

OFFICERS' Pulse

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Coverage.

The Hindu
PIB
Yojana
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At a Glance & In Depth.

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



CURRENT AFFAIRS

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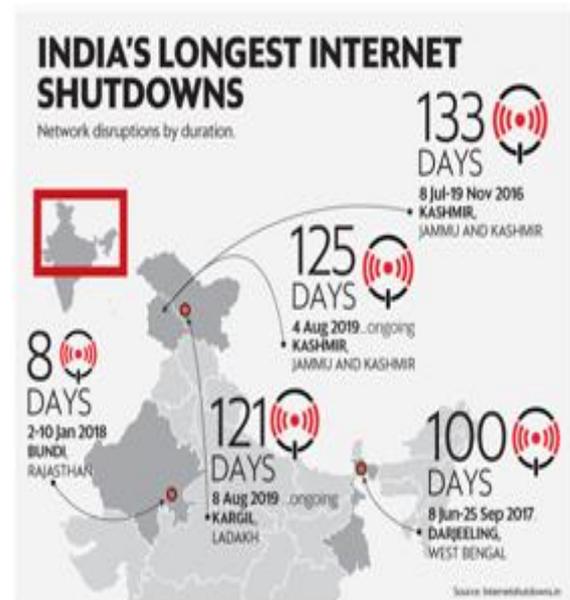
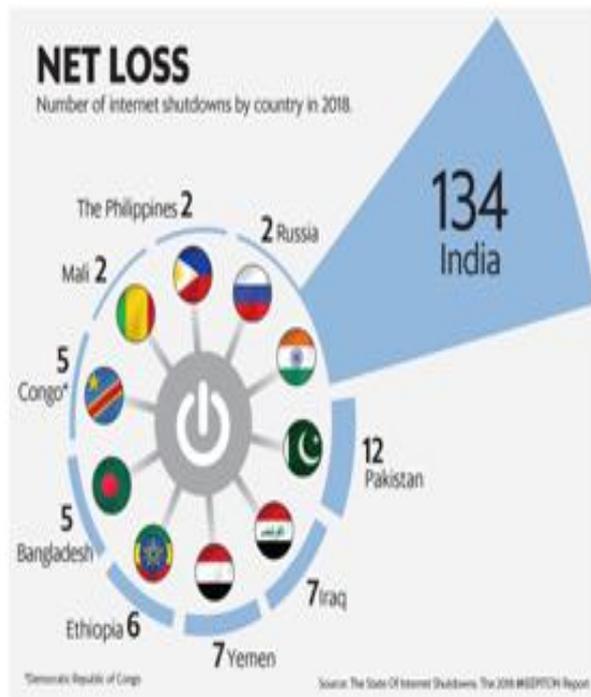
News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Internet shutdowns in India

Why in News?

- In recent years, India is widely considered to be a world leader in cutting off access to the Net. **Software Freedom Law Centre (SFLC)**, the global tracker for Internet shutdowns, was inundated with messages of shutdowns across the country — a frequently recurring phenomenon in India over the past several years.
- The world's fastest growing Internet market is also the global leader by far in cutting off access to small and large sections of its population.
- It is now commonplace during **moments of tension for law enforcement** and government officials to cut off the Internet as both an early and a preventive response — as much to stymie communication between restive groups to prevent them organising, as **to block the spread of rumours and fake news**.



- In 2018, the **#KeepItOn coalition**—which works with the support of 191 organizations globally—and the non-profit Access Now reported that of the 196 internet shutdowns collated from 25 countries, India was responsible for the majority:
- With 134 incidents, 67% of the world's documented shutdowns took place in India last year. **Facebook's Transparency Report**, released last month, identified close to 70 disruptions of Facebook services in 15 countries in the first half of 2019—India accounted for 40 of these.

Few Instances where Internet was shut down

- In the 35 days between November 9 and December 16, 2019, several States, including four from the northeast, have bore the brunt of telecommunication shutdowns after rising protests following the **new Citizenship law** and the **Supreme Court's Ayodhya verdict**
- The telecommunication clampdown following protests after the **amendment of the Citizenship law** extended throughout

Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh while parts of Assam, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh were also affected.

- Earlier in November, internet services in Agra and Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh, parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh were curtailed in the wake of the Ayodhya judgment.
- In addition, internet services continue to be restricted in Jammu and Kashmir, where mobile services were cut-off on August 4 ahead of the **abrogation of Article 370**.
- The on-going shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir is the second longest in the country. **The longest, also from J&K, lasted 202 days between July 8, 2016 and January 7, 2017.**
- **Legal provisions**

- Until 2 years ago, shutdowns were imposed largely under **Section 144** of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).
- This gave the police and district magistrate powers to prevent unlawful gatherings of people and "direct any person to abstain from a certain act".
- However, in August 2017, the Centre promulgated the **Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017**.
- It did this under the authority granted to it by the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885.
- These rules trace the legal source of the power to issue shutdown orders to the Union home secretary or the secretary in charge of the home department in a state.
- This order must then be forwarded to the review committee, which is required to decide on its reasonability within 5 working days.

Difficulties faced by the shutdown:

- The **financial setback** as a result of internet shutdowns can be crippling for businesses both in the formal and informal sectors. The internet shutdowns in India between 2012-17 cost the economy approximately \$3.04 billion (around Rs. 21,584 crore).
- **Education** is now inextricably linked to the internet. Enabling students to have access to the internet will only enhance opportunities for students to acquire knowledge from all available sources.

- The internet today is a platform where dissent can be registered meaningfully. It creates a democratized space cutting across distinctions of caste, class and gender in an unprecedented way.
- The **Kashmir Women's Collective (KWC)** is an organization in the valley that helps women who are targets of violence, domestic or otherwise, and familial disputes. The team counsels complainants, who reach out primarily via Facebook. With communication shutdown in J&K after Centre's decision to revoke special status, services as the above came to a standstill. The gendered impact of a communication blockade, especially in areas ridden with conflict, is often missed in the clamor of politics.
- For a lot of people, the internet has become a very vital way to connect them to their professional and personal lives. In 2016, **the UN declared that access to the internet is a human right.**

2) Section 144 CrPC

What Is Section 144?

- **Section 144 CrPC**, is a law retained from the colonial era, empowers a district magistrate, a sub-divisional magistrate or any other executive magistrate specially empowered by the state government in this behalf to issue orders to prevent and address urgent cases of apprehended danger or nuisance of some event that has the potential to cause trouble or damage to human life or property.
- Section 144 of CrPC generally **prohibits public gathering**. It has also been used in the past to impose restrictions as a means to **prevent protests that can lead to unrest or riots**.
- According to the order under this section, there shall be **no movement of public and all educational institutions shall also remain closed** and there will be a complete bar on holding any kind of public meetings or rallies during the period of operation of this order.

What powers does the administration have under the provision?

- The magistrate can direct any person to abstain from a certain act or to take a certain order with respect to certain property in his possession or under his

management. This usually includes restrictions on movement, carrying arms and from assembling unlawfully.

- 144 CrPC bars the conduct of certain activities or actions or events which are allowed to be done in regular course. It is imposed to **ensure the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in an area.**

Communications blockades :

- Section 144 also empowers the authorities to **block the internet access.**
- The rules for suspending telecommunication services, which include voice, mobile internet, SMS, landline, fixed broadband, etc, are the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017.
- These Rules derive their powers from the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885, Section 5(2) of which talks about interception of messages in the **“interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India”.**
- **Duration of Section 144 order**
- No order under Section 144 shall remain in force for more than two months but the state government can extend the validity for **two months** and a maximum of up to **six months**. It can be withdrawn at any point of time if the situation becomes normal.

Supreme Court Judgments

- **Babulal Parate vs State of Maharashtra and Others.** A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court refused to strike down the law, saying it is “not correct to say that the remedy of a person aggrieved by an order under the section was illusory”.
- It was **challenged again by Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya in 1967** and was once again rejected, with the court saying “no democracy can exist if ‘public order’ is freely allowed to be disturbed by a section of the citizens”.
- In another challenge in **1970 (Madhu Limaye vs Sub-Divisional Magistrate)**, a seven-judge Bench headed by the then Chief Justice of India M Hidayatullah said the power of a magistrate under Section 144 “is not an ordinary power flowing from administration but a power used in a judicial manner and which can stand further judicial scrutiny”.
- The court, however, **upheld the constitutionality of the law.** It ruled that

the restrictions imposed through **Section 144 cannot be held to be violative of the right to freedom of speech and expression, which is a fundamental right because it falls under the “reasonable restrictions” under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.**

Criticisms

- Section 144 ends up conferring almost uncontrolled powers upon executive officers to commit any kind of atrocities on people detained.
- It also takes away people’s fundamental right under Article 19 of expression and protest against government actions and policies.
- The only check placed upon the officer before passing any order under Section 144 is whether or not it satisfied his conscience, which is often eroded by political demands by the ruling government.
- The immediate remedy against such an order is a revision application to the magistrate himself. An aggrieved individual can approach the High Court by filing a writ petition if his fundamental rights are at stake.
- However, fears exist that before the High Court intervenes, the rights could already have been infringed. Imposition of Section 144 to an entire state, as in the UP, has also drawn criticism since the security situation differs from area to area.

Why in News?

- Due to protests by various organisations and people against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) on, Section 144 of the Cr. PC has been imposed across Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.

3) Global Gender Gap Index

About Global Gender Gap Index

- The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks 153 countries on their progress towards gender parity in **four dimensions:**
 1. Economic Participation and Opportunity,
 2. Educational Attainment,
 3. Health and Survival and
 4. Political Empowerment
- The Index aims to serve as a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics. Through this annual

yardstick, the stakeholders within each country are able to set priorities relevant in each specific economic, political and cultural context.

Key Highlights:

- The top country for gender parity remained Iceland (for the 11th year running).
- The most-improved countries were Albania, Ethiopia, Mali, Mexico and Spain.
- Globally, the average (population-weighted) distance completed to gender parity is at 68.6%, which is an improvement since the last edition.
- The largest gender disparity is in political empowerment. Only 25% of the 35,127 seats in parliaments around the world are occupied by women, and only 21% of the 3,343 ministers are women.
- Projecting current trends into the future, the overall global gender gap will close in 99.5 years, on average, across the 107 countries covered continuously since the first edition of the Report.

India's Ranking

- India has **slipped to the 112th spot from its 108th position** in the last edition. India was ranked relatively higher at **98th place in 2006 Report**.
- India has been ranked below countries like China (106th), Sri Lanka (102nd), Nepal (101st), Brazil (92nd), Indonesia (85th) and Bangladesh (50th).
- India has improved to 18th place on political empowerment but it has slipped to 150th on health and survival, to 149th in terms of economic participation and opportunity and to 112th place for educational attainment.
- Among the 153 countries studied, **India is the only country where the economic gender gap (0.354) is larger than the political gender gap (0.411)**.
- India is among the countries with very low women representation on company boards (13.8%), while it was even worse in China (9.7%).

About World Economic Forum

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

impartial and not tied to any special interests.

