

OFFICERS' Pulse

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Coverage.

The Hindu
PIB
Yojana
Rajya Sabha TV
All India Radio

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) Electoral bonds

What are Electoral Bonds?

- An electoral bond is designed to be a bearer instrument like a Promissory Note — in effect, it will be similar to a bank note that is payable to the bearer on demand and free of interest.
- It can be purchased by any citizen of India or a body incorporated in India.
- The bonds will be issued in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore and will be available at specified branches of State Bank of India.
- They can be bought by the donor with a KYC-compliant account.

How to donate to parties

Electoral bonds will be available for purchase for 10 days each in the months of January, April, July and October

- Such bonds can be purchased by any Indian citizen or a body incorporated in India
- Purchaser must pay from KYC-compliant bank account
- Bonds will not carry the name of the payee and will be valid for 15 days
- Can be used for donation to a registered political party only
- Can be encashed only through that party's bank account
- Can be bought for any amount in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh, and ₹1 crore
- Can only be bought from specified SBI branches

Arguments favouring Electoral Bonds leading to Transparency

- The government's argument was that banks would be able to track the buyers of electoral bonds through their KYC details and thus ensure that clean money comes

into the system, while protecting the donor's anonymity.

- The Electoral Bonds are deposited into the bank account which is in turn monitored by Election Commission. This checks the flow of Black Money.
- Donors can donate the bonds to their party of choice which can then be cashed in via the party's verified account within 15 days.

Arguments of the Critics

- The argument put forth by the Election Commission is that it allows political parties not to disclose the source of these bonds as long as the mode of funding is through electoral bonds.
- This provision, to exempt parties from declaring the sources of the electoral bonds they receive, was done through an amendment to the Representation of the People Act by the Finance Act, 2017.
- The Election Commission also criticised the amendments introduced by the government in the Income Tax Act also facilitated anonymous donations by saying that parties did not have to disclose the names, address or PAN of donors of less than ₹20,000.
- Another amendment that has been criticised is the one to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), which will allow political parties to receive funding from foreign companies with a majority stake in Indian companies.

Why in News?

- Electoral bonds worth Rs. 232 cr. were sold in October, according to data shared by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).
- Mumbai had the highest amount of bonds at Rs. 1,880 crore, followed by Kolkata at Rs. 1,440 crore, Delhi at Rs. 919 crore and Hyderabad at Rs. 838 crore, while all

other cities accounted for Rs. 1,051 crore from March 2018 till October 2019.

2) Justice Bobde as 47th Chief Justice of India

Why in News?

- President Ram Nath Kovind on Tuesday signed a warrant to appoint Justice Sharad A. Bobde as the next Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- He will take the oath as CJI on November 18. His term will extend until April 2021.
- As per convention, outgoing CJI Ranjan Gogoi recommended the name of Justice Bobde, the most senior judge of the Supreme Court as his successor.

Appointment of the Chief Justice of India:

- Article 124(1) of the Indian Constitution says there "shall be a Supreme Court of India consisting of a Chief Justice of India".
- The Constitution of India does not have any provision for criteria and procedure for appointing the CJI.

What is the convention?

- When the incumbent CJI retires (all Supreme Court judges retire at the age of 65), the senior-most judge in the SC becomes the CJI.
- Seniority, here, is not defined by age, but by the number of years an individual has been serving as a judge of the apex court.
- The closest mention is in Article 126, which deals with the appointment of an acting CJI. In the absence of a constitutional provision, the procedure relies on custom and convention.

Procedure for appointment of CJI:

- The procedure to appoint the next CJI is laid out in the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) between the government and the judiciary
- The procedure is initiated by the Law Minister seeking the recommendation of the outgoing CJI .
- The CJI sends his recommendation to the Law Ministry; and in the case of any doubts, the CJI can consult the collegium regarding the fitness of a Supreme Court judge to be elevated to the post.
- After receiving recommendations from the CJI, the law minister forwards it to the Prime Minister who then advises the President on the same.

- The President administers the oath of office to the new CJI.

About Justice Sharad A. Bobde

- Starting out as an additional judge in the Bombay High Court in 2000, he has served as the Chief Justice in Madhya Pradesh before being elevated to the Supreme Court in 2013.
- Justice Bobde is part of the five-judge Constitutional Bench that is hearing the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title dispute.

3) Sex Ratio improves in Country; Birth and Death Rates Dip

Why in News?

- India has registered an improved sex ratio and a decline in birth and death rates with non-communicable diseases dominating over communicable in the total disease burden of the country, according to the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence's (CBHI) National Health Profile (NHP) 2019.

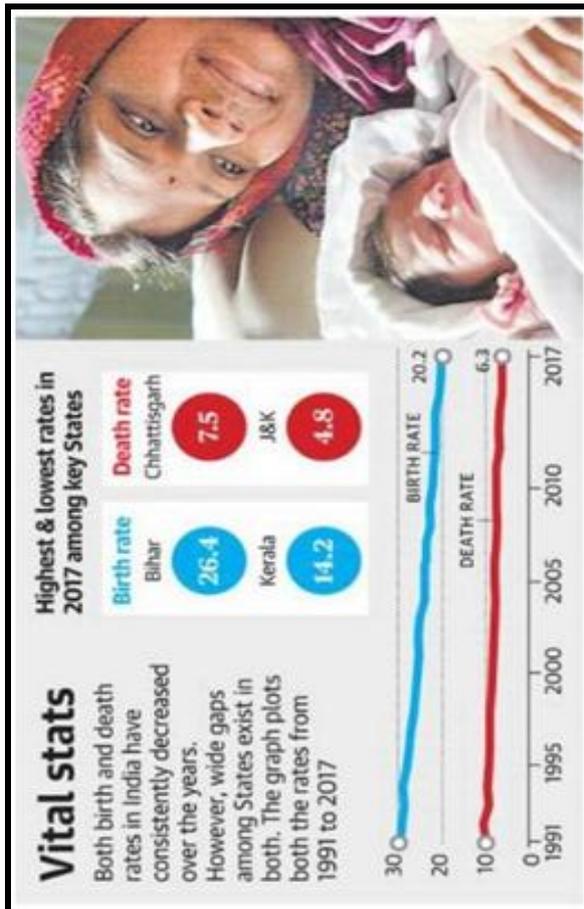
About National Health Profile:

- The NHP covers demographic, socio-economic, health status and health finance indicators, human resources in the health sector and health infrastructure.
- It is also an important source of information on various communicable and non-communicable diseases that are not covered under any other major programmes.

Key Findings:

1) Sex ratio

- Sex ratio (number of females per 1,000 males) in the country has improved from 933 in 2001 to 943 in 2011. In rural areas the sex ratio has increased from 946 to 949, while in the urban areas the sex ratio has increased from 900 to 929.
- Kerala has recorded the highest sex ratio in respect of total population (1,084), rural population (1,078) and urban (1,091). The lowest sex ratio in rural areas has been recorded in Chandigarh (690).



2) Birth and Death Rate:

- The report also showed that the estimated birth rate, death rate and natural growth rate are declining.
- The estimated birth rate reduced from 25.8 in 2000 to 20.4 in 2016 while the

death rate declined from 8.5 to 6.4 per 1,000 populations over the same period.

- The **natural growth rate declined from 17.3 in 2000 to 14 in 2016** as per the latest available information.

3) Fertility Rates:

- As per the report, the total fertility rate (average number of children that will be born to a woman during her lifetime) in 12 States has fallen below two children per woman and nine States have reached replacement levels of 2.1 and above.
- **Delhi, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have the lowest fertility rate among other States.**
- It was also observed that **non-communicable diseases dominated over the communicable in the total disease burden of the country.**

Non-Communicable Diseases

- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), also known as chronic diseases, tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviour factors.
- The main types of NCDs are cardiovascular diseases (like heart attacks and stroke), cancer, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes.

ENVIRONMENT

1) How green are Deepavali crackers?

- The Supreme Court of India mandated the **use of green crackers** for Deepavali, prescribing specific norms for the manufacture in 2018.
- It had banned the use of **barium nitrate**, a key pollutant in crackers.
- The **National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI)**, a part of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), was asked to facilitate the development of green crackers.
- Though 'green crackers' have been made available in markets **but the reach has been limited this year.**



Toxic nature
Conventional firecrackers contain chemicals which produce effects like bright lighting and colours. However, these chemicals can have adverse effects on human health and the environment

Initial ingredient	Use in crackers	Health hazards
Charcoal, potassium nitrate and sulphur	Black powder which is the primary fuel in the cracker	The dust released is hazardous when inhaled; different compounds formed can be carcinogenic
Strontium and lithium	Colouring agent (Red)	Strontium can replace calcium in the body which can be toxic; Lithium releases harmful fumes
Barium	Colouring agent (Orange)	Fumes can cause respiratory and other health issues
Nitrates, chlorates/ perchlorates	Oxidising agents	The compounds can hamper the growth of small children; they remain airborne for days and can be poisonous

What are Green Crackers?

- The general firecrackers are made with **barium nitrate, antimony and a range**

of metals linked to respiratory diseases and even cancer.

- But green crackers doesn't contain barium nitrate, but are substituted with **potassium nitrate and zeolite.**
- Though replaced with other items, green crackers produce the same amount of sound and spark intensity.
- According to NEERI, a reduction of nearly 30% in particulate matter (PM) can be expected from the green crackers and also reduce the release of sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions.
- NEERI has signed agreements with 230 companies to manufacture and make them available for sale.

About NEERI:

- The CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI) is a research institute created and funded by the Government of India.
- It was established in Nagpur in 1958 with focus on water supply, sewage disposal, and communicable diseases and to some extent on industrial pollution and occupational diseases found common in post-independent India.
- NEERI is a pioneer laboratory in the field of environmental science and engineering and is a constituent laboratory of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).
- NEERI has five zonal laboratories at Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Mumbai. NEERI comes under the **Ministry of Science and Technology** of central government.

What are the problems faced by green crackers this year?

- Acceptability among customers was less.
- Shortage of unskilled labour.
- Late licenses to industries.
- Less variety among green crackers.

Way forward

- Manufactures are coming with 'IMPROVED CRACKERS' which contain barium nitrate but in lesser quantities. Supreme Court should look into these varieties.

- Experts say that 2019 is a transition year, if the above limitations are sought solutions, a healthy environment can be built by green crackers.

2) The growing global trade in amphibian pets

Why in news?

- According to a recent study from Stellenbosch University, the amphibians top the list of the global pet trade. This has caused multiple problems in the ecosystem.

What are amphibians?

- The word amphibian means dual lives. An amphibian is a class of animals that live their **lives both in and out of water**. There are three orders within this class, the most common of which includes frogs and toads.

Findings of the study:

- The report quotes that there are more than 5.6 million households who own amphibians or reptiles as pets.
- The highest traded six amphibian families were- **salamanders, frogs and toads, followed by caecilians** (limbless amphibians that look like snakes).
- **Western dwarf clawed frog**(1st fig, Least Concern), **Oriental fire-bellied toad**(2nd Fig, Least Concern), **African clawed frog**(3rd Fig, least concern) - these were the top species (in terms of number of individuals imported) in the USA.



- Most of the pet keepers preferred species with
 - 1) larger bodies,
 - 2) wider distributions, and
 - 3) species that had indirect development (where the embryo develops into a mature individual without larval stage) were preferred.
- This proves that species that are **easy to collect and rear in captivity** were the most traded.

Why are Amphibians Preferred ?

- They are diverse life-forms: climbers, swimmers, burrowers and hoppers.
- These creatures are relatively smaller pets.
- Some people after buying these amphibians **release them** into the wild thinking it is an **act of kindness** or when the cost of ownership becomes too high.

What are the consequences?

- These amphibian species which aren't native to the regions, once released become **INVASIVE** species. This threatens the survival of native animals.

What is an invasive species?

