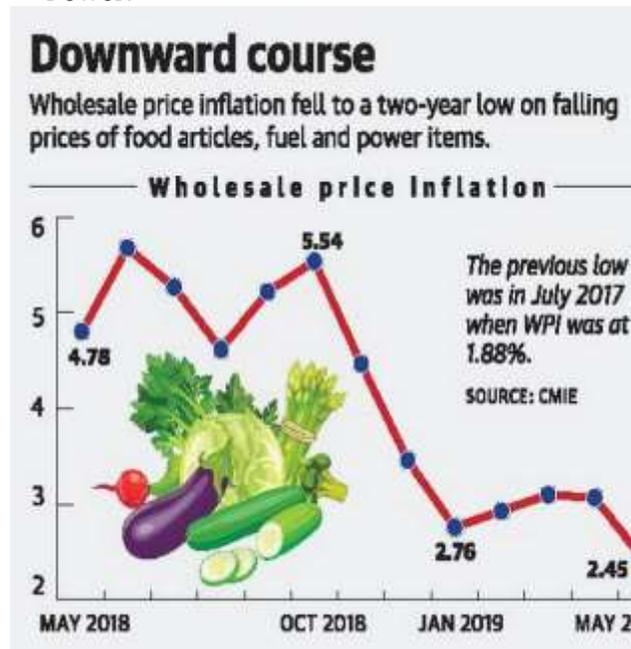
IIP bounces back

- Growth in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) rebounded in April 2019 to grow to a six-month high of 3.4%, following a contraction of 0.1% in March. It was driven by a turnaround across all the sectors measured.
- According to experts, the election spending would have also spurred demand in April and May.
- And in the first few months of the new financial year, there will likely be front-loading of government expenditure, and so, this growth could continue for about three months.

5. WPI inflation at 2-year low in May

About WPI

- It measures and tracks the changes in the price of goods in the stages before the retail level. It provides estimates of inflation at the wholesale transaction level for the economy as a whole.
- It is released by the Office of Economic Adviser, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The base year is 2011-2012.
- The index basket consists of commodities under 3 main categories in decreasing order of weightage: Manufactured products, Primary Articles and Fuel and Power.



Why in News?

- The Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation hit a 22-month low of 2.45% in May on falling prices of food articles, fuel and power items.
- The WPI was at 3.07% in April this year. It was 4.78% in May 2018.
- According to experts, this is clearly an indication of weakening of demand impulse in the economy. The delayed and less than normal monsoon could aggravate the food inflation further in the coming months lest the government monitors the situation proactively, checks speculative

activities, and intervenes in the market to stabilize prices.

6. MoSPI proposes to use big data analytical tools to improve official statistics

What's in the news?

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) proposes to set up a 'National Data Warehouse' with a view to leveraging big data analytical tools to further improve the quality of macro-economic aggregates.
- Efforts are also on to evolve a legislative framework under which the National Statistical Commission (NSC) may function with independence and give holistic guidance for improving the national statistical system.
- Over a period of time, there have been increasing demands on the statistical system for the production of relevant and quality statistics. MoSPI has been criticized in some sections for the quality of macro-economic data.

About National Statistical Commission

- The NSC was created by the government as an autonomous body in 2006 through a resolution.
- The Commission has to function as a nodal agency for core statistical activities including monitoring and enforcement statistical priorities and setting standards and to ensure statistical co-ordination among the different agencies involved.
- The NSC has five members including a Chairperson and four Members. The Chief Statistician of India is the **Secretary of the Commission**.

7. Trade deficit widens to \$15.36 bn in May

What is Trade Deficit?

- A trade deficit is an economic measure of international trade in which a country's imports exceeds its exports. It includes both goods and services.

Cause for concern

Merchandise	April-May 2019-20	Growth %
Exports (\$ Billion)	56.07	2.37
Imports (\$ billion)	86.75	4.39
Trade deficit (\$ billion)	30.69	

Services (estimated)	April-May 2019-20	Growth %
Exports (\$ Billion)	36.26	7.49
Imports (\$ billion)	23	8.88
Net of services (\$ billion)	13.26	

The latest data for services sector released by RBI is for April 2019. The data for May 2019 is an estimation, which will be revised based on RBI's subsequent release.

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF COMMERCE

Why in News?

- India's trade deficit widened in May 2019 to \$15.36 billion, with imports growing faster than exports during the period.
- Exports grew 3.93% in May to \$30 billion compared with \$28.86 billion worth of exports in the same month last year.
- Imports into India grew 4.31% in May 2019 to \$45.35 billion, up from \$43.48 billion worth of imports in May of last year.
- The segments that saw strong growth in exports include pulses (84.2%) and gold (37.4%).

8. India to impose retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods

What's in the News?

- India has decided to impose retaliatory tariffs on 29 goods imported from the U.S. from June 16 onwards.

- The tariffs on the 29 goods — including walnuts, apples, and some pulses — were initially announced in June 2018 in retaliation to U.S. President Donald Trump's decision in March that year to impose higher import tariffs on Indian aluminum and steel.
- India has repeatedly asked for exemption from these higher tariffs, but it is of no use.
- These talks, as well as the ones surrounding granting India duty-free imports for certain items under the U.S.' Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) seem to have fallen through.
- The retaliatory tariffs will place a burden of \$220-290 million on the U.S., about the same amount imposed by Washington on India in 2018.

About GSP

- Under GSP, the U.S. allows preferential duty-free entry for thousands of products from about 120-plus designated beneficiary countries.
- India, as a developing country, enjoyed special trade benefits which allowed duty-free entry of Indian goods worth \$5.6 billion into the U.S.
- In June, the U.S. decided to terminate India's eligibility for the GSP.
- Director General and CEO of the Federation of Indian Export Organizations Ajay Sahai said that the imposition of increased import tariffs on agricultural commodities will help domestic farmers.

International Relations

1. India, Maldives sign six key agreements

What's in the news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his visit to the Maldives, his first state visit abroad since being re-elected to office, signed six key agreements, reaffirming cooperation between the two countries.

- The Memorandums of Understanding (Mou) covered areas such as hydrography, health, passenger and cargo services by sea, capacity building in customs and civil service training.
- A technical agreement on sharing "White Shipping Information" between the Indian Navy and the Maldives National Defence Force was also signed. (*White shipping*

information refers to exchange of relevant advance information on the identity and movement of commercial non-military merchant vessels)

- After the talks, Mr Modi said, the two countries have agreed to start a ferry service between Kochi and the Maldives. He added that the launch of RuPay Card in the Maldives will give a boost to tourism.
- Mr Modi was also conferred with the Maldives' highest honour — the Rule of Nishan Izzuddeen — by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

Ties reset

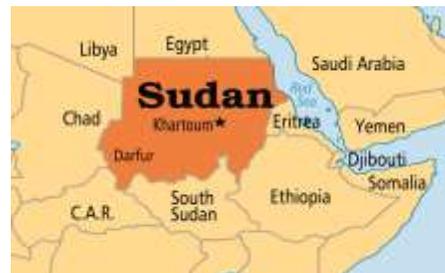
- After years of witnessing souring relations during President Abdulla Yameen's term from 2013-2018, New Delhi and Male reset ties last year after President Solih was elected.
- Mr. Modi attended President Solih's inaugural ceremony in Male in November 2018, and President Solih's first visit abroad, after assuming office, was to India in December 2018, a stark shift from Mr. Yameen's time when New Delhi grew increasingly concerned over his apparent "China tilt".
- While Mr. Modi's visit is seen as underscoring his government's "neighborhood first policy", President Solih has reaffirmed his "India-First Policy", pledging his government's full support towards deepening the multifaceted, mutually beneficial partnership between India and the Maldives.

2. Sudan on the brink

What's in the news?

- After toppling the Sudanese dictator Omar al-Bashir in April after a months-long popular uprising, the Sudanese army reinstated itself at the helm.
- The protesters had demanded a transfer of power to a transitional civilian government, followed by free and fair elections.
- But the generals used the crisis to concentrate more powers in their own hands.

- As talks between pro-democracy activists and the military rulers collapsed, paramilitary groups unleashed deadly violence this week to break the sit-in, killing at least 100 people and injuring hundreds.
- The UN Security Council couldn't even condemn the violence as China, backed by Russia, blocked the move.
- Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which offered financial aid to the junta as soon as Mr. Bashir was removed from power, also support the generals.



3. Quad one way to fix regional issues: Australian envoy

What is QUAD?

- Indo-Pacific Quadrilateral is a closed group consisting of India, Australia, Japan & USA.
- Japan pioneered the initiative about a decade ago as a coalition of maritime democracies.
- Securing a rules-based global order, liberal trading system and freedom of navigation are believed to be the guiding principles.
- QUAD was revived in 2017 but the grouping has so far shied away from adding a military aspect to it. The latest meeting was held last month in Bangkok.
- It is being viewed as response to increased Chinese economic and military power.

What is RCEP?

- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is a grouping of the Asean's 10 members plus India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.
- It envisages regional economic integration leading to the creation of the world's largest regional trading bloc, accounting for nearly 45% of the world's population

with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$21.3 trillion.

- The pact is still under negotiation.

Why in News?

- Australia's High Commissioner in India Ms. Harinder Sidhu asserted that there is need for flexibility, agility and speed in solving regional problems and the Quad is one of many such small groupings in solving them.
- On trade and investment in the region, Ms. Sidhu stressed the importance of concluding the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). A successful conclusion to negotiations on RCEP would help shape the regional rules and norms governing trade, investment and the broader economy and it deals India into regional economic integration.

Naval exercise

- Australia expressed its willingness to India in joining the Malabar Naval Exercise.
- But India has not responded positively to Australia's request to join the Malabar exercises (a trilateral naval exercise involving the United States, Japan and India),
- However, the two countries have expanded bilateral military cooperation over the last few years.
- The latest edition of the bilateral naval exercise AUSINDEX in April saw the largest deployment of Australian military assets to India in peacetime.

4. Narendra Modi, Xi Jinping agree to speed up boundary talks

About SCO

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation established in 2001.
- It's a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan were members of the Shanghai Five.

- Following the accession of Uzbekistan to the organisation in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO.
- India and Pakistan became members in 2017.
- The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO engaged in furthering cooperation and ties between member countries on concerns of terrorism, security, drug trafficking, crime and cyber warfare.



Why in News?

- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, where they will participate in the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
- Both agreed to expedite the dialogue on the India-China boundary issue for securing a "fair" solution.
- The two leaders discussed the status of the bilateral relationship since the Wuhan summit of April 2018, which came in the backdrop of tension following the 73-day Doklam standoff.
- The attention on the border issue acquires significance as the Chinese President is expected to visit India later this year for a summit with Mr. Modi.
- Mr. Xi highlighted the need for regional cooperation and connectivity and singled out the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor as an example for expanding the India-China ties, which had entered a new phase after the Wuhan informal summit.

5. Thousands march in Hong Kong to protest China extradition bill

What's in the News?

- Several thousand people protested in Hong Kong against a proposed extradition law.
- The bill would allow Hong Kong to detain and transfer people wanted in countries and territories with which it has no formal extradition agreements, including Taiwan and the Chinese mainland.
- The unusually broad opposition to the extradition bill came amid a series of government moves to deepen links between southern mainland China and Hong Kong.
- Opponents of the bill question the fairness and transparency of the Chinese court system and worry about Chinese security forces contriving charges.
- Human rights groups have repeatedly cited the alleged use of torture, arbitrary detentions, forced confessions and problems lawyers in China.

Hong Kong and China relationship

- Hong Kong, a former British colony, was returned to China in 1997 under a policy known as “one country, two systems,” which promised the territory a high degree of autonomy.
- The policy has helped preserve Hong Kong’s civil service, independent courts, freewheeling press, open internet and other features that distinguish it from the Chinese mainland.
- But that autonomy, guaranteed under a mini-constitution known as the Basic Law, expires in 2047. The joint signed declaration does not state what will happen in 2047 after that agreement officially ends.
- Well before Hong Kong is set to lose its unique status, the Basic Law has been weakened as China’s Communist Party and its security apparatus increasingly encroach into Hong Kong.

ENVIRONMENT

1. Golden langur to get fruits of MGNREGA in Assam

About Golden Langurs

- They are ENDANGERED primate species, living in western Assam and foothills of Bhutan.
- They play a vital role in the dispersion of seeds and pollination which helps to maintain the forest ecosystem.



- They are found in Manas National park and in nearby forests. Communities in KOKOIJANA reserve forest, near to Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam,

have helped to conserve the species and maintain their population.

Why in News?

- For the first time in India, Bongaigaon district authorities have used MGNREGA to conserve the golden langur.
- Labour and funds will be used to plant grow fruit plants to reduce the food shortage for langurs.
- The MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage.
- The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), Govt of India is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.

2. Sportswear giant set to tap Indian firm's PET project to cut virgin plastic use

What are PET plastics?

- Polyethylene terephthalate (PET or PETE) is a general-purpose thermoplastic (plastic which can be reused by heating and cooling) polymer which belongs to the polyester family of polymers.
- Polyester resins are known for their excellent combination of properties such as mechanical, thermal, chemical resistance as well as dimensional stability.

Why in News?

- The sportswear manufacturer ADIDAS is establishing unit in Maharashtra which can upcycle PET bottles to sportswear.
- The recycling units produce yarn from the PET bottles which in-turn will be used in gear making.
- The firm established at Nasik, is expected to convert 30 tonnes of PET bottles into yarn a day.
- According to the United Nations, around 300 million tonnes of plastic are produced every year. Of this, eight million tonnes of plastic waste ends up in the oceans; PET bottles are the main contributors to plastic waste globally and in India.
- India has best PET material collection rate in India is nearly 80%, but a good portion of these bottles are down cycled (i.e., reused for secondary use), eliminating the possibility of further recycling.
- The upcycling process consumes 86% less water and 75% less energy than conventional manufacturing.

3. SIAM, CII call for a practical road map for electric vehicles

What is SIAM?

- The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) is a not for profit apex national body representing all major vehicle and vehicular engine manufacturers in India.
- SIAM focuses on several areas like to improve Indian automotive industry's

competitiveness, to promote development of a sustainable mobility eco-system, promote development of Alternative Energy Vehicles & achievement of leadership in innovative technology.

What is CII?

- CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization, playing a proactive role in India's development process.
- Founded in 1895, India's premier business association has around 9000 members, from the private as well as public sectors, including SMEs and MNCs, and an indirect membership of over 300,000 enterprises from around 276 national and regional sectoral industry bodies.
- CII works with Govt in policymaking and provides businesses perspective.

What is India's agenda on vehicles?