- The Forum strives in all its efforts to demonstrate entrepreneurship in the global public interest while upholding the highest standards of governance.

Why in News?

- **India** has been ranked 112th among 153 countries in the annual **Global Gender Gap Index** for 2020, published by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)**.

4) National Population Register (NPR)

What is the National Population Register (NPR)?

- The NPR is a database containing a list of all usual residents of the country.
- Its objective is to have a comprehensive identity database of people residing in the country.
- It is generated through house-to-house enumeration during the "house-listing" phase of the census, which is held once in 10 years.
- The last census was in 2011, and the next will be done in 2021.
- The NPR exercise is conducted at the local, sub-district, district, state and national levels.
- The NPR will collect both demographic data and biometric data. Biometric data will be updated through Aadhar details.

Who is a usual resident?

- A usual resident for the purposes of NPR is a person who has resided in a place for six months or more, and intends to reside there for another six months or more.

The link between NPR and NRIC:

- **Out of the NPR, a set of all usual residents of India, the government proposes to create a database of "citizens of India". Thus, the "National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) is a subset of the NPR.** The NRIC will be prepared at the local, sub-district, district and state levels after verifying the citizenship status of the residents.
- **The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003 spells out the rules for operationalizing the idea of registering all citizens and issuing national identity cards to them.** However, so far, there has

been no decision on introducing a national identity card.

Process for NRIC:

- The rules say the **particulars of every family and individual found in the Population Register shall be verified and scrutinized by the Local Registrar.** In the process, details of those “whose citizenship is doubtful” will be entered with a comment suggesting further inquiry. The family or individual will be informed about it and given an opportunity of being heard by the Sub-district or Taluk Registrar of Citizen Registration before a final decision is made on excluding them from the NRIC. The decision should be made within 90 days.
- **A draft of the Local Register of Indian Citizens shall be published to invite objections or claims for inclusion or corrections.**
- Any objection or request for inclusion must be made within 30 days of the publication of the draft. The sub-district or taluk registrar shall summarily dispose of the objections within 90 days. Thereafter, **the entries in the Local Register will be transferred to the National Registrar.**
- Any person aggrieved by an exclusion order can appeal to the District Registrar within 30 days, and the appeal should be disposed of within 90 days. In case, the appeal succeeds, the names of those concerned would be added to the NRIC.

Documents that would help establish citizenship:

- The government is yet to notify a date for generation of the NRIC. It has not yet prescribed rules for the sort of documentary proof that would be required to prove citizenship.
- The government says any document that shows the date of birth or place of birth, or both, will be sufficient. And that common documents will be accepted, and those unable to produce documents may produce witnesses or other proof supported by members of the community.

Difference between NPR and the NRC:

- Unlike the NRC, the NPR is not a citizenship enumeration drive, as it would record even a foreigner staying in a locality for more than six months.

- With the government insisting that the NRC would be implemented across the country, the NPR has raised anxieties around the idea of citizenship in the country.
- NRC countrywide would only happen on the basis of the upcoming NPR.
- After a list of residents is created (i.e. NPR), a nationwide NRC could go about verifying the citizens from that list.

Why in News?

- Kerala and West Bengal have put on hold activities related to NPR work.

5) Common documents enough to prove citizenship: MHA

Government's clarification:

- Indian citizens **do not have to prove any ancestry** by presenting documents such as identity card, birth certificate etc, of parents/grandparents dating back to pre-1971 situation.
- **March 24, 1971 was the cut-off date for Assam's NRC** conducted under the supervision of the Supreme Court as per the Assam Accord, 1985, and it is **not related to countrywide citizens' register.**
- **According to the Citizenship Act, anyone born on or after 26 January, 1950, but before the 1 July, 1987 was an Indian citizen by birth.** The people born after these years would inadvertently be **naturalised citizens** by 2019 and would be having some kind of document as a proof of their birth here.
- For illiterate citizens, who may not have any documents, **the authorities may allow them to produce witnesses or local proofs supported by members of the community.**
- No separate legislation was required to compile the NRC, as the provision existed **under the Citizenship Act when it was amended in December 2004.**

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has stated that the **guidelines for the National Register of Citizens (NRC) are yet to be drafted** but Citizenship of India may be proved by giving any **document relating to date of birth or place of birth or both .**

ENVIRONMENT

1) Fight against pollution: painting roads, lasers among options

Why in news?

- On November 25, 2019 the Supreme Court had directed to form a **High Level Committee (HLC)** to look into the feasibility of technologies to control and monitor pollution.
- The HLC has members from Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), NEERI, professors from IIT-Delhi, IIT-Kanpur and heads of environmental departments of Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.
- Recently the HLC has suggested ways to the Supreme Court to control air pollution in Delhi and NCR.

The following are the pilot projects which were suggested by the HLC :

Painting roads

- There are companies that develop **photocatalytic paints**, which can remove pollutants from the air in the presence of sunlight and ultraviolet (UV) rays.
- Such products have been used by Dubai municipality in parks and also in Mexico.
- The paint can be applied on a range of surfaces, such as roofing tiles or even on the surface of roads.
- Photocatalytic paints contain **titanium dioxide [TiO₂]** which acts as a catalyst when exposed to UV rays and removes atmospheric pollutants.
- The catalyst converts the pollutants into other species.
- **Risk:** there is a risk that nanomaterials may result in production of other undesirable compounds such as **nitrous acid and formaldehyde**, which will have **adverse health impacts**.

Smog tower

- A panel from IIT-Bombay and IIT-Delhi in association with the University of Minnesota had proposed a **20 metre-high smog tower**.
- The proposal had stated that **65% reduction in pollution** can be achieved

on an average up to 700 metres from the tower.

- It is expected to influence air quality of more than 1 km in the downwind direction, according to officials.



- A pilot tower is expected to come up at Connaught Place, in New Delhi

Anti-smog gun

- Anti-smog gun is a device that **sprays nebulised (in gaseous form) water droplets into the air** through high pressure propellers, which help particles to settle down.



- “The committee, based on the finding of a study by the CPCB and DPCC, informed the court that anti-smog guns may be **effective in controlling localised dust** during the period of application and more suitable to high dust emission zones such as large construction sites.
- In tests conducted in Delhi and Gurugram, it has been found that there is reduction in PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ levels in areas where the anti-smog guns were used.

Oxy furnace

- Oxy furnace uses **only oxygen as fuel instead of atmospheric air** (which contains nitrogen), thus reducing the production of NO_x by about 90% in industries.
- This technology has been thought to be feasible in glass, metallurgical and power industries in India.
- But this isn't a solution as most of the NO_x is released in urban centres from vehicles and not industries.
- The committee has also recommended the use of chemical methods, including dust suppressants, to control air pollution.

Wireless Sensor Network

- Wireless Sensor Network (WSN) technology to monitor air pollution is **still in developmental stage** and IIT and NEERI are reviewing its performance.
- The WSN may be used as **an indicative monitoring tool** for a few activities like mining, large construction sites, to supplement air quality data and report to regulator for conducting further investigation.

LiDAR

- LiDAR or Light Detection and Ranging is a high-end application of LASER-based technology **for monitoring pollution**.
- The HLC has recommended that this technology may be adopted **for vertical monitoring** at a few places to track transport of pollutants at higher altitude.

2) Packaged foods breach safe limits of salt, fat: CSE study

Why in news?

- In a recent analysis done by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) on multiple packaged snacks and fast foods, there is breach in safe limits of salt and fat content.
- The samples were collected from grocery stores and fast food outlets in the city.

How are safe limits calculated?

- The limits are based on the concept of the **Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA)** — a daily ceiling on the amount of salt, fat, carbohydrates and transfats.
- The RDA is based on **scientific consensus** and has been agreed upon by expert bodies such as the **World Health**

Organisation, and the National Institute of Nutrition in India.

What are the limits?

- It says that, ideally, **no more than 5 gm of salt, 60 gm of fat, 300 gm carbohydrate and 2.2 gm of trans fat** should be consumed by an adult every day.
- Further, the RDA from each breakfast, lunch and dinner should be no more than 25%, and that from snacks no more than 10%.

About CSE

- Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) is a public interest research and advocacy organisation based in New Delhi.
- Established in 1980, CSE works as a think tank on environment-development issues in India, poor planning, climate shifts devastating India's Sundarbans and advocates for policy changes and better implementation of the already existing policies.
- CSE uses knowledge-based activism to create awareness about problems and propose sustainable solutions

What are the findings?

More on the hips

Most brands of junk food were found to have salt and fat content well above the recommended limit



- All chips brands had minimum salt content **2.4** times the RDA and maximum at **5.1** times the RDA. They had minimum fat content **2.1** times the RDA and maximum at **4.6** times the RDA

- Namkeen brands had minimum salt content **2.7** times the RDA and maximum at **7.9** times the RDA. They had minimum fat content **4.3** times the RDA and maximum at **5.6** times the RDA

- Noodle brands had minimum salt content **5.8** times the RDA and maximum at **6.7** times the RDA. They had minimum fat content **1.9** times the RDA and maximum at **2.8** times the RDA

Concept of RED OCTAGON

- CSE has recommended packed food companies to use RED OCTAGON symbol to represent any deviations from RDA (in Fig).



- A similar kind has been established in Peru and Chile.

Way Forward

- There is a proposed draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, which says that the packaged food companies will need to declare nutritional information such as calories (energy), saturated fat, trans-fat, added sugar and sodium per **serve on the front of the pack**.
- The food labels are also required to declare, per serve percentage contribution to RDA on the front of the pack.
- The regulations need to be extended to fast foods like Burgers and Pizzas.

3) The 2019 Pollution and Health Metrics: Global, Regional and Country Analysis report

Why in News?

- The 2019 Pollution and Health Metrics report has been published by the **Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP)**.
- It provides a ranking of pollution deaths on global, regional and country levels.

About GAHP

- The Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP) is a collaborative body made up of more than 60 members and dozens of observers that **advocates for resources and solutions to pollution problems**.

- GAHP was formed because international and national level actors/ agencies recognize that a collaborative, multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral approach is necessary and critical to **deal with the global pollution crisis and resulting health and economic impacts**.
- GAHP's **overall goal is to reduce death and illness caused by all forms of toxic pollution, including air, water, soil and chemical wastes** especially in low and middle-income countries.
- These efforts will contribute to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals related to pollution, particularly on Health (Targets 3.4 and 3.9).

What are the findings of the report?

- It found that pollution to be the largest environmental cause of premature death on the planet, causing 15% of all deaths – some 8.3 million people.

