

OFFICERS' Pulse

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Coverage.

The Hindu
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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

1) PM- KUSUM

- The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM) launched for farmers for installation of solar pumps and grid connected solar and other renewable power plants in the country.
- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has formulated a Scheme 'Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (KUSUM)'.

Components:

- Component-A: 10,000 MW of Decentralized Ground Mounted Grid Connected Renewable Power Plants.
- Component-B: Installation of 17.50 lakh standalone Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps.
- Component-C: Solarisation of 10 Lakh Grid-connected Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps.
- All three components combined, the scheme aims to add a solar capacity of 25,750 MW by 2022.

Subsidy:

- 60% subsidy on the solar pumps will be provided to farmers will be shared between the Centre and the States while 30% would be provided through bank loans. The balance cost has to be borne by the farmers.

Advantages:

- Under the scheme, farmers can install a solar power system and supply excess power to the grid thus increasing farmer income through sale of surplus power.
- Scheme also includes installation of stand-alone off-grid solar water pumps to fulfil irrigation needs of farmers not connected to grid.
- Scheme entails setting up of 25,750-MW solar capacity by 2022 with the total

central financial support of Rs 34,422 crore.

- When the scheme is fully implemented across the country include promotion of decentralized solar power production, reduction of transmission losses as well as providing support to the financial health of DISCOMs by reducing the subsidy burden to the agriculture sector.
- The scheme has direct employment potential. Besides increasing self-employment the proposal is likely to generate employment opportunity equivalent to 6.31 lakh job years for skilled and unskilled workers.

Impact on Energy/ Environment

- The scheme would also promote energy efficiency and water conservation and provide water security to farmers as India has about 30 million farm pumps that include 10 million pumps running on diesel.
- The Scheme will have substantial environmental impact in terms of savings of CO2 emissions.
- All three components of the Scheme combined together are likely to result in saving of about 27 million tonnes of CO2 emission per annum.
- Further, Component-B of the Scheme on standalone solar pumps may result in saving of 1.2 billion liters of diesel per annum and associated savings in the foreign exchange due to reduction of import of crude oil.

2) National Green Tribunal

- The National Green Tribunal has been established in 2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources including enforcement of any

legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

- It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.
- The Tribunal shall not be bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.
- The Tribunal's dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.
- The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.
- Initially, the NGT is proposed to be set up at five places of sittings and will follow circuit procedure for making itself more accessible.
- New Delhi is the Principal Place of Sitting of the Tribunal and Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata and Chennai shall be the other four place of sitting of the Tribunal.

3) National Investigation Agency

- A large number of terrorist attacks in militancy and insurgency affected areas by left wing extremism, bomb blasts are found to have complex inter-State and international linkages, and possible connection with other activities like the smuggling of arms and drugs, pushing in and circulation of fake Indian currency, infiltration from across the borders, etc.
- Keeping all these in view, it was felt that there was a need for setting up of an Agency at the Central level for investigation of offences related to terrorism and certain other Acts, which have national ramifications.
- The Government after due consideration and examination of the issues involved, proposed to enact a legislation to make provisions for establishment of a National Investigation Agency in a concurrent jurisdiction framework, with provisions

for taking up specific cases under specific Acts for investigation.

- Accordingly the NIA Act was enacted on 31-12-08 and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) was born.
- At present NIA is functioning as the Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in India.

Vision

- The National Investigation Agency aims to be a thoroughly professional investigative agency matching the best international standards.
- 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 (data base) of all terrorist related information.

Mission

- Professional Investigation
- Use of latest scientific methods of investigation
- Assist all states and other investigating agencies in investigation of terrorist cases
- Study and analyse laws relating to terrorism in other countries and regularly evaluate the adequacy of existing laws in India and propose changes as and when necessary.
- To win the confidence of the citizens of India through selfless and fearless endeavours.

4) Naga Peace Accord

- In August 2015, Government of India signed a Framework Agreement with National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) IM to resolve the long-standing Naga issue in a peaceful manner.

Naga Issue

- The Naga Hills became part of British India in 1881.
- Nagas have been demanding an independent homeland to preserve their culture.
- In 1960, a Sixteen Point Agreement was signed between members of the Naga People's Congress and the Government of

India. As a result of this agreement a new state of Nagaland was created in 1963.

- Many Naga areas were left outside the state.
- Several movements and group in Nagaland started demanding a bigger Nagaland.
- National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) emerged as the leading organization of all the Naga movement.
- NSCN(IM) demands a Greater Nagalim comprising of all contiguous Naga areas spread across the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur along with a large tract in Myanmar.
- The Greater Nagalim area as demanded by NSCN (IM) comprises of 1,20, 000 sq km while the present Nagaland state is of 16,257 sq km.
- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur are wary of the NSCN-IM's concept of Nagalim or Greater Nagaland that could lead to a redrawing of their boundaries.
- Manipur has begun protesting with Assembly Speaker Y. Khemchand Singh telling Mr. Modi in a petition that any compromise with Manipur's territorial integrity would not be tolerated.

2015 - Naga Peace Accord

- In August 2015, a Framework Agreement has been signed between NSCN (IM) and Government of India to find a peaceful solution for the Naga issue.
- Contents of the agreement have not been made public. T
- The deal is said to have provided for cultural integration of Naga areas instead of territorial integration.

Why in News?

- Naga Peace Accord contents are not known.
- However a special arrangement was arrived through Naga Accord.
- Abrogation of special status for Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under Article 370 created panic among the North Eastern States especially Nagaland which enjoys certain special privileges under Article 371(A) of the constitution.

5) Kartarpur Pact

- The Kartarpur Corridor is an under-construction border corridor between the

neighbouring nations of India and Pakistan, connecting the Sikh shrines of Dera Baba Nanak Sahib (Punjab, India)) and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur (in Punjab, Pakistan)

Gurdwara in Kartarpur:

- The gurdwara in Kartarpur is located on the bank of river Ravi in Pakistan
- It is about four km from the Dera Baba Nanak shrine.
- It was here that Guru Nanak assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539.
- Sikh jathas from India travel to Pakistan on four occasions every year - for Baishakhi, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev, the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev.

Kartarpur Sahib Corridor

- There had been demands to build a corridor that would allow the pilgrims to cross over into Pakistan from the Indian side to visit Kartarpur Sahib Shrine and return the same day.
- A bridge will need to be constructed over the Ravi and there shall be no need for passports or visas.
- India had first proposed the Kartarpur Sahib corridor in 1999 when the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore.
- Now the corridor is being built by both nations to connect Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan's Kartarpur, the final resting place of Guru Nanak, to commemorate the 550th birth anniversary of the founder of Sikhism on November 12.

Why in News?

- India and Pakistan signed an agreement to operationalise the Kartarpur corridor that will facilitate pilgrims from India to visit the Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan.

Details of the agreement



- The agreement is valid initially for **five years**.

- India will hand over the list of pilgrims to Pakistan 10 days in advance and those granted permission to go may be informed only four days before the proposed date of travel.
- The agreement said pilgrims would be allowed to carry a **maximum of Rs. 11,000 and a 7-kg bag** that could contain drinking water, and they would not be allowed to venture beyond the shrine.
- They would travel in the morning and return the same day.
- For more details, please refer to the Officer's *Pulse Issue No. 19*.

ENVIRONMENT

1) Legal protection alone not effective in preserving a tiger reserve

Why in news?

- A new study by the **Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS)**, titled 'Extensive vegetation browning and drying in forests of India's tiger reserves', published recently in the international science journal Nature,
- It has concluded that most **tiger reserves (TRs)**, which have the highest legal protection in India, have deteriorated in forest conservation as compared to **wildlife sanctuaries (WLS)**.

What are tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries?

- Sanctuaries and National Parks are **areas of significant ecological, floral, faunal or natural significance**.
- They are notified by State Governments (Central Government can also declare an area as national park/wildlife sanctuary. Both the govts can do after consultation with **National Board for Wildlife** and State Board for Wildlife respectively.) and protected by the Forest Department under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Hunting of wild animals, encroachment and/or destruction of habitat, construction of tourist lodges and other such activities are prohibited.
- While most of the provisions are common for Sanctuaries and National Parks, there are **three key differences**:
 1. People within a National Park are not allowed to live, while in a Sanctuary certain rights can be allowed.
 2. Livestock grazing is prohibited in a National Park but can be allowed in a regulated manner in Sanctuaries; and
 3. A Sanctuary can be upgraded to a National Park but a **National Park cannot be downgraded as a Sanctuary**.
- A **National Park or Wildlife Sanctuary** that is considered significant for protecting tigers can be **additionally designated as a Tiger Reserve**.

- **Project Tiger** was launched by the Government of India in the **year 1973** to save the endangered species of tiger in the country.
- Starting from nine (9) reserves in 1973-2016 the number is **grown up to fifty (50) tiger reserves**. A total area of 71027.10 km² is covered by these project tiger areas.
- A Tiger Reserve consists of a **'Core' or 'Critical Tiger Habitat'**, which is to be managed as an inviolate area, and a **'Buffer' or Peripheral** area immediately abutting a Core area, which may be accorded a lesser degree of habitat protection. This is the typical zonation of a Tiger Reserve.

Centre for Wildlife studies (CWS)

- The Centre for Wildlife Studies is a **non-profit trust** based in **Bengaluru**, India. Inspired by the pioneering tiger studies of Dr. George Schaller, founder-trustee Dr. K. Ullas Karanth established CWS in 1984.
- CWS is an internationally recognised centre of excellence in the arenas of wildlife research, policy, education and in situ conservation.

Key points of the report:

- **THE PROBLEM** : The study considers that forest conservation includes stemming deforestation **as well as preserving its vegetation condition** – greenness and moisture.
- However, most evaluations of effectiveness of these protections by authorities for a forest is **done by just evaluating deforestation levels**,
- The study argues that authorities must also study of vegetation condition instead, for better understanding of the state of these forests.
- **PROCEDURE of STUDY**: The study paired TRs with similar WLSs in India – similar area (75 sq.km) and similar vegetation pattern – and **studied 25 such pairs**.
- Using a **before-after control impact style design**, the study evaluated the **effects of protection elevation** – being declared a TR – on vegetation condition,

comparing it with the paired WLS. **It was to see whether any betterness in vegetation after WLS or National Park being declared as TRs.**

- After declaration as TRs, vegetation condition in 13 TRs (52%) declined in more than 50% of their areas, with 12 TRs (48%) being overall better than their matched WLSs,”
- Vegetation condition in 5 TRs out of 8 **was harmed in more than 25%** of their areas, with 3 TRs being overall better than their matched WLSs
- The study **observed browning and drying up of forests in tiger reserves**, essentially declining quality of the forest in these reserves. The extensive vegetation browning and drying is seen in about half of the study TRs, **with these trends often being similar or worse than in matched WLSs.**
- This study questions whether only protection elevation in safeguarding long-term viability of tiger habitats.
- This study can enable in designing better monitoring and adaptive management at large spatial and management scales of our effectiveness in protecting the forest ecosystems.

2) Centre clarifies on definition of forest

Why in News?

- The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Environment Ministry has said that

the States need not take the Centre's approval to define what constitutes unclassified land as forest.

What did the committee said?

- The committee has said that the states have well established forest departments.
- Hence,they are in a better position rather than Union Environment Ministry to understand their own forests and needs.
- The criteria framed by the states for their forests should not be subject to approval by Union Environment Ministry.
- The committee has also referred to the 1996 Supreme Court judgment which has allowed states to define what constitutes unclassified land as forest.

About the Supreme Court Judgement:

- The Supreme Court judgment (Govardhan judgement) in 1996 had expanded the definition of forest to include:
 - a) lands that were already notified by the Centre as forests
 - b) lands that appear in government records as forests and
 - c) Those that fell in the dictionary definition of forest.
- The court had allowed the States to evolve their own criteria and define tracts of land as forest and these would then be bound by forest conservation laws.
- The court had also said that all-encompassing definition of forest wasn't possible for India because the country has **16 different kinds of forest.**

Vegetation Types of India following Champion and Seth 1968

Sl. No	Vegetation Type	General composition	* Area in Sq. Km	%
1	Tropical wet evergreen forests	Dense Tall forests, entirely evergreen or nearly so	51,249	8.0
2	Tropical semi evergreen forests	Domants includes deciduous species but evergreens predominants	26,424	4.1
3	Tropical Moist deciduous forest	Dominants mainly deciduous but sub-dominants and lower story largely evergreen top canopy even and dense but 25m high	236,794	37.0
4	Tropical dry deciduous forest	Entirely deciduous or nearly so top canopy uneven rarely over 25 m high	186,620	28.6
5	Tropical thorny/ scrub forests	Deciduous with low thorny trees and xerophytes predominats top canopy more or less broken, less than 10 m high	16,491	2.6
6	Tropical dry evergreen forest	Hard leaved evergreen trees predominates with some deciduous emergent often dense but usually under 20 m high	1,404	0.2
7	Littoral and swampy forest	Mainly evergreens of varying density and height but always associated predominantly with wetness	4,046	0.6
8	Subtropical broad-leaved hill forests	Broad-leaved largely evergreen high forests	2,781	0.4
9	Subtropical pine forests	Pine associated predominates	42,377	6.6
10	Subtropical dry evergreen forests	Low xerophytic forest and scrubs	12,538	2.5
11	Montane wet temperate forests	Evergreen without coniferous species	23,365	3.6
12	Himalayan wet/ moist temperate forests	Evergreen forests mainly scleriphyllous oak and coniferous species	22,012	3.4
13	Himalayan dry temperate forests	Coniferous forests with sparse xerophytic undergrowth	312	-
14	Sub-alpine forests	Stunted deciduous or evergreen forests, usually close formation with or without confers		
15	Moist alpine	Low but often dense scrub of evergreen species	18,628	2.9
16	Dry alpine	Xerophytic scrub in open formation mostly of deciduous in nature		

- This state to state variation builds the complexity for developing one definition for all over India on forest.