- An invasive species can be **any kind of living organism**—an amphibian (like the cane toad), plant, insect, fish, fungi, bacteria, or even an organism's seeds or eggs—that is not native to an ecosystem and causes harm.

- They can harm the environment, the economy, or even human health.
- Species that grow and reproduce quickly, and spread aggressively, with potential to cause harm, are given the label “invasive.”
- Some examples of invasive species are water hyacinth, Sea Walnut etc.

What can be done?

- Today pet trade is one billion industry. To stop this, a better understanding of the choices of pets needs to be studied.
- More information about why amphibians attract humans need to be gathered. For example, bright colors and ornamental species are traded more. Considering these type of resources better policy framework, laws and awareness can be built to reduce the pet trade.

3) 36 million Indians face flood risk: study

Why in news?

- According to a recent study published in the scientific journal Nature Communications, 36 million people in India would face annual flooding by 2050 and 44 million by 2100 if emissions continue to rise.
- The study gives findings from individual assessments from 135 countries across multiple climate scenarios and years.
- The study has used new software called **Coastal DEM** to produce enabling neighbourhood level exploration of threatened areas around the world.
- After this assessment, the report says that coastal risk has been **underestimated**.

Coastal Digital Elevation Model (DEM):

- It is new software which uses more variables such as vegetation cover, population indices to estimate the actual land surface affected by floods.
- These models integrate ocean bathymetry (study of underwater depth of lake or ocean floors) and land topography supporting to understand and predict changes in Earth's environment, and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet our Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs.
- CoastalDEM, is more accurate and reduces linear vertical bias from 4.71 m to less than 0.06 m.

- DEMs are used for coastal process modeling (tsunami inundation, storm surges, sea-level rise, contaminant dispersal, etc.), ecosystems management and habitat research, coastal and marine spatial planning, and hazard mitigation and community preparedness.

Key findings of the study:

- In India, 36 million people would face annual flooding by 2050 and 44 million by 2100 if emissions continue to rise unabated.
- Nearly 21 million are expected to be living below the High Tide Line (it is the boundary that marks the farthest to which the sea reaches into the land at high tide)
- Climate change has caused global mean sea level to **rise by 11-16 cm in the 20th century** and is expected to by as much as **2 m by the end of this century**.
- The six Asian countries namely China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand which are home to approximately 237 million could experience coastal flooding at least annually by 2050, which is more than four times the estimates based on older elevation data.
- These assessments show the potential of climate change to reshape cities, economies, coastlines, and entire global regions within our lifetimes.

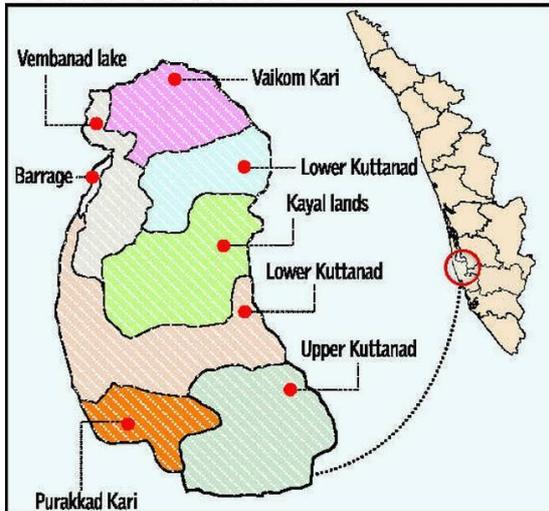
4) Kuttanad Farming system

What is Kuttanad Wetland System?

- Kuttanad Wetland Agriculture System is unique, as it is the **only system in India that favours rice cultivation below sea level** in the land created by draining delta swamps in brackish waters.
- As an approach to cope with the imminent climate impacts in coastal areas and evolve efficient methods it aims to deal with soil availability and floods issues in agriculture.
- The Kuttanad system is a complex mosaic of fragmented agricultural landscapes divided in **three structures**:
- Wetlands used for paddy activities and fish catching,
- Garden lands used for coconut, tubers and food crops plantation and

- Water areas used as inland fishing and shells.

LAND OF GOOD HOPE



- Facing a severe pollution of waters **due to the tourism** but also to the use of chemicals, the protection of this fragile and unique system from any external pressure is important and urgent for humanity as it is essential for maintaining and enhancing so much endemic

biodiversity and several vital ecosystem services for human well-being worldwide.

Why in News?

- Kuttanad is facing a crop loss in the second crop season for the second year in a row. Last year, back-to-back floods had destroyed the additional crop in its entirety.

5) Health emergency declared in Delhi

What is in the News?

- Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) on Friday declared a public health emergency in Delhi NCR, as the pollution levels in the region entered the severe plus category.

What is EPCA?

- It is an authority established to assist Supreme Court of India for protecting and improving the quality of the environment and preventing, controlling and abating environmental pollution in National Capital Region (NCR).

ECONOMY

1) Farmers hit by sharp decline in pepper prices

About Minimum Import Price (MIP)

- Minimum Import Price (MIP) is the price below which an importer is not allowed to import the commodity to India.
- MIP is imposed in view of the falling domestic retail / wholesale price or dumping of cheap goods into the country.
- MEP is a kind of **quantitative restriction to trade**.
- Government fixes MIP for the selected commodities with a view to arrest domestic price decline. This is intended to be imposed for short durations and is removed when situations change.
- The MIP helps farmers / domestic manufacturers in realising better and remunerative prices for their produce.
- MIP will be notified by the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

Why in News?

- Black pepper prices crashed from Rs. 760 a kg in 2017 to Rs. 490 a kg and then to Rs. 290 a kg.

News in Detail

- A drastic fall in the price of black pepper and low production owing to climate vagaries, are the major concerns of farmers in Kerala and Karnataka, the two major pepper producing States in the country.
- The influx of imported pepper from Vietnam via Sri Lanka is the major reason for the fall in prices in the Indian market.
- The cheaper pepper from Vietnam continues to flood the market through Sri Lanka, aided by a low-duty structure under the ASEAN (Association of South-East Nations) trade agreement, SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area) and ISFTA (Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement).
- Though the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry had fixed the minimum import price (MIP) for pepper at Rs. 500 kg in December 2017 to protect the pepper farmers in the country, it was being widely flouted by some pepper importers with the support of

unscrupulous Sri Lankan pepper exporters violating RBI and FEMA regulations.

2) TRAI fixes ring timings for mobiles, landlines

Why in News?

- In a new regulation, the **Telecom Authority of India (TRAI)** has **fixed the ring time** for calls made to **mobiles at 30 seconds**, and those made to **landlines at 60 seconds**.

News in Detail

- This move is followed by tit-for-tat lowering of ring timings by private telecom service providers in India.
- While this is a matter which directly impacts the experience of a mobile phone user, the reduction in ringing time also affects the revenue of the operator as it is likely to impact interconnect usage charges (IUC) between operators.
- As per specifications by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the timer value for international calls or circuits is in the range of 1.5 minutes to 3 minutes but there is no prescribed value for the timer for domestic calls.

Reasons for the move

- The IUC charge is paid by the operator whose customers make a call to the operator whose subscribers receive a call.
- In case of a shorter ringing time, a user may miss the call and may need to call the other user back. Hence, making the operator with a 'shorter ringing time' gain in interconnection charges.
- Thus TRAI intervened to create a level playing field for all operators by fixing the ring timings.
- For more details about TRAI, refer *Officer's Pulse Issue No. 19*.

About 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.
- As the global focal point for governments and the private sector, ITU's role in helping the world communicate spans **3 core sectors: radio communication, standardization and development.**
- ITU also organizes TELECOM events and was the lead organizing agency of the **World Summit on the Information Society.**
- ITU is based in **Geneva**, Switzerland, and its membership includes **191 Member States** and more than 700 Sector Members and Associates.

3) Unemployment rate rose to a three-year high of 8.5% in Oct: CMIE

About Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)

- It is a **leading business information company.** It was established in **1976**, primarily as an independent think tank.
- It provides services to the entire spectrum of business information consumers including governments, academia, financial markets, business enterprises, professionals and media.
- CMIE is a **privately owned** and professionally managed company headquartered at Mumbai.

Why in News?

- The unemployment rate in India rose to a three-year high of 8.5 per cent in October, with **rural joblessness pushing it up**, data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) showed.

News in Detail

- While urban joblessness rate was 8.9 per cent, in villages it stood at 8.3 per cent.
- Unemployment was worse only in the pre-demonetisation period, according to the data, at 9.6 per cent in August 2016.
- It has also been suggested that the present job crisis is worse than that of pre-demonetisation despite a lower rate as the labour force itself fell after demonetisation.
- Urban unemployment has consistently remained about 1 to 2 percentage points

higher than that in the rural, according to the CMIE data.

- But the gap has narrowed to 0.6 percentage points in October, suggesting a **graver deterioration in village jobs.**

4) RBI creates new verticals for supervision and regulation

Why in News?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has created two new departments with specialised cadre on supervision and regulation within RBI will start functioning from November 1.

News in Detail

- These departments have been created by merging the respective supervision and regulation departments on banks, non-banks and cooperative banks.
- In the previous arrangement there were separate regulatory and supervisory departments for banks, non-banks and cooperative banks.
- This indicates the changes in the central bank's approach to the two crucial issues-supervision and regulation of the financial system that has dominated public discourse in recent times.

Reasons for the move

- It was decided to strengthen these departments in the context of the growing diversity, complexities and interconnectedness within the Indian financial sector.
- The need to strengthen the regulatory and supervisory departments of RBI was felt following several malpractices among financial institutions - like the Nirav Modi scam in Punjab National Bank or IL&FS crisis.
- The supervisory apparatus of RBI was unable to detect the financial irregularities which remained unnoticed for a long time.

5) World Trade Organisation (WTO)

About WTO

- Created in **1995**, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is an international institution that oversees the global trade rules among nations.
- It is headquartered in **Geneva**, Switzerland.

- It superseded the 1947 **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)** created in the wake of World War II.
- The main function of the organization is to help producers of goods and services, exporters, and importers protect and manage their businesses.
- As of 2019 the WTO has **164 member countries**, with Liberia and Afghanistan the most recent members, having joined in July 2016, and 23 “observer” countries.
- The WTO's **top decision-making body** is the **Ministerial Conference** (usually take place every two years).

Dispute settlement under WTO

- According to the procedure established by the WTO, the first step to resolve a trade dispute is engaging for consultation process.
- If two trading partners having dispute could not resolve at that level, one of them can ask for settlement of dispute panel for hearing.
- The panel's report or ruling can be challenged at the appellate body.

Why in News?

- India has lost a case filed by the U.S. at the WTO against domestic export incentives as the dispute settlement panel on October 31 concluded that these schemes are inconsistent with international trade norms.

Background

- The U.S. had dragged India to the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism in 2018 over India's export incentive schemes, including **Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS); Export Oriented Units (EOUs)** and **Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) Scheme; and duty free imports scheme (DFIS)**.
- The U.S. had alleged that these schemes were harming American companies.

News in Detail

- The panel has stated that India will not get an eight-year period like other developing countries for phasing out these schemes.
- The dispute panel recommended that India should withdraw the prohibited subsidies under DFIS within 90 days from the adoption of the report.

- It should also withdraw the prohibited subsidies under the EOU/EHTP (Electronics Hardware Technology Park) /BTP (Bio-Technology Parks) schemes, EPCG , and MEIS, within 120 days and SEZ scheme within 180 days.
- The exemptions from customs duties on importation under the EOU/EHTP/BTP schemes are subsidies contingent upon export performance inconsistent with certain articles of the agreement, the ruling said.
- However, it has stated that duty free import for exports (DFIE) scheme does not violate WTO law.
- With this ruling, India will have to re-work these incentive schemes to comply with the WTO ruling.