ANNUAL PREMATURE POLLUTION-RELATED DEATHS

1	India	23,26,771
2	China	18,65,566
3	Nigeria	2,79,318
4	Indonesia	2,32,974
5	Pakistan	2,23,836
6	Bangladesh	2,07,922
7	USA	1,96,930
8	Russian Federation	1,18,687
9	Ethiopia	1,10,787
10	Brazil	1,09,438

POLLUTION DEATHS PER 1,00,000 PEOPLE

1	Chad	287
2	Central African Republic	251
3	North Korea	202
4	Niger	192
5	Madagascar	183
6	Papua New Guinea	183
7	South Sudan	180
8	Somalia	179
9	Serbia	175
10	India	174

ANNUAL PREMATURE AIR POLLUTION-RELATED DEATHS

1	China	12,42,987
2	India	12,40,529
3	Pakistan	1,28,005
4	Indonesia	1,23,753
5	Bangladesh	1,22,734
6	Nigeria	1,14,115
7	USA	1,07,507
8	Russian Federation	99,392
9	Brazil	66,245
10	Philippines	64,386

Source: GAHP

- India is followed by China in the number of pollution deaths, with about 1.8 million.
- The report includes three lists on pollution-induced deaths. **India is the only country that features in the top 10 in all three lists.**
- Chad tops the most pollution-related deaths in proportion to their population list with 287 deaths for every 1,00,000 people, whereas India is at number 10 with 174 deaths for every 1,00,000 people.
- Air pollution — both ambient and indoor — is one of the largest and most obvious types of pollution affecting global health.

ECONOMY

1) Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

About UPI

- UPI or Unified Payments Interface is an **immediate real-time payment system** that helps in instantly transferring the funds between the two bank accounts through a mobile platform.
- Hence, UPI is a concept that allows multiple bank accounts to get into a single mobile application.
- This idea was developed by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** and is controlled by the RBI and IBA (Indian Bank Association).
- It also caters to the “**Peer to Peer**” collect request which can be scheduled and paid as per requirement and convenience.

How is it unique?

- Immediate money transfer through mobile device round the clock **24*7 and 365 days**.
- Instant transfer of funds through Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) which is faster than NEFT.
- Single mobile application for accessing different bank accounts.
- This interface is based on the **2 Factor Authentications** with a seamless single click payment. This feature of UPI is aligned with the regulatory guidelines that make it the safest. 2 Factor Authentication is quite similar to OTP. Here, MPIN will be used instead of OTP.
- Uses **Virtual Payment Address (VPA)** which is a **unique ID** as given by the bank which provides for incremental security with the customer not required to enter the details such as Card no, Account number; IFSC etc.
- Users can create VPA of their own choice.
- **Also available on USSD service** where users can use the service just by dialing *99# and choose the services like fund transfer, send money, request money, non-financial services, balance Enquiry, change MPIN etc. (Service charge of ₹0.50 is applicable) Hence, UPI **can be accessed even without smart phone and internet**.

- Merchant Payment with Single Application or In-App Payments.
- Utility Bill Payments, Over the Counter Payments, Barcode (Scan and Pay) based payments.
- Bill Sharing facility.
- Donations, Collections, Disbursements Scalable.
- Raising Complaint from Mobile App directly.
- It is ‘**open**’ — meaning technology companies (third parties) can build applications that help users directly manage transfers into and out of their accounts held at banks

Why in News?

- **Google** has written to the **U.S. Federal Reserve Board** detailing the successful example of UPI-based digital payments in India in order to build ‘**FedNow**’ — a **new interbank real-time gross settlement service (RTGS) for faster digital payments in the U.S.**

2) MSCI Emerging Markets Index

About the index

- The MSCI Emerging Markets Index stands for **Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI)**.
- It is an index used to **measure equity market performance in global emerging markets**.
- The index is a **float-adjusted market capitalization index**, and represents 13% of global market capitalization.
- The index captures mid and large caps in **26 countries** including China, India, Korea, Mexico, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates.
- The index had about 1,200 constituents, and was **weighted heavily in China, South Korea, Taiwan, India and Brazil**.
- Financials, information technology, and consumer discretionary companies were the top three sectors in the index.

Why in News?

- There could be incremental foreign flows amounting to around \$2.5 billion in Indian equities as the **country's weightage**

increases in the MSCI Emerging Markets (EM) index on account of the **increase in foreign investment limit** in listed entities.

News in Detail

- Earlier, the government confirmed its move to implement its Budget announcement relating to increasing the statutory limit for foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) in a company from 24% to the sectoral foreign investment limit with effect from April 1, 2020.
- According to Morgan Stanley, it **would lead to India's weightage going up by 70 basis points** in the MSCI EM index.
- An increase in the weightage in MSCI index leads to enhanced flows as many funds mirror the index in their portfolio and if the weightage of a particular stock goes up, then these funds also increase their allocation in the same proportion.
- India's free float market cap rank has been lower compared to its market cap and GDP rank because of high promoter holdings and low foreign investment limits.

3) GST Council votes for 28% GST on all lotteries

About GST Council

- Goods & Services Tax Council is a **constitutional body** for making **recommendations to the Union and State Government** on issues related to Goods and Service Tax.
 - The GST Council is **chaired by the Union Finance Minister** and other members are the Union State Minister of Revenue or Finance and Ministers in-charge of Finance or Taxation of all the States.
 - It was created under **Article 279A**, added through the **Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016**.
 - As per Article 279A
1. the Council will make recommendations to the Union and the States on important issues related to GST, like the goods and services that may be subjected or exempted from GST, model GST Laws, principles that govern Place of Supply, threshold limits, GST rates including the floor rates with bands, special rates for raising additional resources during natural calamities/disasters, special provisions for certain States, etc.

2. **One-half of the total number of Members** of the GST Council constitute the **quorum** at its meetings.
3. The Council **can determine the procedure** in the performance of its functions.
4. Every decision of the GST Council shall be taken at a meeting, by a **majority of not less than three-fourths of the weighted votes** of the members **present and voting**, in accordance with the following principles, namely: —
 - a) the vote of the **Central Government shall have a weightage of one third of the total votes cast**, and
 - b) the votes of all the **State Governments taken together** shall have a weightage of **two-thirds of the total votes cast**, in that meeting.

Why in News?

- The GST Council broke its tradition of taking decisions by consensus at its 38th meeting with a **first time vote** on a proposal **to tax all lotteries at the uniform rate of 28%**.

4) Operation Twist

What is 'Operation Twist'?

- Operation Twist is the name given to a **US Federal Reserve monetary policy operation**, which involves the purchase and sale of government securities to boost the economy by bringing down long-term interest rates.
- There is an **inverse relationship between bond prices and yield**—when prices go down in value, the yield increases, and vice versa.
- The Fed's purchasing activity of long-term debt drives up the price of the securities and, in turn, decreases the yield.
- Also selling short-term bonds would decrease the price and, hence, increase the rates.
- However, the short end of the yield curve based on short-term interest rates is determined by expectations of the Federal Reserve policy, rising when the Fed is expected to raise rates and falling when interest rates are expected to be cut.
- Since Operation Twist involves the Fed leaving short-term rates unchanged, only the long-term rates will be impacted by the

buy and sell activity conducted in the markets.

- This would cause long-term yield to decrease at a higher rate than short-term yield.

Why in News?

- The Reserve Bank of India decided to conduct its version of 'Operation Twist' through simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities under **Open Market Operations (OMOs)** for Rs 10,000 crore each on December 23.

News in Detail

- The RBI will purchase the longer-term maturities, that are trading at a spread of 150 bps (basis points) over the repo rate, so that the yield of these papers will soften and sell the shorter duration ones.
- The central bank said it will buy ₹10,000 crore of 6.45% government bonds maturing in 2029 and simultaneously sell ₹10,000 crore of short-term bonds maturing in 2020.

Why Operation Twist now?

- The RBI slashed key interest rate — repo rate — by 135 points to 5.15 per cent this year but banks passed on only part of it.
- The one-year median marginal cost of funds based lending rate (MCLR) has declined only 49 basis points (bps).
- Operation Twist normally leads to lower longer-term yields, which will help boost the economy by making loans less expensive for those looking to buy homes, cars and finance projects, while saving becomes less desirable because it doesn't pay as much interest.
- The RBI says the decision follows "a review of the current liquidity and market situation and an assessment of the evolving financial conditions".
- The central bank is keen that long-term rates are brought down to kickstart investment and revive the economy.
- The idea is that business investment and housing demand were primarily determined by longer-term interest rates.

What are Open Market Operations?

- The RBI manages and controls the liquidity, rupee strength and monetary management through **purchase and sale of government securities (G-Secs)** in a monetary tool called Open market Operations.

- OMOs are the market operations conducted by the RBI by way of sale and purchase of G-Secs to and from the market **with an objective to adjust the rupee liquidity conditions in the market on a durable basis.**

- When the RBI feels that there is excess liquidity in the market, it resorts to sale of securities thereby sucking out the rupee liquidity.
- Similarly, when the liquidity conditions are tight, the RBI may buy securities from the market, thereby releasing liquidity into the market.

5) NCLT & NCLAT

About NCLT

- The Central Government has constituted **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)** (as well as the NCLAT) under the **Companies Act, 2013** with effect from 01st June 2016.
- It can be defined as a **quasi-judicial body** which was established to settle disputes arising between civil corporations.
- The NCLT came to being as a result of the **Eradi Committee**.
- The Tribunal is empowered to practice both power and authority similar to that of a law court.
- In addition, **under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016**, the NCLT serves as an **Adjudicating Authority** for resolving insolvency cases of **Limited Liability Partnerships and Companies**.
- **Article 245** of the Indian constitution gave the powers to the government to establish both Tribunals.
- The NCLT governs the following bodies;
 - a) Company Law Board (CLB)
 - b) Board For Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR)
 - c) Appellate Authority For Industrial and Financial Reconstruction
 - d) High Court Company Related Matters
- The NCLT comprises 15 benches with its Principal Bench at New Delhi.

About NCLAT

- The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) is a **higher tribunal** where appeals can be lodged against the orders of the NCLT **within 45 days** of the judgement.

- The appellate tribunal was conceived as the dedicated appeals forum for resolving corporate law disputes and speeding up the resolution by taking over the role hitherto played by overburdened High Courts in adjudicating such appeals.
- The NCLAT also serves as the **appellate body for** those aggrieved by decisions made by the **Competition Commission of India** or orders passed by the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India**.

- The NCLAT's verdicts can in turn be challenged on a question of law in the **Supreme Court**, within a **60-day window**.
- The duo of NCLT and NCLAT are subject to any rules drafted by the Indian government and also complies with the Code of Civil Procedure.

Why in News?

- More than three years after the removal of Cyrus Mistry, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal reinstated him as the executive chairman of the Tata group.

International Relations

1) Cyprus

▪ Geographical features



- Cyprus is the **third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea** (after Sicily and Sardinia), **located in its eastern part**.
- The island is of **volcanic origin**.
- Cyprus lies about 65 km south of Turkey, 100 km west of Syria, and 770 km southeast of mainland Greece.

Demography

- The people of Cyprus represent two main ethnic groups, **Greek and Turkish**.
- The **Greek Cypriots**, who constitute nearly four-fifths of the population, descended from a mixture of aboriginal inhabitants and immigrants from the Peloponnese who colonized Cyprus starting about 1200 BC.
- Roughly one-fifth of the population are **Turkish Cypriots**, descendants of the soldiers of the Ottoman army that conquered the island in 1571.
- The Greek Cypriots are primarily Eastern Orthodox Christians. The Turkish Cypriots are Sunni Muslims.