Forest Advisory Committee (FAC):

- The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Environment Ministry is a statutory body under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.
- FAC advises the ministry on any activity that requires the diversion of forestland for non-forest use. The committee was constituted under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980. The first such body was constituted at a time when the ministry did not exist, but the charge of

the department was held by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.

- The advisory body considers questions on the diversion of forest land for non-forest uses such as mining, industrial projects, townships and advises the government on the issue of granting forest clearances.
- It comprises official members in the Centre's forestry division and independent experts, who are the non-official members.

3) 2019 ozone hole is the smallest on record

What is ozone, ozone layer and ozone hole?

- **Ozone is a gas** made of three oxygen atoms, and just like any other gas it circulates in the atmosphere.
- The production of ozone is high near the equator, but due to atmospheric circulation transporting the ozone to the poles, the equator tends to be a region of relatively low ozone through the year.
- The stratospheric ozone layer is critical because it protects Earth from harmful ultraviolet solar radiation. (Stratosphere is 2nd atmospheric layer from the surface.)
- The stratospheric ozone layer helps deflect incoming ultraviolet radiation from the sun, shielding life on Earth from its harmful effects, such as skin cancer, cataracts and damage to plants.
- However, chemicals used for refrigeration purposes, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), break down stratospheric ozone molecules, thereby exposing the planet's surface to greater amounts of UV radiation.
- Areas with ozone concentrations less than 220 Dobson Units are called "holes" in the layer.
- It was in 1985, researchers at the British Antarctic Survey discovered the ozone hole and NASA's satellite estimates not only confirmed the 1985 discovery but also revealed the ozone hole's continental scale.

Why in News?

- The Antarctic ozone hole hit its smallest annual peak on record since tracking began in 1982.
- The annual ozone hole - which consists of an area of heavily depleted ozone high in the stratosphere above Antarctica, between 7 and 25 miles (11 and 40 kilometres) above the surface - reached its peak extent of 6.3 million square miles on September 8 and then shrank to less than 3.9 million square miles during the rest of September and October.
- Normally, with normal weather conditions, the ozone hole typically grows to a maximum of about 8 million square miles
- **The Montreal Protocol**, a landmark international environmental treaty that took effect in 1988, has reduced CFC emissions worldwide. It is termed as one of the most successful international agreements.
- On October 15, 2016, Parties to the Montreal Protocol adopted the **Kigali amendment** to phase down production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) worldwide. HFCs are widely used alternatives to ozone depleting substances such as hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), already controlled under the Protocol.
- These chemicals have an atmospheric lifetime of several decades and can destroy extraordinary amounts of ozone over that time. The ozone layer has been slowly but steadily recovering since the Montreal Protocol took effect, but it still has a long way to go.
- Each year, an ozone hole forms during the Southern Hemisphere's late winter as the sun's rays initiate chemical reactions between the ozone molecules and man-made chemically active forms of chlorine and bromine.
- These chemical reactions are maximized on the surface of high-flying clouds, but **milder-than-average conditions in the stratosphere above Antarctica this year inhibited cloud formation** and persistence, according to a NASA statement. **This helped prevent the loss of a considerable amount of ozone.**
- The weather systems that minimize ozone depletion in September, known as **"sudden stratospheric warming" events**, were unusually strong this year.
- About 12 miles (19 kilometres) above Earth's surface, temperatures during September were 29 degrees higher than average, NASA reported, "which was the warmest in the 40-year historical record for September by a wide margin.
- There were no exact reasons discovered for warming of the stratosphere but it was concluded that a lot must be done to conserve the ozone layer.
- Assuming that CFC use continues at recent rates and that no ozone-depleting chemical substitutes are found and widely used, **scientists anticipate the ozone hole to shrink to its 1980 size by about**

2070 as CFCs still in the upper atmosphere gradually decline.

- Since 2000, atmospheric levels of CFCs have been slowly declining, but they are still sufficiently abundant to cause annual ozone holes at the North and South poles.

4) Milk safety and quality survey

What is the issue?

- A milk safety and quality survey was conducted by an independent agency at the behest of the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**.
- This survey has demolished the perception of large-scale milk adulteration in India.

About FSSAI

- It has been established under Food Safety and Standards , 2006 which consolidates various acts & orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.
- FSSAI has been created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure the availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.

Highlights of the Food Safety and Standard Act, 2006

- Various central Acts like Prevention of Food Adulteration Act,1954,Fruit Products Order , 1955, Meat Food Products Order,1973,
- Vegetable Oil Products (Control) Order, 1947,Edible Oils Packaging (Regulation)Order 1988, Solvent Extracted Oil, De- Oiled Meal and Edible Flour (Control) Order, 1967, Milk and Milk Products Order, 1992 etc will be repealed after commencement of FSS Act, 2006.
- What does the survey reveal?
- It was undertaken on 6,432 samples collected between May and October, 2018, picked from over 1,100 town/cities with over 50,000 populations.
- The samples were tested for 13 common adulterants and 3 contaminants - pesticides, aflatoxin M1 and antibiotics.
- The survey found 93% of the samples were absolutely safe.

- Only 12 adulterated samples were found to be unsafe for consumption.
- The adulterated samples - were also subjected to confirmatory tests - were from just three States: Telangana, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala.
- The survey's quantitative analysis of all adulterated samples showed the amount of adulterants and contaminants in the dozen samples was not high and hence unlikely to pose serious threat to human health.
- However, it did find 368 samples (5.7%) had aflatoxin M1 residues beyond the permissible limit of 0.5 microgram per kilogram.
- Antibiotics were also seen above the permissible level in 77 samples, from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

Why is the presence of aflatoxin M1 a health concern?

- Aflatoxin M1 was more widely present in processed milk samples (227) than in raw milk (141). According to the FSSAI, aflatoxin M1 in milk is from feed and fodder, which is not regulated.
- Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Kerala are the states in which the highest residue levels of aflatoxin M1 in milk were seen in samples. - . According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, aflatoxin M1 has been classified as "**possibly carcinogenic to humans**".
- Its carcinogenic potency is estimated to be about 1/10th of aflatoxin B1. Since the current survey has limited itself to milk, it is unclear how widespread aflatoxin M1 contamination is in milk products like cheese, and hence the total exposure to it.
- Aflatoxin M1 in milk and milk products is **a public health concern** especially in infants and young children as milk constitutes one of the major sources of nutrients. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), exposure to aflatoxin M1 in milk and milk products is especially high in areas where the grain quality used as animal feed is poor.
- Improper storage of food harvest in warm and humid conditions lead to aflatoxin contamination that is much higher than what is seen in the field. Steps - Attempts need to be taken both before and after

food crop harvest to reduce the toxin amount.

- Equally important is in having facilities to regularly test for aflatoxin M1.

5) White Bellbird - loudest bird in the world

- According to a study published in the journal 'Current Biology', the male white bellbird's mating call is about three times louder than screaming phias — the previously loudest bird.
- According to IUCN, it is listed under the 'Least Concern' category.



- The discovery gave an example of the **consequences of sexual selection**.
- Sexual selection happens when males compete for mates, driving the evolution of truly bizarre and exaggerated traits such as the peacock's tail, and the now found loud singing abilities of the male bellbirds.
- In general, sexual selection is a theory in postulating that the evolution of certain conspicuous physical traits—such as pronounced coloration, increased size, or striking adornments—in animals may grant the possessors of these traits greater success in obtaining mates.
- The white bellbird is one of the four bellbird species in **South and Central America**.

6) Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is often called 'Mini Kaziranga' due to similar landscape and vegetation.
- Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, situated in the flood plains of **River Brahmaputra** in the district of Morigaon in **Assam**.

- It has the highest density of one-horned rhinos in the world and second highest concentration in Assam after Kaziranga National Park.
- It is also an Important Bird Area as it is also home to more than 2000 migratory birds and various reptiles.
- Pobitora was declared a **reserved forest** in 1971 and a wildlife sanctuary in 1987.
- The wildlife sanctuary is home to endangered one-horned rhinoceros (highest density) and the other mammals such as Leopard, Leopard cat, Fishing cat, Jungle cat, Feral Buffalo, Wild pigs, Chinese pangolins, etc.
- About 72% of Pobitora Sanctuary consists of wet savannah of *Arundo donax* and *Saccharum*. The remaining area is covered by water bodies.
- Water hyacinth (an invasive aquatic plant) is a major problem to the area especially to waterfowl, as it forms thick mats on the water surface.

Why in news?

- Recently, two Asiatic Water Buffaloes died in the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary due to the anthrax.

Asiatic Water Buffalo

- The Asiatic Wild Water Buffalo is scientifically known as *Bubalus Arnee*.
- The buffalo is mainly found in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh.
- It is the state animal of Chhattisgarh.
- Recently, it was found in the forests of Maharashtra after which the Maharashtra Government declared the **Kolamarka forest area** as a conservation reserve for the Asiatic Wild Buffalo.
- Asiatic buffalo has the **widest horn span** among all bovids found globally.
- The wild buffalo is mainly found in the alluvial grasslands, marshes, swamps and river valleys. They are generally found in areas that have plenty of water holes and resources.
- The Asiatic wild buffaloes are of enormous economic significance as they are the direct ancestors of all the breeds of the domestic buffaloes.
- However, over time their population has decreased at an alarming rate because of various reasons such as poaching, loss of

habitat and breeding with domestic buffaloes.



Protection Status:

- It has been listed as an **endangered** species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). (Their population in the world is less than 4000 with an estimate of less than 2,500 mature individuals.)
- Wild Water Buffalo is believed to be extinct in Bangladesh, Peninsular Malaysia, and on the islands of Sumatra, Java, and Borneo.

7) National Protocol on Snow Leopard Population Assessment



Why in news?

- Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Shri Prakash Javadekar launched the First National Protocol on Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India, on the occasion of International Snow Leopard Day (23rd Oct).

- The minister was addressing the inaugural session of the 4th steering committee meeting of the **Global Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Program**.

About GSLEP

- The GSLEP is a high-level intergovernmental **alliance of all the 12 snow leopard range** countries.
- The snow leopard countries namely, India, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Mongolia, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- It majorly focuses on the need for awareness and understanding of the value of Snow Leopard for the ecosystem.
- The GSLEP Program (2019) is being organized by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change at New Delhi.
- Currently, the Steering Committee meeting of GSLEP chaired by Nepal and co-chaired by Kyrgyzstan.
- The first National Snow Leopard Survey of the nation has been developed by scientific experts in association with the Snow Leopard States/UTs namely, **Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The use of technology such as camera traps and scientific surveys will help to estimate the numbers.

Snow Leopard

- The snow leopard inhabits the higher Himalayan and trans-Himalayan landscape in the five states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.
- This area contributes to about 5% of the global snow leopard range.
- Snow leopards are categorized as **'Vulnerable'** by IUCN.
- For more, refer the **science** section of this edition on anthrax.

ECONOMY

1) Appointment of RBI Governor and Deputy Governors

About RBI

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was established on April 1, 1935 in accordance with the provisions of the **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934**.
- Though originally privately owned, since **nationalisation in 1949**, the Reserve Bank is fully owned by the Government of India.

Central Board Of Directors

- The Reserve Bank's affairs are governed by a central board of directors. The board is appointed by the Government of India in keeping with the Reserve Bank of India Act.
- The board consists of
 - a) Official Directors - Governor and not more than four Deputy Governors - **appointed by the government**.
 - b) Non-Official Directors
 - Nominated by Government: ten Directors from various fields and two government Official
 - Others: four Directors - one each from four local boards

Appointments

- The **RBI governor** is appointed by the **PMO** i.e. the Prime Minister's office on the **recommendation of the Union Finance Minister**.
- **Deputy Governors** are appointed on the basis of Appointment Committee of Cabinet (ACC)-approved guidelines, which stipulate that the search committee constituted for the purpose will recommend the person to be appointed as a Deputy Governor.
- **Financial Sector Regulatory Appointment Search Committee (FSRASC), headed by the Cabinet Secretary**, was constituted with the approval of ACC for this purpose.
- The committee will recommend names for appointment of Chairperson and Members of the financial sector

regulatory bodies, including those of the Governor and Deputy Governors.

- Appointment Committee of Cabinet is **chaired by the Prime Minister**. It decides all higher level appointments in the Central Secretariat, Public Enterprises, Banks and Financial Institutions.

Why in News?

- The post of economist- Deputy Governor of the RBI has been lying vacant for three months.

News in Detail

- The central bank has four Deputy Governors of which two are appointed from outside — one, a **commercial banker** and the other, an **economist**. The remaining **two are promoted from within the RBI**.
- The importance of the economist-Deputy Governor can be gauged from the fact that the person is on the monetary policy committee that decides on the interest rate and also handles the all-important monetary policy department.

2) DAC clears indigenous projects worth Rs. 3,300 crore

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)

- It is **constituted under the Ministry of Defence (MoD)** for **overall guidance of the defence procurement planning process**.
- It includes **Defence Minister as Chairman** and chiefs of tri-services, Defence Secretary, Secretary Defence Research & Development, Secretary Defence Production, Director General (Acquisition), Chief of Integrated Staff Committees and Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence as members.
- The objective of the Defence Acquisition Council is to **ensure expeditious procurement** of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces in terms of capabilities sought, and **time frame** prescribed, by **optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources**.

Functions of the DAC

- in-principle approval of 15 Year Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan for Defence Forces;
- accord of Acceptance of Necessity to acquisition proposals;
- categorization of the acquisition proposals relating to 'Buy', 'Buy & Make' and 'Make';
- issues relating to Single vendor clearance;
- decision regarding 'offset' provisions in respect of acquisition proposals above Rs. 6000 crores;
- decisions regarding **Transfer of Technology under 'Buy & Make'** category of acquisition proposals; and
- Field Trial evaluation.