- The government is planning to ban sale of internal combustion engine (ICE) three-wheelers by 2023 as well as of less than 150 cc two-wheelers by 2025.
- India is jumping directly from Bharat Stage IV (engine type) to Bharat Stage VI (engine which produces less sulphur). The gestation period to move is very less for manufacturers.
- Scheme for Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid&) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME India) (under ministry of heavy industries and public enterprises) is already in place for the promotion of electric vehicles.
- The Centre launched the EV@30 campaign to set a collective aspirational goal for all Electric Vehicles Initiative (EVI) members to have EVs contribute to 30 percent of all vehicle sales by 2030.

Why in News?

- CII and SIAM have asked government to step up win-win and realistic targets in automobile sector. The targets hurt the industry which is in profit.
- Rather than gazing up targets, both have asked Govt to bring behavioral changes in people to adopt electric vehicles, which isn't the case now.

- They have asked for a well laid out roadmap for an ambitious EV rollout over a practical time frame along with an integrated plan for setting up the necessary infrastructure across the length and breadth of the country, in consultation with all stakeholders.

4. Aviation sector faces heat over warming

Aviation sector and pollution

- According to the UN's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), aviation sector is responsible for two percent of emissions of global carbon dioxide (CO₂), one of the main gases responsible for rising temperatures.
- Air travel ranks top at 285 grams per passenger kilometer emission while Road transportation follows at 158 and rail travel at 14 grams per passenger kilometer. The sector is even responsible for high altitude nitrogen emissions which contribute 5% increase in warming.
- The industry has committed to improving fuel efficiency by 1.5% per year from 2009 to 2020 and stabilizing its CO₂ emissions in preparation for a 50% reduction by 2050 compared to 2005

Why in News?

- The sector has come under severe stress to mitigate its targets for climate change.
- The sector has reconfirmed that it is HELLBENT (determined to achieve at any cost) to achieve its targets.
- But high costs and machinery brings challenges to the sector.

5. How much plastic you consume in a week



What are microplastics?

- It is the small plastic piece less than 5 millimeter is called microplastics.

Why in the news?

- Researchers have pointed that every person consumes 5g of plastics (equivalent to credit card) every week.
- The major source of the microplastics is tap and bottled water. It is estimated that the average American eats and drinks in about 45,000 plastics particles smaller than 130 microns annually.
- In the last two decades, the world has produced as much plastic as during the rest of history, industry is set to grow by 4% a year until 2025
- More than 75% of all plastics winds up as waste, of which a third is dumped into the oceans.
- According to The New Plastics Economy report, the ocean will contain one metric tonne of plastic for every three metric tonne of fish by 2025.
- The microplastics have reached the deepest trenches and are found in most of the sea animals.
- There have been less research on microplastics and little is known about its health consequences.

Science and Technology

1. Nipah infection

About Nipah

- Nipah virus infection is a viral infection caused by the Nipah virus.

- Fruit bats of the Pteropodidae family are the natural host of Nipah virus.
- The disease was first identified in 1998 during an outbreak in Malaysia and it was named after a village in Malaysia, Sungai Nipah.

Transmission

- It is a zoonotic virus (transmitted from animals to humans) which can also be transmitted through contaminated food or directly between people.
- Consumption of fruits or fruit products (such as raw date palm juice) contaminated with urine or saliva from infected fruit bats was the most likely source of infection.

Infection

- In infected people, it causes a range of illnesses from asymptomatic (subclinical) infection to acute respiratory illness and fatal encephalitis.
- The virus can also cause severe disease in animals such as pigs, resulting in significant economic losses for farmers

Outbreaks

- Nipah virus outbreaks have been reported in Malaysia, Singapore, Bangladesh and India.
- As of May 2018, about 700 human cases of Nipah virus are estimated to have occurred and the case fatality rate is estimated at 40% to 75%.
- This rate can vary by outbreak depending on local capabilities for epidemiological surveillance and clinical management.
- The highest mortality due to Nipah virus infection has occurred in Bangladesh.

Treatment

- There are currently no drugs or vaccines specific for Nipah virus infection.
- The primary treatment for humans is supportive care.

Clinical Prevention

- Currently, there are no vaccines available against Nipah virus (for humans and animals).
- Prevention and Containment Measures for Animals
- Routine and thorough cleaning and disinfection of pig farms with appropriate detergents may be effective in preventing infection
- If an outbreak is suspected, the animal premises should be quarantined immediately

- Culling of infected animals – with close supervision of burial or incineration of carcasses
- Restricting or banning the movement of animals from infected farms to other areas can reduce the spread of the disease.

Why in news?

- The state of Kerala is facing a Nipah outbreak once again. Previously it had faced the outbreak in May 2018.
- A total of 314 people have been quarantined and placed under observation.
- Samples collected from all the patients in the isolation ward of the GMC have been sent to the National Institute of Virology (NIV) labs at Alappuzha and Pune
- It should be noted that, several reported cases were later found to be negative.

Previous outbreak

- The May 2018, outbreak of the disease resulted in at least 17 deaths in Kerala

Ribavirin treatment

- The drug ribavirin has been shown to be effective against the viruses in vitro, but human investigations to date have been inconclusive and the clinical usefulness of ribavirin remains uncertain.

Other methods

- Passive immunization using a human monoclonal antibody targeting the Nipah G glycoprotein has been evaluated in the post-exposure therapy in the ferret model and found to be of benefit.

Steps taken by the govt. to protect livestock

- The District Collector has issued instructions to the animal husbandry department to monitor the health condition of livestock and to immediately report back in case of any animal showing Nipah-like symptoms.

2. New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rule 2019

About

- In March 2019, the Union Ministry for Health and Family Welfare notified the

new *Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019*, aiming to promote clinical research in the country via transparent and faster approvals process.

- The new rule will be applicable to all new drugs, ethics Committee and investigational new drugs intended for human use, clinical trial, and bioequivalence study.

What does it mean?

The new rules bring better clarity in terms of:

- Clinical Trial of New drugs (indigenously developed and those developed outside of India)
- Post-trial access of new drug
- Drug import for sale or distribution
- Compensation and monitoring
- Orphan drugs

Elaboration

Clinical Trial of New drugs

- Any drug discovered in India, or research and development of the drug are being done in India, and which is proposed to be manufactured and marketed in the country, will be deemed approval for clinical trials within 30 working days by Central Licensing Authority (CLA).
- If no communication has been received from the CLA to applicant, the permission to conduct clinical trial shall be deemed to have been granted.
- For the clinical trial of drugs developed outside of India, which is already approved and marketed in a country, 90 working days is set as the limit for the CLA to respond.
- The validity of clinical trial approvals has been determined as two years for pharmaceutical companies to initiate a study, which is extendable by one year.

Post-trial access of new drug

The sponsor shall provide the investigational drug to the trial subject free of cost if:

- The clinical trial is being conducted for an indication for which no alternative therapy is available and the investigational new drug or new drug has been found to be beneficial to the trial subject by the investigator

- The trial subject or legal heir of such subject, as the case may be, has consented

Drug import for sale or distribution

The Rules exempts local clinical trials for new drugs permitted to be imported for sale or distribution in India, to provide early access to patients to drugs already approved in the countries specified by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI)

Conditions:

- If no major unexpected serious adverse events have been reported for the drug, and
- Where the applicant has agreed to conduct Phase IV clinical trial to establish safety and effectiveness of such new drug, and
- If the drug is indicated in life threatening or serious diseases or diseases of special relevance to Indian health scenario or for a condition which is unmet need in India such as XDR tuberculosis, hepatitis C, H1N1, dengue, malaria, HIV, or for the rare diseases for which drugs are not available or available at a high cost or if it is an orphan drug.

Compensation and monitoring

- The Rules aim to ensure patient safety in clinical trials via defining the process of informed consent, ethics committee, monitoring and compensation in cases of adverse events.
- In case of injury to the clinical trial subject, medical management will be provided as long as required as per the opinion of the investigator or till such time it is established that the injury is not related to the clinical trial.
- Compensation in cases of death and permanent disability or other injuries to a trial subject will be decided by the DCGI

Orphan drugs

- For the first time, orphan drugs have been defined as a drug intended to treat conditions which affects not more than five lakh persons in India.
- In addition, no fee shall be chargeable in respect of application for conduct of clinical trial for orphan drugs for rare diseases in India.

- Moreover, the Rules exempt local clinical trials for orphan drugs permitted to be imported for sale or distribution.

What are orphan drugs?

- "Orphan drugs" are medicinal products intended for diagnosis, prevention or treatment of life-threatening or very serious diseases or disorders that are rare.

Why in news?

- The new rules, issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, marked "**stem cell derived products**" under the definition of "new drug".
- It also mandated that such formulations are approved by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation.
- The new rules require clinics engaged in such 'new drug' therapy to acquire a marketing license.
- But there is no provision for an interim arrangement for the period between an application being made to the Drug Controller and a decision being taken on the application.
- Four patients with different ailments have moved the High Court as their treatments has been discontinued.

High court ruling

- As an interim measure, and till such time as the clinics' application for a license is processed, the Bench allowed patients to continue receiving therapy from their clinics.
- It also said the clinics in question should submit all information on the treatment being afforded to the patients to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSO).

What is Stem cell therapy?

- Stem cell therapy, also known as regenerative medicine, promotes the repair response of diseased, dysfunctional or injured tissue using stem cells or their derivatives.
- It is the next chapter in organ transplantation and uses cells instead of donor organs, which are limited in supply.

How does it work?

- Researchers grow stem cells in a lab.

- These stem cells are manipulated to specialize into specific types of cells, such as heart muscle cells, blood cells or nerve cells. The specialized cells can then be implanted into a person.
- For example, if the person has heart disease, the cells could be injected into the heart muscle.
- The healthy transplanted heart muscle cells could then contribute to repairing defective heart muscle.

3. Remdesivir

What is it?

- Remdesivir is an antiviral drug that is used as a treatment for filovirus infections such as Ebola virus disease and Marburg virus.

Why in news?

- Remdesivir was accidentally found to be effective against Nipah virus also in primates.
- African green monkeys survived infection with the Nipah virus after they received Remdesivir.
- Since Nipah currently does not have any cure/treatment, it is a welcome discovery.

More about Remdesivir

- Ebola and Nipah belong to different viral families, but remdesivir — made by Gilead Sciences and also known as GS-5734 — appears effective against both.
- In mice or cells cultivated in the laboratory, the drug has also shown some effectiveness against two other threats: endemic Lassa fever and Pandemic MERS coronavirus.
- It is also effective against respiratory syncytial virus, which infects children all over the world.

4. Gestational diabetes

What is gestational diabetes?

- Gestational diabetes is high blood sugar that develops during pregnancy and usually disappears after giving birth.
- It can occur at any stage of pregnancy, but is more common in the second half.
- It occurs if the mother's body cannot produce enough insulin – a hormone that

helps control blood sugar levels – to meet the extra needs in pregnancy.

- Gestational diabetes can cause problems for the mother and the baby during and after birth.
- But the risk of these problems happening can be reduced if it's detected and well managed.

How can gestational diabetes affect pregnancy?

- Baby growing larger than usual – this may lead to difficulties during the delivery and increases the likelihood of needing induced labour or a caesarean section
- Polyhydramnios – too much amniotic fluid (the fluid that surrounds the baby) in the womb, which can cause premature labour or problems at delivery
- Premature birth – giving birth before the 37th week of pregnancy
- Pre-eclampsia – a condition that causes high blood pressure during pregnancy and can lead to pregnancy complications if not treated
- The baby developing low blood sugar or yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice) after he or she is born, which may require treatment in hospital
- Still born babies

Why in news?

- A recent paper published in the Journal of the Association of Physicians of India has posited that it is imperative that every pregnant woman be screened for high blood glucose even if no symptoms are exhibited.
- It argued that primordial prevention or, in this case, at the earliest stage of development of the foetus, is essential to prevent children from becoming predisposed to diabetes or other non-communicable diseases (NCD)

Diabetes in foetus – Progression

- Higher glucose transfer to the foetus, when the mother has high blood sugar, stimulates the foetal pancreatic cells to start secreting insulin earlier and in higher quantities.
- Once initiated, it becomes self-perpetuating.

- In addition, when the maternal glucose reading is over 110 mg/dl, the amniotic fluid becomes glucose enriched, and after 20 weeks, when the foetus begins to swallow the amniotic fluid, which further stimulates production of insulin.

Steps taken by the government

- The Ministry of Health has developed national guidelines for testing, diagnosis and management of hyperglycaemia in pregnancy, and they recommend early testing at the time of contact (during the first trimester) and if the test is negative, yet another test should be done between 24-28 weeks.
- Uttar Pradesh has fully implemented the screening of gestational diabetes.

5. Long March-11

What is it?

- Long March-11, developed by China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, is the only rocket using solid propellants among China's new generation carrier rockets.
- It is mainly used to carry small satellites and can take multiple satellites into orbit at the same time

Why in news?

- China has successfully launched the Long March-11 rocket from a mobile platform at Yellow Sea.
- This is the first time that China has launched a mobile rocket from sea.

Significance

- It is China's first space launch from a sea-based platform and the 306th mission of the Long March carrier rocket series
- Launching a carrier rocket from an ocean-based platform has many advantages over a land launch.
- The closer to the equator a rocket launch can get, the greater the speed boost it will receive.
- It reduces the amount of energy required to get into space and means that less fuel is required
- The launch site is flexible and falling rocket remains pose less danger. Using civilian

ships to launch rockets at sea would lower launch costs and give it a commercial edge

- The seaborne launch technology will meet the growing launch demand of low inclination satellites and help China provide launch services for countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative

The new space race

- China now spends more than Russia and Japan on its civil and military space programmes — unveiling ambitious plans for missions to the moon and beyond in the coming decade.
- The test marks another win for Beijing's space programme.
- Earlier this year, China became the first nation to land a rover on the far side of the moon.
- In 2003, China became only the third nation to have the capability of launching humans into space

6. Ai-Da

What is Ai-Da?

- Ai-Da is the world's first ultra-realistic humanoid artist, able to draw creatively thanks to in-built artificial intelligence (AI) technology.
- She is the brainchild of Aidan Meller, an art dealer and named after Ada Lovelace, the English mathematician and writer often called the world's first computer coder.
- The paintings done by her have been sold for over 1 million British pounds

7. Chandrayaan-2 mission

About the mission

- India's second mission to the Moon
- A totally indigenous mission comprising of an Orbiter, Lander (Vikram) and Rover (Pragyan).
- The country's first moon lander and rover mission.
- GSLV Mark III will be used to launch.

Towards the moon

- After putting the spacecraft through maneuvers at the earth end, and a few more orbital maneuvers as it approaches

the moon, ISRO has set September 6 as the date to soft-land its landing craft at the lunar south pole.