Political history

- In **1960** Cyprus became independent of Britain (it had been a crown colony since 1925) as the **Republic of Cyprus**.
- The long-standing conflict between the Greek Cypriot majority and the Turkish Cypriot minority culminated into an

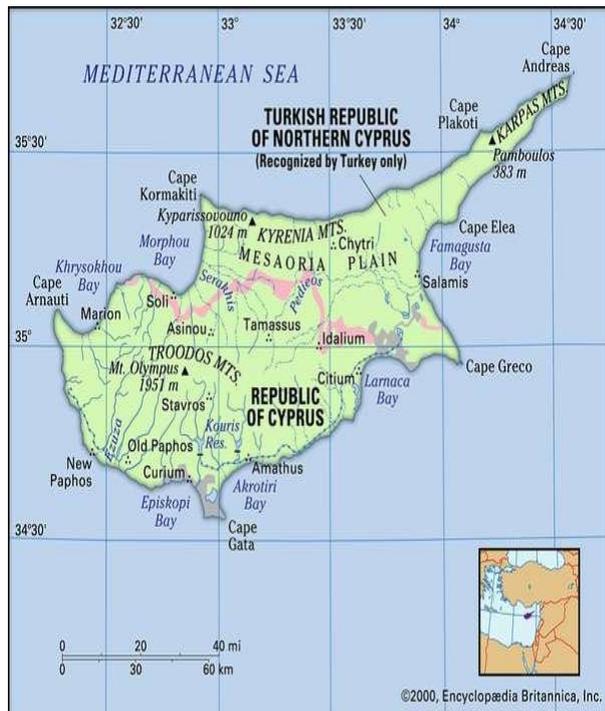
invasion of the island by Turkish troops in 1974.

- It produced an actual—although internationally unrecognized—partition of the island and led to the establishment in 1975 of a de facto Turkish Cypriot state in the northern third of the country.
- The Turkish Cypriot state made a unilateral declaration of independence in 1983 and adopted the name **Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus**.
- Its independence was **recognized only by Turkey**. Northern Cyprus is considered by the international community to be part of the Republic of Cyprus.
- The capital of North and South Cyprus is **Nicosia**.
- The Republic of Cyprus has been a member of the **Commonwealth** since 1961 and was a **founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement** (not a member at present) until it **joined the European Union on 1 May 2004**.

Why in News?

- Turkey deployed its first unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) in the Geçitkale Airport in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in a measure to boost national security in the Eastern Mediterranean as

well as to safeguard the interests of the Turkish Cypriots.



2) Global Refugee Forum

Why in News?

- The **first ever Global Refugee Forum** took place on 17 and 18 December 2019, at **Geneva**, and was a true milestone in the advancement of the international refugee regime.

News in Detail

- The Forum was concluded with more than 770 pledges of support, covering areas such as protection, employment, and education, for refugees and the communities which have taken them in.
- The Forum is a **key element of the Global Compact on Refugees**, which the international community signed in December, 2018.
- It calls for Global Refugee Forums to be held every four years.
- More than 3,000 participants attended this first gathering, ranging from representatives of governments, international financial organizations, business, civil society, and humanitarian and development organizations, as well as refugees themselves.
- Additionally, several countries-of-origin made commitments relating to the voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and other displaced communities.

- UNHCR said indicators have been established to track progress and assess success, for example in jobs created, school places and reduction of poverty levels.
- A stock-taking meeting will take place in two years, and the **second Global Refugee Forum is scheduled for late 2023**.

About Global Compact on Refugees

- On 17 December 2018, the **United Nations General Assembly** affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees, after two years of extensive consultations led by **UNHCR** with Member States, international organizations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts.
- It emerged from the milestone **New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016**.
- This laid out a vision for a more comprehensive response to these crises, known as the **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, or CRRF**.
- The Global Compact on Refugees is a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation.
- It provides a blueprint for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities get the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives.
- It constitutes a unique opportunity to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them.
- Its four key objectives are to:
 1. Ease the pressures on host countries;
 2. Enhance refugee self-reliance;
 3. Expand access to third-country solutions;
 4. Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

3) Indo-U.S. 2+2 dialogue

About 2+2 dialogue

- It is a high level bilateral meeting between Defence Ministers and External/Foreign Ministers of both countries.
- It was first proposed between India and the U.S.
- It provides for a review of the security, defence and strategic partnership between India and the United States.

- The **inaugural** India-U.S. 2+2 dialogue was held in **New Delhi in 2018**.
- Similar kind of mechanism was also **extended to Japan** recently.

Why in News?

- The **second annual India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue** was recently concluded in **Washington DC**. This is the **first in the US**.

Key outcomes

- The **Industrial Security Annex (ISA)** was signed between India and the U.S.
- It will open the door for U.S. defence companies to partner with the Indian private sector for several multi-billion dollar deals in the pipeline, especially the deal for 114 fighter jets.
- The two sides also took stock of the steps being taken to operationalise the foundational agreement, the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)**.
- It was also decided to continue the discussion on the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)** in 2020 to enable greater geospatial information-sharing.
- For more details about ISA, LEMOA, GSOMIA, COMCASA and BECA, refer *Officers' Pulse Issue No. 25*.

Working of COMCASA

- The operationalisation of COMCASA had deepened the maritime cooperation between the two countries.
- Necessary steps are being taken to open the **COMSEC account**.

▪ **COMSEC account** - An administrative entity identified by an account number, used to maintain accountability, custody and control of COMSEC (Communications security) material.

- Defence officials said the **account of \$5 mn**, from which any deductions would be done for services or information sought from the U.S. under the COMCASA has been created and work was on to develop a tactical data link.
- **Sealink Advanced Analysis (S2A)** is to be set up to analyse large volumes of data that is received as part of the **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) cooperation**.
- The S2A is being co-developed by India and the U.S. for **big data analytics**.

4) Portugal sets up Gandhi prize

Why in News?

- **Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa** announced the setting up of a **Gandhi Citizenship Education Prize** in order to promote Gandhi's ideals.



News in Detail

- Every year, the prize **would be inspired by Gandhi's thoughts and quotes**.
- The **first edition** of the prize would be dedicated to **animal welfare**.
- It was inspired by Gandhi's quote "**the greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated.**"
- The announcement was made when the Portuguese PM attended the second meeting of the **National Committee for the Commemoration Mahatma Gandhi's 150th Birth Anniversary** chaired by President Ram Nath Kovind at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- He was the only foreign Prime Minister to be a part of the committee.

5) First India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting

Why in News?

- The first India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting was held on 30 November 2019 in **New Delhi**.

Key notes in the joint statement

- This dialogue will further enhance the strategic depth of bilateral security and defence cooperation.

- The two sides were committed to advancing bilateral security cooperation based on the **2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation** and the **2009 Action Plan to advance Security Cooperation**.
- The Ministers welcomed the significant progress made in the negotiations of **Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)** since the

announcement to commence the negotiations in October 2018.

- The Indian side welcomed **Japan's "Vientiane Vision 2.0"** in November 2019 as an updated initiative for **defence cooperation** between Japan and ASEAN.
- It was also decided to hold the next 2+2 Ministerial Meeting in **Tokyo**.

SCIENCE and TECHNOLOGY

1) 7th Bioprocessing India Conference

About Bioprocessing

- Bioprocessing **combines biotechnology and engineering** for the manufacturing of materials from bioresources.
- These will also include fundamental biomolecular research on proteins, enzymes and microbes, biosensors, bioseparations and bioreactors.
- Applications include food processing and preservation; nutraceutical and plant biotechnology, wealth from waste, computational biology and synthetic biology.

About Bioprocessing India (BPI)

- Bioprocessing India is an **annual conference** first organized by IIT Delhi in **2013**.
- It brings together leading universities, research institutions, agri-food processing, bioprocessing and biotech industries, making the conference a platform for aspiring bioprocessing, and biotechnologists to promote information exchange, networking and strategic alliances.
- The coming together of scientific consortia can help in finding solutions to bioprocessing needs of agri-food resources, so critical for overall food security, health and wellness.
- Hence this conference proposes to provide an open forum to the bioprocessing research community to explore and understand this intricate relationship of bioprocessing with agri-food resources.

Why in News?

- The 7th Bioprocessing India Conference was held recently at **CSIR-Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), Mysuru**.
- The theme of this year's conference is "**Advances in bioprocessing of agri-food resources**".

About CSIR-CFTRI

- CSIR-Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), Mysore, a constituent laboratory of the **Council of Scientific &**

Industrial Research (CSIR), New Delhi, **Ministry of Science & Technology**, Government of India came into existence in 1950.

- Over the years the institute has grown by leaps and bounds with the synergy of research and development in the area of food science, food technology and food engineering.
- The CSIR-CFTRI is well recognized as a leading global research Institute in the thrust **area of food science, food technology, food safety and nutrition**.
- The focus of the institute has been towards development of cost effective, efficient and bio-friendly technologies for utilization of indigenous raw materials, with underpinning food safety of health, and nutrition to all sections of the population.
- CFTRI plays a major role in building the bridge between R&D and food industry.

2) NAL SARAS - indigenous aircraft

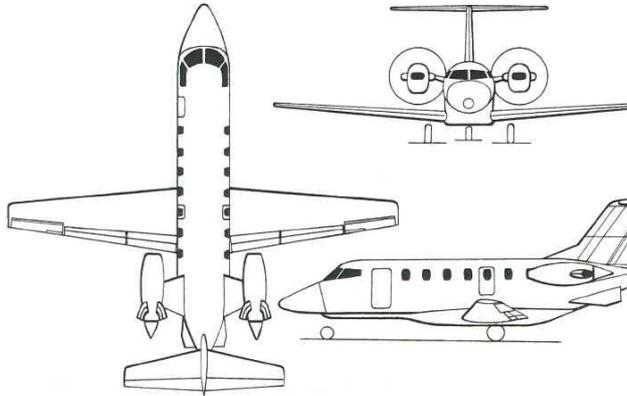
What is SARAS?



- The SARAS is an **indigenous aircraft** developed by the **National Aeronautics Laboratories (NAL)**, which is overseen by the **Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)**.
- It is a **19-seater light transport aircraft**, and its test flights are on.
- The aircraft will soon be certified for **both civil and military use**.
- It can be used for transporting civilians, freight, and in remote sensing exercises.
- The aircraft was designed to operate and manoeuvre at high altitudes and under extreme temperatures.
- The aircraft has been designed to travel at 425 km/h and it has a maximum

continuous flight time of around five hours.

- The project kicked off in **1991** and the first prototype was introduced in 2004.
- Production is expected to start in 2022.



Advantages

- Saras is expected to cost Rs. 45 crore -- **cheaper** than what India currently pays. A comparable Dornier plane costs Rs. 60 crore.
- The plane is capable of executing **both day and night missions**.
- It can take off and land from semi-prepared airfields and even on grass runways.
- It has unique features like high cruise speed, lower fuel consumption, short landing and take-off distance and low cabin noise.