Exports from India Schemes

- The Government of India has introduced Exports from India Schemes through the **Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2015-20** with effect from April 1, 2015.
- Exports from India Schemes **comprise two schemes** for exports of merchandise and services namely, **Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)** and **Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS)**.
- MEIS and SEIS schemes are designed with the aim of **making India's export products more competitive in the global markets** including Europe, The United States of America and Africa.
- As part of this, Government provides rewards to exporters to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved and to provide exporters with a level playing field.

Export Oriented Units (EOU)

- Export oriented units are units undertaking to **export their entire production of goods**.
- EOUs can be engaged in manufacturing, services, development of software, repair, remaking, reconditioning, re-engineering including making of gold / silver / platinum jewellery and articles.
- Further, units involved in agriculture, agro-processing, aquaculture, animal husbandry, bio-technology, floriculture, horticulture, pisciculture, viticulture, poultry, sericulture and granites can also obtain the status of EOU.

- The following are the benefits enjoyed by Export Oriented Units:
- EOUs are allowed to procure raw material or capital good duty free, either through import or through domestic sources;
- EOUs are eligible for reimbursement of GST;
- EOUs are eligible for reimbursement of duty paid on fuels procured from domestic oil companies;

Export Promotion Capital Goods – EPCG Scheme

- Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) Scheme helps **facilitate import of capital goods into India for producing quality goods and service** and to enhance India's export competitiveness.
- EPCG scheme allows import of capital goods used in pre-production, production and post-production at **zero customs duty**.

Duty Free Import Authorization (DFIA) Scheme

- It is a scheme under which **duty free import of inputs, fuel, oil, energy sources**, catalyst which is required for the production of export goods is allowed.

6) Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)

What is PMI?

- PMI is an **indicator of business activity** -
- both in the **manufacturing and services sectors**.

- It is a **survey-based** measure that asks the respondents about changes in their perception of some key business variables from the month before.
- It is calculated separately for the manufacturing and services sectors and then a composite index is constructed.
- In PMI parlance, a figure above 50 means expansion, while a score below that denotes contraction.

Why PMI is important?

- The PMI is usually **released at the start of the month**, much before most of the official data on industrial output, manufacturing and GDP growth becomes available. It is, therefore, considered a **good leading indicator of economic activity**.
- Central banks of many countries also use the index to help make decisions on interest rates.
- The PMI also gives an **indication of corporate earnings** and is closely watched by investors as well as the bond markets. A good reading enhances the attractiveness of an economy vis-a- vis another competing economy.

Why in News?

- IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to a two-year low of 50.6 in October from 51.4 in September 2019.

International Relations

1) U.S. House recognizes Armenian genocide, backs Turkey sanctions

Background

- Armenian Genocide refer to the campaign of deportation and mass killing conducted against the Armenian subjects of the **Ottoman Empire** by the **Young Turk** government during **World War I (1914-18)**.
- Armenians charge that the campaign was a deliberate attempt to destroy the Armenian people and, thus, an act of genocide.
- The Turkish government has resisted calls to recognize it as such, contending that, although atrocities took place, there was no official policy of extermination implemented against the Armenian people as a group.



Why in News?

- The U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to recognize the mass killings of Armenians a century ago as a genocide, a symbolic but historic vote instantly denounced by Turkey.
- The House also backed legislation calling to impose sanctions on Turkey over its offensive in northern Syria. (Refer to *Officer's Pulse Issue No. 19*)

2) India - Saudi Arabia Relations

Why in News?

- Indian Prime Minister visited Saudi Arabia on a two day tour.



Major outcomes of the visit

- PM Narendra Modi announced the formation of the **India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council** that will be led by the leaderships of both countries.
- Both sides sealed **12 MoUs** on issues such as preventing narcotics trafficking, renewable energy, training of diplomats, defence industry production, security collaboration, and the use of RuPay cards in Saudi Arabia.
- Discussion also considered possibilities of increasing Indian investments in Saudi Arabia. India also cleared an **MoU that will help Hajj pilgrims** to travel

comfortably in Saudi Arabia during the pilgrimage seasons.

- Both sides also condemned terrorism in all forms and stated that no particular religion, race or culture should be linked with international terrorism.

Future Investment Initiative 2019

- It was held in Riyadh and has emerged as a major investment event in the Gulf region over the last three years.
- Delivering the keynote address, PM Modi has made the following statements
 - 1) He invited Saudi companies to invest in India's energy space saying that the government has set a target of \$100 billion investment in the sector.
 - 2) In the infrastructure sector alone, the government aims to have an investment of \$1.5 trillion in the next five years.
 - 3) The Prime Minister also noted that India's tax structure and IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) regime are considered the best in the world.
 - 4) Asking businesses to take advantage of the startup movement, Mr. Modi said, India has become the third largest startup ecosystem in the world and offers the highest return to investors.

3) Sharp fall in number of Pakistanis visiting India

Why in News?

- Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has released the annual report which analysed foreign arrivals to India in the recent past.

Inferences from the report

- There has been a sharp decline in the number of Pakistanis visiting India in the past three years. This is owing to the suspension of Samjhauta Express and other direct modes of transport between the two countries post-Balakot strikes.
- The **maximum number of foreign visitors** in 15 months starting 1 January 2018 to 31 March, 2019 were from **Bangladesh**.
- Of the 1.37 crore foreigners who came to India in the same period, around 28.76 lakh were from Bangladesh, followed by 18.63 lakh from the **U.S.** and 13.69 lakh from the **United Kingdom**.
- Out of the 1,982 **foreigners deported** by the authorities of the **Foreigners**

Regional Registration Office (FRRO), the maximum belonged to **Nigeria** (847), followed by **Bangladesh** (491) and **Somalia** (124).

About Foreigners Registration Office (FRO)

- The Foreigner Registration Office is the primary agency to regulate the registration, movement, stay, departure, and also for recommending the extension of stay in India.
- Foreigners Regional Registration Offices are located in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Amritsar and Chief Immigration Office in Mumbai.
- In other places, the Superintendents of Police (SP) of the Districts are registration officers for foreigners.
- The State Registration Officer in the State Capital functions as the liaison office between the Foreigner's Registration Officers (FRO) and the government.

4) Indo-German relations

Why in News?

- German Chancellor Angela Merkel was on a two-day visit to India.



Major outcomes of the visit

- Seventeen agreements have been signed between India and Germany in the fields of agriculture, maritime technology, ayurveda and yoga among others.
- Five joint declarations of intent were also exchanged which included cooperation on strategic projects, partnership for green

urban mobility, research and development on artificial intelligence and cooperation in the field of prevention of marine litter.

- Agreements have also been signed to promote, establish and expand scientific and technological research cooperation, academic collaboration in ayurveda, yoga and meditation.
- An MoU has also been signed in the field of occupational diseases, rehabilitation and vocational training of insured persons and workers with disabilities.
- Another pact was signed for cooperation in inland, coastal and maritime technology.
- Other agreements signed between the two countries include collaboration in agricultural technical and professional training, cooperation between the National Museum, the National Gallery of Modern Art, the Indian Museum, Kolkata, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and the Stiftung Humboldt Forum in Berliner Schloss and between All India Football Federation (AIFF) and Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V (DFB).

Other issues discussed

- India and Germany sought to give momentum to revive stalled negotiations for free-trade agreement with the European Union. proposed in 2007.
- The two sides, in an indirect message to Pakistan, asked it to root out terror havens and prevent the territory from being used for cross-border attacks.
- They called upon all countries to work towards uprooting terror infrastructure, disrupting terrorist networks and financing channels, and reining in movement of terrorists.
- They also established a **Track 1.5 Strategic Dialogue** that will enable key stakeholders to engage annually in an open exchange of views and ideas to enhance mutual understanding of national, regional and strategic interests and to work out recommendations for joint engagement and action on individual policy areas.
- Maritime projects between the Indian and German naval industries (e.g. submarines) are encouraged in view of the shared interest in the stability of the

Indian Ocean region, the joint statement noted in a subtle message for China whose submarines have been active in the IOR.

5) Shaksgam Valley

About

- The Shaksgam Valley or the **Trans Karakoram Tract** is part of Hunza-Gilgit region of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), and is disputed territory claimed by India but controlled by Pakistan.
- It borders Xinjiang Province of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the north, the Northern Areas of POK to the south and west, and the Siachen Glacier region to the east.
- The Shaksgam Valley was **ceded to China** by Pakistan in 1963 when both countries signed a boundary agreement (**China-Pakistan Boundary Agreement of 1963**) to settle their border differences.



Why in News?

- India warned Beijing not to comment on its internal matters just as India refrained from making statements on the internal affairs of China.
- India also slammed China for holding "illegally acquired" Indian territory (Shaksgam Valley).
- New Delhi's warning came after Beijing objected to the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union territories, saying India's decision to "include" what it called Chinese territory into its

administrative jurisdiction “challenged” Beijing’s sovereignty.

6) Pakistan violated its obligations under the Vienna Convention

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

- The ICJ is the **principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN)**.
- It was established in June 1945 by the **Charter of the United Nations** and began work in April 1946.
- The seat of the Court is at the **Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands)**. Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York (United States of America).
- The Court’s role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.
- The Court is **composed of 15 judges**, who are elected for terms of office of **nine years** by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.
- It is assisted by a Registry, its administrative organ. Its official languages are **English** and **French**.

Vienna Convention on Consular Relations

- The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963 is an international treaty that defines a framework for consular relations between independent states.
- A consul normally operates out of an embassy in another country, and performs two functions: (1) protecting in the host country the interests of their countrymen, and (2) furthering the commercial and economic relations between the two states.
- The treaty provides for diplomatic immunity. The treaty has been ratified by 180 states.

Why in News?

The ICJ in its report to the UNGA has told that Pakistan had violated its obligations under Article 36 of the Vienna Convention.

Background

- The ICJ had ruled that Pakistan must review the death sentence awarded to Mr. Kulbhushan Jadhav, a retired Indian Navy officer who was sentenced to death by the Pakistani military court on charges of “espionage and terrorism” after a closed trial in April 2017.
- India had argued that consular access was being denied to its national in violation of the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

News in Detail

- In interpreting Article 36, the Court has ruled that the provision does not exclude from its scope certain categories of persons, such as those suspected of espionage.
- The Court noted that Pakistan’s making of the notification some three weeks after Mr. Jadhav’s arrest constituted a breach of its obligation to inform India’s consular post without delay, as required by the provisions of the Vienna Convention
- The Court found that the appropriate remedy was effective review and reconsideration of the conviction and sentence of Mr. Jadhav.
- India had welcomed the verdict of the International Court of Justice, saying that the ruling of the court by a vote of 15-1 upheld India’s position in the case.
- **Article 36** addresses communications between consular officers and nationals of the sending state. The Convention provides that “consular officers shall be free to communicate with nationals of the sending State and to have access to them.” Foreign nationals who are arrested or detained be given notice “without delay” of their right to have their embassy or consulate notified of that arrest, and “consular officers shall have the right to visit a national of the sending State who is in prison, custody or detention, to converse and correspond with him and to arrange for his legal representation.”

7) Non-Aligned Movement

About Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

- The NAM is the biggest forum for political coordination and consultation after and within the United Nations, composed by **120 Member States** from the developing world.

- Palestine, a member of NAM in the 120-member grouping, is not a UN member.
- There are also 17 countries and 10 International Organizations that hold an Observer status.
- It was officially established in **1961**, at the Belgrade Summit, Yugoslavia, following the discussions that were triggered during the **Bandung Afro-Asian Conference of 1955**.
- The **Bandung Principles** were adopted at the conference which still serve as the purposes and objectives of the policy of non-alignment, and which have governed relations between big and small nations.
- The following are considered to be the founding fathers and historic leaders of the Movement: Joseph Broz Tito (President of Yugoslavia), Gamal Abdel Nasser (President of Egypt), Jawaharlal Nehru (Prime Minister of India), Sukarno (President of Indonesia), and Kwame Nkrumah (President of Ghana), who decided to declare it as a Movement, with a view to avoid the bureaucratic implications of an International Organization.
- The NAM was established in the midst of the collapse of the colonial system and the emancipatory struggle of the oppressed peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and other regions of the world, and at the heights of the Cold War.
- The NAM takes its decisions by consensus, which enhances the unity and solidarity among the Member States of the Movement.
- The conference of Heads of State or Government, often referred to as Non-Aligned Movement Summit is the main meeting within the movement and is held every three years generally.