Orbiter

- The mother ship or the orbiter that carries Vikram and Pragyan will go around the moon at a distance of about 100 km, taking pictures and gathering surface information and sending them back to earth.

Lander

- After reaching the 100 km lunar orbit, the **Lander** (named **Vikram**) housing the Rover will separate from the Orbiter.
- After a controlled descent, the **Lander will** soft **land** on the lunar surface **near** the **south pole** and **deploy** a **Rover**

Rover

- The mission will carry a **six-wheeled Rover** which will move around the landing site in semi-autonomous mode as decided by the ground commands.
- The **instruments** on the rover **will observe** the **lunar surface** and send back data, which will be useful for **analysis** of the **lunar soil**.

Other instruments

- The mission carries 14 payloads or instruments to observe and gauge the lunar scene – both from a distance and on its surface.
- One of them is a tiny NASA reflectometer to mark the spot for future missions and assess the distance from the earth.

Significance

- The landing site (South pole) is a region where no agency has got to so far.
- ISRO recently listed at least six complexities of soft landing a mission on the Moon – something that pioneers Russia and the U.S. could not achieve easily back in the mid-1960s.

The challenge

- Soft landing, it says, is the most challenging part of the mission.



8. World Food Safety Day

What is food safety?

- Food safety is the absence -- or safe, acceptable levels -- of hazards in food that may harm the health of consumers.
- Food-borne hazards can be microbiological, chemical or physical in nature and are often invisible to the plain eye: bacteria, viruses or pesticide residues are some examples.
- Food safety has a critical role in assuring that food stays safe at every stage of the food chain - from production to harvest, processing, storage, distribution, all the way to preparation and consumption.

Why in news?

- The inaugural edition of the World food safety day was celebrated recently.

Statistics

- WHO has released figures that estimate 600 million cases of food-borne diseases occur annually worldwide
- This translates into one in 10 people falling ill after eating contaminated food.
- Children under 5 years of age carry 40% of the food-borne disease burden with 1,25,000 deaths every year.

World Food safety day

- On 7 June 2019, the world will celebrate the first ever World Food Safety Day, an international observance proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly
- The celebration is a unique opportunity to draw attention and inspire action to help prevent, detect and manage foodborne risks, contributing to food security, human health, economic prosperity and sustainable development.
- Safe food is critical to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Theme for this year

- The theme of this year's inaugural World Food Safety Day invites us to recognize, food safety is everyone's business.
- The way in which food is produced, stored, handled and consumed affect the safety of our food.

Food Safety and Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 2 — there is no food security without food safety. Ending hunger is about all people having access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.
- Goal 3 — Food safety has a direct impact on people's health and nutritional intake. Foodborne diseases are preventable.
- Goal 12 — When countries strengthen their regulatory, scientific and technological capacities to ensure that food is safe and of the expected quality throughout the food chain, they move towards more sustainable patterns of food production and consumption.
- Goal 17 — A globalized world with annual food exports currently in excess of USD 1.6 trillion and complex food systems demands international cooperation across sectors to ensure food is safe. Food safety is a shared responsibility among governments, food industries, producers and consumers.

9. Indian space station

What's in the news?

- ISRO has announced that India will have its own space station
- The project will be constructed once the 'Gaganyaan' human space mission is completed successfully.

What is a space station?

- A space station is a spacecraft capable of supporting crew members, designed to remain in space for an extended period of time and for other spacecraft to dock.
- Currently, there is only one fully functional space station in the Earth's lower orbit, the International Space Station and astronauts conduct different experiments in it.

Details on ISRO's announcement

- India has set its eye on building its own space station in low earth orbit to conduct

microgravity experiments in space in 5 to 7 years.

- The prospects of setting up such a space station at an altitude of 400 kilometres from earth would hinge on successfully carrying the 'Gaganyaan' human space mission, in which two to three Indian astronauts would send to space for a period of up to seven days before India celebrates its 75 anniversary of its independence

Comparison with ISS

- The proposed Indian space station would be much smaller than the existing International Space Station (ISS).
- While ISS weighs 420 tonnes, Indian station is expected to have a payload of 20 tonnes.
- The International Space Station is a partnership between European countries represented by European Space Agency, the United States (NASA), Japan (JAXA), Canada (CSA) and Russia (Roscosmos). It is the world's largest international cooperative programme in science and technology.

Why a space station for ourselves?

- Since 2000, astronauts have periodically visited the ISS to carry out close to 300 different microgravity science experiments in diverse fields such as astrobiology, astronomy, materials science, space medicine and space weather.
- Similarly, the idea is to have "our own" space station where Indian astronauts can fly regularly to conduct microgravity experiments.

Open for collaboration

- The Indian station would be available for other countries to do collaborative research.
- However, it should be noted that ISRO is not thinking of "space tourism"

10. Gene-edited babies

The shocking announcement

- Chinese researcher Jiankui He shocked the global medical community in November 2018 when he announced the birth of two

babies whose DNA he had edited—the first ever humans born with heritable changes to their genomes, made using a technique called Crispr-Cas9.

- He says he made the changes to lower the babies' risk of contracting HIV, but the news instantly sparked ethical and medical controversy about his work, and about the use of gene editing in humans.

How did he do it?

- The gene CCR5 codes for a protein that, among other things, sits on the surface of immune cells and helps some strains of HIV, including the most common ones, to enter and infect them.
- Jiankui He, had experimented with CCR5 on at least two babies, said he wanted to introduce a mutation in the gene that would prevent this.
- Naturally-occurring mutations that disable the protein are rare in Asians, but a mutation found in about 11 per cent of Northern Europeans protects them against HIV infection.
- The genetic mutation, Delta 32, refers to a missing 32-base-pair segment in the CCR5 gene. This mutation interferes with the localisation on the cell surface of the protein for which CCR5 codes, thwarting HIV binding and infection.
- He was unable to duplicate the natural mutation, but appears to have generated a similar deletion that would also inactivate the protein, researchers said.
- One of the twin babies reportedly had one copy of CCR5 modified by CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing, while the other baby had both copies edited.

Why in news?

- Now, a study finds that the edits may have actually hurt the babies' lifespans.
- According to an analysis by scientists from the University of California, Berkeley, the genetic mutation that a Chinese scientist attempted to create in twin babies born last year is associated with a 21% increase in mortality in later life.
- The researchers scanned more than 400,000 genomes and associated health records contained in a British database, UK

Biobank, and found that people who had two mutated copies of the gene had a significantly higher death rate between ages 41 and 78 than those with one or no copies.

Concern

- Beyond the many ethical issues involved with the CRISPR babies, the fact is that, right now, with current knowledge, it is

still very dangerous to try to introduce mutations without knowing the full effect of what those mutations do.

- Because one gene could affect multiple traits, and because, depending on the environment, the effects of a mutation could be quite different, I think there can be many uncertainties and unknown effects in any germline editing.

ART and CULTURE

1. U.P.'s Chaukhandi Stupa declared 'protected area'



- Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has declared Chaukhandi stupa located in

Sarnath, UP as protected area. This was notified by the Ministry of Culture.

- This notification will allow ASI to undertake restoration and preservation works at the site.
- Chaukhandi Stupa is a Buddhist site and has served as a place of relics of Buddha. It is called Chaukhandi because of four armed plan.
- This site finds mention in Hiuen Tsang, traveler during Harsha's period. This site was renovated during Mughal period by Raja Todarmal to commemorate Humayun visit.

PIB Analysis

1. World Environment Day

Why in news?

- World Environment Day 2019 will be hosted by China with a theme of "Air Pollution".
- Air pollution is the biggest environmental health risk of our time. Airborne pollutants are responsible for about one third of deaths from stroke, chronic respiratory disease, and lung cancer, as well as one quarter of deaths from heart attack. Air pollution is also fundamentally altering our climate, with profound impacts on the health of the planet.

Some Air Pollution Facts

- 92 percent of people worldwide do not breathe clean air.
- Air pollution costs the global economy \$5 trillion every year in welfare costs
- Ground-level ozone pollution is expected to reduce staple crop yields by 26 percent by 2030.
- India's Action Plan: India has formulated and launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). The objective of NCAP is comprehensive plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution besides augmenting the air quality monitoring network. The tentative national level target is reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by 20% – 30% by 2024. The focus of this year WED would be

on the identified 102 Non-attainment cities.

What is Non-attainment of cities?

- Non-attainment cities are those which are consistently showing poorer air quality than the National Ambient. These include Delhi, Varanasi, Bhopal, Kolkata, Noida, Muzaffarpur, and Mumbai.

2. Work on Economic Census -2019

Why in news?

- The Seventh Economic Census (7th EC) is being conducted by **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** in 2019. The first Economic Census was undertaken in 1977.

Implementing Agency

- In the current Economic Census, MoSPI has partnered with CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, a Special Purpose Vehicle under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

About Economic Census

- Economic Census is the complete count of all establishment including household enterprises, engaged in production or distribution of goods/services (other than for the sole purpose of own consumption) in non-farm agricultural and non-agricultural sector located within the geographical boundary of India.

Benefits

- The information collected during Economic Census are useful for socio-economic developmental planning at state and district levels.

3. Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS)

Why in news?

- Fee for SC/ST candidates, who join vocational training under Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), under the aegis of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, has been waived off.

Highlights of the new guidelines released for JSS:

- Alignment of JSS course and curriculum to National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) to standardize training
- Decentralization of powers for JSSs- giving more accountability and independence to district administration
- To identify and promote traditional skills in the district through skilling / upskilling.

4. Agreement for Exchange of Information between India and Marshall Islands

Why in news?

- Agreement for Exchange of Information between India and Marshall Islands was notified in the Gazette of India.

What is its use?

- The Agreement enables exchange of information, including banking and ownership information, between the two countries for tax purposes which will help curb tax evasion and tax avoidance.
- It is based on international standards of tax transparency and exchange of information and enables sharing of information on request.
- The Agreement also provides for representatives of one country to undertake tax examinations in the other country.

5. Cabinet Committees

Why in news?

- The Government of India has reconstituted Cabinet Committees and two new Committees have been formed.

Why is a Cabinet Committee formed?

- The Prime Minister selects the team of Ministers in the Cabinet and allocates portfolio.
- He sets up different Cabinet Committees with select members of the Cabinet and assigns specific functions to such Cabinet Committees for smooth and convenient functioning of the Government.
- These include:

Appointments Committee of the Cabinet:

- This panel makes appointments to posts of the three service chiefs, Director General

of Military Operations, chiefs of all Air and Army Commands, Director General of Defence Intelligence Agency, Scientific Advisor to the Defence Minister etc.

- This Committee decides on all important empanelment and shift of officers serving on Central deputation.
- The Cabinet Committee on Accommodation determines the guidelines or rules with regard to the allotment of government accommodation

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs is supposed to review economic trends, problems and prospects “for evolving a consistent and integrated economic policy”, and
- Coordinate all activities requiring policy decisions at the highest level, deal with fixation of prices of agricultural produce and prices of essential commodities.

Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs:

- The Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs draws the schedule for Parliament sessions and monitors the progress of government business in Parliament.
- It scrutinises non-government business and decides which official Bills and resolutions are to be presented.

Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs:

- The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs addresses problems related to Centre-state relations.
- It also examines economic and political issues that require a wider perspective but have no internal or external security implications.

Cabinet Committee on Security:

- The Cabinet Committee on Security deals with issues relating to law and order, internal security and policy matters concerning foreign affairs with internal or external security implications.
- It also goes into economic and political issues related to national security.

New Committees

Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth:

- The Cabinet Committee on Investment will “identify key projects required to be implemented on a time-bound basis”, involving investments of Rs 1,000 crore or more, or any other critical projects, as may be specified by it, with regard to infrastructure and manufacturing.
- It will prescribe time limits for giving requisite approvals and clearances by the ministries concerned in identified sectors. It will also monitor the progress of such projects.

Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development:

- The Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development is supposed to provide “direction to all policies, programmes, schemes and initiatives for skill development aimed at increasing the employability of the workforce for effectively meeting the emerging requirements of the rapidly growing economy and mapping the benefits of demographic dividend”.

Note:

- “Barring the Committees on Parliamentary Affairs and Accommodation, all six committees will be headed by the Prime Minister.
- The two remaining committees will be chaired by Home Minister Amit Shah”

6. World Food Safety Day

Why in news?

- Dr. Harsh Vardhan inaugurates first-ever World Food Safety Day. The first-ever World Food Safety Day was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018. It is observed on 7 June 2019.

Theme: Food Safety, everyone's business.

Initiatives launched:

1) State Food Safety Index (SFSI):

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), under Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, have developed first State Food Safety Index (SFSI) to measure performance of States on five parameters of food safety.

- This is an effort of ministry to motivate states to work towards ensuring safe food for citizens.

2) Raman 1.0:

- It is a hand-held battery operated device which performs rapid detection (in less than 1 minute) of economically driven adulteration in edible oils, fats and ghee.
- The equipment tests more than 250 samples per battery charge, collects and stores data on the cloud using a smart device.

3) Food Safety Magic Box:

- It is an innovative solution to take food safety to schools. This do-it-yourself food testing kit comprises a manual and equipment to check for food adulterants, which school children can use in their classroom laboratories.

4) Eat Right Awards:

- FSSAI has instituted the 'Eat Right Awards' to recognize the contribution of food companies and individuals to empower citizens to choose safe and healthy food options, which would help improve their health and well-being.

7. Cyclone VAYU

Why in news?

- According to India Meteorological Department (IMD)'s forecast, the Cyclonic Storm 'VAYU' is expected to touch Gujarat coast between Porbandar and Mahuva around Veraval & Diu region as a Severe Cyclonic Storm with wind speed of 110-120 kmph.

Arabian Sea Cyclones

- Cyclonic activity is comparatively less intense in the Arabian sea, as compared to the Bay of Bengal, where high-intensity severe cyclones originate frequently.
- In the last 120 years, just about 14% of all cyclonic storms, and 23% of severe cyclones, around India have occurred in the Arabian Sea.
- Arabian Sea cyclones are also relatively weak compared to those emerging in the Bay of Bengal.

- Gujarat coastline, where most of the cyclones emerging in the Arabian Sea are headed, is not very densely populated, ensures that the damage potential of the cyclones on the western coast is comparatively low.

Indian Metrological Department (IMD)

- The IMD is the national meteorological service of the country and it is the chief government agency dealing in everything related to meteorology, seismology and allied subjects.
- It's one of the main function includes offering warning against severe weather phenomenon such as tropical cyclones, dust storms, nor westers, heat waves, cold waves, heavy rains, heavy snow, etc.

8. Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister has approved the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019.

Impact

- The Bill would ensure gender equality and gender justice to Muslim women.
- The Bill would also help in protecting the rights of married Muslim women and prevent divorce by practice of 'talaq-e-biddat' by their husbands.

Implications:

- The Bill proposes to declare the practice of triple talaq as void and illegal.
- It also makes an offence punishable with imprisonment up to three years and fine.
- It also provides for payment of subsistence allowance to married Muslim women and dependent children.
- The Bill also proposes to make the offence cognizable, if information relating to the commission of an offence is given to an officer in charge of a police station by the married Muslim woman upon whom talaq is pronounced or by any person related to her by blood or marriage.

- The offence is made compoundable with the permission of the Magistrate at the instance of the married Muslim woman upon whom talaq is pronounced.
- The Bill further provides for hearing the married Muslim woman upon whom talaq is pronounced, before the accused is released on bail by the Magistrate.

9. Relief for the persons in J&K

Why in news?

- Cabinet has cleared the decks for approval of “The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2019”.

Background:

- The people living in Jammu and Kashmir areas adjoining international border were not included in the ambit of the Jammu and Kashmir reservation Act, 2004 and Rules, 2005.
- Due to continuous cross border tensions, persons living alongside International Border suffer from socio-economic and educational backwardness.
- Shelling from across the border often compels these residents to move to safer places and is adversely impacting their education as Educational Institutions remain closed for long periods.

Benefits of the proposed Bill:

- The move will go a long way in providing relief to the persons in Jammu and Kashmir living in areas adjoining international border.
- They can now avail reservation in direct recruitment, promotion and admission in different professional courses.

Implications:

- The Bill will bring persons residing in the areas adjoining International Border within the ambit of reservation at par with persons living in areas adjoining Actual Line of Control (ALoC).

10. The Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2019

Why in news?

- At making Aadhaar making people friendly, the Union Cabinet, has approved “The Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2019”.

Purpose:

- The decision would enable UIDAI to have a more robust mechanism to serve the public interest and restrain the misuse of Aadhaar.

Few key amendments proposed:

- Provides for voluntary use of Aadhaar number in physical or electronic form by authentication or offline verification with the consent of Aadhaar number holder;
- Provides for use of twelve-digit Aadhaar number and its alternative virtual identity to conceal the actual Aadhaar number of an individual;
- Gives an option to children who are Aadhaar number holders to cancel their Aadhaar number on attaining the age of eighteen years;
- Permits the entities to perform authentication only when they are compliant with the standards of privacy and security specified by the Authority;
- Allows the use of Aadhaar number for authentication on voluntary basis as acceptable KYC document under the Telegraph Act, 1885 and the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002

11. International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) Bill, 2019

Why in news?

- Government aims in setting up of an independent an autonomous regime for institutionalized domestic and international arbitration .
- The Bill provides for setting up of an independent an autonomous body for institutional arbitration and to acquire and transfer the undertakings of International Centre For Alternative Dispute Resolution (ICADR) to New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC)

Impact:

- The benefits of institutionalized arbitration will be manifold for the Government and its agency and to the parties to a dispute.
- This will result in quality experts being available in India and also an advantage in terms of cost incurred.
- It will facilitate India becoming a hub for institutional arbitration.

12. Strategy to combat problem of Child Labour

Why in news?

- Government is adopting a multi-pronged strategy to combat the problem of Child Labour and emphasizing on the importance of implementation of the various acts and rules to eliminate the child labour which are:
 - The employment of a Child below 14 years is completely prohibited in any occupation or processes as per ILO Convention 138
 - Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016, prohibits the employment of adolescent (14-18 years) in hazardous occupations and processes as per ILO Convention 182.
 - The census 2011 also shows decline in Child Labour which has come down to 1.01 crore as compared to 1.26 crore in 2001.

World Day against Child Labour celebrated

- The Theme of World Day against Child Labour for the year 2019 is 'Children shouldn't Work in Fields, but on Dreams' which focuses on the importance of ending child labour and calls for evolving strategies to end child labour.

13. 5th Governing Council of NITI Aayog

Why in news?

Context

- Prime Minister will chair the fifth meeting of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog.
NITI Governing Council

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

Functions:

- The Governing Council reviews the action taken on the agenda items of the previous meeting and deliberates upon the future developmental priorities.

Composition:

- The Governing Council of NITI Aayog comprises of the Prime Minister of India, Chief Ministers of all the States and Union Territories with Legislatures and Lt. Governors of other Union Territories, and other special invitees.

14. Kimberley Process

Why in news?

- The Intersessional meeting of Kimberley Process (KP) is being hosted by India in Mumbai.
- India is currently the Chair of Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) since 1st January 2018. India is founding member of KPCS.

What is the Kimberley Process?

- The Kimberley Process is an international certification scheme that regulates trade in rough diamonds. It aims to prevent the flow of conflict diamonds, while helping to protect legitimate trade in rough diamonds.
- The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) outlines the rules that govern the trade in rough diamonds.

What are Conflict diamonds?

- "Conflict Diamonds" means rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance conflict aimed at undermining legitimate governments. It is also described in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

Composition:

- The Kimberley Process (KP) is open to all countries that are willing and able to implement its requirements.

- It has 55 participants, representing 82 countries, including the European Union and its Member States counting as a single participant.
- Its members account for approximately 99.8% of the global production of rough diamonds.
- Rough diamond trading under the KPCS
- As per the Scheme, each shipment of rough diamonds being exported and imported by crossing an international border be transported in a tamper proof container and accompanied by a validated Kimberley Process Certificate.
- The shipment can only be exported to a co-participant country in the KPCS.
- No uncertified shipments of rough diamonds are permitted to enter a participant country.

15. SVEEP

Why in news?

- A two-day National Conference of SVEEP Nodal Officers was organized by the Election Commission of India to review the

strategy and implementation of outreach program during Lok Sabha Election 2019 and to chalk out the blueprint for the next 5 years.

SVEEP

- Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation program, better known as SVEEP, is the flagship program of the Election Commission of India for voter education, spreading voter awareness and promoting voter literacy in India.
- It works towards preparing India's electors and equipping them with basic knowledge related to the electoral process.
- SVEEP's primary goal is to build a truly participative democracy in India by encouraging all eligible citizens to vote and make an informed decision during the elections.
- The program is based on multiple general as well as targeted interventions which are designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.

News In-depth

Polity and Social issues

1. Squandering the gender dividend

What is the trend?

- Number of rural women employed as full time employee or considered employment as a partial activity dropped from 48.5% (according to 61st round of National Sample Survey Office) to 23.7% according to the recent report released by Periodic Labour Force Survey.
- In Urban areas, women worker to Population Ratio (WPR) has declined from 22.7% in 2004-5 to 19.5% in 2011-12, and to 18.2% in 2017-18.
- Rural women WPR too declined from 48.5% in 2004-5 to 35.2% in 2011-12, and then to 23.7% in 2017-18.
- If these data are true, there can be two possibilities.
- One - there is an increase in household income, hence women are turning to child care.
- Or the second possibility is women are facing **disguised unemployment** (hidden unemployment, a kind of unemployment where some people seem to be employed but are actually not).
- It was found that there is a direct link between the education levels of women and unemployment.
- The greater decline of WPR was found in farm and allied sector (14.8 % points), where the women are less educated.
- Then there was a decline of 8.9 % points observed in casual labour.
- In contrast, there was an increase in a 0.7 % increase in regular salaried work and 0.5 % points in MGNREGA jobs. But it didn't substitute the loss.
- It's not only women but men's participation in agriculture has also declined.
- Among men aged 15 and above, 56.1% participated in agriculture in 2004-5, while only 39.6% did so in 2017-18.
- The mechanization and land fragmentation of agriculture are thought to be a major reason for it.
- While men jumped to other secondary or tertiary jobs but women couldn't.
- Some jobs are like barber, mechanic etc. is easily available for men with secondary education but it isn't the case for women.
- Even when women are employed in a fragmented manner, this wasn't acknowledged in NSSO or PLFS surveys.
- Like when on some days women did farm work, on some days MGNREGA and in some days she cared for her family this holistically wasn't considered when was employed.
- These backlogs in the survey might have affected the numbers.

Way Forward:

- Govt has established a new Cabinet committee on employment and skills. It must focus on these issues.
- Not all policies need to be seen in gender parity lens, but providing basic infrastructure like transport and safety may allow women to take up jobs like clerks, nurses, etc.
- Institutions like the National Council of Applied Economic Research's National Data Innovation Centre (NCAER-NDIC) should come up with a better criterion to find accurate data and substantiate policymaking.
- **GENDER DIVIDEND** (potential of the women workforce) can be increased if

timely removal of these backlogs and make India prosperous.

2. Journalist Prashant Kanojia arrest

Why in the news?

- Mr Prashant Kanojia, a journalist was arrested by the UP police in Delhi for tweeting a video of women proposing the chief minister of UP Yogi Adityanath.
- He was booked under Section 66 of the Information Technology Act and defamation case.
- These were non-cognisable offences which need an arrest warrant.
- He was directly picked from Delhi without any arrest warrant and was taken to UP without the permission of the local magistrate.
- Wife of the journalist moved to Supreme Court against his breach of freedom of expression and also applied for **Habeas Corpus petition**.

What did the Supreme Court do?

- The Supreme Court asked for immediate release of the Journalist on bail and upheld his personal liberty.
- It said that it **doesn't** defend that what he tweeted was right but it said that he has personal liberty and his liberty must not be infringed.
- The court observed that every tweet must not be treated as public incitement.
- People are educated and they can judge what's best or worse.

Way forward:

- These types of cases have always returned to the surface from time to time. We know that this type of media exists on the internet but it only becomes a case when political masters turn it into.
- The civil servants here must understand the necessity to protect civil and personal liberty rather than acting at whims and fancies of political masters.
- Even judicial magistrates must put their minds before issuing the orders and check the credibility of the case.

3. Truth, technology and the teacher

What is the article about?

- In light of the death of renowned filmmaker Vijaya Mulya, who voiced for proper use of technology in the education system, the article discusses the present condition of the education system and technological challenges it is facing.
- Mulya believed that educational technology would bring centralized decision-making and make classrooms attractive.
- But this can make teacher marginal.
- How to avoid the risk of making the teacher feel marginal and dependent was the key challenge for policy making.
- Today's teachers have become a mere facilitator who operates gadgets in class.
- There are even continuous contentions between teacher and children on the data which the teacher said in class and children found on the internet.
- Students now carry two knowledge repositories - one at a personal level and one to please the system to score marks.
- The new education technology has become a double-edged sword.
- Schools are places to learn discernment (the ability to make decisions) which has become difficult after the technological intervention.

What can be done?

- The aspirations of the parents from teachers as consumers must stop.
- It is necessary to build faith upon teachers and stop questioning her competence and calibre.
- Knowledge should be appreciated at the end without the marginalization of the teachers, and the proper use of technological interventions.

4. On Shaky building blocks

Context:

- National Education policy has devoted a chapter on foundational literacy and numeracy.

Significance:

- Though the NEP is silent on pedagogical (relating to teaching) issues on how to teach and process of learning, it emphasized on early learning and stressed on continuity in education from preschool to primary school.
- Likewise, its emphasis on mother tongue-based education and oral language development are critical

Issues

- Many children in elementary classrooms across India cannot read and write proficiently, as demonstrated on an annual basis by the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER).
- Capabilities of children to learn and understand largely pertains to factors surrounding health and nutritional status of children, high student – teachers ratio, and so on. NEP do not address these issues with clarity.
- Most classrooms across India view the task of foundational literacy as teaching children to master the script, and being able to read simple words and passages with comprehension. Higher order meaning making, critical thinking, reading and responding to literature, and writing are typically reserved for later years of schooling. This draft reinforces such restrictive and outdated ideas about the goals of a foundational literacy programme.
- Pedagogical issues :How to teach effectively, approach in taking classes Learning process, etc. Research evidence around the world demonstrates children are capable of using early forms of reading, writing and drawing to express themselves and to communicate, critical thinking and so on. This is referred to as “emergent literacy” which has been ignored in the draft. The draft contradicts this evidence

suggesting that young children be taught listening, speaking, reading and writing simultaneously and not sequentially.

- The draft again reinforces the outdated ideas oral activities for the pre-primary grades, reading hours for Grades 1-3, with an additional hour for writing starting only in Grades 4 and 5.
- Another concern is that the recommendations are based on generic theories of early childhood education, such as multiple age groups learning together in flexible, play- and activity-based ways. They don't draw upon ideas specific to the teaching and learning of early literacy.

Suggestions to resolve the problem:

- Pedagogical problems: MHRD's Padre Bharat, Bhadreshwar Bharat, 2014 and Ambedkar University's position paper on Early Language and literacy in India, 2016 are recommending a comprehensive approach with expanded time, and a balance of goals, methods and materials.
- Student specific instruction to be given by the teachers as they should be trained to do so.
- Draft reinforces the importance of imparting skills on higher order meaning making, critical thinking, reading and responding to literature, writing,etc
- Thus, it is included in foundational literacy programme.
- Teaching literacy : One size fit for all approach cannot help and also, it is a myth that any literate can teach literacy. Teaching and learning are different processes. Thus, trained teachers must be assigned to impart literacy.
- In sum, National education Policy has laid stress on foundational literacy and early childhood learning.

- However, it is silent on curriculum setting, pedagogical dealings and teachers training.
- Nevertheless, it has stressed on quality of education though the major aspects of it are not delivered in the recommendations.

5. Why Language Matters

- After the recent protests against the draft national education policy's three language formula i.e., protests of Tamil Nadu against the compulsory Hindi education, the question comes why is the language so important? Why does the language draw so much affection from the people? Does the purity of a language really exist? Etc.
- This article says that language plays a vital difference between humans and other animals. The vocabulary of a language entitles us to describe the world outside and also communicate ideas with others.
- To answer the above question the article gives CONSULTATIVE THEORY of Charles Taylor which says that the linguistics of our language helps us to articulate the

objects and weave between imagination and reality.

- Language fulfils the necessities which are required in a society like making classifications, telling our choices, explaining the emotions, etc. Hence language as a part of the personality of a human being becomes intricate and closest to him.
- The consultative theory also mentions the 'communitarianism' face of the language which makes groups within a group having a strong bonding among the members of a common language. Whenever there is a threat to the language this group emerges to fight for it.
- We all know that every language is DYNAMIC in nature, i.e., the scope, vocabulary, dialect, accent, etc change from time to time. Hence the PURITY of LANGUAGE is a myth.
- So to sum up the article asks everybody to understand the necessity of language but also asks to adjust with coming times.