Why in News?

- Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) had disclosed that the prototype of India's **first indigenously developed 70-seater aircraft** will be ready in five or six years, with one of its labs in Bengaluru — the National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) — launching the 'Aircraft Mission' soon.

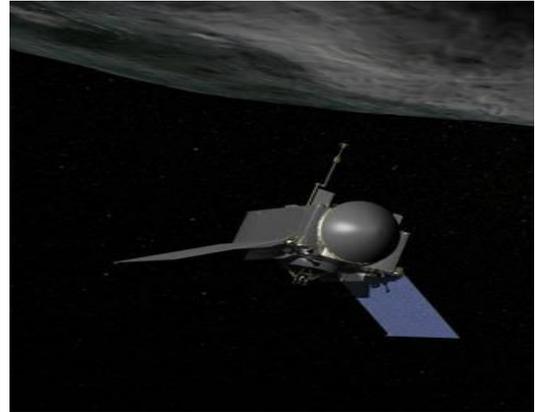
3) OSIRIS Rex

About OSIRIS Rex

- **NASA's Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security - Regolith Explorer** asteroid sample return mission (OSIRIS-REx), is the first U.S. mission to collect a sample of an asteroid and return it to Earth.
- The spacecraft will travel to a **near-Earth asteroid, called Bennu** (formerly 1999 RQ36), and bring at least a 2.1-ounce sample back to Earth for study.
- The mission will help scientists investigate how planets formed and how life began, as

well as improve our understanding of asteroids that could impact Earth.

- OSIRIS-Rex is the **third mission in NASA's New Frontiers Program** (after New Horizons launched in 2006 and Juno launched in 2011).
- The spacecraft was launched in September, 2016 and is expected to return a sample to Earth in 2023.



Mission objectives

- The OSIRIS-REx name is an acronym of the mission objectives, which are:
 - *Origins*: Return and analyze a pristine carbon rich asteroid sample
 - *Spectral Interpretation*: Provide ground truth or direct observations for telescopic data of the entire asteroid population
 - *Resource Identification*: Map the chemistry and mineralogy of a primitive carbon rich asteroid
 - *Security*: Measure the effect of sunlight on the orbit of a small asteroid, known as the Yarkovsky effect—the slight push created when the asteroid absorbs sunlight and re-emits that energy as heat
 - *Regolith Explorer*: Document the regolith (layer of loose, outer material) at the sampling site at scales down to the sub-centimeter

Why Bennu?

- Asteroids are the leftover debris from the solar system formation process.
- Studying them can answer these questions and teach us about the history of the sun and planets.
- Bennu is a carbonaceous asteroid whose regolith **may record the earliest history of our solar system**.
- Bennu may contain the **molecular precursors to the origin of life** and the Earth's oceans.

- Benu is also **one of the most potentially hazardous asteroids**, as it has a relatively high probability of impacting the Earth late in the 22nd century.
- OSIRIS-REx will determine Benu's physical and chemical properties, which will be critical to know in the event of an impact mitigation mission.
- Finally, asteroids like Benu contain natural resources such as water, organics, and precious metals.
- In the future, these asteroids may one day fuel the exploration of the solar system by robotic and crewed spacecraft.

About New Frontiers Program

- Missions in NASA's New Frontiers Program tackle specific solar system exploration goals identified as top priorities by the planetary science community.
- The following missions have been competitively selected under the New Frontiers Program: i) New Horizons ii) Juno iii) OSIRIS-REx iv) Dragonfly

New Horizons

- NASA's New Horizons mission is the first scientific investigation to obtain a close look at Pluto and its moons.
- New Horizons is now venturing deeper into the distant, mysterious Kuiper Belt – a relic of solar system formation.

Juno

- NASA's Juno spacecraft has been orbiting Jupiter since 2016.
- Juno is studying the gas giant's gravitational and magnetic fields, vast magnetosphere, intense aurora and the swirling clouds that form Jupiter's colorful, trademark atmosphere.

Dragonfly

- Dragonfly is a unique spacecraft that will visit Saturn's richly organic moon Titan.
- It is slated for a 2026 launch and a 2034 arrival.

Planetary Missions Program

- It includes three mission programs such as the Discovery, New Frontiers and Solar System Exploration Programs.
- The three programs are comprised of independent space science missions that share a common management structure.
- The strategic objective in planetary science is to figure out the content, origin, and evolution of the solar system and the potential for life elsewhere.

Discovery Program Missions List

- Active: Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and InSight
- Future: Lucy, Psyche and MEGANE
- Past: ASPERA-3, CONTOUR, Dawn, Deep Impact, EPOXI, Genesis, GRAIL, Kepler, Lunar Prospector, M3, Mars Pathfinder, MMX, MESSENGER, Near-Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR), Stardust, STARDUST-NEXT and STROFIO

Solar System Exploration Missions List

- DART, Europa Clipper and JUICE

Why in News?

- NASA recently selected a sample collection site on the asteroid Benu's boulder-scattered surface for the OSIRIS-Rex mission.

News in Detail

- A site designated **Nightingale** -- located in a crater high in Benu's northern hemisphere -- was chosen as the best spot for the Osiris-REx spacecraft to snag its sample.
- Over the last few months, the Osiris-Rex team has been evaluating close-range data from four candidate sites to identify the best option for asteroid sample collection.
- These sites, dubbed **Sandpiper, Osprey, Kingfisher, and Nightingale**, were chosen for investigation since they posed the **fewest hazards to the spacecraft's safety** while also providing the opportunity for great samples to be gathered.

4) StrandHogg - bug in Android OS

- **Why in News?**
- The Union Home Ministry has sent an alert to all States warning them about the **vulnerability of the Android operating system** to a **bug called 'StrandHogg'** that **allows real-time malware applications to pose as genuine applications** and **access user data of all kinds.**



StrandHogg

News in Detail

- While **all versions of Android**, including Android 10, are vulnerable to this bug, it may not be apparent to the affected users that malware applications are already on board their device.
- These malware can then potentially listen to their conversations, access photo album, read/send messages, make calls, record conversations and get login credentials to various accounts.
- At least 500 popular apps are at risk because of this malware that hackers can deploy to attack mobile phone users.
- This apart, things that such malware can access include private images, files, contact details, call logs, and location information.
- The information was shared by the **Threat Analytical Unit, Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- The Ministry also sent a detailed list of the modus operandi of the hackers and latest trends in cyberattacks for appropriate action of the States.

Warning signs

- Pop-ups asking for permission to send notifications, messages etc., are one of the main entry points for 'StrandHogg' to launch the attack.
- An app in which the user is already logged in asking him/her to login again is another anomaly pointing to the possibilities of a cyberattack.
- Once users approve such requests, the malware would instantly access the mobile phone or tablet for specific purposes.
- It can activate the microphone, allowing a hacker in a remote location to listen to live conversations.
- The camera can also be switched on to capture visuals.
- Links and buttons that become non-functional, apps asking for permissions that are not required are among the other warning signs.

PIB ANALYSIS

1) GeM Samvaad

About GeM

- Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is a one stop **portal to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services** required by various **Government Departments / Organizations / PSUs**.
- GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.
- It provides the tools of e-bidding, reverse e-auction and demand aggregation to facilitate the government users achieve the best value for their money.
- The purchases through GeM by Government users have been authorized and made mandatory.

Journey of GeM

- GeM has more than 15 lakh products and around 20,000 services, more than 3 lakh registered sellers and service providers and more than 40,000 Government buyer organizations.
- In its short journey of three years, GeM has processed more than 28 lakh orders worth Rs. 40,000 crores in Gross Merchandise Value out of which 50% has been transacted by MSMEs.
- State Departments and Organizations and Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) have been using GeM for their buying needs.
- Sellers from the State are also benefiting through access to national Public Procurement market using the portal.

Why in News?

- A national outreach Programme, GeM Samvaad, was launched. Through GeM Samvaad the marketplace is looking forward to receiving feedback from users which shall be used for making improvements and advancements in the system.

2) National Broadband Mission (NBM)

What is it for?

- The National Broadband Mission is to fulfill all aspirations of the people and enables fast track growth of digital communication infrastructure.

- The vision of the NBM is to fast track growth of digital communications infrastructure, bridge the digital divide, facilitate digital empowerment and inclusion and provide affordable and universal access of broadband for all.
- Some of the **objectives** of the Mission which is structured with a strong emphasis on the three principles of **universality, affordability and quality** are:
 - **Broadband access to all villages by 2022**
 - Facilitate universal and equitable access to broadband services for across the country and especially in rural and remote areas
 - Significantly improve **quality of services for mobile and internet**
 - Develop a **Broadband Readiness Index (BRI)** to measure the availability of digital communications infrastructure and conducive policy ecosystem within a State/UT.
 - Address **policy and regulatory changes** required to accelerate the expansion and creation of digital infrastructure and services
 - Work with all stakeholders including the concerned Ministries / Departments/ Agencies, and Ministry of Finance, for enabling investments for the Mission

Why in News?

- The Minister for Communications, Law & Justice and Electronics and Information Technology, **launches National Broadband Mission.**

3) Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) Phase III

Need of PMGSY

- Rural Road Connectivity is not only a key component of Rural Development by promoting access to economic and social services and thereby generating increased agricultural incomes and productive employment opportunities in India, it is also as a result, a key ingredient in ensuring sustainable poverty reduction.
- Hence, Government launched the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana **to provide all-weather access to unconnected habitations.**

- The **Ministry of Rural Development along with state governments** is responsible for the implementation of PMGSY.
- Govt. of India is endeavouring to set high and uniform technical and management standards and facilitating policy development and planning at State level in order to ensure sustainable management of the rural roads network.

About PMGSY Phase III:

- Under the PMGSY-III Scheme, it is proposed to consolidate 1,25,000 Km road length in the States.
- PMGSY-III involves consolidation of through routes and major rural links connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural markets (GrAMs), higher secondary schools and hospitals.
- It will be Implemented from 2019-20 to 2024-25. The funding pattern for the PMGSY-III will be 60:40 between Centre and the States for States other than NE & Himalayan States and 90:10 for NE and Himalayan States as applicable for Central sponsored schemes.

Why in News?

- The Union Minister of Rural Development launched Phase III of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) to further enhance connectivity of villages with hospitals, schools and agricultural markets.

4) Special Economic Zone (SEZ)

What are SEZs?

- A special economic zone is an area in a country that is subject to unique economic regulations that differ from other regions of the same country. The SEZ regulations tend to be conducive to foreign direct investment (FDI). Conducting business in an SEZ typically implies that the company will receive tax incentives and the opportunity to pay lower tariffs.

Background:

- With a view to overcome the shortcomings experienced on account of the multiplicity of controls and clearances; absence of world-class infrastructure, and an unstable fiscal regime and with a view to attract larger foreign investments in India, the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) Policy was announced in April 2000.

- The Special Economic Zones Act, 2005, was passed by Parliament in 2005. After extensive consultations, the SEZ Act, 2005, supported by SEZ Rules, came into effect in 2006.