▪ **Offset**, in literary sense, is a factor that **counterbalances or compensates** an act. In the defence procurement context, it is an element of 'compensation' made by the overseas manufacturer that mostly takes place in the form of placing a **minimum percent of value addition in the ordering country.**

Defence Procurement Policy 2016

- Capital Acquisition schemes are broadly classified as, 'Buy', 'Buy and Make' and 'Make'.

'Buy' category

- Under the 'Buy' scheme procurements are categorised as 'Buy (Indian - IDDM)', 'Buy (Indian)' and 'Buy (Global)'. These refer to an **outright purchase of equipment.**
- **'Buy {Indian-IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)}**' has been introduced in DPP-2016 to promote indigenous design and development of defence equipment.
 1. It has been **accorded top most priority for procurement of capital equipment.**
 2. 'Buy (Indian-IDDM)' category refers to the procurement of products from an Indian vendor meeting one of the two conditions: products that have been indigenously designed, developed and manufactured with a minimum of 40% Indigenous Content (IC) on cost basis of the total contract value; Or products having 60% IC on cost basis of the total contract value, which may not have been designed and developed indigenously.
- **'Buy (Indian)'** category refers to procurement of products from an Indian

vendor having a minimum of 40% IC on cost basis of the total contract value.

- **'Buy (Global)'** category refers to outright purchase of equipment **from foreign or Indian vendors.**

'Buy & Make' category

- Under the 'Buy and Make' scheme, the procurements are categorised as 'Buy and Make (Indian)' and 'Buy and Make'.
- The two categories under 'Buy and Make' scheme refer to an **initial procurement of equipment in Fully Formed (FF)** state in quantities as considered necessary, from the appropriate source, **followed by indigenous production in a phased manner** through comprehensive **Transfer of Technology (ToT).**

"Make" category of the Defence Procurement Procedure

- The provision of 'Make' category of capital acquisition in Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) is a vital pillar for realising the vision behind the **'Make in India'** initiative of the Government, by fostering indigenous capabilities through design & development of required defence equipment/systems **by both public and private sector** in a faster time frame.
- 'Make' Procedure has following **two sub-categories:**
 - a) **Make-I (Government Funded):** Projects under 'Make-I' sub-category will involve **Government funding of 90%**, released in a phased manner and based on the progress of the scheme, as per the terms agreed between MoD and the vendor.
 - b) **Make-II (Industry Funded):** Projects under 'Make-II' category will **involve prototype development of equipment/system, primarily for import substitution/innovative solutions**, for which **no Government funding** will be provided.

Why in News?

- The Defence Acquisition Council chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh approved **three projects worth Rs. 3,300 crore** of **"indigenously designed and developed equipment."** These projects will be progressed under the **'Make-II' Category.**

News in Detail

- The approved projects include
- third generation **Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGM)** to be executed by the Indian industry.
- Auxiliary Power Units (APUs) for the **T-72 and T-90 Tanks** to be executed by the Indian industry.
- **Discrete electronic warfare systems** for the mountain and high altitude terrain to be designed and developed by the DRDO and manufactured by design cum production partner from the Indian industry.

Significance of the move

- For the **first time** the Ministry of Defence has offered **complex military equipment** to be designed, developed and manufactured **by the Indian private industry**.

3) IMF members delay quota changes, agree to maintain funding levels

About International Monetary Fund (IMF)

- The IMF was conceived in 1944 at the **United Nations Bretton Woods Conference** in New Hampshire, United States.
- It is called as **Bretton Woods twins** along with the **World Bank**.
- It is an organization of **189 countries**, working to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.

IMF finances

- IMF Resources - Most resources for IMF loans are provided by the member countries, primarily through their payment of quotas.
- **Quotas** - Quota subscriptions are a **central component of the IMF's financial resources**. Quota subscriptions of member countries are the **IMF's main source of financing**.
- **Special Drawing Rights (SDR)** - The SDR is an **international reserve asset**, created by the IMF in **1969** to supplement its member countries' official reserves.

- **Gold** remains an important asset in the reserve holdings of several countries, and the IMF is still one of the world's largest official holders of gold.
- **Borrowing Arrangements** - Multilateral and bilateral borrowing serve as a second and third line of defense respectively, by providing a **temporary supplement to quota resources**.

IMF Quotas

- The IMF is a quota-based institution. Quotas are the building blocks of the IMF's financial and governance structure.
- Each member country of the IMF is assigned a quota, based broadly on its relative position in the world economy.
- IMF quotas are distributed according to a four pronged formula: $0.50 * GDP + 0.30 * \text{Economic Openness} + 0.15 * \text{Economic Variability} + 0.05 * \text{International Reserves}$.
- Quotas are **denominated in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)**, the IMF's unit of account.

Multiple roles of quotas

<p>Resource Contributions</p> <p>Quotas determine the maximum amount of financial resources a member is obliged to provide to the IMF.</p> 	<p>Voting Power</p> <p>Quotas are a key determinant of the voting power in IMF decisions. Votes comprise one vote per SDR100,000 of quota plus basic votes (same for all members).</p> 
<p>Access to Financing</p> <p>The maximum amount of financing a member can obtain from the IMF under normal access is based on its quota.</p> 	<p>SDR Allocations</p> <p>Quotas determine a member's share in a general allocation of SDRs.</p> 

The Reserve Tranche

- It is a segment of an IMF member country's quota that is **accessible without fees or economic reform conditions**.
- Initially, member nations' reserve tranches are 25% of their quota, but this position can change according to any lending that the IMF does with its holdings of the member's currency.
- The reserve tranches that countries hold with the IMF are considered their **facilities of first resort**, meaning they will tap into them before seeking a formal credit tranche that charges interest.

Quota reviews

- The IMF's **Board of Governors** conducts **general quota reviews** at regular intervals (no more than five years).
- Any changes in quotas **must be approved by an 85 percent majority** of the total voting power, and **a member's own quota cannot be changed without its consent**.
- Two main issues addressed in a general quota review are
 - a) the size of an overall quota increase - **assess the adequacy of overall quotas** in relation to both the members' balance of payments financing needs and the Fund's ability to help meet those needs.
 - b) the distribution of the increase among the members - **realignments in members' quota shares** to reflect changes in their relative positions in the world economy.
- The 14th General Review of Quotas was completed on December 15, 2010 and conditions for the effectiveness of quota increases were met on January 26, 2016.
- The 15th quota review is currently underway.

- The **14th Review** delivered a package of **far-reaching reforms** of the IMF's quotas and governance.
- **Doubled total quotas** to SDR477 billion
- **Shift of quota shares** - shifted more than 6 percent of quota shares from over-represented to under-represented member countries; and more than 6 percent of quota shares to dynamic emerging market and developing countries.
- **Protection of the poorest** - preserved

the quota and voting shares of the poorest member countries.

- **India's vote share increased** marginally to 2.6% from 2.3%.

Why in News?

- Members of the IMF, in its annual meeting, agreed to maintain its funding at \$1 trillion but postponed changes to its voting structure.

News in Detail

- The deal will allow an extension of non-permanent, supplementary sources of funds — such as the **New Arrangement to Borrow (NAB)**, a renewable funding mechanism through multilateral borrowing that has existed since 1998, and bilateral borrowings from countries — the IMF had entered into after the 2008 financial crisis to increase its lending ability.
- The agreement extended the bilateral borrowing facility by a year — to the end of 2020 — and a potential doubling of the NAB.
- Specifically, the agreed package will leave **IMF quotas** (the primary source of IMF funds) unchanged. Instead, these **will be reviewed before the end of 2023**.
- The deal is a compromise with the U.S., the Fund's largest shareholder, which has resisted changes to the organisation's voting structure as well as increases in its permanent resource base.

Concerns

- Some IMF members have become frustrated with the pace of governance reforms, as the balance of economic and geopolitical power has shifted, becoming more dispersed across the world, particularly with the emergence of China and India — among the world's largest and fastest growing economies.
- **India's quota is 2.76%** and China's is 6.41%, while the **U.S.'s quota is 17.46%** (translates to a **vote share of 16.52%**) giving it a **unique veto power** over crucial decisions at the IMF, many of which require a supermajority of 85%.

4) New MSP rate for Rabi crops

About Minimum Support Price (MSP)

- MSP is a **form of market intervention** by the Government of India to insure agricultural producers **against any sharp fall in farm prices**.
- The minimum support prices are announced by the Government of India at the **beginning of the sowing season** for certain crops on the basis of the **recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**.
- MSP is price **fixed by Government of India** to protect the producer - farmers - against excessive fall in price during bumper production years.
- The major objectives are to support the farmers from **distress sales** and to **procure food grains for public distribution**.
- In case the market price for the commodity falls below the announced minimum price due to bumper production and glut in the market, government agencies purchase the entire quantity offered by the farmers at the announced minimum price.

Crops covered

- Government announces minimum support prices (MSPs) for **22 mandated crops** and **fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane**.
- The mandated crops are **14 crops of the kharif season, 6 rabi crops and two other commercial crops**.
- In addition, the MSPs of **toria** and **de-husked coconut** are fixed on the basis of the MSPs of rapeseed/mustard and copra, respectively (i.e., in total **25 crops are covered**).
- The list of crops are as follows.
 1. Cereals (7) - paddy, wheat, barley, jowar, bajra, maize and ragi
 2. Pulses (5) - gram, arhar/tur, moong, urad and lentil
 3. Oilseeds (8) - **groundnut, rapeseed/mustard, toria, soyabean, sunflower seed, sesamum, safflower seed and nigerseed**
 4. **Raw cotton**
 5. **Raw jute**
 6. **Copra**

7. De-husked coconut

8. Sugarcane (Fair and remunerative price)

9. Virginia flu cured (VFC) tobacco

About Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)

- CCEA, **headed by the Prime Minister**, has a mandate to **review economic trends** on a continuous basis, as also the problems and prospects, with a view to evolving a consistent and integrated economic policy framework for the country.
- It also directs and coordinates **all policies and activities in the economic field** including **foreign investment** that require policy decisions at the highest level.
- Matters regarding **fixation of prices of agricultural products** as well as reviewing progress of activities related to rural development including those concerning small and marginal farmers are in CCEA's competence.

About Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP)

- It is an **attached office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**, Government of India.
- It came into existence in January **1965**.
- It is mandated to **recommend MSPs**.
- CACP submits its recommendations to the government in the form of **Price Policy Reports** every year, separately for **five groups of commodities** namely **Kharif crops, Rabi crops, Sugarcane, Raw Jute and Copra**.

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) decided to **increase to the minimum support price for winter crops** for the forthcoming rabi season (2020-21).

5) 70,000-crore BSNL, MTNL package cleared

About BSNL

- **Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL)** was incorporated on 15th september 2000.
- It is one of the largest & leading public sector units providing comprehensive range of telecom services in India.
- BSNL is the only service provider, making focused efforts & planned initiatives to

bridge the rural-urban digital divide in ICT sector.

- In fact there is no telecom operator in the country to beat its reach with its wide network giving services **in every nook & corner of the country** & operates across India **except New Delhi & Mumbai**.

About MTNL

- **Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL)**, setup on 1st April, 1986 by the Government of India, is the principal provider of fixed-line telecommunication service in the two Metropolitan Cities of **Delhi and Mumbai**.
- MTNL is also providing telecommunications beyond boundaries through its Joint Ventures and Subsidiaries.
- MTNL is present in Nepal through its Joint Venture **United Telecom Limited (UTL)** and in **Mauritius** through its 100% subsidiary **Mahanagar Telephone Mauritius Limited (MTML)**.

Why in News?

- In an effort to revive the beleaguered state-owned telecom firms **BSNL** and **MTNL**, the Union Cabinet approved a **package worth nearly Rs. 70,000 crore**. The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also gave an in-principle **nod for the merger** of the two entities.

4 way revival plan

- Under the package, **4G spectrum** worth Rs. 20,000 crore will be administratively allotted to the two firms. Additionally, the GST amount of Rs 3,674 crore applicable on the spectrum value will also be borne by the Centre via budgetary resources.
- In addition, their **debt will be restructured** by raising bonds with **sovereign guarantee** (provided by the Government.) worth Rs. 15,000 crore.
- A **voluntary retirement scheme**, on an outlay of Rs. 30,000 crore, will be offered to the employees who are **aged above 50 years**.
- The government also **plans to monetise the assets** of the two firms worth Rs. 38,000 so as to raise resources for retiring debt, servicing of bonds, network upgradation, expansion and meeting the operational fund requirements.
- **Expected outcomes**

- With these measures, BSNL and MTNL are expected to turn EBITDA (Earnings before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, And Amortization) positive in the next two years.

Amortization typically refers to the process of writing down the value of either a loan or an intangible asset

- Allotment of spectrum for 4G services to BSNL and MTNL will enable the PSUs to provide broadband and other data services.
- With the said resources, BSNL and MTNL will restructure their existing debt and also partly meet CAPEX (Capital expenditure), OPEX (Operational expenditure) and other requirements.
- An immediate merger will not be feasible, given that MTNL is a listed entity. Until the time the process is completed, MTNL will work as a subsidiary of BSNL.

Issues with these firms

- Since the telecom sector was opened up for private sector participation in 1995, BSNL and MTNL have become marginal players.
- Financially, the two companies are in dire straits, with BSNL running cumulative losses of about Rs 32,000 crore in the last four years, and find it difficult to pay salaries to its 1.76 lakh employees.
- The debt of the two firms stands at about Rs 40,000 crore.
- While human resource comprises 5% of the cost for other telecom operators, for BSNL and MTNL the number is over 70% which effectively reduces the potential profits.
- In the mobile market, their combined customer share is only 10.3% as of March 2019.
- BSNL's customer share among rural mobile subscribers is lower at 7.2%, which debunks the hypothesis that BSNL serves the underserved rural market.
- Their market share in fixedline services is still quite significant, though, at 66.4%. But the segment serves just 2% of the sector's customers, and has almost lost its relevance.
- BSNL-MTNL continues to be the largest in the wired broadband market with a reported customer share at 54%. The real

market share, though, is less than half of this, as a significant portion of their customer base is dormant and non-

revenue-generating, and since the user base from several small and unlicensed players goes unreported.