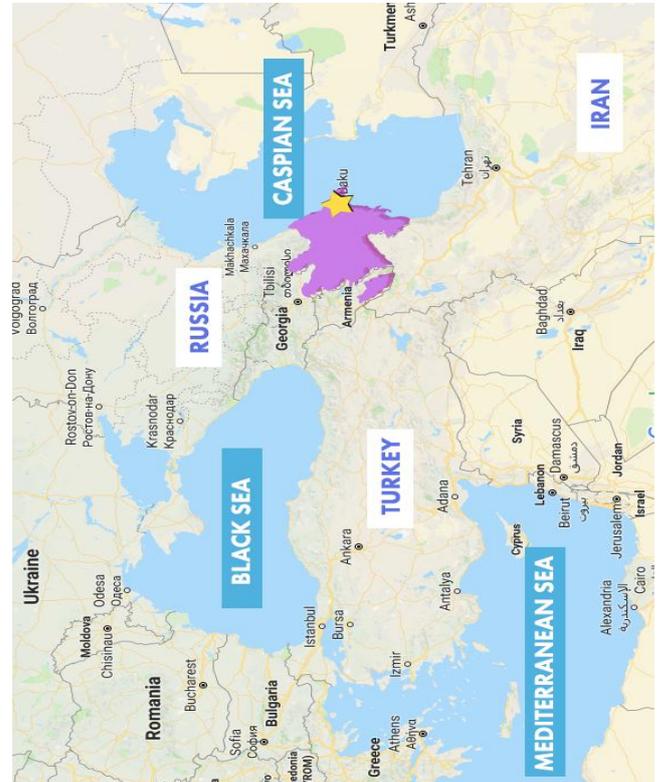
Why in News?

- The **18th Summit** of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) took place in **Baku, Azerbaijan** on October 25 and 26.

News in Detail

- Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu represented India marking the second time in a row that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will give the summit a miss.

- In 2016 as well, India was represented by then Vice-President Hamid Ansari at the NAM summit in Venezuela.
- Since it was inaugurated in 1961, the Indian Prime Minister has always attended the NAM summit, except once in 1979, when Chaudhury Charan Singh was the caretaker PM and hence missed it.



Keynotes of Baku Declaration

- The group stressed the need to revitalize the UN General Assembly and strengthen its authority.
- The leaders affirmed their commitment to make efforts to strengthen NAM's solidarity in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations in accordance with the principles of the UN and other international laws.
- The Movement also expressed concern about "the increased adverse impacts of climate change, particularly on developing countries, which are severely undermining their efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development."
- The Summit saw Azerbaijan take over the presidency of the movement from Venezuela for a three-year term from 2019 to 2022.

SCIENCE and TECHNOLOGY

1) Indigenous Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system for submarines

About Air-independent propulsion

- AIP is any marine propulsion technology that allows a non-nuclear submarine to operate without access to atmospheric oxygen (by surfacing or using a snorkel).

- A **submarine snorkel** is a device which allows a submarine to operate submerged while still taking in air from above the surface.

Need for AIP submarines

- Conventional diesel-electric submarines must surface periodically to recharge their batteries by using generators driven by air breathing diesel engines. These batteries run out of charge within 4-5 days.
- Recharging is done by snorkelling, which exposes them to detection by enemy radars and makes them an easy target for hostile anti-submarine assets.
- On the other hand, Air independent propulsion (AIP) systems **generate electrical power while the submarine is submerged.**
- Such systems provide power for recharging the batteries, for propulsion and for the submarine's other electrical equipment requirements, while the submarine is submerged.
- Thus greatly increases their underwater endurance, allowing them to continuously stay submerged for weeks without surfacing.
- However AIP doesn't give any advantage other than increased underwater advantage and it should not be assumed that AIP-equipped submarines will always defeat their non-AIP equipped counterparts.

Fuel cell based AIP

- Fuel cells are the most advanced and **preferred AIP technology** because of the major advantages they offer in stealthiness and power generation.

- A **Fuel Cell** is a device which **converts chemical energy into electricity** using a fuel (hydrogen) and an oxidizer (oxygen).
- **Phosphoric Acid Fuel Cells (PAFC)** and **Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cells (PEMFC)** are presently used in submarines.

Why in News?

- The indigenous Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system to enhance the endurance of conventional submarines being developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** reached a milestone with the successful operation of a land-based prototype.

2) CERT-In [Indian Computer Emergency Response Team]

About CERT-In

- CERT-In is a functional organisation of **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**, Government of India, with the objective of securing Indian cyber space.
- CERT-In provides Incident Prevention and Response services as well as Security Quality Management Services.

Objectives

- Preventing cyber-attacks against the country's cyber space.
- Responding to cyber-attacks and minimizing damage and recovery time Reducing 'national vulnerability to cyber-attacks.
- Enhancing security awareness among common citizens.

Functions/Activities (allocation of Business Rules)

- The **Information Technology (Amendment) Act 2008**, designated CERT-In to serve as the national agency to perform the following functions in the area of cyber security:
- Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on cyber incidents.
- Forecast and alerts of cyber security incidents.
- Emergency measures for handling cyber security incidents.

- Coordination of cyber incident response activities.
- Issue guidelines, advisories, vulnerability notes and whitepapers
- relating to information security practices, procedures, prevention,
- Response and reporting of cyber incidents.
- Such other functions relating to cyber security as may be prescribed

Why in News?

- The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) confirmed that a **malware** had infected its system at the **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP)**. The matter was conveyed by CERT-In.

3) WhatsApp infected by a spyware - Pegasus

What is a spyware?

- Spyware is the term given to a category of software which aims to **steal personal or organisational information**.
- It is done by performing a set of operations **without appropriate user permissions**, sometimes even covertly. It may be hidden in the system files of the computer and difficult to differentiate.
- General actions a spyware performs include advertising, collection of personal information and changing user configuration settings of the computer.
- Spyware is controversial because even when it is installed for relatively innocuous reasons, it can violate the end user's privacy and has the potential to be abused.
- A Spyware is generally classified into adware, tracking cookies, system monitors and Trojans.
- **Adware** - are usually used to give popup advertisements based on user habits and search history. Malicious adware is often bundled in with free software, shareware programs and utilities downloaded from the internet, or surreptitiously installed onto a user's device when the user visits an infected website.
- **Tracking cookies** - track the user's web activities, such as searches, history, and downloads, for marketing purposes.

- **System monitors** - This type of spyware can capture just about everything you do on your computer. System monitors can record all keystrokes, emails, chat-room dialogs, websites visited, and programs run. System monitors are often disguised as freeware.

- **Trojan** - This kind of malicious software disguises itself as legitimate software. For example, Trojans may appear to be a Java or Flash Player update upon download. Trojan malware is controlled by third parties. It can be used to access sensitive information such as Social Security numbers and credit card information.

Why in News?

- The popular messaging platform **WhatsApp** sued the **NSO Group**, accusing it of using WhatsApp servers in the United States and elsewhere “to send malware to approximately 1,400 mobile phones and devices (‘Target Devices’) for the purpose of conducting surveillance of specific WhatsApp users (‘Target Users’)”.

News in Detail

- The surveillance was carried out “between in and around April 2019 and May 2019” on users in 20 countries across four continents.
- The surveillance was carried out using a **spyware tool called Pegasus**, which has been developed by an Israeli firm, the NSO Group.

About Pegasus

- Pegasus works by sending an exploit link, and if the target user clicks on the link, the malware or the code that allows the surveillance is installed on the user's phone.
- A presumably newer version of the malware does not even require a target user to click a link.
- Pegasus delivers “a chain of **zero-day exploits** to penetrate security features on the phone and installs Pegasus without the user's knowledge or permission”.
- Once the phone is exploited and Pegasus installed, it begins contacting the operator's command and control servers to receive and execute operator commands, and send back the target's private data.

- The operator can even turn on the phone's camera and microphone to capture activity in the phone's vicinity.
- A "**zero-day exploit**" is a completely unknown vulnerability, about which even the software manufacturer is not aware, and there is, thus, no patch or fix available for it.

About WhatsApp

- WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook, is the world's most popular messaging app, with more than 1.5 billion users worldwide.
- About a quarter of those users — more than 400 million, or 40 crore — are in India, WhatsApp's biggest market.

About the NSO Group

- The NSO Group is a Tel Aviv-based cybersecurity company that specialises in "surveillance technology" and claims to help governments and law enforcement agencies across the world fight crime and terrorism.

4) Organoids for treatments

What is an organoid?

- **Organoids** are a group of cells grown in laboratories into three-dimensional, miniature structures that **mimic the cell arrangement of a fully-grown organ**.
- They are tiny (typically the size of a pea) **organ-like structures** that do not achieve all the functional maturity of human organs but often resemble the early stages of a developing tissue.
- Most organoids contain only a subset of all the cells seen in a real organ, but lack blood vessels to make them fully functional.
- Organoids of the brain, small intestine, kidney, heart, stomach, eyes, liver, pancreas, prostate, salivary glands, and inner ear to name a few have already been developed in the laboratory.

How are organoids grown in the laboratory?

- Organoids are grown in the lab **using stem cells** that can become any of the specialised cells seen in the human body, or stem cells taken from the organ or adults cells that have been **induced to behave like stem cells**, scientifically

called **induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSC)**.

- Stem cells are provided with nutrients and other specific molecules to grow and become cells resembling a specific organ.
- The growing cells are capable of self-organising into cellular structures of a specific organ and can partly replicate complex functions of mature organs — physiological processes to regeneration and being in a diseased state.

Benefits and application

- Since the organoids closely resemble mature tissues, it opens up new vistas. These include studying the complex arrangements of cells in three-dimension and their function in detail, and understanding how cells assemble into organs.
- Organoids **can be used to study the safety and efficacy of new drugs** and also test the response of tissues to existing medicines.
- Organoids will bring precision medicine closer to reality by developing patient-specific treatment strategies by studying which drugs the patient is most sensitive to.
- Organoids are far superior alternative to the use of animals and human cell lines or other methods in **drug development studies** as they can closely mimic the whole organ system.
- Organoids offer new opportunities in studying proteins and genes that are critical for the development of an organ. This helps in knowing how a mutation in a specific gene causes a disease or disorder.
- Researchers have used brain organoids **to study how the Zika virus affects brain development** in the embryo.
- Scientists are already using stem cells taken from tumours to grow organoids that are poised to develop cancer. This allows researchers to study the genes, proteins and signalling pathways that cancer cells use to develop and grow. They are also using healthy organoids to identify and verify the gene mutations that cause cancer.

Ethical concerns

- Some scientists are "perilously close" to crossing the ethical red line of growing

mini-brains or organoids in the laboratory that can perceive or feel things.

- In some cases, scientists have already transplanted such lab-grown brain organoid to adult animals. The transplanted organoid had integrated with the animal brain, grown new neuronal connections and responded to light.
- Similarly, lung organoid transplanted into mice was able to form branching airways and early alveolar structures.
- These are seen as a step towards potential “humanisation” of host animals.

Why in News?

- At Neuroscience 2019, the Society for Neuroscience’s 49th annual meeting, held in Chicago, U.S., ethical concerns of organoids were discussed.

5) New class of quantum materials - semi-Dirac materials

Quantum mechanics

- It is a physical science dealing with the **behaviour of matter and energy on the scale of atoms and subatomic particles / waves.**
- Quantum mechanics is the foundation of several related disciplines including nanotechnology, condensed matter physics, quantum chemistry, structural biology, particle physics, and electronics.