Objectives :

- Generation of additional economic activity
- Promotion of exports of goods and services
- Promotion of investment from domestic and foreign sources
- Creation of employment opportunities
- Development of infrastructure facilities

Few benefits for SEZs:

- Duty-free import/domestic procurement of goods for development, operation and maintenance of SEZ units.
- Exemption from Central Sales Tax, Exemption from Service Tax and Exemption from State sales tax.
- These have now subsumed into GST and supplies to SEZs are zero-rated under the IGST Act, 2017.
- Single window clearance for Central and State level approvals.

Why in News?

- Tripura gets its first SEZ, at Paschim Jalefa, Sabroom, South Tripura District. It will be a Sector Specific Economic Zone for Agro-Based Food Processing.

5) Indra- 2019

About:

- The exercise included joint training in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations under the United Nations mandate.
- Important lectures, demonstrations and drills related to counter-terrorism operations were rehearsed and executed jointly.
- Both the contingent shared their expertise and experience.
- The INDRA series of exercise began in 2003 and the First joint Tri-Services Exercise was conducted in 2017.
- The objective of the exercise is to imbibe the best practices from each other, jointly evolve drills to defeat the scourge of terror under the United Nations mandate.

Why in News?

- The second edition of the bilateral tri-services Exercise Indra-2019 between India and Russia concluded at Babina, Pune and Goa.

6) Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)

About:

- The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) was established by the Government of India under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act passed by the Parliament in December, 1985. It is under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, Government of India is mandated with the responsibility of export promotion and development of the following scheduled products like
 1. Meat, Poultry and Dairy Products.
 2. Confectionery, Biscuits and Bakery Products.
 3. Honey, Jaggery and Sugar Products, Cocoa and its products, chocolates of all kinds.
 4. Alcoholic and Non-Alcoholic Beverages.
 5. Cereal and Cereal Products.
 6. Groundnuts, Peanuts and Walnuts.
 7. Pickles, Papads and Chutneys.
 8. Guar Gum.
 9. Floriculture and Floriculture Products
 10. Herbal and Medicinal Plants

What are Agri Export Zone (AEZ)?

- The concept of Agri Export Zone (AEZ) was introduced in 2001, to take a comprehensive look at a particular produce/product located in a contiguous area for the purpose of developing and sourcing the raw materials, their processing/packaging, leading to final exports.

Why in News?

- APEDA in its endeavor to promote exports from agriculture produce rich regions of India is sending the first trial shipment of vegetables by sea route from Varanasi to Dubai.
- Considering the potential of production of fruits and vegetables in Varanasi Region comprising of 5 districts namely, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Chandauli, Mirzapur and Sant Ravidas Nagar, APEDA is in the process of setting up Agri export hubs in these 5 districts of the Varanasi region.

7) Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP)

About IP

- IP is an officially recognized book of standards as per the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** and **Rules 1945** thereunder.
- The IP **specifies the standards of drugs manufactured and marketed in India in terms of their identity, purity and strength.**
- In order to ensure the quality of medicinal products, the legal and scientific standards are provided by Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) in the form of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP).
- As per, the Second Schedule of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, IP is designated as the official book of standards for drugs imported and/or manufactured for sale, stock or exhibition for sale or distribution in India.

About Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC):

- Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) is an autonomous institution of the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** which sets standards for **all drugs that are manufactured, sold and consumed in India.**
- The IP Commission's mission is to promote public and animal health in India by bringing out authoritative and officially accepted standards for quality of drugs including active pharmaceutical ingredients, excipients and dosage forms, used by health professionals, patients and consumers.

Why in News?

- Afghanistan has become the first country to formally recognize Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP).

8) EChO Network

About:

- EChO Network is a national program to provide a template for cross-disciplinary leadership in India with the specific focus of increasing research, knowledge, and awareness of Indian ecology and the environment.
- EChO Network would develop a national network to catalyse a new generation of Indians who can synthesize interdisciplinary concepts and tackle real-world problems in medicine, agriculture, ecology, and technology.

- The program will then train postdoctoral leaders in research and outreach on these topics, while also incorporating current public and private efforts into a national network.

Why in News?

- EChO Network, a national program to provide a template for cross-disciplinary leadership in India with the specific focus of increasing research, knowledge, and awareness of Indian ecology and the environment was launched in New Delhi.

9) National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE)

About NPHCE

- The National Programme for the Health Care for the Elderly (NPHCE) is an articulation of the International and national commitments of the Government as envisaged under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Vision

- To provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality long-term, comprehensive and dedicated care services to an Ageing population;
- Creating a new “architecture” for Ageing;
- To build a framework to create an enabling environment for “*a Society for all Ages*”;
- To promote the concept of Active and Healthy Ageing;

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory, under Article 9 casts an obligation on all the signatory governments to take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.
- These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter-alia :

- Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;
- Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.

Why in News?

- The Vice President appreciated the government of India for implementing the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE).

10) NITI Aayog to draft roadmap for achieving population stabilisation

What is the need?

- India, with a **current population size of 1.37 billion**, has the second largest population in the world.
- Family planning is considered universally as the smartest development investment.
- For India to realize its sustainable development goals and economic aspirations, it is important to ensure that people have informed access to contraception and quality family planning services.
- India is also at a stage where birth rates are falling but the population continues to grow due to the fact that more than 30 % of the population is young and in the reproductive age group.
- Nearly 30 million currently married women in the age group of 15-49 years within this critical cohort have unmet needs in family planning.
- This limits their ability to delay or avoid pregnancy by not having access or the agency to use contraception.

About the draft

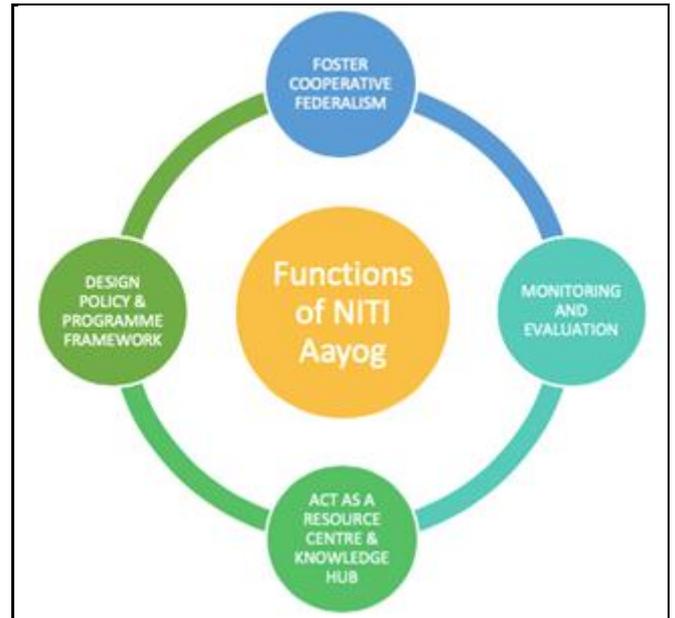
- The working paper is expected to address key gaps in **India’s family planning programmes**.
- It will offer constructive recommendations to address regional disparities in outcomes by focusing on adolescents and youths, inter-departmental convergence, demand generation, access to contraceptive services and quality of care.
- The recommendations from the consultation will contribute to a NITI Aayog working paper to help achieve India’s vision of attaining population stabilization.

Key recommendations expected to emerge from the meeting are as follows:

- Increasing the basket of contraceptive choices, with greater focus on spacing methods and helping women make informed choices about delaying pregnancy and spacing between children.
- Addressing social determinants of health such as age at marriage and sex-selective practices.
- Strengthening quality of care, including counselling services, managing side effects and family planning support.
- Increasing budgetary allocations for family planning, to align with the unmet needs of India's young people who constitute nearly 30 per cent of our population.
- Addressing existing socio-cultural barriers towards contraception by investing extensively in innovative behaviour-change communication strategies.
- Treating population stabilization and family planning as a national priority, fostering inter-departmental convergence and ensuring multisectoral participation and integration.

About Niti Aayog:

- The National Institution for Transforming India, also called NITI Aayog, was formed **via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on January 1, 2015**. NITI Aayog is the premier policy **'Think Tank'** of the Government of India, providing **both directional and policy inputs**. While designing strategic and long term policies and programmes for the Government of India, NITI Aayog also provides relevant **technical advice to the Centre and States**.
- NITI Aayog's entire gamut of activities can be divided into four main heads:
 1. Design Policy & Programme Framework
 2. Foster Cooperative Federalism
 3. Monitoring & Evaluation
 4. Think Tank and Knowledge & Innovation Hub



Why in News?

- NITI Aayog is organising a National Consultation titled ***“Realizing the vision of population stabilization: leaving no one behind”***.

11) Exercise ‘Apharan’

About:

- The Exercise code named “Apharan” saw participation of multiple agencies, including more than 12 ships and helicopters of the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard and Cochin Port Trust.
- This was the first time that such a large scale exercise involving all stakeholders has been conducted in Kerala.
- The Exercise ‘Apharan’ was **aimed at streamlining the response mechanism/preparedness to thwart any attempt by Anti-National Elements to hijack a merchant vessel or attempt forced entry of a rogue/commandeered merchant vessel into the harbour**.

Why in News?

- The Indian Navy, in collaboration with Indian Coast Guard, Cochin Port Trust and all other concerned stakeholders, conducted a large scale Anti Hijacking Exercise off the Port of Kochi .

News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) International Astronomical Union

About:

- The International Astronomical Union (IAU) was founded in **1919**.
- Its mission is to **promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects**, including research, communication, education and development, through international cooperation.
- Its individual Members — structured into Divisions, Commissions, and Working Groups — are professional astronomers from all over the world, at the Ph.D. level and beyond, who are active in professional research, education and outreach in astronomy.
- It is an internationally recognized authority for assigning designations (names) to celestial bodies (stars, planets, asteroids, etc.) and any surface features on them.

Why in News?

- The International Astronomical Union (IAU) announced the names of the newly discovered stars and planets, where the name "Sharjah" was chosen for a star with

"Barjeel" being the name of one of its planets.

2) UN Olympic Truce Resolution

About:

- The resolution will aim to ensure a halt to all hostilities, allowing the safe passage and participation of athletes and spectators for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.
- The Olympic Truce, or ekecheria, is based on an ancient Greek tradition, dating back to the original Olympic Games in Ancient Olympia in 776 BC.
- The Truce was revived by United Nations Resolution 48/11 of 25 October 1993.
- In 1999, the International Olympic Committee announced the establishment of the International Olympic Truce Foundation and the International Olympic Truce Centre in cooperation with Greece.

Why in News?

- International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief Thomas Bach has thanked President Ram Nath Kovind for co-sponsoring the United Nation Olympic Truce Resolution, which was recently adopted in the United Nation General Assembly.

Hindu Editorial Analysis

1) Reservations need to continue for Anglo-Indians

Context:

- Recently, Parliament passed the **Constitution (126th Amendment) Bill**, extending reservation for SC/STs but **doing away with the provision for nomination of Anglo Indians to Lok Sabha and some state Assemblies.**

Who are Anglo Indians?