Economy

1. Full disclosure: On SEBI norm for financial disclosure

Introduction

- Amidst the rising number of defaults by companies, the chief markets regulator is taking the fight to what it thinks is the enemy: ratings agencies.

Mandatory disclosure

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India has asked credit rating agencies in the country to, clearly state the "probability of default" of the instruments they rate for the benefit of investors.
- There have been a record 163 downgrades of debt instruments this year, according to data released by Prime Database this week. This is more than double the number of defaults over the whole of last year.

- This spate of defaults, which may well be a sign of the turning of the credit cycle in the broader economy, may have forced SEBI to crack the whip on credit rating agencies.
- In a circular SEBI laid down a new standard framework for financial disclosure by credit rating agencies that it believes will enhance the quality of information made available by these agencies to investors.
- Notably, the agencies will have to publish information on how their performance in the rating of debt instruments compares with a benchmark created in consultation with SEBI.
- The regulator believes this will help investors to better gauge the performance of credit rating agencies.

Inherent flaws

- SEBI's aggressive regulatory approach seems to suggest a certain disappointment with credit rating agencies, which may not be unfounded.
- They have been caught napping on several occasions, including during the recent default by Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services on its debt commitments.
- They are also seen by many as being more loyal to companies whose instruments they rate rather than to investors who provide precious capital. These concerns need to be addressed.
- SEBI's attempt seems to be to align ratings methodologies with global best practices.
- The suggestion to revise the method of computing default rates and the precise definition of terms that raters should use in describing a client's liquidity position — strong, adequate, stretched and poor — are aimed at sharpening disclosure and leaving little room for raters to be ambiguous.
- What is not clear, though, is how the new framework will effectively resolve the conflict of interest issue that plagues the rating industry.
- The issuer-pays model where the ratings agency is paid by the issuer of the instrument that it rates is not a healthy one.

Conclusion

- But the problem is that a viable alternative is yet to be proposed.
- The bottomline is that the poor track record of credit rating agencies is known to most investors and is appropriately discounted by market participants.

2. No surprises: on RBI's repo rate cut

Introduction

- There were no surprises in the second bi monthly monetary policy announcement by the Reserve Bank of India. A 25 basis point cut was widely expected, and the RBI delivered that.

Dovish policy (Policy

- With inflation well under the benchmark figure of 4%, market expected a deep rate cut or atleast a rate cut upto 50 basis point.
- There is enough in the latest policy to indicate that the RBI's focus is now on growth.
- The change of stance to 'accommodative' from 'neutral' and the setting up of an internal working group to review the existing liquidity management framework, all clearly point to a central bank that is not only listening to the demands of the key stakeholders in the economy, but also acting on them.

Interest rate transmission

- The one area where the RBI has some work to do is in the transmission of rates.
- By its own admission, only 21 of the cumulative 50 basis points rate cut effected by the RBI in the February and April policies has been passed on to borrowers by banks.
- The excuse from banks, at least in the last few months, was that liquidity was tight and so deposit rates could not be cut.
- However, liquidity has considerably improved in the last week, and more so with the new government loosening the purse strings. There cannot be any more excuses from banks to not pass on the cuts fully.

Other measures

- The RBI's decision to do away with its charges on RTGS/ NEFT (Real Time Gross Settlement System/ National Electronic Funds Transfer) transactions is welcome provided it can, again, ensure that banks pass on the benefit to customers.
- The central bank has also proposed measures such as a reduction in the leverage ratio under Basel norms for banks, which will increase their lendable resources.
- The projected growth rate for this fiscal has been lowered to 7% from the 7.2% projected in April, and the first-half growth is estimated at 6.4-6.7%, which by itself appears ambitious given the current trends in the economy.

Conclusion

- With the RBI having done its bit, the focus shifts to the Finance Ministry.
- There are tremendous expectations from the government over the next round of reforms, backed as it is by a strong mandate.
- The onus is now on the budget, to be presented on July 5, to unleash the animal spirits again in the economy.

3. Striking a balance: On stressed assets

Introduction

- The efforts of the Reserve Bank of India to clean up the non-performing loans mess in the banking system suffered a setback in April when the Supreme Court shot down its circular of February 12, 2018, terming it *ultra vires*.
- Version 2.0 of the circular, titled “Prudential Framework for Resolution of Stressed Assets”, issued by the central bank on June 7, manages to retain the spirit of the original version even while accommodating the concerns of banks and borrowers.

Balanced approach

- The RBI has achieved a good balance between its objective of forcing a resolution of stricken assets and giving banks the elbow room to draw up a resolution within a set timeframe without resorting to the bankruptcy process.
- Banks will now have a review period of 30 days after a borrower defaults to decide on the resolution strategy, as compared to the one-day norm earlier.
- They will also have the freedom to decide whether or not to drag a defaulter to the insolvency court if resolution does not take place within 180 days of default. Banks had no such option earlier.
- By making an Inter-Creditor Agreement between lenders mandatory, the RBI has ensured that they will speak in one voice, while the condition that dissenting lenders should not get less than the liquidation

value puts a floor on recovery from the resolution process.

Role of the government

- The RBI’s nuanced approach now is noteworthy.
- There will be disincentives in the form of additional provision of 20% to be made by banks if a resolution is not achieved within 180 days and a further additional provision of 15% if this extends to a year.
- If that is the stick, the carrot is that they can write back half of the additional provision once a reference is made to the insolvency court and the remaining half can also be clawed back by banks if the reference is admitted for insolvency resolution.
- This approach will give banks the freedom to explore all options before referring a defaulter to the insolvency process.
- Instead of treating banks like truant school children who need to be disciplined with the stick, the RBI has graduated to treating them like responsible adults who know what is good for them when it comes to handling defaulters.
- Of course, the RBI was forced to wield the stick originally only because banks resorted to ever greening loans and pushing NPAs under the carpet. It is to be hoped that they will now uphold the trust placed in them by the RBI.
- The central bank, anyway, retains the right to direct banks to initiate insolvency proceedings in specific cases by drawing on its powers under Section 35AA of the Banking Regulation Act.
- Meanwhile, the government has to assess what ails the insolvency resolution process, which has got bogged down in the case of several high-profile defaulters, beginning with Essar Steel. The delays in resolution are not good optics, and the gaps that defaulters typically use to subvert the process must be plugged.

The road ahead

- Ultimately, the RBI’s efforts will be negated if banks, put off by the long delays in the resolution process, choose not to refer cases to the insolvency court.

4. U.S. is shooting itself in the foot on GSP

Introduction

- After targeting China and Mexico, President Trump has declared a trade war on India.
- Unsurprisingly, the U.S. decided to terminate India's designation as a 'beneficiary developing country' under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) effective June 5, 2019.

About GSP

- Under GSP, the U.S. allows preferential duty-free entry for thousands of products from about 120-plus designated beneficiary countries.
- Thus, products from these countries enter the U.S. duty-free, provided the beneficiary developing countries meet the eligibility criteria.
- The U.S. Trade Representative's (USTR) office-established eligibility criteria includes affording worker rights, prohibiting child labour, ensuring occupational safety, etc.
- India, as a developing country, enjoyed special trade benefits which allowed duty-free entry of Indian goods worth \$5.6 billion into the U.S.

Timeline of the dispute

- The seeds for this discord were sown way back when the Trump administration introduced steel and aluminum tariffs under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, citing national security reasons.
- India was one of the countries affected by the U.S. steel and aluminum tariffs. India retaliated immediately and announced tariffs on U.S. importations into India worth about \$240 million although these are yet to take effect.
- With a move to teach India a lesson, the U.S. had been threatening to withdraw India's benefits from the GSP system.
- The GSP preferential trade term forms a part of the trade obligation of the U.S., and is designed to positively impact the

“development, financial and trade needs of developing countries.”

- Internationally, the legal basis for the GSP programme is found in the Enabling Clause (EC).

Enabling Clause

- It is a platform established under the international trade regime of the World Trade Organization (WTO) for developed countries to offer preferential trade treatment on a non-reciprocal basis to products originating in developing countries.
- The reason for the non-reciprocal arrangement was that the Enabling Clause means to provide differential and more favorable treatment with a view to incentivizing developing countries and promote their fuller participation in global trade.

Will hurt U.S. economy

- The Trump administration's withdrawal of India's GSP benefits is a violation of the trade terms.
- Unfortunately, the withdrawal is not based on any criterion that is to be applied to other nations.
- Indeed, it is intended as a sanction towards India and Turkey, thus making the U.S. moves a positive violation of the WTO norms.
- In reality, withdrawing India from the list of GSP beneficiaries will also hurt the U.S.
- First, a trade war with India will reportedly cost American businesses over \$300 million in additional tariffs.
- Second, America's belligerent stance has not gone well with most trading partners. Operationally, in order to determine whether trade terms of other countries are fair, America uses the opinions of its industries and corporations.
- Thus, arguably, America puts itself in a position wherein its trade posture is an echo of the industry's position rather than taking a reasoned articulated stance. India may well decide to take this as a dispute to the WTO.
- Under such circumstances, India is likely to find support from other similarly

situated developing countries. There may be support to challenge this and other unilateral U.S. actions that have come to personify the imbalances of global trade.

Conclusion

- The world trading system is not based on the leadership of any one country. It is a mechanism to work with trade partners.
- The U.S. action, unfortunately, seeks leadership among its trading partners and that hurts America first and its allies next.

International Relations

1. Tweaking visa norms

Introduction

- On May 31, 2019, U.S. Department of State introduced a change in online visa forms for immigrant and non-immigrant visas requiring applicants to register their social media handles over a five-year period. The policy does not cover those eligible for the visa waiver programme and those applying for diplomatic visas and certain categories of official visas.

How did it come about?

- The policy is part of U.S. President Donald Trump's intent to conduct "extreme vetting" of foreigners seeking admission into the U.S.
- In March 2017, Mr. Trump issued an Executive Order asking the administration to implement a programme that "shall include the development of a uniform baseline for screening and vetting standards and procedures for all immigrant programs."

How will it impact India?

- Most Indians applying for U.S. visas will be covered by this policy. Over 955,000 non-immigrant visas and some 28,000 immigrant visas were issued to Indians in fiscal year 2018. So at least 10 lakh Indians — and these are just those who are successful in their visa applications and not all applicants — will be directly impacted by the policy.

What lies ahead?

- The new policy is expected to impact 14 million travelers to the U.S. and 700,000 immigrants worldwide according to the administration's prior estimates. In some individual cases it is possible that the visa

policy achieves what it is supposed to — allows the gathering of social media information that results in the denial of a visa for an applicant who genuinely presents a security threat.

- However, the bluntness of the policy and its vast scope raise serious concerns around civil liberties including questions of arbitrariness, mass surveillance, privacy, and the stifling of free speech.

2. A clear arc from India to Nigeria

Introduction

- As leaders of India and Nigeria began their respective second terms, there is an urgent need to improve ties between the two nations given the amount of substance and potential linking the two countries and aspirations of their people.

Diverse trade

- First, Nigeria being Africa's most populous country (191 million) and economy (\$376 billion) as well as the world's sixth largest oil exporter (about 2 million barrels per day) is evidently important to us.
- According to the latest Indian Department of Commerce statistics, Nigeria is India's largest trading partner in Africa (19th overall) with total trade estimated at \$13.5 billion in 2018-19. As official Nigerian data show, thanks to our booming oil imports, India is Nigeria's largest trading partner. For the same reason, Nigeria enjoys 4:1 surplus in bilateral trade.
- Nevertheless, it is still a sizeable market for India's manufactured exports, such as (2018-19 figures) miscellaneous machinery (\$500 million), vehicles (\$495 million), pharmaceutical products (\$447

million), textile items (\$299 million), iron and steel articles (\$152 million) and plastics (\$109 million).

- In contrast to the stagnation in India's global exports, its exports to Nigeria surged by 27% last year to reach around \$2,880 million. Indian investments in Nigeria are estimated at around \$15 billion with a further \$5 billion in the pipeline. There are at least 180 Indian companies operating in Nigeria with pharmaceuticals, steel, power, retailing, fast-moving consumer goods and skilling as their mainstay. Approximately 50,000 Indians reside in Nigeria, some of them for decades. Most of them are professionals, such as engineers, accountants, bankers, trainers and health-care experts.

Success despite apathy

- While all these facts go to underline the substantive nature of India-Nigeria ties, they also point to two important contextual factors. First, all these achievements are the outcome of valiant attempts by individual stakeholders with scant official encouragement or support.
- For instance, some simple tweaking in our visa procedure can help thousands of Nigerians avail of our medical and educational facilities, benefiting all sides and creating huge people-to-people goodwill. Despite the encouraging numbers, the two governments have not yet been able to facilitate direct connectivity of air travel, banking and shipping — steps which could have promoted the ease of doing bilateral business.
- Second, enormous potential still waits to be leveraged in such sectors such as upstream hydrocarbons (despite India being the largest buyer of Nigerian crude), agriculture, health care and skilling. Despite their growth, Indian exports to Nigeria are still around a quarter of China's.

Much potential

- Although bilateral ties have had to face strong headwinds during the past five years, more could have been

accomplished. Mr. Buhari, who was trained in India as a military officer and holds this country in high esteem, attended the third India-Africa Forum Summit held in October 2015 and met Mr. Modi for bilateral talks. Then Vice President Hamid Ansari's bilateral visit in September 2016 broke the hiatus in top-level contact since Manmohan Singh's Nigeria visit, as Prime Minister, in 2007.

- Bilateral ties have not drawn commensurate proportion of the resources offered by India to its African partners largely due to some systemic issues. Defence cooperation has been mostly episodic and training oriented.

Way Forward

- As the two leaders of these countries begin their respective second innings, they need to give a push to India-Nigerian ties sooner rather than later. With oil and other commodities becoming a seller's market, an early summit between the two leaders is an obvious imperative.
- It could evolve a multi-pronged strategy to leverage evident economic complementarities in sectors such as hydrocarbons, infrastructure, institution-building, defence and agriculture. If handled deftly and with political will, it could usher in an India-Nigeria economic synergy that has been untapped for some decades.

3. Foreign policy challenges five years later

Introduction

- As Prime Minister Narendra Modi begins his second term, the world looks more disorderly in 2019 than was the case five years ago.
- U.S. President Donald Trump's election and the new dose of unpredictability in U.S. policy pronouncements; the trade war between the U.S. and China which is becoming a technology war; Brexit and the European Union's internal preoccupations; erosion of U.S.-Russia arms control

agreements and the likelihood of a new arms race covering nuclear, space and cyber domains; the U.S.'s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and growing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran are some of the developments that add to the complexity of India's principal foreign policy challenge of dealing with the rise of China.