What Quantum materials?

- These are materials where the extraordinary effects of quantum mechanics give rise to **exotic and often incredible properties.**
- While all materials exhibit quantum mechanical properties at some level, 'quantum materials' exhibit unique properties like quantum fluctuations, quantum entanglement, quantum coherence, and topological behavior.

What are Dirac metals?

- Normal metals like gold and silver are good conductors of electricity. A key aspect that decides the quality of conduction is the way energy depends on the momentum of electrons.
- Dirac metals differ from normal metals in that the energy depends linearly on the momentum. This difference is responsible for their unique properties.

Why in News?

- Researchers from IIT Bombay have discovered special properties in a class of materials called “semi-Dirac metals”. Examples of **semi-Dirac metals** are systems such as TiO₂/V₂O₃ nanostructures.

What are semi-Dirac metals?

- Semi-Dirac metals behave like Dirac metals in one direction and like normal metals in the perpendicular directions (since their microscopic structure is different along the two directions).
- Within any material, charge carriers, such as electrons, acquire an effective mass which is different from their bare mass. The effective mass and the number of states available for electrons to occupy when it is excited by an electric field, determine the conductivity and other such properties. In semi-Dirac metal, the effective mass becomes zero for conduction along a special direction.
- The researchers have shown theoretically that the direction-dependence of the microscopical properties gives the material special optical properties.

Special optical properties and their applications

- Through calculations, the researchers have shown that such materials would be transparent to light of a given frequency and polarisation when it is incident along a particular direction.
- The material would be opaque to the same light when it falls on it from a different direction.
- There are many known applications for transparent conducting films – the common example being touch screens used in mobiles.

6) 1.3 mn Indian payment cards details up for sale on Dark Web

About DarkNet and Dark Web

- DarkNet is a network built over the internet which is **encrypted.**
- These are networks that are **only available to a select group of people** and not to the general Internet public, and only accessible via authorization, specific software and configurations.

- Dark Web is a website hosted on the DarkNet. It is not searchable by traditional means, such as a search engine, and it's not visible through traditional web browsers.
- It needs special browsers like **TOR** (The Onion Router), **Freenet** or **I2P**.
- Darknet provides anonymity to the users.

Concerns about DarkNet

- The anonymity of DarkNet attracted the criminal element to it.
- Here they are free to conduct their business and express themselves without fear of repercussion. It has become a haven for criminals selling drugs and guns, human trafficking and scamming.
- It is becoming a **huge cyber security nightmare** to governments and businesses all over the world.

Dark Web vs Deep Web

- The **deep web refers to unindexed sites which are unsearchable**; in most cases, this is because those sites are **protected by passwords**.
- DarkNet sites are purposefully hidden from the surface net by additional means.
- A large majority of internet sites constitute the "deep web," as they are password-protected.

Why in News?

- Nearly 1.3 million debit and credit card data of Indian banking customers that can fetch up to \$130 million for cybercriminals are available on Dark Web for open sale..
- According to ZDNet, the cards' details is available on **Joker's Stash** — one of the oldest card shops on the dark web which is known to be the place where major hackers sell card dumps.

PIB ANALYSIS

1) Indo-French Joint Exercise Shakti-2019

- GS PAPER 2 -International Relations (Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements and Military Exercises)

About Exercise Shakti

- Exercise SHAKTI' is the military exercise between India and France commenced in year 2011. It is a biennial exercise and is conducted alternately in India and France.
- The joint exercise will focus on Counter Terrorism operations in backdrop of semi-desert terrain under United Nations Mandate.
- The training will focus primarily on high degree of physical fitness, sharing of drill at tactical level and learning of best practices from each other.
- The exercise aims at enhancing understanding, cooperation and interoperability between the two Armies.



Why in News?

- The 2019 edition of Exercise SHAKTI will be conducted from 31 October 2019 to 13 November 2019 in Rajasthan, India.

2) Postal ballot facilities for Absentee voters

- GS PAPER 2 -Constitutional Bodies (Government Policies and Interventions)

Why in News?

- The Election Commission of India has started working on detailed guidelines to facilitate the process of postal ballot paper for absentee voters of essential services, senior citizens of more than 80 years and marked (Persons with Disabilities) PwD electors.
- These guidelines will include the identification of such voters, the manner of outreach, and the methods of collection as well as voting in the specified centres in each constituency.

Salient features of these amendments:

- In order to facilitate this, the following amendments to the Rules have been made:
- A concept of 'absentee voter' has been introduced and defined for the elections.
- An 'absentee voter' means a person belonging to such class of persons as may be notified, and who is employed in essential services as mentioned in the said notification, and includes an elector belonging to the class of senior citizens or persons with disabilities.
- A 'person with disability' means a person flagged as person with disability in the data base for the electoral roll.
- A 'senior citizen' for the purpose of this Part means an elector belonging to the class of absentee voters and is above 80 years of age.
- In the case of absentee voters, postal ballot paper shall be returned to the centre provided for recording of vote.
- These two categories of voters – senior citizens of more than 80 years of age and PwD electors marked in the electoral roll, will now have the choice of voting either as an absentee voter or as a regular voter on the poll day.

3) Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana

- GS PAPER 2 -Government Schemes and policies

About Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana

- The Van Dhan Scheme is an initiative of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED. It seeks to improve tribal incomes through value addition of tribal products.
- The scheme aims at economic development of tribals involved in the collection of Minor Food Produces (MFPs) by helping them in optimum utilization of natural resources and provide them a sustainable livelihood.

Importance of Minor Forest Produce (MFP)

- Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas. Around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income.
- Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from MFP on which they spend major portion of their time. This activity has a strong linkage to women's financial empowerment as most of the MFPs are collected and used/sold by women.
- MFP sector has the potential to create about 10 million work days annually in the country.

Implementation:

- The scheme will be implemented through Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level and TRIFED as Nodal Agency at the National Level.
- At State level, the State Nodal Agency for MFPs and the District collectors are envisaged to play a pivot role in scheme implementation at the grassroot level.
- Locally the Kendras are proposed to be managed by a Managing Committee (an SHG) consisting of representatives of Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster.
- At the unit level, aggregation of produce would be done by SHGs having about 30 members each forming Van Dhan Vikas 'Samuh'. They are then trained and provided with working capital to add value to the products, which they collect from the jungle.

Why in News?

- A two day "National Workshop on Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY)" begins here today. PMVDY is a component of 100 days plan of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

4) 2nd Assembly of International Solar Alliance (ISA)

- GS PAPER 2-International Relations (Important International Institutions and agencies, their structure and Mandate)

About ISA

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is an alliance of 121 countries initiated by India, most of them being sunshine countries, which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. The alliance is a treaty-based intergovernmental organization.
- The ISA was launched by the Prime Minister of India and the President of France on 30 November 2015 in Paris, France on the side-lines of the COP-21.



Objective:

- The overarching objective of the ISA is to collectively address key common challenges to the scaling up of solar energy in ISA member countries.

- It also aims to undertake joint efforts required to reduce the cost of finance and the cost of technology, mobilize investments needed for massive deployment of solar energy, and pave the way for future technologies adapted to the needs.
- ISA has been positioned to help create the conditions that would make funding, developing and deploying solar applications on a large scale a reality.

ISA Assembly

- The Assembly is the supreme decision making body of the ISA, and gives directions on various administrative, financial and programme related issues.
- Shri R.K. Singh, Minister for New and Renewable Energy and Power is President of the ISA Assembly and Ms Brune Poirson, Minister of State for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition Govt. of France, is the Co-President of the Assembly.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is hosting the second Assembly of International Solar Alliance (ISA) on 30 and 31 October 2019 New Delhi.

5) Lymphatic Filariasis

- GS PAPER 2- Issues related to Health

About Lymphatic Filariasis

- Lymphatic filariasis, commonly known as elephantiasis, is a painful and profoundly disfiguring disease.
- The disease is caused by three species of thread-like nematode worms, known as filaria – *Wuchereria bancrofti*, *Brugia malayi* and *Brugia timori*.
- Lymphatic filariasis impairs the lymphatic system which is an essential component of the body's immune system.
- It can lead to the abnormal enlargement of body parts, causing pain, severe disability and social stigma.

Symptoms

- Lymphatic filariasis infection involves asymptomatic, acute, and chronic conditions. The majority of infections are asymptomatic, showing no external signs of infection while contributing to transmission of the parasite. These asymptomatic infections still cause damage to the lymphatic system and the

kidneys, and alter the body's immune system.

WHO's Response

- WHO launched its Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis (GPELF) in 2000. WHO's strategy is based on 2 key components:
 - stopping the spread of infection through large-scale annual treatment of all eligible people in an area or region where infection is present; and
 - alleviating the suffering caused by lymphatic filariasis through provision of the recommended basic package of care.

India's Initiatives to tackle Lymphatic Filariasis

- The launch of the **Global Program to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis (GPELF)** by the World Health Organization in 2000, endemic countries across the world including India have adopted a twin pillar strategy:
 - Prevention through Mass Drug Administration (MDA) using a combination of 2 anti-filarial drugs (**DEC and Albendazole**)
 - Providing Morbidity Management and Disability Prevention (MMDP) services to those affected by the disease
- The Government launched the **Accelerated Plan for Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis (APELF)** in 2018.
- As per this plan, over 4 billion treatments have been availed by over 630 million target population in endemic districts.
- India has made steady progress in this regard by reducing the infection levels in the community below the threshold level in 96 districts, which accounts for nearly 37% of the total districts.

Why in News?

- The Union Health Minister inaugurates National Symposium on the theme 'United to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis'.

6) Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority

- GS PAPER 2-Government Policies and Interventions, Welfare Schemes and Measures

Why in News?

- Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) has

permitted Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) to enroll in the National Pension Scheme (NPS) at par with Non-Resident Indians.

- The Government has specified that an OCI may subscribe to the National Pension System governed and administered by PFRDA, provided such person is eligible to invest as per the provisions of the PFRDA Act and the annuity/accumulated saving will be repatriable, subject to FEMA guidelines

About PFRDA

- Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is the statutory Authority established by an enactment of the Parliament, to regulate, promote and ensure orderly growth of the National Pension System (NPS) and pension schemes to which this Act applies. It was authorised by the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance.

Difference between OCI and NRI

- An NRI is an Indian citizen who is ordinarily residing outside India and holds an Indian Passport. While an OCI is a person registered as Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Cardholder under section 7A of the Citizenship Act, 1955. Foreign nationals are eligible for registration as Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Cardholder:-
 - 1) who was a citizen of India at the time of, or at any time after the commencement of the Constitution i.e. 26.01.1950;
 - 2) who belonged to a territory that became part of India after 15.08.1947)
 - 3) who is a child or a grandchild or great grandchild of such a citizen
 - 3) who is a minor child and whose both parents are citizens of India or one of the parents is a citizen of India;
- **Note :** No person who or either of whose parents or grandparents or great grandparents is or had been a citizen of Pakistan, Bangladesh or such other country as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify, shall be eligible for registration as an Overseas Citizen of India Cardholder,

7) Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO)

- GS PAPER 2-Government Institutions, Welfare Schemes and Measures

Why in News?

- Minister of State (I/C) for Labour and Employment launched 3 Apps **Uan Registration, E-Inspection and DigiLocker** developed by Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) at its 67th Foundation Day .

About EPFO

- The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation, is an organization tasked to assist the Central Board of Trustees, a statutory body formed by the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.
- It is under the administrative control of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- It is the biggest social security organization of the world covering around six crore active members and 65 lakh pensioners and maintaining around 22 crore accounts of workers with a fund of approximately 13 lakh crore.
- The three important digital initiatives of EPFO are:

Online Facility for UAN generation by worker:

- Now any workers can obtain Universal Account Number (UAN) directly on EPFO website which enrolls them for PF, Pension and Life Insurance benefits and a worker need not depend on his employer alone for UAN.
- This is in the direction of ease of living and ensuring universal social security.