- The Anglo-Indian community in India traces its origins to an official policy of the British East India Company to encourage marriages of its officers with local women.
- The term Anglo-Indian first appeared in the Government of India Act, 1935.
- In the present context, **Article 366(2)** of the Constitution Of India states:
- “An Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only...”

Anglo Indian Population:

- The number of people who identified themselves as Anglo-Indian was 296, according to the 2011 Census. However, the All India Anglo-Indian Association, on the other hand, has objected to Law Minister’s claim that the community has just 296 members.

STATE-WISE ENUMERATION

West Bengal	9
Odisha	4
Chhattisgarh	3
Maharashtra	16
Andhra Pradesh	62
Karnataka	9
Kerala	124
Tamil Nadu	69

(Source: All India Anglo Indian Association)

- Under what provisions was reservation in legislature granted?**

Provision for nomination of two Anglo-Indians to Lok Sabha:

- Article 331** of the Constitution says: “Notwithstanding anything in Article 81, the President may, if he is of the opinion that the Anglo-Indian community is not adequately represented in the House of the people, nominate not more than two members of that community to the House of the People.”
- The idea of such nominations is traced to Frank Anthony, who headed the All India Anglo-Indian Association. Article 331 was added in the Constitution following his suggestion to Jawaharlal Nehru.

Representation of the Anglo-Indian community in Legislative Assemblies.

- Article 333** says: “Notwithstanding anything in Article 170, the Governor of a State may, if he is of the opinion that the Anglo-Indian community needs representation in the Legislative Assembly of the State and is not adequately represented therein, [nominate one member of that community to the Assembly].”
- Currently 14 Assemblies have one Anglo-Indian member each: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. The 126th Amendment

does away with this as well.

10th schedule and Anglo Indian Community

- According to the **10th Schedule of the Constitution**, Anglo-Indian members of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies can take the membership of any party within six months of their nomination.
- But, once they do so, they are bound by their party whip. The Anglo-Indian members enjoy the same powers as others, but they can not vote in the Presidential election because they are nominated by the President.

What is the issue now?

- The Union Cabinet recently approved a proposal to **end the constitutional provisions that guarantee the reservation** of two seats for the **Anglo-Indian community** in the Lok Sabha and one seat in State Assemblies.
- The decision not to renew this provision was based on the view that the community is doing well and does not need these political reservations.

Arguments against the reason stated:

- Anglo-Indians are no longer identified as a separate category in the Census survey.
- The government-commissioned **Ministry of Minority Affairs report (2013)** on the situation of Anglo-Indians reiterated the Problems faced by the community which are as follows.
- Based on surveys conducted among people belonging to the community in a number of cities, the report documented poor economic and social conditions for too many.
- Among the major challenges and problems faced by people of the community, the report observed, the most significant ones
 1. related to identity crisis,
 2. lack of employment,
 3. educational backwardness,
 4. lack of proper facilities and cultural erosion.
- The document also explicitly commended the assistance Anglo-Indians receive from their nominated MPs and MLAs, stating that “representatives of the Anglo-Indian community in the State Assemblies and local leaders of the community are working hard for the welfare and progress of the community”.

- While there are certainly success stories in the community, the existence of many not-so-successful ones must also be acknowledged.
- A radical decision like that involving scrapping of reservations ought to have been based on a thorough examination of the position of the community as a whole, and not on the status of some eminent individuals.
- It should also be noted that many success stories exist because of the work of dedicated community members, including those who serve or have served as MLAs and MPs.

Need to not end the provision for reservation:

- **Testament to forward looking vision**
- Nomination of seats for Anglo-Indians in the Lok Sabha was a testament to the fair-minded and forward-looking vision of the founding fathers of the Republic.

Supporting community's interests as well as National interests

- Representing an All-India community they use their voice to provide an independent, national view of the interests of India as a whole.
- Even when supporting their own community's causes, particularly in areas like education, they advanced the national interest and greatly benefited the country.

Constructive Pro-National Voice:

- The presence of Anglo-Indian MLAs in many State legislatures similarly provided a constructive pro-national voice, who are against linguistic and religious separatism and similar narrowly communal interests.

Way forward:

- Retaining the reserved seats would demonstrate its ability to respond to the needs of those among the most vulnerable people.
- This would also be a recognition of encouragement for the work done on the ground by grassroots groups involved with the community.
- In the near future, the community can also possibly find representation in the National Commission for Minorities.
- A stronger, less socioeconomically marginalised Anglo-Indian community would benefit the nation as a whole.

- Thus the author concludes by saying that Indian government needs to continue giving reservation to this marginalised community.

2) Fish in troubled waters

Context:

- Climate change and unprecedented floods resulting from cloud bursts have facilitated the introduction of aquatic invasive alien species into new habitats in India which threatens ecosystems, habitats and native species.

What are Invasive Alien Species?

- Invasive alien species (IAS) are species whose introduction and/or spread outside their natural past or present distribution threatens biological diversity.
- IAS occur in all taxonomic groups, including animals, plants, fungi and microorganisms, and can affect all types of ecosystems.

For a species to become invasive:

- For a species to become invasive,
- it must successfully out-compete native organisms,
- spread through its new environment,
- increase in population density and
- harm ecosystems in its introduced range.

Characteristics of invasive alien species:

- Rapid reproduction and growth,
- high dispersal ability,
- phenotypic plasticity (ability to adapt physiologically to new conditions), and
- Ability to survive on various food types and in a wide range of environmental conditions.

Which ecosystems are more prone to Invasive Alien Species?

- Ecosystems that have been invaded by alien species may not have the natural predators and competitors present in its native environment that would normally control their populations. Native ecosystems that have undergone human-induced disturbance are often more prone to alien invasions because there is less competition from native species.
- For example, imported red fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta* Buren) are more successful in establishing themselves in disturbed areas such as roadsides and agricultural fields and rarely colonize intact closed forests.

- Islands are especially vulnerable to IAS because they are naturally isolated from strong competitors and predators. Islands often have ecological niches that have not been filled because of the distance from colonizing populations, increasing the probability of successful invasions.

What happens during floods?

- During heavy floods, invasive alien fishes which are illegally farmed in fragile systems, including domestic aquarium tanks, ponds, lakes and abandoned quarries, effortlessly escape from captivity and enter nearby wetlands.
- After a while, they slowly begin to wipe out local diversity and the economy by altering the functions of the ecosystem.

Instances of Aquatic Invasive Alien Species affecting biodiversity:

- Recently, a study by Biju Kumar and others from the Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries, University of Kerala, revealed the role of the 2018 floods in introducing the most dangerous fish species into Kerala's wetlands.
- The authors said that exotic fishes such as **arapaima and alligator gar** were reported or caught by the residents after the floods.
- These are illegally imported fish that are reared by ornamental and commercial fish traders across India.
- A team of researchers from Madurai Kamaraj University found that the exotic **ornamental Amazon sailfin catfish** poses a serious threat to the native fish species of Vandiyur Lake, Madurai.
- They reported that the biomass of the Amazon sailfin catfish is statistically significant compared to the indigenous varieties.
- This clearly shows the negative impact of this exotic aquarium fish on inland aquaculture in terms of diminished production/catch of edible fish.
- Further, sailfin catfish species do not hold any commercial value; therefore, people discard the species on the banks of the lake where it is not even scavenged by other animals and birds.

What is the issue now?

- During the monsoon, details about the amount of rainfall, water level in reservoirs, and how the flood paralysed essential services including transport,

communication and electricity are released but there is no information about biodiversity loss and the impact of the flood on freshwater diversity.

- Though there are steps taken to strengthen the state disaster response force to tackle the possible impacts of the northeast monsoon, there is, however, no information on the aquatic biodiversity conservation policy.
- It can be inferred that the State government has not yet framed any policy to control and manage the escape of invasive alien fish species during the monsoon season.

Way forward:

- It is time for the government to draft a policy in consultation with experts and for the state governments to establish a unique research centre to address this issue.

3) Justice for the Rohingya

Background information:

- **Who are Rohingya?**
- Rohingya are an ethnic group, largely comprising Muslims, who predominantly live in the Western Myanmar province of Rakhine. They speak a dialect of Bengali, as opposed to the commonly spoken Burmese language.
- Though they have been living in the country for generations, Myanmar considers them as persons who migrated to their land during the Colonial rule. So, it has not granted Rohingyas full citizenship.
- Since they are not citizens, their movements are restricted within the Rakhine state.

2017 attack

- In 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a Rohingya insurgent group, attacked police posts and an army base in Rakhine state.
- The response by the Myanmar security forces has sent over 7,00,000 Rohingyas fleeing into Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries including India. Reports of villages being torched and civilian deaths have followed the militant attack.
- The UN has termed the Rohingya's situation as the "world's fastest growing refugee crisis".

Why is Bangladesh having a problem with the Rohingya?

- The country has opened its border for

Rohingyas upon United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' request and continues to shelter about five lakh Rohingyas in refugee camps.

- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the International community to put pressure on Myanmar to stop the exodus of Rohingyas.

What about Rohingya in India?

- According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, there are approximately 40,000 Rohingyas living in India. They have reached India from Bangladesh through the land route over the years.
- The government had previously informed that all the Rohingyas in India were "illegal immigrants" and they will be deported soon.
- (A foreigner is considered to be an illegal immigrant under two circumstances. One, if they come into India without valid travel documents, or two, having come in legally, they stay beyond the time period permitted to them under their travel documents. Illegal migrants may be imprisoned or deported.)

What is the issue now?

- Preliminary hearings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) seeking guarantees of basic protection for Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims arguably offer only symbolic hope to this long-suffering community according to the author.

About ICJ:

- The International Court of Justice is the **principal judicial organ of the United Nations**. It was established in **June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations**.
- The Court's role is to settle 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.
- Unlike most other organs of international organizations, the Court is not composed of representatives of governments. Members of the Court are independent judges.
- 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.
- All members of the UN are automatic parties to the statute, but this does not automatically give the ICJ jurisdiction over disputes involving them. The ICJ get

jurisdiction only on the basis of consent of both parties.

4) A duty to publish: On RTI

Context:

- There have been persistent and growing apprehensions though The Right to Information Act's role in fostering a more informed citizenry and an accountable government has never been in doubt ever since its implementation in 2005.

Reasons for growing apprehensions:

- **Voluntary dissemination of information**
- Section 4 of the Act calls for pro-active and voluntary dissemination of information.

Section 4 of RTI Act:

- Under RTI Act, Section 4 was a commitment and promise of Parliament to ensure that ,
- "It shall be a constant endeavour of every public authority to take steps to provide as much information suo motu to the public at regular intervals through various means of communications, including internet, so that the public have minimum resort to the use of this Act to obtain information.
- But only a few Central and State institutions have published relevant information and Rajasthan has taken a lead through its Jan Sochna portal.

Persisting vacancies

- The other problem has been persisting vacancies in the State and Central Information Commissions.
- CIC has four vacancies and 33,000 pending cases.