Redefining neighborhood

- As in 2014, in 2019 too, the central government began his term with a neighborhood focus but redefined it. In 2014, all South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) leaders had been invited for the swearing-in. However, the SAARC spirit soon evaporated, and after the Uri attack in 2016, India's stance affected the convening of the SAARC summit in Islamabad. Since an invitation to Pakistan was out of the question, leaders from the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) countries with Kyrgyzstan, added as current Shanghai Cooperation Organisation chair, highlighted a new neighborhood emphasis.
- Yet the government will find it difficult to ignore Pakistan. Despite good planning there is always the risk of unintended escalation as Balakot showed. In the absence of communication channels between India and Pakistan, it appears that the U.S., Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates played a role in ensuring the quick release of the IAF pilot, Wg. Cdr. Abhinandan Varthaman, thereby defusing the situation.
- Unless the present government wants to outsource crisis management to external players, it may be better to have some kind of ongoing dialogue between the two countries. This could be low-key and discreet, at whatever level considered appropriate, as long as no undue expectations are generated. A policy in-between diplo-hugs and no-communication provides both nuance and leverage.

- This present situation necessitates using multi-pronged diplomatic efforts and being generous as the larger economy. It also needs a more confident and coordinated approach in handling neighborhood organizations — SAARC, BIMSTEC, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation, the Indian Ocean Rim Association.
- This should be preferably in tandem with bilateralism because our bilateral relations provide us with significant advantages. With all our neighbors, ties of kinship, culture and language among the people straddle boundaries, making the role of governments in States bordering neighbors vital in fostering closer linkages. This means investing attention in State governments, both at the political and bureaucratic levels.

Managing China and the US :

- China will remain the most important issue, as in 2014. Then, Mr. Modi went along with the old policy since the Rajiv Gandhi period that focused on growing economic, commercial and cultural relations while managing the differences on the boundary dispute through dialogue and confidence-building measures, in the expectation that this would create a more conducive environment for eventual negotiations.
- Underlying this was a tacit assumption that with time, India would be better placed to secure a satisfactory outcome. It has been apparent for over a decade that the trajectories were moving in the opposite direction and the gap between the two was widening. For Mr. Modi, the Doklam stand-off was a rude reminder of the reality that the tacit assumption behind the policy followed for three decades could no longer be sustained.
- The informal summit in Wuhan restored a semblance of calm but does not address the long-term implications of the growing gap between the two countries. Meanwhile, there is the growing strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China

unfolding on our doorstep. We no longer have the luxury of distance to be non-aligned. At the same time, the U.S. is a fickle partner and never has it been more unpredictable than at present.

- In 2014, Mr. Modi displayed unusual pragmatism in building upon a relationship that had steadily grown under the previous regimes, after the nuclear tests in 1998. Despite this, a number of issues have emerged that need urgent attention. As part of its policy on tightening sanctions pressure on Iran, the U.S. has terminated the sanctions waiver that had enabled India to import limited quantities of Iranian crude till last month. The Generalised System of Preferences scheme has been withdrawn, adversely impacting about 12% of India's exports to the U.S., as a sign of growing impatience with India's inability to address the U.S.'s concerns regarding market access, tariff lines and recent changes in the e-commerce policy.
- Another critical issue is the threat of sanctions under the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), were India to proceed with the purchase of the S-400 air and missile defence system from Russia.
- Other potential tricky issues could relate to whether Huawei, which is currently the prime target in the U.S.-China technology war, is allowed to participate in the 5G trials (telecom) in India. The reconciliation talks between the U.S. and the Taliban as the U.S. negotiates its exit from Afghanistan raise New Delhi's apprehensions about the Taliban's return, constituting another potential irritant.

External balancing

- In a post-ideology age of promiscuity with rivalries unfolding around us, the harsh reality is that India lacks the ability to shape events around it on account of resource limitations. These require domestic decisions in terms of expanding the foreign policy establishment though having a seasoned professional at the top does help. We need to ensure far more

coordination among the different ministries and agencies than has been the case so far.

- Our record in implementation projects is patchy at best and needs urgent attention. The focus on the neighbourhood is certainly desirable, for only if we can shape events here can we look beyond. However, the fact that China too is part of the neighbourhood compounds Mr. Modi's foreign policy challenges in his second term.
- Employing external balancing to create conducive regional environment is a new game that will also require building a new consensus at home.

4. The importance of being neighborly

Introduction

- The present government has acted swiftly to pursue its foreign policy priorities. Focused on strengthening India's place in the world, it has begun by shoring up the country's position in the immediate neighbourhood. This message emanated from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's trip to Bhutan.
- Shift towards BIMSTEC
- Ties with South Asian neighbours were a priority even earlier, as seen in the invitation extended to SAARC leaders to attend Mr. Modi's swearing-in ceremony in 2014. After that there were some difficulties. India's relations with Pakistan soured, while China continued to expand its footprint in Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.
- However, India's cooperation with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Myanmar showed tangible progress. As a result, attention was consciously shifted from SAARC to BIMSTEC, thereby giving an eastward shift to India's neighbourhood policy. In 2016, BIMSTEC leaders were invited to the BRICS summit in Goa. BIMSTEC leaders also attended Mr. Modi's swearing-in last month.

Three visits

- A week thereafter, Mr. Jaishankar was in Bhutan holding comprehensive discussions with his counterpart and the Prime Minister. He also met King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. The visit was perhaps meant to assess the current thinking in Thimphu about Chinese overtures to open diplomatic relations and the border issue before Mr. Modi's meeting with President Xi Jinping at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit.
- Mr. Modi's visit to the Maldives was astutely designed to showcase that a dramatic turnaround has taken place in India-Maldives relations. Former Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen gave a blatantly pro-China tilt to his foreign policy. The new President Ibrahim Solih and the Majlis speaker reiterated the Maldives' commitment to its 'India first policy'. The Majlis invited Mr. Modi to deliver a special address. The President conferred the nation's highest honour "Rule of Nishan Izzuddeen" on Mr. Modi.
- This visit demonstrated how India has begun to implement recent decisions to extend ample financial assistance, move ahead with projects to be funded through a new \$800 million Line of Credit, and focus on people-centric welfare measures in accordance with the priorities of the Maldives. This is in sharp contrast with China's approach of extending massive loans for mega infrastructure projects that end up in debt traps.
- Mr. Modi's visit to Colombo was prudent. It conveyed India's solidarity with Sri Lanka as the latter struggles to overcome the overwhelming effects of the Easter Sunday attacks. Mr. Modi held discussions with all the main actors: the President, the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition, and Tamil leaders. President Maithripala Sirisena reflected the nation's view as he publicly thanked Mr. Modi for a productive visit.

Neighbourhood first

- New Delhi has clearly indicated that the neighbourhood will continue to be a

priority, but four subtle elements are being introduced in the policy matrix.

- First, without always insisting on reciprocity, India may get into a proactive mode and adopt measures "to incentivise cooperation in the neighbourhood", as Mr. Jaishankar put it.
- Second, India will prefer to work on quick impact projects that bring socio-economic benefits to the people.
- Third, recognising its limited capabilities New Delhi would have no objection in forging a trilateral development partnership, involving India and Japan in a neighbouring country.
- Fourth, SAARC's drawbacks have caused India's conscious shift to BIMSTEC. Mr. Jaishankar explained that India sees a mix of "energy, mindset and possibility" in the latter grouping.

The road ahead

- The government is moving in the right direction. It could also consider bringing the Maldives into BIMSTEC, at least as an observer. Finally, Mr. Jaishankar should visit other neighbours soon, particularly Bangladesh and Myanmar.

5. Navigations in Bishkek

Introduction

- At the 19th Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, India will have to navigate between two contradictory imperatives. While on the one hand it must act as a willing partner of regional cooperation led by China and Russia, on the other it must avoid being seen as a part of the 'anti-American gang'.
- It could also be seen as a paradox that India wants to fight against terrorism through a body that includes states that pose the biggest threats to Indian security.

Trade and terrorism

- In Bishkek, Russia and Central Asian countries are likely to express broad support for China in its escalating tariff fight against the U.S. India is equally concerned about this trade war, but it is

unclear whether it will join the others in slamming U.S. protectionism.

- New Delhi is seemingly confident of dealing with the U.S. without necessarily supporting China. It is also notable that all SCO members barring India are enthusiastic supporters of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- During the summit, terrorism is likely to be approached from the angle of improving the situation in Afghanistan and not necessarily of curbing the terrorist elements emanating from Pakistan.
- China is sure to offer its experiences of dealing with counterterrorism, and the deradicalisation measures it has taken in Xinjiang. China's achievement in expanding its high-speed rail network to restive Xinjiang comes with enormous economic and security implications for Eurasia. China has also enhanced its military projection capabilities to meet any potential crises beyond its western frontiers.
- Kyrgyzstan is the latest to create an international near-border trade centre in Alai district bordering China. If the regional countries switch to adopting the Chinese railway track gauge of 1,435 mm, then China will be successful in uniting Eurasia to challenge a united Europe. As the situation unfolds, China and Russia are adopting a new era of global strategic partnership. Where India fits in is the question.

On the sidelines

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with President Xi on the sidelines of the summit will be critical, especially as Mr. Modi is now being guided by his new External Affairs Minister. This meeting also comes after China's decision to withdraw its technical hold on listing Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The key concern for the two leaders is the impact of the U.S.-China trade war, but judging from the trends, both sides seem to be gearing up for a big settlement of pending bilateral issues.

- Mr. Modi's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin is important to save the S-400 contract deal against Washington's mounting threat to act under CAATSA. India and Russia have an ambitious economic agenda drawn up for 2019, and Mr. Putin might reiterate his invitation to Mr. Modi to be the chief guest at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September. It would be a good opportunity for India to explore Russia's Far East region not just for developing economic cooperation but also for exploring the prospects of transferring skilled labourers to offset Chinese demographic threats in the region. Russia is also keen that India joins the Arctic: Territory of Dialogue Forum.
- India seems committed to work within the SCO to develop a 'cooperative and sustainable security' framework, to make the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure more effective, and participate in efforts to bring about stability in Afghanistan. Even though the regional aspirations of Central Asian countries contradict India's goals, these countries back India's proposal for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Mr. Modi is certain to bring up India's resolve to fight terrorism by drawing the SCO's attention to the attacks in Pulwama and Sri Lanka. But China would not like India to use the SCO to name and shame Pakistan.
- India may stick to its position on BRI, but accelerating progress on the International North-South Transport Corridor, the Chabahar Port, the Ashgabat Agreement and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway should be very much on the cards.

The Pakistan policy

- The India-Pakistan stalemate endures but the environment has changed a little since India's air strikes in Balakot. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has been less belligerent, but whether the Pakistani military is taking tougher measures to curb anti-India terror groups is not known.

- Mr. Khan will have to demonstrate clearly if he wants Mr. Modi to give diplomacy a chance should they meet on the margins of the SCO meet. Mr. Modi might chart a new policy course in favour of normalising ties, especially since India has scored a point with Masood Azhar being designated as a global terrorist at the UNSC.
- Pakistan places high hopes on the SCO to regulate key regional security issues (Afghanistan and Kashmir) even though the SCO discourages bilateral disputes to be raised. Its other agenda would be to sell the Gwadar Port as a potential passage to landlocked Central Asian states, besides promoting the China-Pakistan Economic

Corridor for regional economic integration and security cooperation.

The road ahead

- To be sure, none of the institutional-level measures including the joint SCO military exercises have so far entailed any satisfactory results in jointly fighting against terrorism.
- Nevertheless, the SCO is relevant for India to garner support for reforms of the UNSC to make the latter more representative and effective. India has been lending support to the member countries' candidatures for non-permanent membership of the UNSC for a long time.

Science and Technology

1. 5G for the future

What is 5G?

- It is the next generation cellular technology that will provide faster and more reliable communication with ultra-low latency.
- With 5G, the peak network data speeds are expected to be in the range of 2-20 Gigabit per second (Gbps)

What is latency?

- Latency is the amount of time data takes to travel between its source and destination.

Social implications of 5G

- 5G is expected to form the backbone of emerging technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and machine to machine communications, thereby supporting a much larger range of applications and services, including driverless vehicles, tele-surgery and real time data analytics

What does the government say?

- A government panel on 5G says the technology will extend the use of wireless technologies — for the first time — across completely new sectors of the economy from industrial to commercial, educational, health care, agricultural, financial and social sectors.

What does this mean for India?

- “5G may offer ‘leapfrog’ opportunities by providing ‘smart infrastructure’ that offers lower cost and faster infrastructure delivery,” as per the government panel.
- It is widely accepted that 5G's value for India may be even higher than in advanced countries because of the lower levels of investments in physical infrastructure.
- One of the primary applications of 5G will be implementation of sensor-embedded network that will allow real time relay of information across fields such as manufacturing, consumer durables and agriculture.
- 5G can also help make transport infrastructure more efficient by making it smart. 5G will enable vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-infrastructure communication, making driverless cars, among other things, a reality.

Economic impacts of 5G

- 5G is expected to create a cumulative economic impact of \$1 trillion in India by 2035, according to a report by a government-appointed panel.

Has 5G technology been launched anywhere?

- South Korea and the U.S. became the first countries to commercially launch 5G services

- China too has handed out commercial 5G licences to its major carriers.
- The Indian government had set a target of 2020 for the commercial launch of 5G services, largely in line with rest of the world.

What about the old generation devices?

- The report also stresses that even after the entry of 5G into the Indian networks, the earlier generation mobile technologies (2G, 3G and 4G) will continue to remain in use and that it may take 10 or more years to phase them out.
- Besides the spectrum, 5G will require a fundamental change to the core architecture of the communication system. Simply upgrading the existing Long Term Evolution core will not be able to support the various requirements of all 5G use cases.
- A report on 5G by Deloitte stated that it is anticipated that the industry might require an additional investment of \$60-70 billion to seamlessly implement 5G networks.

2. Dark web

What is dark web?

- The dark web is part of the internet that isn't visible to search engines and requires the use of an anonymizing browser (like Tor) to be accessed.
- The dark Web is comprised of websites that are visible to the public, but their IP address details are intentionally hidden.
- These websites can be visited by anyone on Internet, but it is not easy to find the server details on which the corresponding site is running, and it is difficult to track the one hosting the site.

Illicit activities

- One can buy credit card numbers, all manner of drugs, guns, counterfeit money, stolen subscription credentials, hacked Netflix accounts and software that helps you break into other people's computers.
- Buy login credentials to a \$50,000 Bank of America account for \$500.
- Get \$3,000 in counterfeit \$20 bills for \$600.