International Relations

1) Interpol - International Criminal Police Organization

About Interpol

- Interpol is the shorter name of the **International Criminal Police**

Organization, is a network comprising **194** member nations.

- The agency, with its headquarters in **Lyon, France**, was established in **1923**.



Functions of Interpol

- The Interpol **connects police across the world** even if these individual member nations do not have diplomatic relations.
- The Interpol **facilitates information exchange**, knowledge sharing and research between nations.
- This is done by **issuing colour-coded 'notices' in four languages - English, Spanish, French, and Arabic**.
- The Interpol **doesn't have law enforcement powers** such as arrest.
- When a member nation approaches it with a specific request backed with court orders, the Interpol sends it out to other countries. The information received is sent back to the country.

What are different Interpol notices?

- A **Red Notice** is a request to locate and provisionally arrest an individual pending **extradition**. It is issued by the General Secretariat at the request of a member

country or an international tribunal based on a **valid national arrest warrant**. However, the arrest of the fugitive is based on the rule of the member nation where he or she is located.

- A **Yellow Notice** is issued to **help locate missing persons**, often minors, or to help identify persons who are unable to identify themselves. This is highly useful in cases of human trafficking or in case of missing persons due to calamities
- A **Blue Notice** is issued to collect **additional information about a person's** identity, location or activities in relation to a crime. This does not guarantee extradition or arrest of the person.
- A **Black Notice** is a request to **seek information on unidentified bodies** in member nations.
- A **Green Notice** is issued to provide **warnings and intelligence** about persons who have committed criminal

offences and are likely to repeat these crimes in other countries.

- An **Orange Notice** is issued to provide **warnings** about warn of an event, a person, an object or a process representing a serious and imminent threat to public safety.
- A **Purple Notice** is a request to **seek or provide information** on the modus operandi, objects, devices and concealment methods used by criminals.
- The **INTERPOL-United Nations Security Council Special Notice** is issued for individuals and entities that are **subject to sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council**. Its principal function is to alert national law enforcement authorities that sanctions such as assets freeze, arms embargo, and travel ban apply to designated individuals and entities.

India and Interpol

- India has been a **member since 1956**.
- Like any member nation, India maintains a **National Central Bureau (NCB)** which is the **designated contact point for the Interpol**. The **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** represents the Interpol in India as the country's National Central Bureau.
- The NCB serves as **the national platform for cooperation** between domestic law enforcement units and the international police community.
- India has collaborated with the Interpol in tackling a myriad of organised crimes such as poaching, wildlife trafficking, spurious drugs and fake medicine rackets, among others.

Why in News?

- The CBI will host the **91st General Assembly of Interpol** after 25 years (since 1997) in **2022** as part of the 75th anniversary celebrations of India's Independence.

General Assembly of Interpol

- The General Assembly of Interpol is an **annual exercise** hosted by member countries.
- All **major decisions** affecting general policy, the resources needed for international cooperation, working methods and finances are deliberated and discussed by representatives.

2) South Asian University (SAU)

About South Asian University

- South Asian University (SAU) is an **international university** established by the eight member nations of South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC).
- SAU started its operations from the academic year 2010.
- The university now offers post-graduate and doctoral programmes in various disciplines that include Economics, Computer Science, Biotechnology, Mathematics, Sociology, International Relations and Law.
- SAU attracts students from all member nations and its **degrees are recognised by all the eight SAARC countries**.
- The University is currently functioning from Akbar Bhawan Campus in Chanakyapuri, **New Delhi** before it eventually moves in to its 100 acre campus in Maidan Garhi, South Delhi where construction is under way.

About SAARC

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the **SAARC Charter in Dhaka** on 8 December **1985** with **7 founding members**.
- SAARC now comprises of eight Member States: Afghanistan (joined in 2007), Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.



- There are nine observer countries namely Australia, China, European Union, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, South Korea, and the United States.
- **The Secretariat** of the Association was set up in **Kathmandu** on 17 January 1987.

- The charter stipulates that **decisions are to be unanimous** and that “bilateral and contentious issues” are to be avoided.

Why in News?

- A government circular on the recruitment for the post of President of the South Asian University **called for applications only from Indian candidates** causing disquiet among the university’s academics.

News in Detail

- Sources at the university said limiting the process to Indian nationals would **violate the university rules**.
- Rule 5.1.2 says, “The first President of the University shall be nominated by the host country. Subsequent Presidents...shall be nominated by the respective Member States of SAARC on the principle of alphabetical rotation.”
- Non-adherence to the principle of rotation would undermine the university’s SAARC character.

3) Rohingya refugees agree to move to island

Who are Rohingya?

- Rohingya are an ethnic group, largely comprising **Muslims**, who predominantly live in the **Western Myanmar province of Rakhine**. They speak a dialect of **Bengali**, as opposed to the commonly spoken Burmese language.



- Though they have been living in the South East Asian country for generations, Myanmar considers them as persons who migrated to their land during the Colonial

rule. So, it has not granted Rohingyas full citizenship.

- Since they are not citizens, they are not entitled to be part of civil service. Their movements are also restricted within the Rakhine state.

Violence against Rohingyas

- Myanmar state, which was ruled by the military junta until 2011, has been accused of ethnic cleansing in Rakhine by the United Nations.
- There were also repeated sectarian violence between Rohingyas and Myanmar’s Buddhist natives.
- Thousands of Rohingyas fled their homes and sought refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh, India and South East Asian nations.
- The “clearance operations” to root out Rohingya militants, launched by the Myanmar military has once again affected the lives of Rohingya. Myanmar military has been accused of targeted killing of Rohingyas and torching of villages.

Rohingya in India

- Rohingyas are not accorded refugee status in India, rather are being considered as illegal immigrants. They are also believed to pose security challenges due to the presence of rohingya militant group, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).

Why in News?

- Thousands of Rohingya living in Bangladesh **refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar** have agreed to move to an island in the Bay of Bengal despite fears the site is prone to flooding.

Concerns

- Bangladesh has been planning since last year to relocate Rohingya to the desolate flood-prone site, **Bhashan Char**, which would take pressure off the overcrowded border camps where almost a million Rohingya live.
- Rights groups have warned the island, which emerged from the sea only about two decades ago, might not be able to withstand violent storms during the annual monsoon season.



4) Universal Postal Union (UPU)

About UPU

- Established in **1874**, the Universal Postal Union (UPU), with its **headquarters** in the Swiss capital **Berne**, is the second oldest international organization worldwide.



- It is a specialised agency of the United Nations.
- With its 192 member countries, the UPU is the primary forum for cooperation between postal sector players.
- It helps to ensure a truly universal network of up-to-date products and services.
- It sets the rules for international mail exchanges and makes recommendations to stimulate growth in mail, parcel and financial services volumes and improve the quality of service for customers.
- Among the principles governing its operation as set forth in the **Universal Postal Convention and the General Regulations**, two of the most important were
 - the **formation of a single territory** by all signatory nations **for the purposes of postal communication**
 - Uniformity of postal rates and units of weight.**
- The original agreement adopted in 1875 applied only to letter mail; other postal services, such as parcel post and international money orders, have been regulated by supplementary agreements that are **binding only on signing members**.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

- Founded in 1865 to facilitate international connectivity in communications networks, it is the oldest international organisation.
- ITU is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies – ICTs.

Why in News?

- India slammed Pakistan for unilaterally stopping postal mail service between the two nations, saying the move was in contravention of international norms.

SCIENCE and TECHNOLOGY

1) Decoding how plant roots regenerate

Why in News?

- A new research has identified a **protein that helps plant roots regrow its cut tips**.

News in Detail

- A protein called **PLETHORA 2 (PLT 2)** is the essential ingredient for **primary and lateral root regeneration**.
- The entire plant root is not competent to regenerate and it is confined only to the tip of the root.
- The researchers demonstrated that by delivering the PLT2 protein, regeneration can be triggered even from non-competent root cells, which have long ago ceased to divide.

Agricultural benefits

- This regeneration is of immense importance for agronomics important plant species like carrot, radish or beetroot, in which the edible part is the primary root.
- During the early stages of plant growth, the plant relies only on the primary root and any damage if not regenerated will halt the further growth of the root, which can prove very detrimental to the plant. The newly identified protein can be used to address these issues.
- Aerial organs such as leaves and stems often encounter injuries and their quick repair is essential for the survival of plants. Interestingly, members of the PLETHORA proteins are known to repair such damages and allow the plant to restore their growth.

2) Saturn is our solar system's new moon king

Why in News?

- The International Astronomical Union's Minor Planet Center announced the discovery of **20 new moons orbiting Saturn**, bringing the planet's total number of moons to 82. That surpasses Jupiter, which has 79, and makes Saturn

the planet with the most known moons in our solar system.

News in Detail

- According to the researchers, each of the newly discovered moons is about **5 km in diameter**.
- Seventeen of them orbit Saturn backwards, or in a retrograde direction, meaning their movement is opposite to the planet's rotation around its axis.
- The other three circle in the same direction that Saturn rotates.
- These moons are the remnants of the objects that helped form the planets. Hence by studying them, it is possible to learn about what the planets formed from.

What is a Moon?

- Moons — also known as **natural satellites** — orbit planets and asteroids.
- There are more than 200 moons in our solar system. Even a few asteroids have small companion moons.
- Moons come in many shapes, sizes and types.
- Most are without atmosphere, but a few have atmospheres and even hidden oceans.

Other facts

- Mercury and Venus do not have any moons.
- **Mars** has **two** moons named **Phobos** and **Deimos**.
- **Jupiter (79)** has the **biggest moon**. Jupiter's **Ganymede** is almost half the size of Earth. The other well known moons are **Europa** and **Callisto**.
- The important moons of **Saturn (82)** are **Mimas**, **Enceladus**, and **Tethys**. **Titan** has its **own atmosphere**, which is very unusual for a moon.
- **Uranus** has **27** moons that we know of. Some of them are half made of ice.
- Lastly, **Neptune** has **14** named moons. One of Neptune's moons, **Triton**, is as big as dwarf planet Pluto.

3) Possible to grow crops on Mars, Moon for future explorers

Why in News?

- The researchers at Wageningen University & Research in the Netherlands have **produced crops in Mars and lunar soil simulant** developed by NASA, supporting the idea that it is possible to grow food on the Red Planet and the Moon to feed future settlers.

News in Detail

- The researchers simulated the properties of Lunar and Martian regolith and “normal” soil — potting soil from Earth — as a control.
- They cultivated ten different crops, including garden cress, tomato, radish, rye, quinoa, spinach, chives, and peas.
- Nine of the ten crops sown grew well and edible parts were harvested from them. Spinach was the exception, according to the study published in the journal *Open Agriculture*.
- The scientists also suggest that it is also possible to obtain viable seed from crops grown on Mars and the Moon.
- Total biomass production per tray was the highest for the Earth control and Mars soil simulant that differed significantly from Moon soil stimulant.
- The seeds produced by three species — radish, rye and garden cress — were tested successfully for germination.

4) Volocopter - Flying taxis could soon take off in Singapore

Why in News?

- German aviation firm **Volocopter** held its **first public test flight of flying taxi** along the Marina Bay waterfront in Singapore.

News in Detail

- The hover-taxis — resembling small helicopters but powered by drone-like technology — can fly autonomously.
- Volocopter has already tested the aircraft in Dubai, Helsinki, Germany and Las Vegas but the Singapore trial is the first in the heart of a city.
- Singapore is likely to be among the first to get the service, with a commercial rollout expected in two to four years.
- The company wants to bring the service to sprawling cities like Jakarta, Manila and

Bangkok, as well as parts of India and China

- Earlier this week in the city-state, Volocopter unveiled the **VoloPort**, a **flying taxi port** at the water’s edge with a landing and take-off pad as well as a passenger terminal.

5) CSIR offers free mapping of Indian genomes

Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)

- CSIR was **established by the Government of India** in September of **1942** as an **autonomous body** that has emerged as the **largest research and development organisation in India**.
- Although it is **mainly funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology**, it operates as an autonomous body through the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- CSIR covers a wide spectrum of science and technology – from radio and space physics, oceanography, geophysics, chemicals, drugs, genomics, biotechnology and nanotechnology to mining, aeronautics, instrumentation, environmental engineering and information technology.
- CSIR has put in place **CSIR@80: Vision & Strategy 2022 - New CSIR for New India**.

CSIR in genomic research

- CSIR has led human genomic sciences in India and has made major contributions in understanding the “**Indian Genome Variation**”.
- CSIR contributed towards the **first personal human genome in India** and in understanding ancestral population in India and early migrations that led to what we know today on distinct ethnic groups.
- CSIR also pioneered the application of genomics in clinical settings in the area of rare genetic diseases in India by means of DNA/Genome based diagnostics and interaction with a large number of clinical collaborators.

Why in News?

- **IndiGen** initiative allows for a **free mapping of one’s entire genome** on request of the individuals.

About IndiGen

- The IndiGen initiative was undertaken by CSIR in April 2019, which was implemented by the **CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB)**, Delhi and **CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB)**, Hyderabad.
- The aim of the exercise was twofold:
 - a) to test if it's possible to rapidly and reliably scan several genomes and advise people on health risks that are manifest in their gene;
 - b) to understand the variation and frequency of certain genes that are known to be linked to disease.
- In order to generate data on genetic diseases, the CSIR has conducted **Whole Genome Sequencing** of around 1,008 Indians from different populations across the country to represent the width of genetic variability.
- Those who do get their genes mapped this way will get a card and access to an app, which will allow them and doctors to access "clinically actionable information" on their genomes.

Whole Genome Sequencing

- A laboratory process that is used to determine nearly all of the approximately 3 billion nucleotides of an individual's complete DNA sequence, including non-coding sequence.
- It provides detailed information on thousands of genes involved in normal growth, development, and all of the "silent" genomic regions simultaneously.