Need for locus standi

- RTI Act explicitly rejects the need for locus standi in Section 6(2).

Section 6(2) of RTI Act:

- Under Section 6(2) of RTI Act,
- "an applicant making request for information shall not be required to give any reason for requesting the information...".

- This clause is present for vital reasons —
- seeking locus standi in order to respond to public requests could result in a chilling effect as public authorities (PAs) could choose to deny information to general citizens on subjective grounds.
- Besides, information commissioners and public officials have the authority to reject requests based on criteria that enable exemption from information disclosure.
- Data on RTI requests since 2005 show that the yearly rejection rate (requests rejected as a percentage of those received) has come down steadily to 4.7% in 2018-19.
- A change in the Act that seeks locus standi as a criterion could dramatically increase this number.

RSTV Big Picture

1) Rejuvenating Economy

THE ROAD AHEAD

Here is a look at the key priorities of the government:

Economy

- Reviving economic growth.
- Rejuvenating private sector investment.
- Resolving Rs10 trillion bad debt.

Jobs and education

- Employment generation.
- Adding scale to skills.
- Frame new education policy.

Connectivity

- Improving railway safety.
- Port modernisation and construction of new ports.
- Air India privatization.

Defence and foreign policy

- Evolving strategic defence partnership models.
- Accelerate India's economic diplomacy.
- Improving ties with China, containing Pakistan.

Digital

- Expanding \$500 mn digital economy to \$1 trillion.
- Enforcing data protection laws and cyber security standards.
- Ramping up electronic goods production.

Health and sanitation

- Ensuring affordable healthcare.
- Containing the spread of communicable diseases.
- Open defecation-free India by 2019.

Farmers and rural economy

- Improving farm income.
- Managing the fall out of monsoon's uneven geographical spread.
- Rural housing for all by March 2019.

Green economy and energy

- Managing fallout of record low wind and solar tariffs.
- Framing national forest policy.
- Integrating state-run oil companies.

Context

- Listing the major interventions by the govt to boost the economy Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said govt will continue to take measures as and when required to boost the growth.
- In a press conference on Chief Economic Advisor KV Subramanian gave a recap of measures taken by the govt since August which include moderation of interest rate, infusion of liquidity through various means, capitalisation of public sector banks and giving last mile funding to reality projects.
- He also said that Govt's schemes to support NBFCs and HFCs and restarting stalled real estate projects are also likely to start disbursing funds soon.

How effective have the measures taken by the government been effective?

- Some measures like Real Estate Fund is still taking shape.
- Disbursals of funds are not yet happening like the 100lakh crore investments in the Infrastructure projects.

- Issues which was sought to be addressed in terms of providing liquidity to NBFCs, Housing Finance Limited Companies, etc
- Corporate Tax reductions which were announced is still waster standing
- Boosting consumption which is one of the reasons for economic slowdown also needs to be addressed
- GST and Income Tax reduction also needs to be addressed.

What are the reasons behind?

- The short is in demand in the economy which was historically boosted by government spending and in the past couple of years it has seen reduction.
- The willingness of the banks to lend and businessmen to take credit has also gone down due to rise in NPAs.
- There is job growth but is not stable longer jobs which can stimulate the private consumption demand because people are not sure about their future prospects.
- Though there are tax cuts it has not been monitored and implemented well.

- An interest rate transmission which was initiated by the RBI to the small savings rate is not initiated.
- Restricting Imports can be catastrophic which is anti consumer and rises prices of production.

Key Focus areas:

- This is the first time in many years that six consecutive quarters in GDP growth declined and is fundamentally different than the usual trends.
- 4.5% GDP growth is down by around 25-30% of the average which is a concern.
- The campaign against Black Money which culminated in demonetisation has put pressure on the black economy.
- Tightening the norms of monetary policies led to the collapse.

What needs to be done to bring the economy on track?

- Government has to focus on the Demand side by new schemes like the last mile connectivity for the housing sector, clearing the debts of the Public sector units etc
- The clogging of credit channels should be sorted out to stop running into the negative spiral.

- Structural reforms which can give confidence in investors and private players needs to be built up.
- Contractual obligations which are been undone by the states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra should be sorted soon and seek more cooperation.
- Be realistic in Fiscal deficit targets.
- Initiate the interest rate transmissions at earliest.
- Roll back the fiscal stimulus.
- Direct Tax Code which is important for small business should be implemented critically.
- Increase credibility in infrastructure market.

Conclusion

- As far as the Economic situation is concerned the government is doing as of now steps focussing on short term as well as long term objectives and they may take some time to yield results. With the budget around the corner the government should have a holistic picture of the economy and take steps to rejuvenate it sooner with far reaching implications.

2) Centre - State Rights



 **Narendra Modi**
@narendramodi

A landmark day for India and our nation's ethos of compassion and brotherhood... This Bill will alleviate the suffering of many who faced persecution for years

KEY FEATURES

Bill grants citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists & Parsis from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who moved to India before Dec 31, 2014

Reduces duration of residency from 11 years to 5 years

States with ILPs and areas under Sixth Schedule in north-east exempt from new law

Authorises govt to cancel registration of OCI cardholders in case of violation of provisions of Citizenship Act or any other law

MORE REPORTS
➡ PAGE 2

Context

- Some of the opposition-ruled states have declared they will not implement the changes in the Citizenship Act. Kerala, Punjab, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh have

claimed they will block implementation of the CAA in their states.

- Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister has also indicated that his government is against the law.

- Meanwhile, the Maharashtra government will take a decision on the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act only after the Supreme Court hears a bunch of petitions challenging the legislation.
- On the other hand, Defence minister Rajnath Singh said the threat by some states not to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is a challenge to India's federal structure as the legislation has been passed by Parliament and is binding on all states after the presidential assent.

What is the legal perspective behind affecting federalism?

- Unlike the Government of India Act, 1935 which said India as a federation of states the Constitution of India says India as a union of states.
- Article 3 to 11 the Constitution of India grants Union government power wrt citizenship.
- If this is violated the Centre can impose President's rule on the unwilling states on account of violation of the Constitution.
- States cannot say they will not implement as it invites violation of Constitution.

Why the states are rejecting ?

- The states were not consulted who are supposed to implement the law and citizenship is a major issue which needs states role to play.
- The NRC and CAA are exclusive part of Union but implemented by the states has created confusion about its features.
- Law and order problems have pressurised the states to reject.
- Politics of the ruling and opposition parties in Union and state governments too have played the role in rejecting the act.

What does the Constitution say?

- The states have to merely identify the illegal citizens staying in their territory and not take cognizance of the act.

- Vestation of Citizenship falls under Article 5-11 and Citizenship Amendment Act whereas deputation of illegal migrants falls under Foreigners Act.

What needs to be done?

- There needs to be a cordial relation between states and Union to smoother functioning.
- Address the misunderstandings between NRC and CAA with National Advisory Council's meeting and public debates.
- States should consider the vested interests of territorial threat to India from its borders and act accordingly.
- The Union government should address the grievances of the states and help them wherever needed.

Conclusion

- With people all over the streets against the CAA and harming lives and properties all around the issue is sensitive and needs to be clarified by the Union to the citizens and seek states cooperation to implement the act without affecting the interests of citizens and balancing the persecuted migrants.

3) GST Review and Reform

Context

- In its 38th meeting, the GST Council, voted for uniform rate of 28% on lotteries across the country.
- It was for the first time since the launch of the new overarching indirect tax that the Council took a decision through the voting route.
- During the voting, 21 states voted in favour of a uniform rate on lotteries.
- On top of the agenda of the meeting was to explore ways and means to maximise revenue collection by checking tax evasion.
- The government has set a Rs. 1.10 lakh crore monthly GST collection target in the remaining four months of this fiscal year.
- The GST Council also rationalised tax rate on woven and non-woven bags to 18%.

THE COUNCIL'S KEY DECISIONS



TWO-YEAR extension for National Anti-Profiterring Authority.

PROFITEERING fine raised from ₹25,000 to 10% of tax benefit accrued by a business.

AADHAAR can be used for GST registration to improve ease of doing business.

DEADLINE for filing GST returns for FY18 extended by two months to August-end.

First Show

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Anti-profiterring body's tenure extended

Anti-profiterring penalty norm strengthened

EV rate cut referred to fitment panel

Aadhaar allowed for registration under GST

E-invoice approved for B2B from Jan 2020



E-ticketing permitted for multiplexes

Annual return date extended by 2 months



The GST Council passed a resolution acknowledging the role played by Arun Jaitley, former union finance minister

and chairperson of the GST Council, in making the council a shining example of cooperative federalism.

What are the big takeaways from the 38th meeting?

- This is the first time where voting has taken place which was till now done on consensus.
- 21 states were in favour of Uniform rate on lotteries whereas others were not.
- GST Council fixes 28% tax rate on lottery effective March 1, 2020
- This is the first indication that GST rates and reforms shall be discussed and voting as a way out will be resorted to.
- Despite pressure to boost revenues amid a shortfall, the GST Council chose not to tamper with the rates.
- It is significant that there is no deviation or distortion in the GST system.
- The GST Council had a presentation from the committee as how to augment revenues.
- It was decided to extend the annual date of GSTR 9 filing to January 31, 2020 and

waive late fees for all taxpayers who have not filed GSTR1 form July 2017 to November 2019.

What are the glitches ?

- The norms need to be simplified and ease the process.
- Compensation distribution to states has been an issue.

Can the Rs. 1.1 lakh crore target be met?

- With the November month collections being encouraging due to the sales in the festive season and there is a hope that this momentum will be maintained in the next few months.
- But the collections of three months before November were not quite encouraging and were less than lakh crore.
- Given a conundrum of the economic slowdown the GST Council has a restriction of raising the rates, the council has emphasized on more collections and effective implementations.

What needs to be done?

- Though GST is revolutionary in its form it takes time to settle and should be understood by the public.
- More involvement of the states in decision making to fetch cooperation in implementation.
- Increasing cess on the items which are brought down from 28% bracket with around 2% to improve collections.
- Reducing the Inverted tax structure like the textile industry.
- Tackling Tax Evasion issue which can generate huge revenues.
- Reducing the number of tax slabs to improve collections.
- The government needs to consider bringing oil and petrol under GST Framework as it brings down their spend and has spill over effects.
- Simplification and ease of filing the returns.
- Payment of mounting dues could be met by levying cess on items with 28% tax slab, preventing tax evasion or By bringing "fuel" into the GST tax brackets.
- Inflation targeting of RBI affects the tax collection due to reduced consumption and hence it must be relaxed temporarily.
- 5% tax slab goods doesn't enjoy input tax credit and hence are mostly exploited by evading taxes. It must be addressed.

Conclusion

- As defined in Economics in the 'theory of Thrift', there is low demand for goods and services owing to unemployment resulting in recession has been the cause of slower economic growth and people are tending to increase their savings than on spending.
- Considering the OECD Countries India is still a long way to achieve that feat and needs to make GST more effective and eased out.

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