- Buy seven prepaid debit cards, each with a \$2,500 balance, for \$500 (express shipping included).
- A "lifetime" Netflix premium account goes for \$6.
- You can hire hackers to attack computers for you.
- You can buy usernames and passwords.

How to access it?

- The dark web is as messy and chaotic as you would expect when everyone is anonymous, and a substantial minority are out to scam others.
- Accessing the dark web requires the use of an anonymizing browser called Tor.
- The Tor browser routes your web page requests through a series of proxy servers operated by thousands of volunteers around the globe, rendering your IP address unidentifiable and untraceable.
- Tor works like magic, but the result is an experience that's like the dark web itself: unpredictable, unreliable and maddeningly slow

Dark web sites

- Dark web sites look pretty much like any other site, but there are important differences. One is the naming structure. Instead of ending in .com or .co, dark web sites end in .onion.
- That's "a special-use top level domain suffix designating an anonymous hidden service reachable via the Tor network,"

Scamming in Dark Web

- Many dark websites are set up by scammers, who constantly move around to avoid the wrath of their victims.
- Even commerce sites that may have existed for a year or more can suddenly disappear if the owners decide to cash in and flee with the escrow money they're holding on behalf of customers

Commerce on the dark web

- The dark web has flourished thanks to bitcoin, the crypto-currency that enables two parties to conduct a trusted transaction without knowing each other's identity.

- Nearly all dark web commerce sites conduct transactions in bitcoin or some variant.

Is everything about the dark web illegal?

- Not all parts of it are engaged in illegal activities
- The Tor network began as an anonymous communications channel, and it still serves a valuable purpose in helping people communicate in environments that are hostile to free speech.
- A lot of people use it in countries where there's eavesdropping or where internet access is criminalized.
- There's also material that you wouldn't be surprised to find on the public web, such as links to full-text editions of hard-to-find books, collections of political news from mainstream websites.
- There are a variety of private and encrypted email services, instructions for installing an anonymous operating system and advanced tips for the privacy-conscious.
- Law enforcement agencies keep an ear to the ground on the dark web looking for stolen data from recent security breaches

that might lead to a trail to the perpetrators.

- Many mainstream media organizations monitor whistle-blower sites looking for news.

What is Tor?

- Tor stands for Thin Onion Routing. Tor was initially developed by the US Navy, and its goal was to protect internet users from spying.
- It does that by bouncing users' and sites' traffic through multiple relays to disguise their location
- But it also happens to be the place where illegal activities take place.
- But it should be noted that It's not that Tor is evil; it's just that the same tools that protect political dissidents are pretty good at protecting criminals too.

Why is dark web in news?

- Amitabh Bachchan's twitter account was hacked and 'Ayyildiz Tim cyber army', a pro-Pakistan Turkish hacker group established in 2002, claimed responsibility for the hack and bragged about it on the Dark Web.
- They (the group) also posted the actor's Twitter password.

News on AIR

1. Benchmarking India's Payment Systems

Why in news?

- RBI released the report on 'Benchmarking India's Payment Systems'.
- The report provides a comparative position of the payment system ecosystem in India relative to comparable payment systems and usage trends in other major countries.

Highlights of the report:

- India is a "leader" in regulating costs of payments systems, number of debit cards issued and automated teller machines.
- India is "strong" in areas like having necessary laws and cash in circulation per capita.

- There has been substantial growth in e-payments by Government and also in digital infrastructure in terms of mobile networks.
- However, India needs to make more efforts to decrease the volume of paper clearing and increase acceptance infrastructure to promote digital payments.

2. Swachh Bharat has led to reduced ground water contamination-A study by UNICEF

- The Swachh Bharat initiative has led to reduced ground water contamination.
- The substantial reductions may potentially be attributed to the improvement in sanitation and hygiene practices.

- Supportive systems such as regular monitoring and behaviour change messaging, which have all been critical aspects of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), also helped reduce ground water contamination.

About Swachh Bharat Mission:

- To accelerate the efforts to achieve universal sanitation coverage and to put focus on sanitation, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, launched the Swachh Bharat Mission on 2nd October, 2014.
- The Mission Coordinator shall be Secretary, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) with two Sub-Missions – the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban).
- The Mission aims to achieve a Swachh Bharat by 2019, as a fitting tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.

3. Heat Waves

Why in news?

- Heat wave has intensified in several parts of the country like Odisha, Maharashtra, and Telangana etc.

What is a Heat Wave?

- A Heat Wave is a period of abnormally high temperatures, more than the normal maximum temperature that occurs during the summer season in the North-Western parts of India.
- Heat Waves typically occur between March and June, and in some rare cases even extend till July.
- The extreme temperatures and resultant atmospheric conditions adversely affect people living in these regions as they cause physiological stress, sometimes resulting in death.
- As such there is no universal definition for heat wave. It is generally defined as a prolonged period of excessive heat.
- Heat wave will be declared in hilly region when it exceeds 30 degree Celsius.



4. Implementation of BS-6 emission norms from 2020

- The vehicular pollution which is 28 to 30 per cent of air pollution will be reduced drastically after implementation of Bharat Stage (BS)-6 emission norms from next year.
- Air quality has improved in the national capital due to the concerted actions of the government.
- Citing that in 2014 in the National Capital the number of poor air quality days was 300 and it came down to 206 days in 2018.
- By implementing the BS-6 emission norms the air quality is expected to improve further.

What are Bharat Stage norms?

- The Bharat Stage are standards instituted by the government to regulate emission of air pollutants from motor vehicles.
- The norms were introduced in 2000. With appropriate fuel and technology, they limit the release of air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, particulate matter (PM) and Sulphur oxides from vehicles using internal combustion engines.
- As the stage goes up, the control on emissions become stricter. Thus Bharat Stage VI norms are two stages ahead of the present Bharat Stage IV norms in regulating emissions.
- These norms are based on similar norms in Europe called Euro 4 and Euro 6.

Differences between two stages

- The extent of Sulphur is the major difference between Bharat Stage IV and Bharat Stage VI norms.
- BS-IV fuels contain 50 parts per million (ppm) sulphur, the BS-VI grade fuel only has 10 ppm sulphur. BS VI can bring PM in diesel cars down by 80 per cent .

- The new norms will bring down nitrogen oxides from diesel cars by 70 per cent and in petrol cars by 25 per cent.
- BS VI also makes on-board diagnostics (OBD) mandatory for all vehicles. OBD device informs the vehicle owner or the repair technician how efficient the systems in the vehicle are.

5. Godavari-Penna Linking Project

Why in news?

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has stayed the Andhra Pradesh government's Godavari-Penna interlinking projects due to lack of environmental clearance from the Central Water Commission (CWC) and the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
- The project will interlink the two major rivers, Godavari and Penna to solve drinking water and irrigation problems in south coastal Andhra.

Godavari River

- The Godavari is India's second longest river after the Ganga. Its source is in Trimbakeshwar, Maharashtra.
- It flows east for 1,465 kilometers, draining the states of Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Karnataka, ultimately emptying into the Bay of Bengal through its extensive network of tributaries.
- The river has a religious significance, it is also known as the Vridha Ganga.
- The major tributaries of the river are classified as the left bank tributaries which include the Purna, Pranhita, Indravati and Sabari River and the right bank tributaries are Pravara, Manjira, Manair.

Penna River

- The Penna River is also known as Pennar. It rises in Nandi Hills in Chikballapur District of Karnataka and runs north and east through the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to empty into the Bay of Bengal.
- It is 597 kilometers long, with a drainage basin covering 55,213 km² in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

- This is a seasonal river, the main source of the water is from rain. The river basin lies in the rain shadow region of Eastern Ghats and receives 500 mm average rainfall annually.
- The major tributaries of the Penna are the Jayamangali, Kunderu and Sagileru from the north, and Chitravathi, Papagni and Cheyyeru from the south.

6. Ban on single use plastics

Why in news?

- Canada Prime Minister announced that single-use plastics will be banned in the country from 2021. He declared it a global challenge to phase out the plastic bags, straws and cutlery clogging the world's oceans.
- Canada, France, Germany, United Kingdom and Italy, along with the European Union, subscribed at last year's G7 summit in Quebec to a new charter against pollution in the world's oceans. The United States and Japan did not join the pact.

Single-Use Plastics

- Single-use plastics, often also referred to as disposable plastics, are commonly used for plastic packaging⁷ and include items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These include, among other items, grocery bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups and cutlery.

G7 Ocean Plastics Charter

- Ocean Plastics Charter is a charter against pollution in the world's oceans. This non-binding Charter called on participating countries and the EU to commit to making all plastics reusable, recyclable or recovered by 2030.

What is the need of the charter?

- Each year a million birds and more than 100,000 marine mammals worldwide suffer injury or death by becoming entangled in plastic or ingesting it through the food chain. Single-use items represent some 70 % of the plastic waste littering the marine environment.

7. VG Kannan Committee

Why in news?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted a six-member committee to review the entire gamut of Automated Teller Machines (ATM) charges and fees.
- Chief Executive of Indian Banks' Association VG Kannan will chair the committee consisting of senior officers from National Payments Corporation of India, SBI, HDFC Bank, Confederation of ATM Industry and Tata Communications Payment Solutions Limited.
- The committee will review existing patterns of costs, charges and interchange fees for ATM transactions. It is to submit its report within two months from the date of its first meeting.

8. Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES)

Why in news?

- Government of India has constituted a multi-specialist team to assist the Bihar government in containment of the rising cases of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) in Muzaffarpur and Japanese Encephalitis (JE) in Gaya.

About Acute encephalitis syndrome (AES)

- It is characterized as acute-onset of fever and a change in mental status (mental confusion, disorientation, delirium, or coma) and/or new-onset of seizures in a person of any age at any time of the year.
- The disease most commonly affects children and young adults and can lead to considerable morbidity and mortality.
- Viruses are the main causative agents in AES cases, although other sources such as bacteria, fungus, parasites, spirochetes, chemicals, toxins and noninfectious agents have also been reported over the past few decades.
- Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) is the major cause of AES in India (ranging from 5%-35%).
- Nipah virus, Zika virus is also found as causative agents for AES.

Why is it a cause of concern in India?

- In India, AES outbreaks in north and eastern India have been linked to children eating unripe litchi fruit on empty stomachs. Unripe fruit contain the toxins hypoglycin A and methylenecyclopropylglycine (MCPG), which cause vomiting if ingested in large quantities. Hypoglycin A is a naturally occurring amino acid found in the unripened litchi that causes severe vomiting (Jamaican vomiting sickness), while MCPG is a poisonous compound found in litchi seeds.

9. Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D)

Why in news?

- Senior IPS officer V S Kaumudi has been appointed as the Director General of the BPR&D.

About:

- The Government of India established the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), under the Ministry of Home Affairs giving a new orientation to then existing Police Research and Advisory Council (1966) for the following reasons and with the primary objective of modernization of police force:
 - 1) To take direct and active interest in the issues
 - 2) To promote a speedy and systematic study of the police problems,
 - 3) To apply science and technology in the methods and techniques used by police.

10. Relaxation in NEFT and RTGS

Why in news?

- With an aim to encourage digital transfer of funds, the RBI has waived off all charges for transactions using National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) and Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) systems.
- It has asked banks to pass on benefits to customers.

- This move will benefit the small traders who deal in small value transactions and operate on small margins.

National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT)

- NEFT is a payment system facilitating funds transfers from one bank account to another.
- One can access this service either by using Internet banking or by visiting the bank branch. (Not all bank branches are enabled with this service.)
- Once we initiate the transfer, the money reaches the beneficiary account within hours.
- There is no limit on the minimum or maximum amount you can transfer, however, individual banks may put restrictions on the per transaction amount.

Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS)

- This is a facility used for transferring high value amounts. In RTGS, the minimum amount that can be currently transferred is Rs 2 lakh.
- We can only transfer funds using RTGS on any working day between Monday and Saturday either via internet banking or bank branch.

11. World Investment Report 2019

Why in news?

- According to The World Investment Report 2019, FDI flows to India grew 6% in 2018 to 42 billion.
- The World Investment Report 2019 was released by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Highlights of the Report

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to India grew by 6 % to 42 billion dollars in 2018, with strong inflows in the manufacturing, communication and financial services sectors, and cross-border merger and acquisition activities.
- India was among the top 20 host economies for FDI inflows in 2017-18.
- FDI inflows to South Asia increased 3.5 % to 54 billion dollars. India has historically accounted for 70 to 80 % of inflows to the subregion.

- Further, the growth in cross-border Merger & Acquisitions for India to 33 billion dollars in 2018 was primarily due to transactions worth 16 billion dollars in retail trade, which includes e-commerce, and telecommunication.

UNCTAD

- UNCTAD was established in 1964. It is a permanent intergovernmental body and principal organ of the United Nations General Assembly dealing with trade, investment, and development issues.
- Functions:
 - It formulates policies relating to all aspects of development including trade, aid, transport, finance and technology.
 - It undertakes research, policy analysis and data collection for the debates of government representatives and experts.
 - It provides technical assistance tailored to the specific requirements of developing countries, with special attention to the needs of the least developed countries and of economies in transition.

12. E-Foreigner Tribunal (e-FT)

Why in news?

- The Centre has approved setting up of e-Foreigner Tribunal (e-FT) in Assam.
- The proposed integrated e-FT IT system will be implemented across the state for effective monitoring and resolution of cases registered with Foreigner Tribunal.

Functions:

- The main objective of the project is to maintain a statewide bio-metric and biographic data, to capture the illegal migrants' data to computerize data flow for all the stakeholders.
- It will also help in the legalization of eligible beneficiaries for welfare schemes.
- The new IT system will not only strengthen the Judiciary in the disposal of cases but also help Police organization in faster detection, prosecution and detention.
- This will enhance the transparency of case disposal process. It will also help in legalization of eligible beneficiaries for welfare schemes.

Big picture

1. India's water crisis

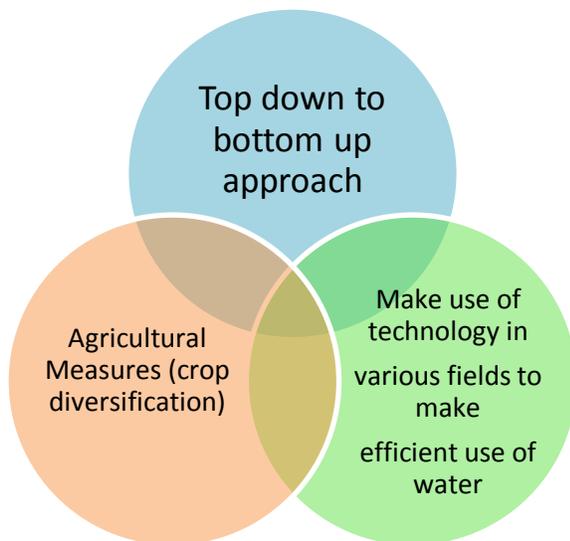
Context:

- Water crisis in India is becoming critical as certain companies in India asked their employees to work from home due to water shortage. Also, Maharashtra is facing a worst water shortage.