EPS Pensioner's PPO in DigiLocker website/Application (APP)

- EPFO integrates with DigiLocker of NeGD to create depository of electronic PPOs which is accessible to individual pensioners.
- This is a move towards paperless system and ease of living for pensioners.

e-Inspections:

- Digital interface of EPFO with employers: The E-Inspection Form would be available in user login of employers not filing ECR which enables employer to inform either closure of business or unpaid dues with proposal for payment.
- It will nudge employers for compliant behavior and prevent undue harassment

of non-willful defaulters and eliminate inspector raj.

About Digilocker

- DigiLocker is a platform for issuance and verification of documents & certificates in a digital way, thus eliminating the use of physical documents.
- Indian citizens who sign up for a DigiLocker account get a dedicated cloud storage space that is linked to their Aadhaar (UIDAI) number.
- Organizations that are registered with Digital Locker can push electronic copies of documents and certificates (e.g. driving license, Voter ID, School certificates) directly into citizens lockers.
- Citizens can also upload scanned copies of their legacy documents in their accounts. These legacy documents can be electronically signed using the eSign facility.

8) Mumbai & Hyderabad as a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

- GS PAPER 1- Art and Culture (Indian Heritage and Culture)

About UCCN:

- The UCCN, created in 2004, is a network of cities which are thriving, active centres of cultural activities in their respective countries.

- The member cities that form part of the Network come from all continents and regions with different income levels and populations.

- They work together towards a common mission of placing creativity and the creative economy at the core of their urban development plans to make cities safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable, in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- **Note: Ministry of Culture** is the nodal Ministry of Government of India for all matters in UNESCO relating to culture.

The 7 categories for recognition under UCCN are:

- 1) Crafts and Folk Arts
- 2) Design
- 3) Film
- 4) Gastronomy
- 5) Music
- 6) Media Arts
- 7) Literature

- Indian cities previously recognized as members of UCCN, namely:

- 1) Jaipur-Crafts and Folk Arts(2015)
- 2) Varanasi-Creative city of Music (2015)
- 3) Chennai-Creative city of Music(2017)

Why in News?

- UNESCO has designated Mumbai as a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in the field of FILM and Hyderabad in the field of GASTRONOMY.

News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Chavang Kut

- **GS PAPER 1- Art and Culture (Indian Heritage and Culture)**

About Chavang Kut

- Chavang stands for 'autumn' and Kut mean 'harvest'. The festival is observed to mark the end of the harvesting season and also to thank deities for a good harvest season.
- In Manipur, Mizoram and Assam and other parts of the country, the festival is organized every year as thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest.
- The celebration also included the dancing and singing along with the sports competitions and feasts.
- It is one of the most important festivals of Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities.



Why in News?

- Chavang Kut, the post-harvest festival of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo communities is being celebrated across North-Eastern states with traditional gaiety and enthusiasm. The festival marks the Anglo-Kuki war centenary year.

2) Chhath Festival

- **GS PAPER 1- Art and Culture (Indian Heritage and Culture)**

About Chhath Festival

- Chhath is a **Hindu festival dedicated to the Sun god and his wife Usha** in order to thank them for bestowing the bounties of life on earth.

- The Goddess who is worshipped during the famous Chhath Puja is known as Chhathi Maiya (also known as Usha, wife of the sun god).
- The main worshipers, called **Parvaitin** (meaning 'occasion' or 'festival'), are usually women.
- However, many men also observe this festival as **Chhath is not a gender-specific festival**.
- The parvaitin pray for the well-being of their family, and for the prosperity of their offspring.



- The festival is observed most elaborately in Madhesh (southern) region of Nepal and Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand and UP, it is also more prevalent in areas where migrants from those areas have a presence.

Why in News?

- In Bihar, the four days long auspicious Chhath festival worship of the Sun God began with ritual of Nahay Khaya Devotees especially women across the state by taking holy dip in Ganga and other rivers, ponds and water bodies.

Hindu Editorial Analysis

1) Substance across the Arabian Sea - Riyadh summit

- GS II- International relations

Context:

- The Prime Minister of India recently visited Saudi Arabia for their third summit after many years.
- Southwest Asian sub region is experiencing a cascade of issues one after the another ranging from India-Pakistan tensions to the approaching climax of crises in Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan. In spite of this, both India and Saudi Arabia have demonstrated their maturity and strategic construct in the Riyadh Summit.



- Significance of Riyadh Summit:

Acknowledging core interests

- Both the countries **acknowledged each other's core interests** and accommodated them,

- Saudi Arabia showed an **understanding of recent Indian actions in Jammu and Kashmir**
- India strongly **condemned the various attacks on Saudi civilian facilities.**

2) Defence cooperation

- Bilateral defence, security and anti-terror cooperation has intensified.
- First naval exercise is to be held soon.

Strategic partnership council

- Setting up of a **bilateral Strategic Partnership Council (SPC)** to be co-chaired by the Indian Prime Minister and Saudi crown prince is a defining development.
- The centralised nature of executive at both ends would expedite the **decision-making process.** The SPC would be a **permanent bilateral platform** with two verticals jointly serviced by the two Foreign and Trade and Industry Ministries.

Memorandum Of Understanding

- **12 bilateral documents** were signed in several areas including Energy, Civil Aviation, Security Cooperation, Defence, launch of RuPAY Cards and regulation of medical products to further strengthen cooperation across the sectors.
- This shows, India and Saudi Arabia have already commenced **leveraging opportunities** across a vast eco-space, from energy to agriculture and from fintech to skilling.

Investment

- At the **Future Investment Initiative forum** in Riyadh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi listed **five "trends" in India with global investors' remit**:
 - technology and innovation,
 - infrastructure development,
 - human resource development,
 - environment and
 - Business-friendly governance.

India- Saudi Arabia relations:

Areas of Cooperation:

- **Bilateral trade:** In 2018-19, the India-Saudi bilateral trade was around US \$ 34

billion. Saudi Arabia is **India's 4th largest trade partner**.

- **Energy cooperation:** Saudi Arabia is currently **India's second-largest supplier of crude oil**, providing about 18 % of its energy needs. It also has a major role in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs).
- An preliminary agreement was signed between **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd and Saudi Aramco** that is expected to see a greater Saudi role in setting up a second fuel reserve facility at Padur in Karnataka
- **Anti-terrorism cooperation:** India and Saudi Arabia face multidimensional security threats, not only on land, air, and sea, but also in cyberspace. Both countries condemn terrorism in all forms and they believe that no particular religion, race or culture should be linked with international terrorism.
 - ➤ Both countries agreed to constitute a "**Comprehensive Security Dialogue**" at the national security adviser (NSA) level and set up a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism
- **Defense partnership :** India recently hosted the Saudi General Authority of Military Industry and Indian defense companies visited Saudi Arabia subsequently. The **first India-Saudi Arabia joint naval exercise** is scheduled to be held in the year 2020 , what would be key element in India's Indo-Pacific vision in Western Indian Ocean Region.
- **Cultural cooperation:** The 2.6 million-strong Indian community in Saudi Arabia is the **largest expatriate community** in the Kingdom .
 - ➤ The two sides also launched a new chapter on people-to-people ties through the launch of the **RuPay Card** that will be useful for not only the large Indian community in Saudi Arabia but also for Haj and Umrah pilgrims.
 - ➤ An important factor influencing India's foreign policy is her socio-cultural affinity of Indian Muslims owing to Macca and Madina located in this region. Every year more than a lakh Indian Muslims go for Hajj, providing a binding force between two countries.

- **Commercial cooperation :** Saudi Arabia aims to **invest USD 100 billion** in India in the areas of energy, refining, petrochemicals, infrastructure, agriculture, minerals and mining

Way forward:

- Among the potential areas for next stage of bilateral cooperation could be greater bilateral synergy in **Indian infrastructure, agriculture, start-ups, skilling and IT**.
- **Shifting some labour-intensive establishments** from Saudi Arabia to India would serve the respective national priorities by reducing the kingdom's expatriate population and **boosting 'Make in India'**.
- The **World Bank's** recently published "**Ease of Doing Business**" rankings included both India and Saudi Arabia in its **ten "most improved economies"**.
- India by jumping up 14 places and Saudi Arabia by jumping 34 places stood at **63rd and 62nd** positions in the Index.
- **The two largest, top performing and complementary economies of the subregion by joining hands can transform Southwest Asia region.**

2) Still a developing country

- **GS II - Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.**
- India is a country making **rapid developmental strides** since 2014, but when it comes to **developmental status** at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), India is trying hard to prove that it is a **poor country**.

Why this dichotomy?

- The former assertion is made to please the domestic constituency, the latter proclamation is because of U.S. President's threat that countries like India should be stripped off their 'developing country' status in the WTO.

WTO norms for recognising developing developed and least developed countries:

- Under the WTO system, generally, countries are designated as **developed, developing, and least developed countries (LDCs)**.

- **Article IX.2** of the WTO agreement provides that the **LDC status** of a country in the WTO is based on such status being **recognised by the UN**. But the agreement **does not mention any criterion** to determine a **'developing country' status**.
- **Article XVIII** of the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)** recognises that attaining the objectives of this agreement would require **facilitating the progressive development** of those countries that can only support low levels of development and are at the **early stages of development**.
- Accordingly, countries **self-designate** themselves as **'developing country'** to take advantage of provisions like Article XVIII of GATT and other special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions in the WTO agreements.
- These provisions are aimed at increasing trade opportunities for developing countries, ensuring longer transitional periods to comply with WTO obligations, and affording technical assistance to countries, among other things.

What is the issue?

- In January 2019, the U.S. made a formal submission to the WTO that countries like India are no more 'developing countries' and thus should not enjoy the S&DT benefits.
- The U.S. proposed that any country that meets one of the following criteria shall not be eligible for S&DT benefits:
 - membership of, or seeking accession to OECD;
 - membership of G20;
 - share in world exports exceeding 0.5% or
 - classified as high-income group by the World Bank.

Supporting facts:

- **India's GDP has grown** from \$0.60 trillion in 1995 to \$2.63 trillion in 2017.
- India is a **member of the G20** and its **share in world exports is around 1.7%** as of early 2019. So, as per these criteria, India will not qualify as a developing country.

Special and Differential Treatment Provisions

- The WTO Agreements contain special provisions which give developing countries **special rights** and which give

developed countries **the possibility to treat developing countries more favourably** than other WTO Members.

- These provisions are referred to as **"special and differential treatment" (S&D) provisions**.
- The special provisions include:
 - longer time periods for implementing Agreements and commitments,
 - measures to increase trading opportunities for developing countries,
 - provisions requiring all WTO members to safeguard the trade interests of developing countries,
 - support to help developing countries build the capacity to carry out WTO work, handle disputes, and implement technical standards, and
 - provisions related to least-developed country (LDC) Members.

India's claim:

- In a paper submitted to the WTO, India gave several numbers to show that it is still a poor country and thus requires S&DT provisions.
 - For example, the paper showed that
 - India's GDP per capita is very low;
 - India has 364 million people living in multidimensional poverty;
 - the domestic subsidies provided to per farmer is a meagre \$227; and
 - India has a very low research and development capacity.

US threat:

- It declared that if substantial progress were not made in the WTO in reforming the determination of 'developing country' status, it would, within three months, **unilaterally stop treating certain countries as 'developing country'**.
- **South Korea** capitulated to this pressure giving up its developing status.
- Any unilateral action by the US would be a **violation of international law** and yet another **attack on trade multilateralism**.

What India should do?

- According to the author, India's publicity overdrive about development can come back to bite it at the WTO and hence **India's political leadership should refrain from being on a publicity overdrive**.

About GATT:

- The **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)** is a **multilateral agreement regulating international trade**, the purpose of which is the “**substantial reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers and the elimination of preferences, on a reciprocal and mutually advantageous basis**”.
- The **failure** to create the International Trade Organization (ITO) resulted in the GATT negotiation at the UN Conference on Trade and Employment.
- GATT was in place from **1947-1993**, when it was **replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO)** in 1995.
- GATT text is still in effect under the WTO framework, subject to modifications.