Benefits and application

- The IndiGen Genome project will have applications in a number of areas including **predictive and preventive medicine** with faster and efficient diagnosis of rare genetic diseases.
- The outcomes of the IndiGen will be utilized towards understanding the genetic diversity on a population scale.
- The whole genome data will be important for building the knowhow, baseline data and indigenous capacity in the emerging area of **Precision Medicine** and aid in the development of technologies for clinical and biomedical applications in India.
- The benefits of this initiative include epidemiology of genetic diseases to

enable cost effective genetic tests, carrier screening applications for expectant couples, enabling efficient diagnosis of heritable cancers and pharmacogenetic tests to prevent adverse drug reactions.

6) Anthrax

What is anthrax?

- Anthrax is a **serious infectious disease** caused by gram-positive, rod-shaped bacteria known as **Bacillus anthracis** which commonly affects **domestic and wild animals** around the world.
- **People** can get sick with anthrax if they come in **contact with infected animals** or contaminated animal products resulting in **severe illness**.
- It's is a **non-contagious disease** since it doesn't spread by mere contact with infected animals but by their spores.



Symptoms:

- **Cutaneous anthrax:** Cutaneous anthrax is anthrax initially **involving the skin** which begins as a **raised itchy bump** resembling an insect bite, which then develops into a **vesicle** (blister), then into a **painless ulcer** with a characteristic black area in the centre.
- **Inhalational anthrax**

- Inhalational anthrax may occur when **spores are breathed** in which initially resemble flu-like illness, but after several days **severe breathing problems** and **shock** may develop.

- **Intestinal anthrax**

- Intestinal anthrax may occur following eating **contaminated meat**. Symptoms may include: nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, fever, abdominal pain, **vomiting of blood** and severe **diarrhoea**.

Diagnosis:

- Anthrax is usually diagnosed by **isolating Bacillus anthracis** from the blood, skin lesions or respiratory secretions.

Treatment:

- Anthrax is usually **treated with antibiotics** to be taken for **60 days** and in some cases preventative antibiotics can also be given to people who are suspected to have been exposed to anthrax spores.

Prevention:

- Control of anthrax in livestock herds is essential for prevention of its spread to humans. **Anthrax Vaccine Adsorbed (AVA)** protects against anthrax.

Why in news?

- **Veterinarians have confirmed anthrax as the cause of death of two Asiatic water buffaloes in central Assam's Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary.**
- For details about Porbitora Wildlife sanctuary and Asiatic Buffalo refer environment section.

PIB ANALYSIS

1) Okayama Declaration

What is Okayama Declaration?

- The declaration, having 52 articles endorses the Commitment of G20 countries to address the major global health issues, and to pave the way towards an inclusive and sustainable world, as envisioned in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. This was concluded at the G20 Okayama Health Ministers' Meeting.



About the G20 Okayama Health Ministers' Meeting

- G 20 Health Ministers focused on few major global health issues, namely
- Achievement of Universal Health Coverage
- Response to population aging
- Management of health risks and health security management including Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and its containment.

India's Response

- On "Response to **Population Aging**" Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, during his intervention, shared India's vision under **National Programme for Health Care of Elderly** for its projected 20% elderly population by 2050
- Intervening on **Universal Health coverage (UHC), 'Sab Ka Saath; Sab Ka Vikas; Sab Ka Vishwas'** for inclusive health was highlighted along with **Ayushman Bharat, FIT India Movement and Eat Right Campaign.**
- On Health risk and health security, Union Health Minister made intervention on **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)**, that in a short span of time India has made commendable progress by implementing a national action plan, establishing a national antimicrobial resistance

surveillance system, and its decision to contribute to global AMR R&D efforts.

- **About Fit India Movement** :The Fit India Movement aims in encouraging Indians to include fitness activities and sports in their daily routine for a healthy and fit lifestyle. The birth anniversary of Major Dhyanchand, hockey icon from India has been the foundation stone for "Fit India Movement".
- **About Eat Right Movement**:It was launched by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The Eat Right Movement' lies in its holistic and collaborative approach, with stakeholders on both the demand and supply-side.
- On the demand side, the Eat Right Movement focuses on empowering citizens to make the right food choices.
- On the supply side, it nudges food businesses to reformulate their products, provide better nutritional information to consumers and make investments in healthy food as responsible food businesses.

Why in News?

- Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare attended the G20 Okayama Health Ministers' Meeting , held under the Presidency of Japan in Okayama City, Japan.

2) Digital Bharat Digital Sanskriti

What is it?

- Digital Bharat Digital Sanskriti program is organised by the Rashtriya **Centre for Cultural Resources and Training(CCRT)**, under the **Ministry of Culture**. With an aim to take India to a newer digital pinnacle and to promote Indian culture, the CCRT e-portal and YouTube Channel are launched.
- In order to explore and understand the unknown aspects of India's lesser-known places and their rural and semi-urban culture, CCRT has started publishing

books from the series “**Untold Tales of India’s Cities**”.

About CCRT

- The Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) is one of the premier institutions working in the field of linking education with culture.
- Established in 1979, pioneered by Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, it functions as an autonomous organization under the aegis of **Ministry of Culture**, Government of India.

Why in News?

- The Union Minister of State for Culture & Tourism inaugurated the CCRT e-portal and YouTube Channel at the event “Digital Bharat Digital Sanskriti” In New Delhi.

3) 18th NAM Summit

About the NAM:

- The Non-Aligned Movement was formed during the Cold War as an organization of States that did not seek to formally align themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, but sought to remain independent or neutral. The basic concept for the group originated in 1955 during discussions that took place at the Asia-Africa Bandung Conference held in Indonesia.
- India is one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was established in 1961 with 29 members. It has since grown to 120 members to become one of the largest groupings of nation-states.



About 18th NAM Summit

- The Summit will focus on a whole gamut of contemporary issues such as terrorism, threats to peace and security, UN reform, climate change, sustainable development, economic governance and south-south cooperation.
- At the NAM Baku Summit, the **Republic of Azerbaijan** will take over the

chairmanship of the NAM for the upcoming 3 years.

- **Theme:** “Upholding the Bandung Principles to ensure concerted and adequate response to the challenges of the contemporary world”. The theme is significant as it relates to the forthcoming 65th anniversary of the Bandung Principles in 2020 and the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the NAM in 2021

What are Bandung Principles?

- The Ten Principles of Bandung, a political statement encapsulating the need to promote world peace and cooperation were formulated at the Asian-African Conference in 1955.

Why in News?

- The Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu will lead the Indian delegation at the XVIII Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to be held at Baku, Azerbaijan .

4) National Panchayat Awards 2019

What is the motive behind National Panchayat Awards?

- The incentivization encourages Panchayat representatives who make special efforts; creates models for other Panchayats and Gram Sabhas to follow and focuses public attention on Panchayats’ performance, which encourages all Panchayats to improve their performance. Finally, this creates an ecosystem for overall good governance at the local level.
- The Best performing Panchayats were selected based on various criteria and indicators. The awards are given under five categories:
- **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar (DDUPSP):** It is given to best performing Panchayats (District, Intermediate and Gram) in recognition of the good work done for improving the delivery of services and public goods.
- **Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (NDRGGSP):** It is given to Gram Panchayats for their outstanding contribution to the socio-

economic development by involving Gram Sabhas.

- **Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Award:** It is given to best performing Gram Panchayats which have developed their GPDPs according to the State/UT specific guidelines prepared in line with the model guidelines issued by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- **Child-friendly Gram Panchayat Award:** It is given to best performing Gram Panchayats/Village Councils (VCs) (one in each State/UT) for adopting child-friendly practices.
- **e-Panchayat Puraskar:** It is given to States/UTs or promoting e-enablement of PRIs for bringing in efficiency, transparency and accountability in their functioning.

Gram Manchitra:

- A Spatial Planning Application called 'Gram Manchitra' which is a Geo Spatial based decision support system for the panchayats. The panchayats can utilize this App to plan, develop and monitor developmental activities on real time basis.

Why in News?

- Out of the 2.5 lakh panchayats in the country, 240 panchayats were conferred the National Panchayat Awards 2019 by the Union Minister for Panchayati Raj in New Delhi.

5) Review of Guidelines for Granting Authorization to market Transportation Fuels

Significance:

- The existing policy for granting authorization to market transportation fuels **had not undergone any changes for the last 17 years since 2002.** It has now been revised to bring it in line with the changing market dynamics and with a view to encouraging investment from private players, including foreign players, in this sector.

Benefits:

- The new guidelines are expected to give a boost to '**Ease of Doing Business**'.
- It will also boost employment in this sector.

Salient features:

- Entry barrier for private players is decreased. Entities seeking authorisation need to have a net worth of Rs. 250 crore as opposed to the earlier Rs. 2000 crore prior investments.
- Non-oil companies can also invest in this sector now. Earlier, there was a requirement of prior investment in the oil and gas sector, mainly in exploration and production, refining, pipelines/terminals, etc.
- The entities seeking market authorisation for petrol and diesel are allowed to apply for retail and bulk authorisation separately or both.
- Companies have been given flexibility in setting up a joint venture or subsidiary for market authorisation.
- In addition to conventional fuels, the authorized entities are required to install facilities for marketing at least one new generation alternate fuel like CNG, LNG, biofuels, electric charging, etc. at their proposed retail outlets within 3 years of operationalization of the said outlet.
- Entities will also encourage the employment of women and ex-servicemen at the retail outlets.
- CCTV facilities will be set up at all retail outlets.
- The authorised entities are required to set up a minimum 5% of the total retail outlets in the notified remote areas within 5 years of grant of authorisation. A robust monitoring mechanism has been set up to monitor this obligation.
- An individual may be allowed to obtain dealership of more than one marketing company in case of open dealerships of PSU oil marketing companies but at different sites.

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by the Prime Minister has approved the review of guidelines for granting authorization to market transportation fuels. This marks a major reform of the guidelines for marketing of petrol and diesel.

6) Vigilance Awareness Week

About Vigilance Awareness Week:

- Vigilance Awareness Week is observed every year during the week in which the

birthday of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (31st October) falls. **Theme of Vigilance Awareness Week 2019 : “Integrity- A way of life”**

- The awareness week campaign affirms CVC’s commitment to the promotion of integrity and probity in public life through citizen participation.
- The Commission believes that the theme would help draw the attention of all sections of society especially the youth to the significance of ethical conduct in the building of an honest, non-discriminatory and corruption free society.

Initiatives Taken:

- The establishment of ‘Integrity Clubs’ in schools and colleges is an initiative to cultivate ethical values in the leaders of tomorrow.
- “Awareness Gram Sabhas” are organized for dissemination of awareness in Gram Panchayats (in rural and semi-urban areas) to sensitize the rural citizens about the ill-effects of corruption.
- Seminars, discussions and other outreach events will be organized involving the private sector, professional associations, trade unions and associations for wide participation of all sections of civil society.

About Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)

- The Central Vigilance Commission was set up by the Government in February, 1964 on the recommendations of the Committee on Prevention of Corruption, headed by Shri K. Santhanam, to advise and guide Central Government agencies in the field of vigilance. As the apex integrity institution, the Commission is mandated to fight corruption and to ensure integrity in public administration.

▪ The Commission shall consist of:

- A Central Vigilance Commissioner - Chairperson;
- Not more than two Vigilance Commissioners - Members;

Why in News?

- The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) will observe the Vigilance Awareness Week from 28th October to 2nd November, 2019.

7) National Corporate Social Responsibility Awards (NCSRA)

About National Corporate Social Responsibility Awards (NCSRA):

- The National CSR Awards has been instituted by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to recognize corporate initiatives in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to achieve inclusive growth and inclusive and sustainable development.
- These awards are the highest recognition in the domain of CSR by the Government of India.

What is CSR?

- Corporate social responsibility is a type of international private business self-regulation that aims to contribute to societal goals of a philanthropic, activist, or charitable nature or by engaging in or support volunteering or ethically-oriented practices.

NATIONAL CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AWARDS

29th OCTOBER, 2019 NEW DELHI

Categories of Awards

Total number of 20 awards in 3 categories

- (1) Corporate Awards for Excellence in CSR
Recognition to a company based on total eligible CSR Spend
- (2) Corporate Awards in CSR in Challenging Circumstances
Recognition to a company based on its CSR efforts in challenging circumstances, aspirational districts, difficult terrains/disturbed areas, etc. (up to five awards)
- (3) Up to Eleven Awards to be chosen based on contribution to National Priority Schemes so as to motivate corporates to spend in these areas.

Objectives of the award:

- To increase competition in various categories of companies to infuse excellence in their CSR activities.
- To encourage companies to spend the entire amount i.e. eligible CSR amount.
- To recognise the impact, innovation, usage of technology, gender and environment issues, sustainability,

scalability and replicability of CSR activities.

- To channelize CSR activities of corporate so that the benefits of their activities reach the marginalised sections of society and in remote areas of the country.

Why in News?

- The President of India will present the National Corporate Social Responsibility Awards (NCSRA) to select companies for their outstanding contribution in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

8) 29th BASIC Ministerial Meet on Climate Change

About BASIC

- It is a bloc of four developing countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) formed in the year 2009 by an agreement to act jointly at the COP15-Copenhagen Climate Summit (CCS).
- The alliance was formed to negotiate with developed countries regarding the further course of action to be taken on climate change after the end of the first mandate of Kyoto Protocol.
- Subsequently, the CCS resulted in Copenhagen Accord between the US and BASIC countries. Since then, the BASIC countries have met regularly and address the common concerns and interests of the developing countries vis-a-vis developed countries regarding climate change.

Key Highlights of the Meeting:

- BASIC Ministers confirmed their commitments to multilateralism in order to address the issue and to foster climate resilience and promote greenhouse gas emissions reduction, low-carbon and sustainable development.
- They also emphasized the implementation of the Paris Agreement, in particular of its goals and principles.
- The Group highlighted the substantial gaps not only in mitigation, but also in adaptation and support provided by developed countries to developing countries in the pre-2020 period.
- They stressed that these gaps should not be transferred to the post-2020 period to present additional burdens on developing countries.