Why Crisis?

- Major source of water is from monsoon. Thus, erratic monsoon can cause drought in certain areas and flood in some other. That means, temporal variation is also a concern.

Issues discussed:



- Here, water conservation is as important as energy conservation, and here are some

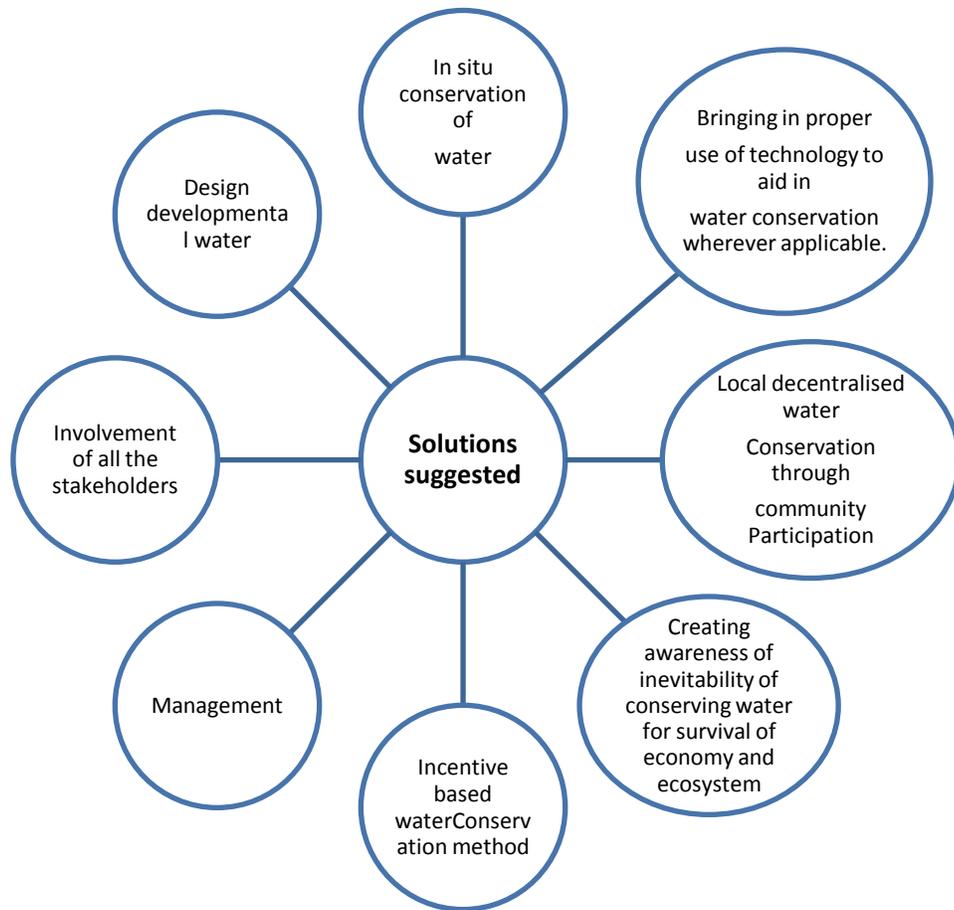
of the measures to address the problems as depicted in the figure.

In situ Conservation

- Rain water harvesting
- Watershed management
- Promoting drip irrigation
- Crop diversification to include more drought resistant crop in vulnerable areas
- Local and decentralized water conservation
- Community participation
- Village level initiatives

Design development of water management

- Planning should be involved and focus must be on water conservation as in if the water management is right, then we get our energy management right, land management right and so on.
- In total, the sphere of water management should be expanded by creating awareness on indispensability of such a thing from deeply decentralized level as in from each home. Here, it is not the government who must put in its effort but it should start from individual level.
- More specifically, a bottom up approach with proper access to infrastructure for the process of water conservation is the key.



2. US shadow over India-Iran relations

Context:

- US sanctions on Iran to choke it to get in terms with the former's interest is the situation. And, it can have a significant geopolitical as well as economic impacts in the world and India-Iran relation in particular as we share major cultural, economic, and political interests with Iran.

Significance:

- India being a second largest importer of oil from Iran. And, we have gas projects with Iran that can significantly contribute to our energy security. So, the sanctions on Iran by big fries in the world can invariably impact Indian economy.

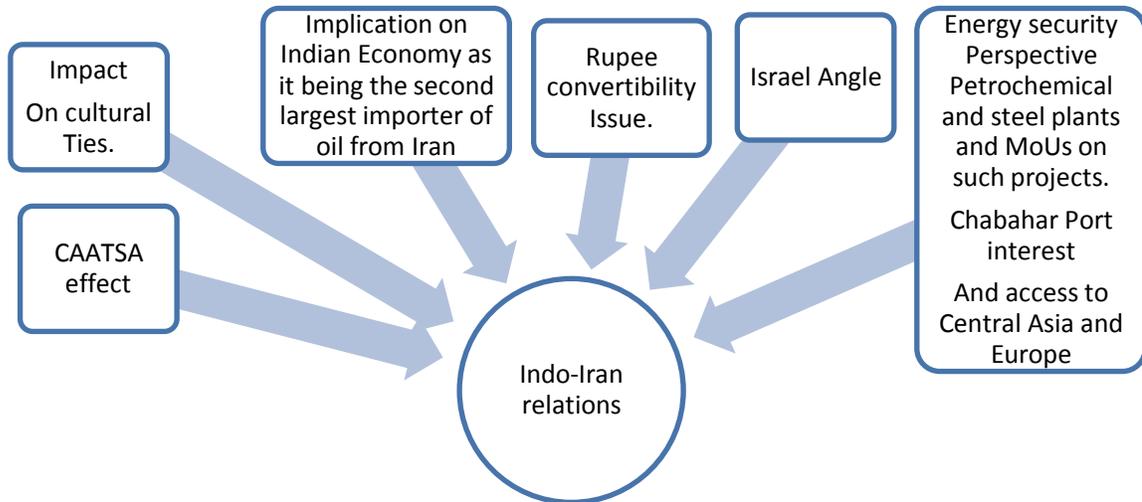
India's Interest and concerns

Interest

- Chabahar Port Access to Central Asia and Europe
- Gas projects and Energy security
- Projects in Chabahar free trade zone
- Cultural ties Art and Architecture perspective

Concerns

- May have to face US wrath when favoring Iran
- Russian challenges as it favors Iran
- Rupee convertibility issue in trade terms
- Inaccessibility through Chabahar Port



US Angle

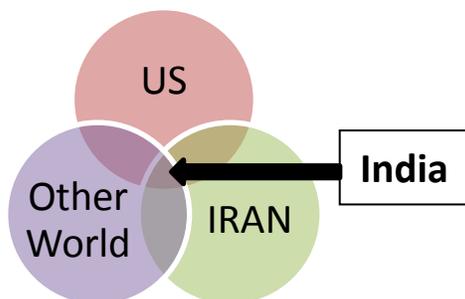
- Violation and withdrawal from Joint Comprehensive plan of Action 2015(Iran Nuclear Deal) by Iran has incited US wrath on Iran.
- Attack on US tankers escalated the tensions between them further.
- Strained US-Russia reactions

Israel Angle

- As the nation is instigating US and west to attack Iran, there are chances of polarization on the lines of Iranian deeds. In that case, it would be difficult to prevent economic and political crisis around the world. India will obviously be in a compromised condition if it happens.

What should be India's stand?

- The figure depicts what India's stand should be as in balancing all the relations And maintain communication with both of the nations



Iran Angle

- As India cannot counteract the sanctions and also, cannot favor it fully, neutral stand can help. Iran cannot be completely trusted for its anti-terrorism claims and peace stand, so, India should not completely back Iranian cause. At the same time, US's interest on Middle East should not be ignored.
- So, considering all the angles, India needs a balanced as well as futuristic approach, and for the time being it should portray its economic interest as the priority than favouring any of the nations involved.

3. National Education Policy draft 2019

What is it?

- Education policy that seeks to address challenges faced by Indian education system.

Significance:

- As a draft it is released in public for review. And, it has already created a controversy on its three language formula proposal as certain states are not happy with it. However, draft policy has other proposals that strive to overcome the limits of present education system in the country. And, the listed below are areas of challenges.

1. Accessibility
2. Equity
3. Affordability

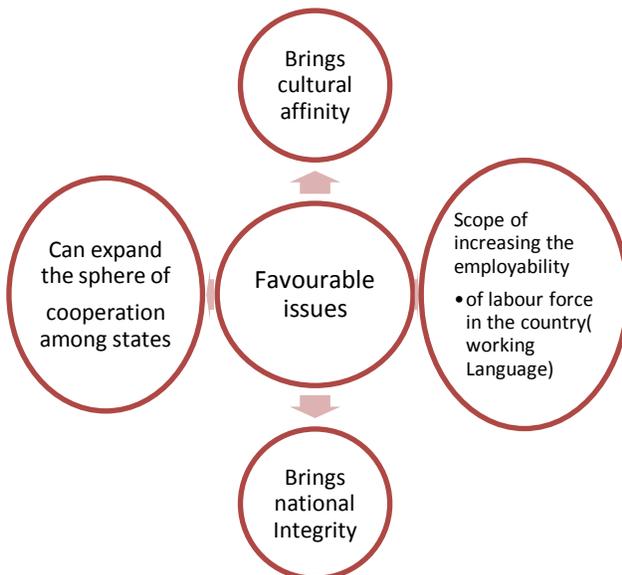
- 4. Quality
- 5. Accountability

What was discussed?

- Three Language formula of National Education Policy Draft 2019

What is three languages Formula?

- The formula enunciated in the 1968 National Policy Resolution which provided for the study of Hindi,
- English and modern Indian language (preferably one of the southern languages) in Hindi speaking states and Hindi, English and the regional language in the non-Hindi speaking states.
- And, Kothari commission examined and recommended this.



Favorable attributes

Affinity factor

- Language learning means cultural learning and that brings affinity among people who speak different languages.

Scope of increasing the quality or employability of labour force

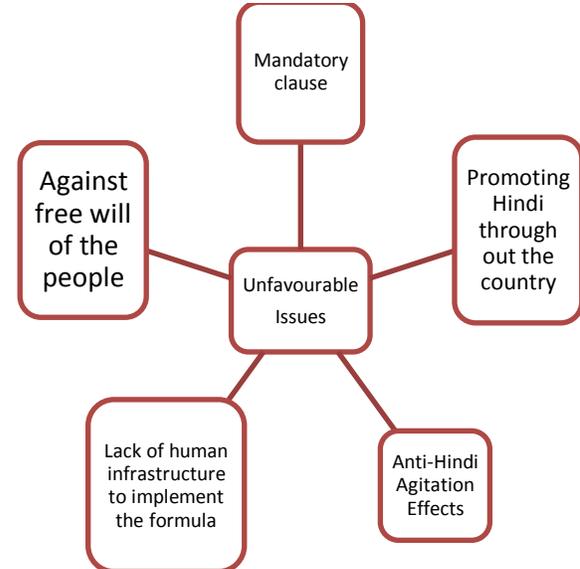
- Language Learning provides young people to get access to jobs across the country as language will not be a barrier for fetching a job anywhere in the country. It simply is the working language flexibility.

Brings in National Integrity

- Common Language allows people to communicate among each other regardless

of their cultural and geographical differences.

- **Expands the sphere of cooperation among states in the country.**



Unfavorable Factors/ arguments against Against free will of people

- The mandatory clause on learning Hindi is argued to be against the free will of the people.

States' protests

- The protests can jeopardize the very purpose of the three language formula.

Anti-Hindi agitation effect

- The agitation took place during 1937-40 and had impacted the opinion of the people in certain states.

Dearth of human infrastructure to fulfil the need of the proposal

- The third language trainers or teachers are less likely to be available across the country.

Way forward

- In sum, the three language formula can be considered as a tool for national integration and cultural affinity by transcending the language barriers. However, challenges faced due to the dearth of human infrastructure should be dealt with to implement the policy in its given terms. And, also, it should be beyond tokenism.

4. BIMSTEC vs SAARC

Introduction

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has recently said that “India would aim to enhance regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC grouping as there have been certain problems with SAARC”.
- The shift towards BIMSTEC is also indicated by inviting BIMSTEC leaders to the Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi’s swearing-in ceremony last month. (During Mr. Modi’s first term, he invited SAARC leaders for the swearing-in ceremony)

Why India is moving away from SAARC?

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union consists of 8 member states-- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives.
- The foundation of SAARC was laid in 1985 in Dhaka. SAARC member nations cooperate on a range of issues from agriculture, economy, poverty alleviation, S&T and culture to encourage people to people contact.
- However, it is being said that SAARC has become merely a symbolic regional forum with little prospect of strengthening regional cooperation. When compared to other regional groupings it seems that SAARC has been underperforming.
- The grouping is also being held hostage by Pakistan which tries to halt any significant progress by bringing in bilateral issues which is not allowed as per the SAARC charter.
- The SAARC intra-regional trade stands at just 5% on the share of intra-regional trade in overall trade in South Asia.

BIMSTEC and its significance

- Founded in 1997, BIMSTEC consists of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan, and Nepal.
- It currently represents over 1.5 billion people and has a combined gross domestic product of 3.5 trillion US dollars.

- BIMSTEC has the potential to become a bridge between SAARC and ASEAN.
- The primary objective of this organisation has been on providing technological and economic cooperation in 14 sectors such as customs, connectivity, technology, counterterrorism, etc.
- Strategic projects like Kaladan multi modal project and India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway can act as a catalyst in connecting India’s North-East region with South-East Asia, giving a strong impetus to India’s Act East policy.
- Physical connectivity with BIMSTEC would also help India integrate itself with ASEAN’s Master Plan of Connectivity 2025.
- However, India should focus on timely implementation of projects which is usually seen as our major weakness. The Ministry of External Affairs’ engagement with the PRAGATI model for timely implementation and delivery of projects is a step in the right direction.

Has SAARC Lost its Utility?

- The two organizations—SAARC and BIMSTEC—focus on geographically overlapping regions. However, this does not make them equal alternatives.
- While BIMSTEC holds great possibilities, there is nevertheless urgent need to revive SAARC. These two regional organizations can surely thrive together and even prove complementary.
- And being the biggest in stature and size, India surely holds the key to reviving SAARC summits while strengthening BIMSTEC at the same time.