About WTO:

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only **global international organization** dealing with the rules of trade between nations.
- The WTO has **six key objectives**:
- to set and enforce rules for international trade,
- to provide a forum for negotiating and monitoring further trade liberalization,
- to resolve trade disputes,
- to increase the transparency of decision-making processes,
- to cooperate with other major international economic institutions involved in global economic management, and
- to help developing countries benefit fully from the global trading system.
- The WTO has **164 members and 23 observer governments**.
- **India** has been a WTO member since 1 January 1995 and a member of GATT since 8 July 1948.
- **Liberia** is the 163rd country and **Afghanistan** becomes the 164th Country to join WTO

3) Cramped Prisons: On need for decongestion

GS II- Governance

Context:

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has recently released a report on Prison statistics.

Highlights of the report:

- **Overall occupancy rates** of prisons have come down from **140% in 2007 to 115% in 2017**.
- Between 2007 and 2017, inmate **population** increased by **20%** while jail **capacity** rose by **41%** across prisons, thereby reducing the occupancy rate of prisoners.
- In spite of average occupancy rate being 115% of their capacity, Indian jails continue to remain **congested and overcrowded**.
- In 16 of the 28 States covered in the report, occupancy rate was higher than 100% with States and Union Territories such as **Uttar Pradesh (165%), Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Sikkim** faring the worst.
- **Tamil Nadu** has reported the **lowest occupancy rate** in prisons compared to other large States in the country.(61.3%)

Reasons for low occupancy rate in Tamilnadu:

- 1) Tamilnadu has 138 jails, including nine central prisons, which is the highest in the country.
- 2) Hundreds of convicts, mostly those serving life imprisonment, are given remission of sentence and released from prisons on occasions like Anna birth anniversary and M G Ramachandran centenary celebrations.
- More than **68%** of those imprisoned were **under trials**, indicating that a majority were poor and were unable to execute bail bonds or provide sureties.
- **Law Commission** of India in its **268th report** in May 2017 has highlighted the **inconsistencies in the bail system** as one of the key reasons for **overcrowding** in prisons.

Recommendations to reduce overcrowding:

- The Law Commission recommended that:
 - 1) Those **detained for offences** that come with a punishment of up to seven years of imprisonment should be released on completing one-third of that period
 - 2) For those **charged with offences** that attract a longer jail term, after they complete half of that period should be released.
 - 3) For those who have spent the whole period as **undertrials**, the period

undergone should be considered for **remission**.

4) It also recommended that the police should **avoid needless arrests**.

5) **magistrates** should **refrain from mechanical remand orders**.

6) A system of holding **undertrials** for too long without a just trial process in overcrowded prisons that suffer problems of hygiene, management and discipline, makes the **convicted criminal to reoffend**.

▪ It is imperative that these recommendations are incorporated into law soonest.

Do you know?

▪ Major committees on Prison Reforms:

Mulla committee:

▪ Mulla committee (All India Committee on Jail Reform) setup in 1983, the basic objective of which is to review the laws, rules and regulations keeping in view the overall objective of protecting society and rehabilitating offenders.

Krishna Iyer Committee:

▪ Krishna Iyer Committee was setup in 1987 which undertook a study on situation of Women prisoners in India.

Justice Amitava Roy Panel:

▪ Supreme court's recently constituted Justice Amitava Roy (2018) panel looks into various matters including overcrowding in prisons and issues concerning women prisoners.

4) Cutting risk: On India's Anti polio drive

▪ GS II- Health

Context:

▪ Global Commission for the Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication **officially declared on World Polio day that wild poliovirus type 3 has been eradicated**.

What is Polio?

▪ Poliomyelitis (polio) is a **highly infectious viral disease** caused by the Polio **virus** which mainly **affects young children**.

Mode of spread:

▪ The virus is transmitted by **person-to-person** spread mainly through the **faecal-oral route** or, less frequently, by a **common vehicle** (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the

intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system.

Symptoms:

▪ Initial symptoms of polio include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs.

▪ In a small proportion of cases, the disease causes **paralysis**, which is often permanent.

Is there a cure for Polio?

▪ There is **no cure** for polio, it can only be **prevented by immunization**.

About Polio vaccine:

▪ There are **three wild types** of poliovirus (WPV) – **type 1, type 2, and type 3**.

▪ People need to be protected against all three types of the virus in order to prevent polio disease and the polio vaccination is the best protection.

▪ There are **two vaccines** used to protect against polio disease, **oral polio vaccine** and **inactivated poliovirus vaccine**.

▪ After **wild poliovirus type 2** was declared **eradicated** in 2015, the world switched from **trivalent to bivalent OPV**. Trivalent OPV contains all three types of poliovirus, while bivalent OPV only contains poliovirus type 1 and 3.

Current scenario:

▪ Global Commission for the Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication officially declared that **wild poliovirus type 3** has been **eradicated**.

▪ The last case of wild poliovirus type 3 was seen in northern Nigeria in 2012 and this is the second wild poliovirus to be declared eliminated after wild poliovirus type 2 eradication in 2015.

▪ With two of the three wild polioviruses eliminated, only **type 1 wild poliovirus** is still in **circulation** and is restricted to just two countries — **Afghanistan and Pakistan**.

Significance:

▪ it opens up the possibility of switching from the currently used **bivalent oral polio vaccine** containing type 1 and type 3 to a **monovalent vaccine** containing only type 1.

What is Vaccine derived Polio and Vaccine Associated Paralytic Polio (VAPP)?

Vaccine derived Polio:

- Oral polio vaccine (OPV) contains an **attenuated (weakened) vaccine-virus**, activating an immune response in the body.
- When a child is immunized with OPV, the weakened vaccine-virus replicates in the intestine for a limited period, thereby developing immunity by building up antibodies.
- During this time, the vaccine-virus is also excreted. In areas of inadequate sanitation, this excreted vaccine-virus can spread in the immediate community (and this can offer protection to other children through '**passive' immunization**), before eventually dying out.
- On rare occasions, if a population is seriously under-immunized, an excreted vaccine-virus can continue to circulate for an extended period of time which allows more **genetic changes** to take place.
- In very rare instances, the vaccine-virus can genetically change into a form that can paralyse – this is what is known as a **circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV)** which causes Vaccine derived Polio.
- This condition **doesn't happen** with **Inactivated Poliovirus Vaccine** as it doesn't contain live viruses.

Vaccine Associated Paralytic Polio(VAPP):

- VAPP is caused when the **live, weakened virus used in the vaccine turns virulent** in the intestine of the vaccinated child or spreads to close contacts who have not been immunised.
- **Type 3 Polio virus vaccine** though least likely to cause Vaccine derived Polio, It has the greatest propensity to cause **Vaccine Associated Paralytic Polio**.
- VAPP can be greatly reduced if there is a switch from the bivalent to a monovalent vaccine containing only type 1.
- Alternatively, the risk of VAPP can be reduced 80-90% **if every child receives the bivalent vaccine and one dose of inactivated polio vaccine injection**.
- A recent paper suggests that post 2016, **India** might have **75 VAPP cases** annually due to **global IPV vaccine shortage** and "**delay in IPV implementation in India's national immunisation programme**".

World polio day:

- World Polio Day is celebrated on October 24 of every year.
- **The theme for World Polio Day 2019 is** "Stories of Progress: Past and Present for World Polio Day".

5) India's Afghanistan conundrum

- GS II- International Relations
- Afghanistan has been **ravaged by war since 2001** when a **US-led coalition overthrew the Taliban**. Since October 2018, Taliban representatives and US officials have been negotiating for a **peace treaty**.
- The negotiations focus on three elements
- **Withdrawal of foreign forces** from Afghanistan.
- To **prevent** Afghanistan from being used by **international terrorist groups**.
- **Permanent ceasefire** between the Taliban and Afghanistan.

New Afghan Strategy of US

- **Military commitment without a deadline**.
- Open **acknowledgement of Pakistan's role** in providing sanctuary to Afghan-based militant groups.
- **Acknowledgement of India's' role** in stabilizing Afghanistan

India's Afghan Policy

- India follows a policy of **Afghan led and Afghan owned peace process**
- India is helping the Afghan state in the **rehabilitation** process. This has taken away the large number of youth in Afghanistan from the path of terrorism.
- India has an **investment of over 3 billion dollars** in Afghanistan.
- It stresses on the **legitimate democratically elected government** in Afghanistan
- There will be **no Indian boots-on-ground** in Afghanistan.
- India will provide **economic assistance and capacity building** to aid peace process in Afghanistan.

India in tough spot

- India was always sceptical of the outcome of the US-Taliban talks without the participation of the elected Afghanistan government.

- **Away from India's Afghan's policy :** USA's recent strategy of engaging with the Taliban without the consideration of India has cast a shadow over the US's role as a strategic ally of India in the region.
- India believes that the negotiation had to do more with **American withdrawal** rather than a roadmap for permanent peace in Afghanistan which in line with India's policy of Afghan led and Afghan owned peace process.
- While India's principled position of not directly engaging with Taliban, until it engages the Afghan government remains valid, it is necessary that India should be aware of all negotiations and should ensure a **key partnership for resolution of Afghan crisis.**

Pakistan in good place:

- The current US move has been a **diplomatic victory for Pakistan.** The US will require Pakistan's support to implement the interim deal as only **Pakistan has influence over the Taliban.**

- **Pakistan-Taliban nexus :** If the negotiation resulted in a **power sharing agreement** between the Taliban and Afghan government, it would provide Pakistan a '**Strategic advantage**' over **India**
- **Proxy war:** In case of failure of negotiation between US and Taliban, it would push Afghanistan into a full-fledged civil war.
- In this situation ,it would be easier for Pakistan to push Afghan jihadists into Kashmir thereby destabilizing the region

Way Forward:

- **New Delhi** should **leverage the goodwill** it enjoys among the Afghan people. India must **intensify its dialogue with regional and global stakeholders**, and impress upon them that **any dialogue** with the Taliban must **not come at the cost** of the **hard-fought victories of the Afghan people** in the past two decades on establishing constitutional democracy and the rule of law, and securing the rights of women and minorities.

RSTV Big Picture

1) Naga Talks – Issues and Way Forward

Long quest for peace
With the Naga talks in the final leg, a look at the progress till now



with Centre in 1997

- NSCN-IM seeks a 'Greater Nagalim' merging Naga-inhabited areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur & separate flag and constitution for the Nagas
- The outfit signs ceasefire agreement
- Interlocutor **R.N. Ravi (in pic)** inks framework agreement in 2015
- Signs preamble in 2017 with six Naga National Political Groups to continue discussions

Why in news?