- Ministers underlined their commitment to taking ambitious actions to implement their NDCs.
- Ministers urged developed countries to propose a new collective quantified goal on finance as soon as possible, including detailed road map and timetable. The goal should be from a floor of USD 100 billion per year, significantly publicly funded and of greater transparency.
- **Ministers welcomed the offer of India to host the 30th BASIC Ministerial Meeting.**

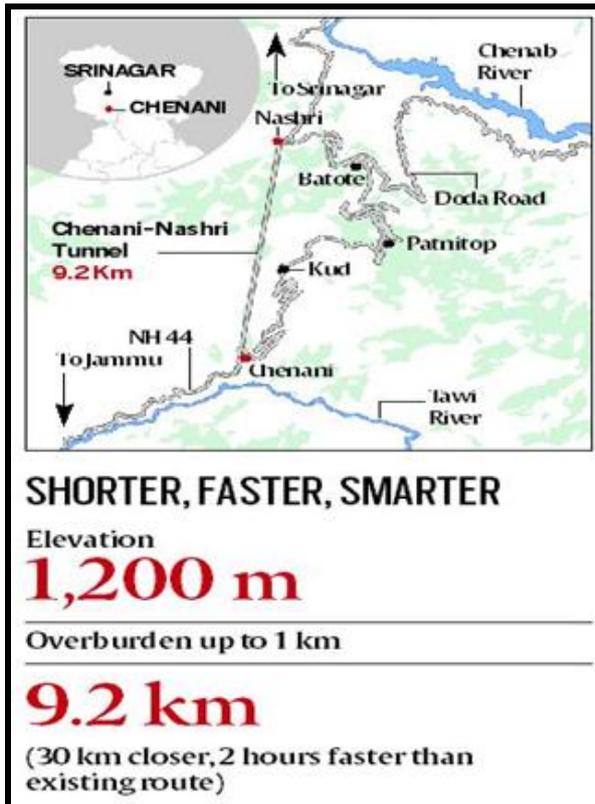
Why in News?

- The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) participated in the **29th ministerial meeting of the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) countries on Climate Change in Beijing, China.**

9) Chenani Nashri Tunnel renamed after Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee

About Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee Tunnel

- It is **India's longest road tunnel with a length of 9.28 km** in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir on NH 44. It was inaugurated on 2 April 2017 by Indian Prime Minister.
- It cuts down 31 km of travel distance and reduces the travel time between the two points by about two hours, in addition to substantial saving in fuel cost.
- **Why in News?**
- Union Ministry for Road Transport & Highways announced renaming of Chenani Nashri Tunnel on NH 44 in Jammu & Kashmir as Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee Tunnel.



10) Global Bio-India 2019

About Global Bio-India 2019

- Global Bio-India, a Government of India initiative, is an Interactive platform to congregate, confer and converse on the current and future trends, growth drivers and challenges with doyens of biotech industry, senior policy makers and government dignitaries.
- This platform brings multi-faceted benefits for all stakeholders in Life Sciences, Healthcare, Industrial Biotech, Agri-Tech, Med-Tech, Clean Energy industry not only by offering opportunities for business growth but

also opening up doors for bigger opportunities by having open dialogue with key policy makers.

- The event is expected to draw around 3000+ delegates from across the globe connecting Indian Biotechnology ecosystem with International ecosystem.

Key Objectives

- Identify funding and collaboration opportunities for research and development
- Attracting major contract projects from international companies as well as major global venture funding into India
- Create platforms for new idea evaluation and investments
- Opportunity for Indian State Governments to attract foreign investment into their respective States
- Discuss key trends and policy interventions across all sub-sectors including bio-pharma, bio-agriculture, bio-industrial, bio-energy, bio-manufacturing, bio-services etc. and establish takeaways
- Connect Indian Biotech ecosystem with international ecosystem
- Learning platform experience of other successful geographies and companies
- Facilitate interactions of research institutions with the industry

Why in News?

- The Global Bio-India 2019, one of the largest biotechnology stakeholders conglomerate will be held for the first time in India at New Delhi from 21st to 23rd November, 2019.

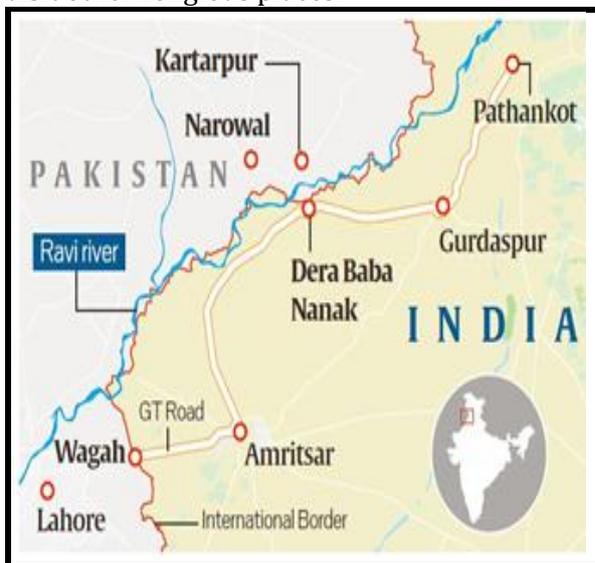
News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Pakistan to issue tourist visas to non-Indian Sikhs for Kartarpur visit

Why in News?

- The Pakistan government will issue tourist visas to non-Indian Sikhs visiting the Kartarpur corridor and other gurdwaras in the country during the 550th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev.
- Under the Kartarpur Corridor agreement between India and Pakistan, pilgrims coming from India for one day would not require a visa but they can only visit Gurdwara Baba Guru Nanak.
- However, those coming from other countries will need a visa and be free to visit other religious places.



About Guru Nanak Dev

- Guru Nanak was born on 15 April 1469 at Nankana Sahib, Punjab, Pakistan to a Hindu family. He was drawn towards spiritualism and showed a spiritual and intellectual side from a young age. He studied both Hinduism and Islam.

- According to Sikh traditions, there were events in his early life which distinguished him from others and confirmed that he was special. His birth anniversary is celebrated as Guru Nanak Gurburab by Sikhs all over the world.
- His teachings can be found in the form of 974 hymns, in the holy text of Sikhism 'Guru Granth Sahib'.

2) Disabled, people over 80 can vote through postal ballot

Why in News?

- The people over 80 years of age and Persons with Disability can now cast their votes through postal ballot.

News in Detail

- However such voters will have both the choices available either voting through postal ballot by following due procedure or going to the polling station on polling day for voting.
- On the recommendations of the Election Commission, the Ministry of Law and Justice has amended the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, allowing senior citizens and person with disabilities in the absentee voter list.

About Election Commission

- The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India. The body administers elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country.

Functions

- It prepares electoral roll, issues Electronic Photo Identity Card (EPIC).
- It decides on the location polling stations, assignment of voters to the polling

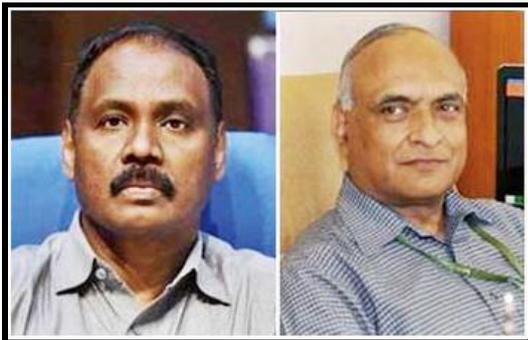
stations, location of counting centres, arrangements to be made in and around polling stations and counting centres and all allied matters.

- It grants recognition to political parties & allot election symbols to them along with settling disputes related to it.
- It issues the Model Code of Conduct in elections for political parties and candidates so that no one indulges in unfair practice or there is no arbitrary abuse of powers by those in power.
- It sets limits of campaign expenditure per candidate to all the political parties, and also monitors the same.

3) L-G for J&K and Ladakh

Why in News?

- Indian Administrative Service officers Girish Chandra Murmu has been appointed as Lt. Governor of Jammu-Kashmir and R K Mathur as Lt. Governor of Ladakh.



News in Detail:

- The incumbent Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Satya Pal Malik has been moved to Goa.
- While Murmu, a 1985-batch Gujarat cadre officer, is serving as the Expenditure Secretary in the Union Finance Ministry, Mathur, a 1977-batch officer, has served as the Defence Secretary and is a former Chief Information Commissioner (CIC).

The two Union Territories will come into existence on 31st of October.

4) Open General Export Licences (OGELs)

Why in News?

- Defence Minister has approved issuance of two Open General Export Licences (OGELs) for export of certain parts and components and intra-company transfer of technology to select countries. The decision will give a boost to defence exports.

About OGEL

- The OGEL is a one-time export licence to be granted to a company for a specific period which is two years initially.
- The application for grant of OGEL will be considered by Department of Defence Production (DPP) on a case-to-case basis.
- For acquiring the licences, the applicant is mandatory to have Import-Export certificate.

News in Detail:

- The items permitted under OGEL includes components of ammunition and fuse setting device without energetic and explosive material, firing control and related ing and warning equipment and related system and body protective items.
- Complete aircraft or complete unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and any components specially designed or modified for UAVs are excluded under this license.
- The countries allowed under the OGELs are Belgium, France, Germany, Japan, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, UK, USA, Canada, Italy, Poland and Mexico. Export of items to a Special Economic Zone is not permitted.

Hindu Editorial Analysis

1) A road map for criminal justice reforms

What is criminal justice system?

- Criminal Justice refers to the **agencies of government** charged with **enforcing law, adjudicating crime, and correcting criminal conduct**. The criminal justice system is essentially an **instrument of social control**, the job of which is to prevent dangerous and destructive behaviours by apprehending and punishing transgressors or deterring their future occurrence.

Objectives of criminal justice system:

- To **prevent** the occurrence of crime.
- To **punish** the transgressors and the criminals.
- To **rehabilitate** the transgressors and the criminals.
- To **compensate** the victims as far as possible.
- To **maintain law and order** in the society.
- To **deter offenders** from committing any criminal act in the future.

Issues surrounding criminal justice system:

- **Ineffective enforcement of the law**
- Uncertain and inconsistent application of law and arbitrary sentencing affects the substantive judgment that tends to have a disproportionate impact on the poor.
- **Delay in disposal of the cases**
- According to economic survey 2018-2019, 3.5 crore cases are pending in India, of which 86 percentage lies in the subordinate courts. The two aspects of delay that need to be considered is
- **Time taken to complete a trial** and give judgement.
- **Consequences of delay** and its effect on undertrials.
- According to **National Crime Record Bureau -Prison Statistics India (2015)**, **67.2 percent** of our total prison population comprises of **under trial prisoners**.

- The pendency of a criminal trial has a substantive impact on the liberty of an accused person.

▪ **Poor prison condition**

- According to the Prison Statistics India 2015 report by the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, India's prisons are overcrowded with an occupancy ratio of **14% more than the capacity**.

- Indian prisons face three long-standing structural constraints: **overcrowding**, a high percentage of **undertrials** in the prison population, **understaffing and underfunding**. The inevitable outcome is sub-human living conditions, poor hygiene, and violent clashes between the inmates and jail authorities.

Importance of reforms in criminal law:

- Criminal law is considered to be the most apparent **expression of the relationship between a state and its citizens**. Well-conceived reforms in these laws would automatically translate into massive reforms in criminal justice.

Suggested reforms:

- **Victimological underpinnings should be given a major thrust in reforming laws to identify the rights of crime victims**

- **Eg:** Victim and witness protection schemes, use of victim impact statements, advent of victim advocacy, increased victim participation in criminal trials, enhanced access of victims to compensation and restitution all point towards the increased role of victims in the criminal justice system.

- **Construction of new offences and reworking of the existing classification of offences must be guided by the principles of criminal jurisprudence.**

- **Eg:** Criminal liability could be graded better to assign the degree of punishments. New types of punishments like community service orders, restitution orders, and other aspects of restorative and reformatory justice could also be brought into this fold.

- **Scheme of chapters and classification of offences can be drastically reworked.**

- Eg:** Offences like criminal conspiracy, sedition, offences against coin and stamps etc. must be abolished or replaced.
- Chapters on offences against public servants, contempt of authority, public tranquility, and trespass can be redefined and narrowed.
- New offences under a fresh classification scheme, like those suggested by the Malimath Committee on criminal justice reforms, can be introduced. Classification of offences must be done in a manner conducive to management of crimes in the future.

- **Guiding principles need to be developed** to avoid unprincipled criminalisation which often leads to not only the creation of new offences on unscientific grounds, but also arbitrariness in the criminal justice system.

Way forward:

- India needs to **draft a clear policy** that should inform the changes to be envisaged in the IPC or CrPC.
- The criminal justice system often swinging between the three theories of deterrence, retribution and reformation depending on its convenience, **adhering to one particular theory of punishment** is need of the hour.
- Simultaneous **improvements** are to be made in the **police, prosecution, judiciary** and in prisons along with the above said reforms.
- A **Criminal Justice Reform Committee** with a mandate to evolve criminal justice policy should be formed in furtherance to the work done by the Menon Committee on Criminal Justice System, the Malimath Committee, and the Law Commission in India in this regard.