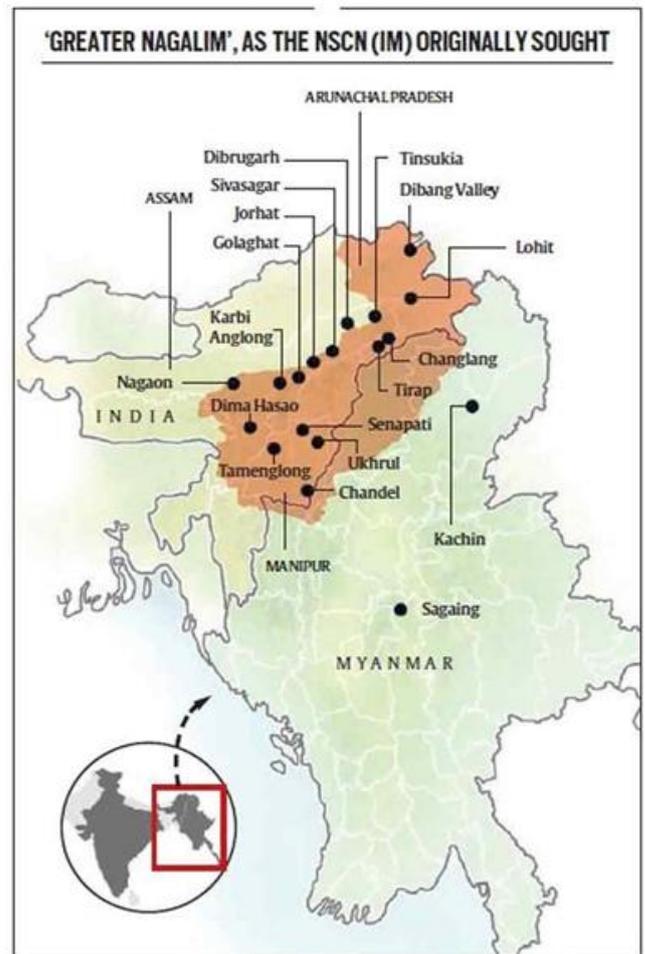
- With the next round of peace talks to end the protracted Naga Political problem scheduled for October 31, Nagaland and Manipur governments have taken steps to meet any eventuality and have put their respective police forces on high alert.
- The Nagaland government has directed all Deputy Commissioners of the Districts and Administrative officers to remain in their places of posting within their jurisdiction till further orders.
- In neighbouring Manipur, where Nagas have a sizeable presence, security forces in the state have been put to high alert and a large number of security forces

including women personnel have been deployed at important areas as to thwart any unwanted activities.

What is the background?

- The crucial round of talks of October 24 to find a lasting solution to the seven decade old Naga Insurgency problem has remained inconclusive. Naga tribal organisations, civil societies and political groups have been saying that any agreement on the Naga issue should be inclusive, honourable and acceptable to all segmentation of the people.

What is the History of Naga people?



- The Nagas are an ethnic community that comprises several tribes who live in Nagaland and its neighbourhood.
- Assam was annexed in 1826 by the British government.
- Naga Hills became part of British India in 1881.

- The Naga club formed in 1918 was the first sign of resistance which opposed the Simon Commission.
- The Naga National Council (NNC) which was created by A Z Phizo in 1946 declared Nagaland as an independent state on 14th August 1947.
- Its resolution was to establish a sovereign Naga state and also conducted a referendum in 1951.
- The referendum saw 99% of Nagas supporting an independent Nagaland or the greater Nagalim.
- The Greater Nagalim comprises of all contiguous Naga inhabited areas along with Nagaland which includes districts of Assam, Arunachal, Manipur and parts of Myanmar.
- In 1975 when NNC split with NSCN which further split into NSCN (IM) and NSCN (Khaplang).

What the Naga talks are all about?

- This is a seven decade old insurgency problem – The Nagas want a sovereign separate state of Nagaland i.e, a separate nation.
- There have been cyclical phases of violence followed by dialogue.
- It has seen the longest ever ceasefire the Government of India has had with the most influential Naga group, the NACN-IM.
- The framework agreement to solve this issue was signed by Narendra Modi's government but the nitty gritty were still being worked out.
- There is a deadline that is October 31 by which the centre wants to settle the Naga issue.

What is the History of Naga Peace Talks? Naga – Akbar Hydari Agreement of 1947

- This was signed by the Naga National Convention(NNC) and the Governor of Assam.
- The agreement said that the right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes.
- The agreement gave special responsibility to the Governor of Assam for a period of 10 years to ensure the observance of the agreement.

Sixteen point Agreement with the Naga People's Convention -1960

- This agreement said that any act or law passed by the Union Parliament affecting the Religious or Social Practices, Customary laws etc will not have any legal force in Nagaland.

Shillong Agreement of 1975

- This agreement was signed between Nagaland Governor and the Naga underground leaders who agreed to their decision to accept, without condition the Constitution of India.
- This also saw the NNC agreeing to give up the arms and the split of NNC.

Nagaland Peace Accord of 2015

- This was signed between the Indian Government and the NSCN- IM to end the insurgency.

What are the issues unresolved?

- The trickiest issue is the Naga Constitution and the National Flag.
- This was signed between the Indian Government and the NSCN- IM to end the insurgency.

What are the impacts?

- The issue has taken a toll on Naga leaders and people.
- It has taken a long period of time impacting the lives of the Naga people.
- The sense of restlessness amongst the youth.

Where do the demands currently stand?

- The boundary of the states cannot be altered as it might trigger the peace of the states involved.
- Providing autonomous Naga territorial councils for Arunachal, Manipur and Assam can be considered.
- Removal of AFSPA in these states and integrating the Naga militias.

What is the way forward?

- The stakeholders are not only Indians but also from neighbouring countries so the modus operandi should consider this factor.
- The issues prevailing should be seen more democratically and integration of Naga society is the need of the hour.
- The Naga church fraternity should play a greater role in solving the issues.
- The sentiments of the Naga identity and culture should be considered.

- Integration of underground Naga leaders to the society.
- Make the Naga leaders understand the practical realities of redrawing the boundaries and work out the most practicable solution like providing autonomous governments in the states and districts where sizeable population of Nagas resides can be considered.
- A greater body considering the areas of Nagalim to honour the culture of Nagas too is a feasible solution.

Conclusion

- In the backdrop of Kashmir decision by the Government of India and revoking 370, the Naga issue reflects on the culture, identity and honour of Naga people which should be handled sensitively. Both the leaders of NSCN – IM and the Government of India should consider the ground realities and work on integrating the solution upholding the sovereignty of India.

2) Strengthening Parliamentary Institutions

Why in News?

- Vice President Venkaiah Naidu pushed for the Women's Reservation Bill and Reforms in the way Parliament works including a Code of Conduct for Lawmakers and greater powers to the presiding officer to deal with disruptive legislators.
- The Vice President delivered the Arun Jaitley Memorial Lecture at Delhi University and also pitched for a minimum sitting for both houses in a year and a longer tenure to Parliamentary Standing Committees.

What is the background?

- Pointing out at the present women constitute only 13% in the Parliament he urged political parties to take forward the legislation in the Parliament. The Vice President also suggested a list of broad framework of reforms for Parliamentary Institutions to enhance the trust of the people in them.
- He suggested both pre and post legislative impact assessment for quality and informed law making and also said the practise of reconstituting Parliamentary

standing committees every year can be stopped and nomination of members in the committees may be based on the academic background and re-nominations on same committees for a longer period.

What needs to be done in the immediate future?

- The presence of MPs in the Parliamentary sessions.
- The functioning of the house with dedicated work by the MPs.
- Quality discussions in the sessions for better work towards the nation.

What needs to be done with the Women's Reservation Bill?

- The Political will and commitment by the political parties.
- The government needs to be responsive to the concerns of the Opposition and the Opposition to be responsible and constructive during the debates and while criticising the government and opposing legislation.

What are the issues with Parliamentary Institutions?

- Recently the Parliament is being forced to be adjourned due to lack of quorum of the required presence of 10% of the strength of the Houses.
- Stifling of freedom of expression of the legislators due to issuance of 'Whip'.
- Declining attendance.
- Lack of Specialisation of the MPs.
- Limited tenure of one year in the Parliamentary Standing Committees.
- Frequent hopping of Committees.
- Frequent disruptions
- Points of Order without a point
- Adjournment Motions and interruptions betray political immaturity
- Exhibitionism and excessive fondness for the limelight
- Inadequate appreciation of the need to utilise the opportunity of serving the public interest.

What needs to be done for strengthening the Parliamentary Institutions?

- Academic and background of the politicians should be the major consideration for appointing an MP in a committee.
- Extending tenures of the members so that their learning can be fruitfully used for better contributions.

- Visits to other Parliaments for more learning and engagements.
- Providing well educated and efficient staff to assist the MPs in their work.
- A new political consciousness should be awakened in all the stakeholders to review their mind-set with regard to their roles and responsibilities.
- Political parties should ensure of at least 50% of their legislators all through the proceedings of the Houses by adopting a roster system.
- Enable reasonable degree of dissent without impacting the stability of the government.
- Thorough review of the Anti-Defection Law to rectify the grey areas like incentivising legislators to resort to actions inviting expulsion from the party besides providing for time bound disposal of defection cases by the Presiding Officer.
- Every legislative proposal shall incorporate a detailed account of social, economic, environmental and administrative impact for wider awareness and subsequent assessment of the effect of legislation on ground.
- Building consensus on simultaneous polls to let unfettered governance.
- Enacting for reservation for women in legislatures.
- Making rules that automatically take effect against erring members in case of interruptions and disruptions.
- Regular publication of reports by the Secretariats of Legislatures on the attendance of Members and their participation in debates.
- Doing away with the win ability as the sole criterion for selecting contestants by the parties to address the concern of rising number of legislators with criminal record.

Conclusion

- Political thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham, Tacqueville, John Stuart Mill and James Bryce insisted that in the last resort, it is the public opinion that makes democracy work. Parliamentary government revolves around the consent of the people through elected representatives. The question raised by Dr. Ambedkar is still to be answered. The only answer is that the people and the

political parties shall rise to a new level of consciousness in all respects that forms the bedrock of effective functioning of our parliamentary institutions.

3) India and West Asia - New Frontiers

Why in News?

- India and Saudi Arabia have inked over a dozen agreements in several key sectors including oil and gas, defence and civil aviation to bolster their ties as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held extensive talks with the Kingdom's top leadership during which a Strategic Partnership Council was established to coordinate on important issues. Saudi Arabia has, for some time now, been looking for new friends in the East.

What is the background?

- The disappointing response of the United States after half of the kingdom's oil production was knocked out by drone attacks last month, or when the West cornered Riyadh on the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year, has only driven it to look east.

What is the current status?

- India is also achieving its strategic goals alongside trade with Saudi Arabia.
- Meanwhile, the bilateral ties between India and the UAE too have reached new heights.
- Having prospered for several decades, it has more recently advanced into a sterling partnership spanning multiple dimensions, with both countries firmly committed to expanding collaboration in new sectors.
- Not just Saudi and the UAE, the whole of West Asia is looking to engage with India and explore new frontiers.

What is the history of bilateral relations?

- In 1955, the Saudi ruler made his first visit to India. But the second visit was made in 2006 after 51 years.
- After 9/11 and 2006 visit the bilateral relations substantially improved because of the shift of Saudi on the issue of terrorism and Pakistan.
- India has been successful in getting the Saudi and other gulf countries de-hyphenate from Pakistan to a greater extent.

- India is one of the leading trade partner for Saudi Arabia as 18 percent of India's oil supplies come from there.
- Nearly 3 million Indian workers are working in Saudi Arabia and other gulf nations.
- With India's emerging global status and being a nuclear state adds to its worth.
- The strategic location of India in Asia is also a beneficial factor for the relations between the two.

How have India's relations with Israel and UAE?

- UAE is India's third largest trade partner with \$60 billion in 2018-19.
- India and Israel share a very warm relationship since 1992.
- Israel is India's 10th largest trading partner.
- Economic, Cultural, people to people and defence are the major areas of cooperation between India and Israel.
- Despite being a water deficient country, Israel has achieved a lot in the areas of Agriculture and rainwater harvesting helping India to gain from it.

What are the major challenges?

- Though Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the major players in the region, India needs to strategically weigh the relations with the west Asian countries.
- The dependency of India on petroleum products is also a major challenge to have a sound relations with these countries
- With sizeable Indian population working and also shares in major businesses too makes the major concern to envisage the relation to a wider areas.
- Iran which is the immediate neighbour in the Arabian Sea has major economic interests of India and is also a gateway to Central Asia. With economic sanctions of US on Iran, the relations with Iran are significant.

Conclusion

- The multipolar world and global politics has put India on major platform to be the pivot of Asia which leaves on its shoulders to diligently balance the bilateral relations with the West Asian countries with a broader vision to achieve the dreams of \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25.

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