2) Ease of doing business index - World Bank

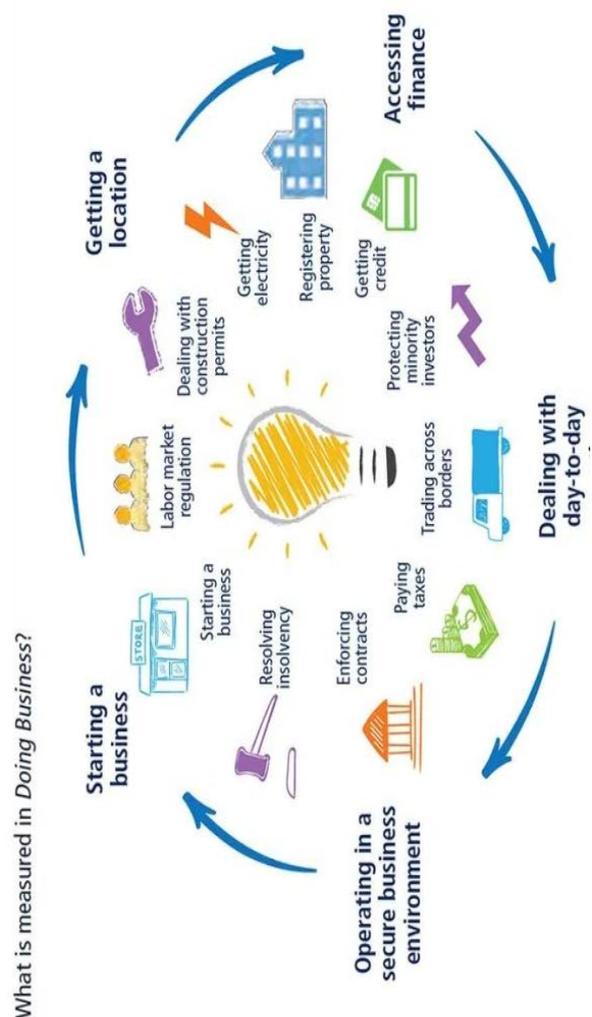
- **Ease of doing business** is an index published by the **World Bank**.

What is it?

- It is an **aggregate figure** that **includes different parameters** which define the ease of doing business in a country.

How is it calculated?

- It is computed by **aggregating the distance to frontier scores** of different economies.
- The distance to frontier score uses the **'regulatory best practices'** for doing business as the parameter and benchmark economies according to that parameter.



- The **ten areas of study** are defined as: starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts, and resolving insolvency. An **11th area — employing workers**, is measured but not factored into the score.
- For each of the indicators that form a part of the statistic 'Ease of doing business,' a

distance to frontier score is computed and all the scores are aggregated.

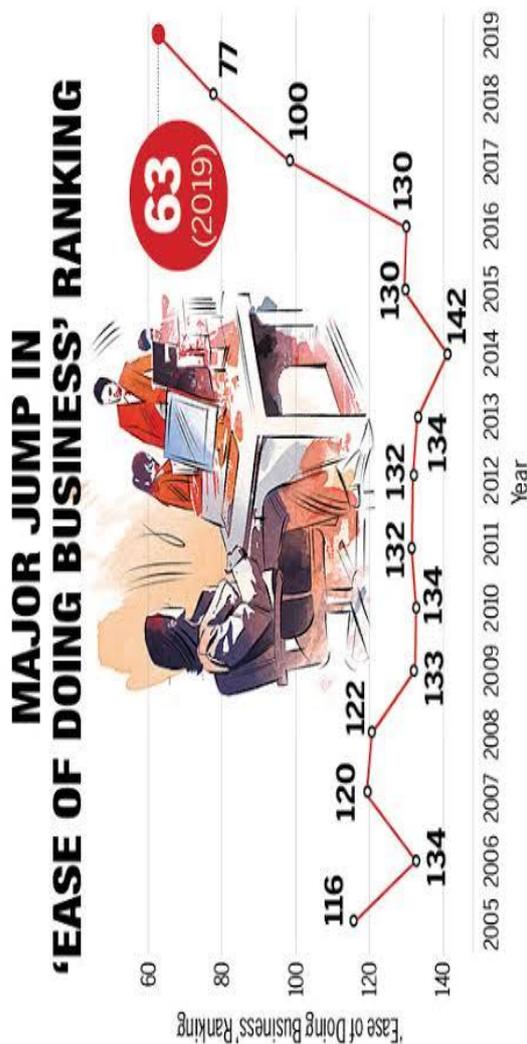
- The aggregated score becomes the Ease of doing business index.

Why in news?

- India has **jumped 14 ranks** in World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index, 2019 to **63**.

Rankings so far:

- From being **ranked 142 in 2014** to **63 in 2020**, it has been a significant upward journey for the country.
- India was ranked at **77th position in 2018** which was a 23ranks jump from the previous year's **ranking of 100 in 2017**.



What is the score?

- The country's score improved from 67.3 last year to 71.0 this year.

Findings of the report:

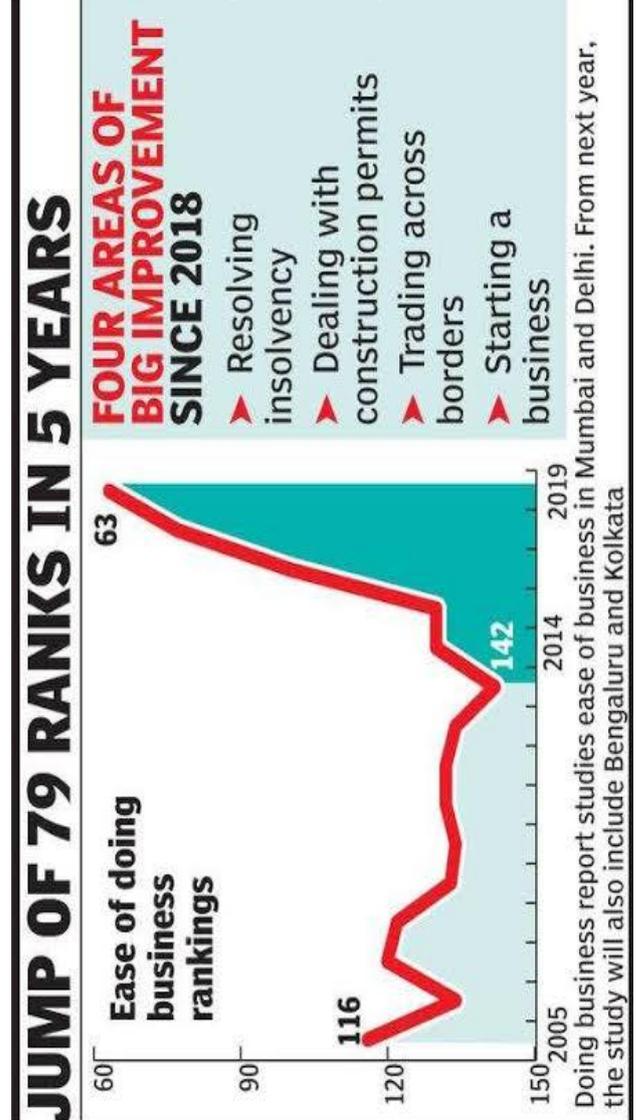
- The country's improved ranking was on the back of four reforms:

a) **starting a business,**

b) **dealing with construction permits,**

c) **trading across borders and**

d) **Resolving insolvency.**



Resolving insolvency:

- India's rank has improved from 108 to 52 in the "resolving insolvency" category with the **overall recovery rate for lenders moving up.**

Trading across borders:

- The abatement of paperwork in favour of **electronic filing of documents** and **single-window customs procedures** made India's ranking in Trading across borders to jump 12 places from 80 to 68.

Construction permits:

- The country's ranking has improved by 25 places from 52 to 27.

Significance:

- India is **among the top ten most improved countries** in the world for the third consecutive year.
- Significant upward journey for the country in a rank list is an important input in the plans of global investors.
- A high ease of doing business ranking means the regulatory environment is more conducive to the starting and operation of a local firm.

What is the issue?

- India is still **below its competitors for global capital** particularly China even though it shows improvement in overall ranking.
- The country **lags in key metrics** such as “Enforcing contracts” and “Registering property”.
- Rankings are based on **samples and audits done in Mumbai and Delhi only** (the World Bank has said it would be covering Bengaluru and Kolkata too from next year)(Starting, running or shutting down a business may be easier in Delhi and Mumbai compared to Coimbatore or Hyderabad where it is probably more difficult)
- India has federal set up where **States have a big say in several parameters** that go into the ranking such as securing building permits, land approvals, electricity connections, registering assets etc. makes **streamlining processes across the country difficult**.

3) A fix for growth gain from fiscal pain

Corporate tax:

- Corporate tax is a tax **imposed on the net income of the company**.

Who should pay?

- Companies, both **private and public** which are **registered** in India under the **Companies Act 1956**, are liable to pay corporate tax.
- It is taxed at a **specific rate** as prescribed by the **income tax act** subject to the changes in the rates every year by the IT department.
- **Domestic** as well as **foreign companies** are liable to pay corporate tax under the Income-tax Act. While a domestic company is taxed on its universal income, a foreign company is only taxed on the

income earned within India i.e. is being accrued or received in India.

- Recently, the government slashed the corporate tax rate to 22% from 30% for existing companies and to 15% from 25% for new manufacturing companies.

Positive impacts of corporate tax rate cuts:

- The prospects of **attracting sizeable foreign capital investment** in the Indian economy are indeed brighter than ever before
- it would give a **stimulus to the ‘Make in India’ campaign**
- improve the **competitiveness** of India’s private sector
- create **more jobs**

Criticism:

- The corporate tax rate cut leading to **loss of huge tax revenue** could be justified only if the above said ambitious outcomes are met for a country like India which starves to become a \$-5trillion economy by 2025.
- Higher levels of surplus income with corporates **will not necessarily translate into a higher level of investment** and a consequent spurt in economic growth.
- **Agriculture and allied sectors and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)** are still the strongest drivers of our economy and not corporates.
- MSMEs suffer for a long time on account of institutional constraints including inadequate and timely availability of credit were crippled after demonetisation.

Will this corporate tax rate cut help revive the economy?

- According to the author, corporate tax rate cut will not necessarily revive the economy. Instead, importance should be given to strengthen the MSME and Agriculture & allied sectors which are the strong drivers of economy.
- In this background, here are Significant recommendations given by Expert Committee on MSME set up by RBI
- Constituting a **government-sponsored “fund of funds”** to support venture capital funds and a credit guarantee fund.

- **Strengthening the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme**, and making it **demand-driven** could be a concrete and immediate step to generate **greater purchasing power** in the hands of the people to **accelerate demand and consumption**, especially in the rural areas (A high level of demand for products and services is inevitable to attract higher levels of investment and consequent economic growth)
- **Higher levels of public spending** for creating much-needed **infrastructure** in several sectors would **generate employment** and also create **productive assets**.
- Well-calibrated **policy interventions** and **targeted incentives** to select industries especially with **high export potential** would push MSMEs to a higher growth trajectory.

4) Recording crimes: On NCRB report

About National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) an Indian government agency was set up in the year 1986.
- It was set up based on the recommendation of the MHA's Task force, 1985 and National Police Commission, 1977.
- NCRB is headquartered in New Delhi and is part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India.

Functions of NCRB:

- It is mandated to empower the Indian Police with Information Technology and is responsible for collecting, maintaining and analysing the crime data of the country.
- It facilitates Investigating Officers with updated IT tools and information in Investigation of Crimes.

Organisation:

- NCRB is headed by Director who is in the rank of Inspector General of Police.
- It has four Deputy Directors in the rank of DIGs.

Publications Of NCRB:

- Four major annual reports viz.
 1. Crime in India,
 2. Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India,

3. Prison Statistics,
4. India and Fingerprint in India.

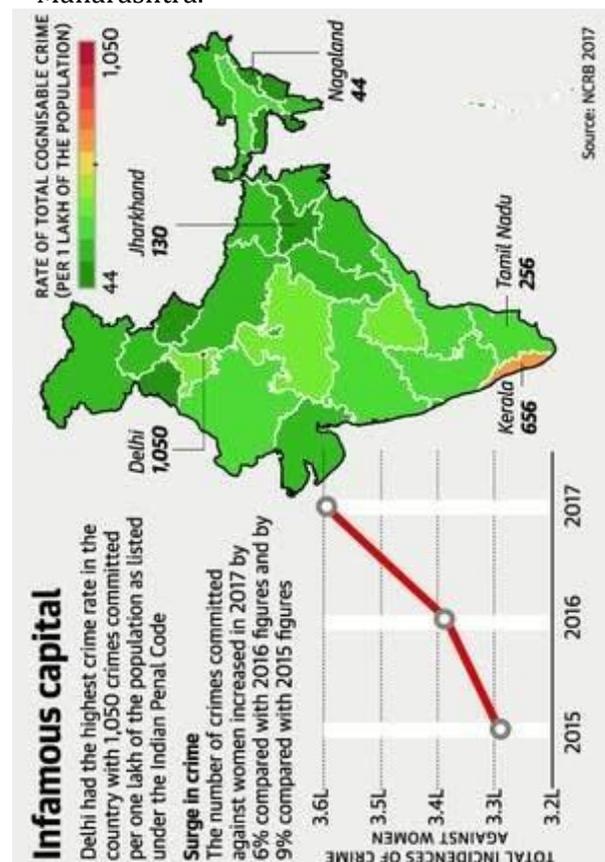
Why in news?

- **The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has recently released its annual 'Crime in India' report for the year 2017 after a delay of 2 years.**

Key findings:

Crime against women:

- The number of crimes committed against women has **increased in 2017 by 6%** compared to 2016 and by 9% compared to 2015.
- Majority are registered under:
 - a) Cruelty by Husband or his Relatives
 - b) Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty
 - c) Kidnapping & Abduction of Women
 - d) Rape
- **Uttar Pradesh** topped the list followed by Maharashtra.



Crime against elderly:

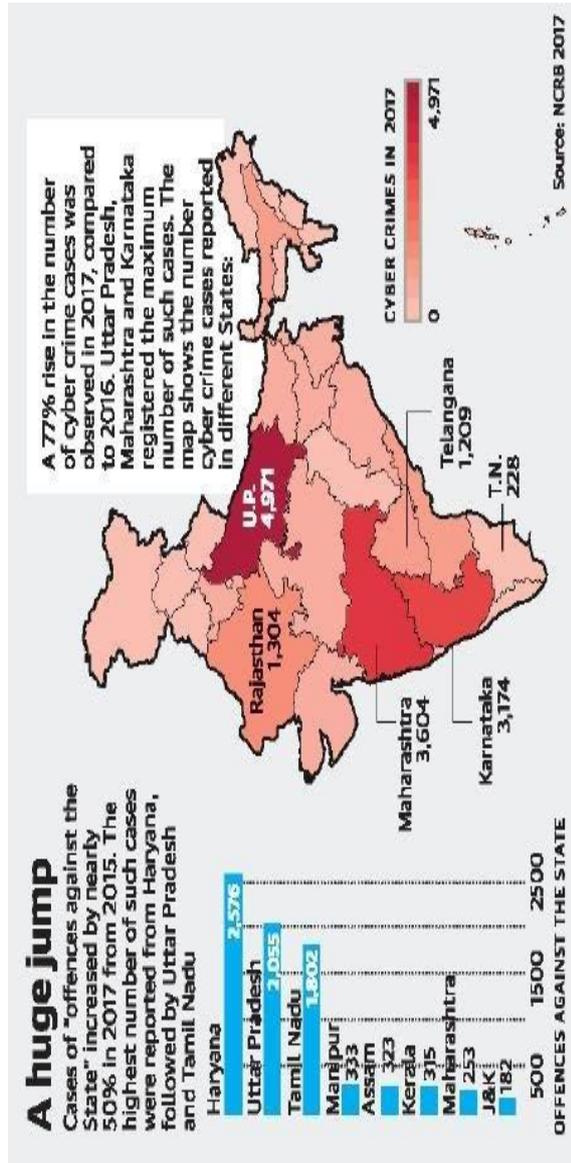
- **Tamil Nadu** topped the country in reporting **grave crimes**, particularly murder, against senior citizens.
- Maharashtra topped in reporting incidents of robbery and snatching targeting elders followed by Tamilnadu.

Road accidents:

- **Delhi** stood first followed by **Chennai** with highest number of road accident victims.

Crime against state:

- Offences against state have **increased by 30percent** with the maximum number of these cases reported from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.



Cybercrime:

- Number of cybercrime cases reported was **increased by 77percent** in 2017 compared to 2016.

What is specific about 2017 NCRB report?

- It included **88 new categories** including sexual harassment of women at the workplace/public transport, offences relating to elections, obscene acts at public places, circulation of fake news, chit funds, cases under the Prevention of

Corruption Act and Mental Health Act, noise pollution and defacement of public property.

- A new category called "**anti-national elements**" has been added which includes details of "jihadi terrorists, Left Wing Extremism and North East insurgents."
- **Cyber stalking and bullying of women** has been included in the report for the first time.

Criticism:

- The NCRB data on crime **hide significant variances in case registration** of serious crimes such as rapes and violence against women across States, which make it **difficult to draw State-wise comparisons**.
- There is the possibility of **some States reporting crimes better**. For example, Delhi recorded a 40.4% of the total IPC crimes registered among metropolitan cities in 2017 is also likely due to the use of easier (online) means to register them
- Use of the **census base year as 2001** to calculate crime rates **for States and 2011 for metropolitan cities**, which make the assessments unwieldy.
- Opacity surrounding the **methodology for collection and compilation** makes the data obscure and renders them ineffective for policymaking.
- **Basis of classification of offences** is questionable. For example, while reporting murder offence NCRB has segregated the numbers based on motive of the offence (e.g.: honour killing, dowry) instead of providing more detailed description of categories. (E.g.: class conflict)
- **Cross-referencing and examination** of the numbers in both NCRB crime statistics and prison statistics **could not be done** because Prison statistics does not provide such offence wise data on undertrials and convicts.
- methodological concerns about the **rate of calculating charge-sheeting**, which has been measured based on the total number of cases disposed of by the police, and not the total number of cases for investigation
- **Presentation of data on arrests, convictions and acquittals** is unclear if it is in reference to the number of people

arrested in 2017 or those charged, arrested in previous year.

- Data for certain **newly created additional parameters** and crime heads are **unreliable** and their definitions are also prone to misinterpretation.

- In order to explore **more precise and effective solutions** to criminal justice issues, NCRB must first take steps towards **ensuring the accuracy, reliability and comprehensiveness** of these reports.

RSTV Big Picture

1) Humans and artificial intelligence

Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi underscored the importance of Digital Economy and Artificial Intelligence at the G20 Summit in Osaka, Japan. The 5 'I's – Inclusiveness, Indigenization, Innovation, Investment in Infrastructure and International cooperation play very significant role in developing these two areas.

What is the background?

- The present government has been emphasising on these two areas from its maiden budget session including the interim budget session presented in February 2019. It has been the part of the government's policies and programmes agenda.

What do we understand by Artificial Intelligence?

- The idea of building machines which are capable of thinking, acting, talking and learning like humans is the basics of Artificial Intelligence. This is basically a branch of Computer Science wherein a computer is made to behave or enact like human. The performing of activities like thinking, problem solving, analysis etc is generally understood as Artificial Intelligence.

What is the importance of Artificial Intelligence in governance?

- Artificial Intelligence is estimated to add upto 15% gross value added (GVA) for Indian economy by 2035 as per NITI Aayog.
- With its analytical ability, AI can help better financial and technical innovations.
- Its intellectual power can help in building efficient infrastructure like Smart cities and solve urban problems.
- With the shortage of qualified doctors in India, AI can help in increasing access to affordable healthcare facilities.
- With India's dependence more on Monsoons and Agriculture being the backbone of Indian economy, AI can

contribute in doubling farmer's income by increasing farm productivity.

- AI can also help in bringing digital education infrastructure to rural areas by improving the quality of education making it more affordable.
- AI can help in developing smarter and safer modes of transports like GPS to avoid congestion and traffic related problems.
- AI in contrary to general belief can help in generating jobs for the youth due to R&D and human involvement.
- This leads to Innovations which is also the objective of 'Make in India' programme.

What are the recent trends?

- The evolution of cloud, big data, and digitisation of the economy, more and more dependence on gadgets, and the choice of faster and easier life through machine work has opened up ocean of opportunities for Artificial Intelligence in India where Human Resource can take the benefits of Artificial Intelligence and similarly give back his innovations to AI.

What are the applications of AI in different fields?

- AI can help in accurate predictions of weather phenomenon through neural networks which are fed with previous data.
- AI can help doctors detect cancer and target delivery of drugs in their treatments like in the AI developed by Microsoft.
- AI can make recommendations to the user based on their previous records as applied by Amazon, Flipkart, Google etc.
- Manufacturing sector gets the major benefits where manufacturing is totally automated, controlled and maintained by AI leaving the human workforce less prone to dangerous accidents and exposure to chemicals.
- Human like robots i.e., Humanoids have made their debut in banking sector to screen and analyse financial data.

- AI can also be applied in predicting stock market performance which is impossible by humans.
- GPS and AI related applications can help Aviation sector avoid accidents and be precise in their flights and navigational abilities.
- AI technology is now applied in developing vehicles and transportation nodes for smart drives avoiding accidents, collisions, congestions etc.
- AI is also used in home appliances like lighting, safety lockers, electricity, and refrigerators etc. making life easier and simpler.
- With their great analytical ability, AI too can avoid human errors in calculations, predictions etc. mainly in Research.

Conclusion

- India has huge potential to become the next super power with wise applications of Artificial Intelligence. Smart city project and Make in India schemes are some areas where the government has tapped in to use AI for its benefits but with vast opportunities ahead, India needs to strategize its needs and streamline the technology now to reap the benefits in future.

2) Wooing FDI

Why in news?

- FDI is a major driver of economic growth and largely is a matter of private business decisions. FDI inflows depend on number of factors like availability of natural resources, Infrastructure, market size and general investment climate.

What is the background?

- Government of India has put in place liberal and transparent policy for FDI with most sectors open to FDI under the automatic route. To further attract more investors, the department for Promotion of Industries and Internal Trade along with the Investment Promotion Agency 'Invest India' have joined hands to put in place a new mechanism under which those looking to invest \$ 500 million or more will have a designated person to facilitate all clearances.

What are the policies in store?

- The government has been dynamic and being opening several sectors for FDI and

relaxing norms from time to time with only handful of sectors now not open to FDI like health care, security, atomic energy etc.

- GST which has reduced Centre–state disparities of Investment and taxation.

What are the statistics?

- The DIPP report says that \$ 23.5 billion dollars of FDI are pulled in which has grown to 28% from the previous.
- In the ease of doing business Index, India has improved its overall ranking to the 63rd place in 2019 from 77th in 2018, in terms of ease of doing business.

What are the look outs by the investors?

- The regulations or policies put in place should be predictable and not a sudden shocker. For example the recent issue of e-commerce norms which led to chaos with Amazon and other sites.
- The political and economic stability in the country.
- Enhance the competitiveness of the products manufactured in the country.
- The Growing rate of the country's economy and market size.
- Handholding investors to bring in confidence and boost comfort to the investors sending signals to the investment world to attract more investments.

What is the way forward?

- \$ 500 million is a very high threshold limit to commit with and needs to be achieved in phased manner.
- Revamping the working structure of 'Invest India' to bring in more robustness and reduce red-tapism in its operation.
- Streamlining Centre-state coordination in investment policies.
- Matching the standards of business strategies of both Investor and host country. Taking examples from Japan and Singapore.
- Introducing one stop solutions for investment related issues with more focus on larger investments.
- Easing the norms like Tax break reforms and flexibility frameworks to ease doing business.
- Go by the figures put out by International agencies to build positive picture of the country's economy.

Conclusion

- The trade war between US and China is in a kind boon to India for both Human resource and Indian economy in general and must not lose out to Vietnam or Thailand.
- Ease of investors doing business should be looked out as a whole package. Given India's big domestic market, India has the pull factor But the government should focus on two things: first get the infrastructure in place, and second improve on ease of doing business.

3) Challenges in Telecom sector

Why in news?

- The Department of Telecommunications has asked the Finance Ministry to offer some GST related relief to telco sector to bring down the import duties of network equipments but the Ministry is not considering any other company specific relief measures as sought by Vodafone-Idea.

What is the background?

- The Industry needs to speak in cohesive voice seeking further financial relief is the response which came after the meeting of the Digital Mission by the Ministry to the letter written by the Industry body cellular operators Association of India which urged that the 35,000 crore input tax credit due to telcos from the government will be adjusted against spectrum payments and levies as a measure to help carriers oversee financial distress. The matter above is dissented by Reliance Jio operator.
- The Industry had also called for roll back of the basic custom duty increase on several telecom equipments in October 2018 and the duties imposed on the printed circuit boards used in them in a bid to curb non-essential imports and address its Current Account Deficit as well as encourage the Make in India initiative.

What is the state and health of the Telecom sector in the country today?

- Historically, India had a very low penetration of network while the developed nations had very high penetration. This has given these countries advantage and is far ahead of India like say for example – the download

speed in India is 512 kbps compared to some of the nations who have 100 mbps.

- Though we have cellular connections now and increased penetration capacity the download speed is still behind.
- The fixed cables used earlier were of copper which was quite expensive and now we have optical fibers to make it more easy and affordable.
- India's position in Broadband Readiness Index is comparatively lower than our smaller neighbors.
- Getting the Right-of-Way (ROW) is a costly affair and the time consuming.
- In November 2017, the DoPT through gazetted notification has advised the state governments for quicker ROW permission and minimize the expenses which otherwise becomes prohibitive to lay down the fibre. This has received lukewarm response from states.
- Even when we have 5G at our doorstep, the Infrastructure in India is not ready to exploit its benefits. Like the connecting towers are still in radio systems while it requires fibre systems. Only 25% of our connectivity is in fibres while in developed nations it is almost 75%.
- The equipment through which the delivery is happening is also important because its where the cost and pricing comes to play.

What are the impacts?

- Improving digital penetration and making it affordable has multiple impacts on GDP of our country.
- Changing technology has many roller effects from medical care, e commerce, entertainment etc.
- Telecom component manufacturers can reap benefits and enhance productions.
- Data is comparatively cheaper in India than other countries and this can build a smart ecosystem if adapted efficiently and consumed well.
- With growing losses of telco operators there is layoffs and unemployment which has caused dissatisfaction having negative effects on the economy.
- Attract investments in telco sector which can pump up India's GDP.

Is cheaper data availability sustainable in nature?

- With all operators reporting losses and financial stress, this model of cheaper data availability is no longer sustainable.
- Though the competition between players has come down, there is no much significant changes in the tariffs which is in fact good for consumers but adverse for the operators.
- With changing technology and the ambitious plans of the government, the grade up cost for coping up technology advancements is a costly affair making the operators charge more.

What is the way forward?

- Improving the Infrastructure should be the main emphasis.
- Reaching the last mile consumer through better and affordable connections.
- Exploiting the large consumer base which is the biggest strength for India.
- Government policies are having a lag in reaching the consumers which needs to be tackled strategically. This needs more synergies in planning and execution of things.
- Though India has good vision and objective for the sector it needs to aligned well and executed well.

- The component which is bridging the gap between service provider and consumers also needs to be cost effective.
- Develop infrastructure on shareable basis like laying ducts so that the optical fibres flow through that for many establishments to reach out the needs of cities and towns.
- Encourage domestic manufacturing of telco equipments reducing imports and provide employment opportunities to youth in the country.
- Spend lot on R&D for exploiting technological revolution.
- Enhance in house manufacturing capability to reduce our dependence on imports.

Conclusion

- The National Digital Communication Policy (NDCP) envisages that there should be enhanced limit of 50 mbps download to every citizen by 2022 which should be followed in spirit.
- To achieve this government has called upon all state and local players to build infrastructure and exploit on share basis. Aligning policy in longer term, availing good lending rates and tapping connected ecosystems of telco sector should be the need of the hour for the new India.

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