

OFFICERS' Pulse

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Coverage.

The Hindu
PIB
Yojana
Rajya Sabha TV
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At a Glance & In Depth.

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

CURRENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY

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



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News @ a glance

POLITY and SOCIAL ISSUES

1) Odisha uses satellite imagery to create unique flood hazard atlas

Why in news?

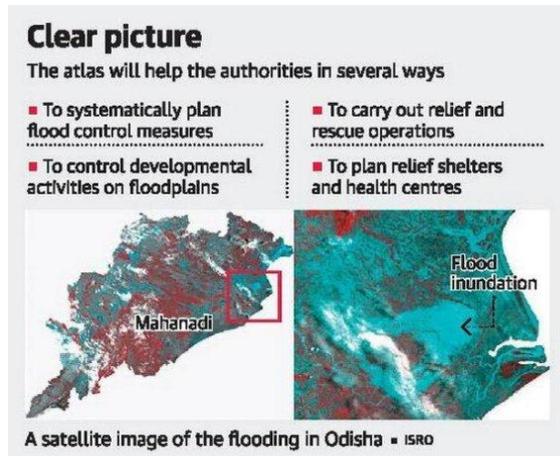
- Odisha has come out with unique flood hazard Atlas on the basis of historic flood inundation captured through satellite imagery to help the state manage floods more efficiently.

Atlas released by:

- Odisha Chief Minister Naveen patnaik at the state level natural calamity meeting.
- Base period: 2001 to 2018

Why this Atlas?

- The Atlas would serve as a useful resource of information for policy makers, planners and civil society groups.



Methodology:

- A large number of satellite images acquired over 18 years were used.
- All satellite data sets were analysed and flood layers were extracted.
- All the flood layers corresponding to a year are combined as one inundation layer, so that this layer represents the maximum flooded area in one year.
- All such combined flood layers for 18 years were integrated into flood hazard layer representing the observed flood

inundated areas with different frequencies.

- This layer was integrated with the digital database layers of Odisha.

Study:

- The National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Hyderabad had undertaken a study on Odisha's flood hazard zonation.

Findings:

- **Floods:** Due to Mahanadi, Subarnarekha, Brahmani, Rushikulya and Baitarani.
- As per Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA), damages due to floods are mainly caused by Mahanadi, Brahmani and Baitarani, which have a common delta where floodwaters intermingle and when in series simultaneously cause havoc.
- **Flash Floods:** Few districts in western and southern part of Odisha
- Due to instant run-off from hilly catchments areas of rivers like, Vamsadhara and Budhabalanga.
- **Hazard Prone:** The entire coastal belt is prone to storm surges, which is commonly accompanied by heavy rainfall which then makes estuary region vulnerable to both storm surges and river flooding

2) Ayushman Bharat undergoes price review

Ayushman Bharat

- It is an umbrella of two major health initiatives, namely Health and Wellness Centres and National Health Protection Scheme.
- It is rolled out across all States/UTs in all districts with an objective to cover all the targeted beneficiaries.

Health and Wellness Centres

- Under this 1.5 lakh existing sub centres will bring health care system closer to the homes of people in the form of Health

and wellness centres. These centres will provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services.

List of Services to be provided at Health & Wellness Centre

- Pregnancy care and maternal health services
- Neonatal and infant health services
- Child health
- Chronic communicable diseases
- Non-communicable diseases
- Management of mental illness
- Dental care
- Eye care
- Geriatric care Emergency medicine

National Health Protection Mission: AB-PMJAY (Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana)

Benefits

- AB-PMJAY provides a defined benefit cover of **Rs. 5 lakh per family** per year.
- This cover will take care of almost all secondary care and most of tertiary care procedures.
- To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be **no cap on family size** and age in the scheme.
- The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.
- All pre-existing conditions will be covered from day one of the policy.
- A defined transport allowance per hospitalization will also be paid to the beneficiary.
- Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/**private empanelled hospitals** across the country.
- The beneficiaries can avail benefits in both public and empanelled private facilities.
- All public hospitals in the States implementing AB-PMJAY, will be deemed empanelled for the Scheme.
- Hospitals belonging to Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) may also be empanelled based on the bed occupancy ratio parameter.

- As for private hospitals, they will be empanelled online based on defined criteria.
- To control costs, the payments for treatment will be done on package rate (to be defined by the Government in advance) basis.
- The package rates will include all the costs associated with treatment.
- For beneficiaries, it will be a cashless, paperless transaction.
- Keeping in view the State specific requirements, States/ UTs will have the flexibility to modify these rates within a limited bandwidth.

Eligibility criteria

- AB-PMJAY is an entitlement-based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the **SECC database**.
- The different categories in rural and urban areas include:
 - families having only one room with kucha walls and kucha roof;
 - families having no adult member between age 16 to 59;
 - female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59;
 - disabled member and no able-bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour,
- Families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour.
- For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme

Implementation Strategy

- At the national level to manage, a National Health Authority has been set up. It will be chaired by the Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India which will enable the decision making at a faster pace, required for smooth implementation of the scheme.
- States/ UTs are advised to implement the scheme by a dedicated entity called State Health Agency (SHA)

Why in the news?

- Indian government with the help of expert doctors and consultants is

revising about 1300 insurance packages covered under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan arogya yojana.

3) Increase number of judges, CJI urges PM

Why in the news?

- Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi 3 letters.
- 1) to increase the strength of judges
- 2) Raise the retirement age of high court judges to 65 years.
- 3) Appointment of retired top court judges and high court judges under Articles 128 and 224A of the Constitution respectively.

Condition as of now:

- A pendency of 58,669 cases in the top court and the number was increasing due to filing of more fresh cases.
- Due to paucity of judges, the required number of Constitution benches to decide important cases involving questions of law was not being formed.
- The size of the feeder cadre of chief justice and judges of the high courts has increased in the past yet the strength has not been increased proportionally in the top court.
- shortage of HC judges
- This necessitates to increase the strength of judges.

Need to increase the strength of judges:

- To function more efficiently and effectively as it will go a long way to attain ultimate goal of rendering timely justice to the litigant public.

Need to raise the retirement age of high court judges:

- This would help in improving the vacancy position and consequently reducing pendency of cases.
- This would also be in consonance with the (repeated) recommendations made by parliamentary standing committees.
- If the age of retirement is raised to an appropriate level, his vast experience, deeper insight and expertise can be utilised for a longer period.

Arguments in favour:

- If retired HC judges are considered for appointment in tribunals beyond the age

of 62 years, they may continue in HCs up to 65 years. The proposal suggested will ensure continued availability of more experienced judges for a longer tenure.

4) Halwa ceremony

What is it?

- The Halwa ceremony at the finance ministry marks the beginning of printing of documents related to the Union budget.

Halwa ceremony is all about:

- The printing of budget documents starts nearly a week ahead of the budget day at a printing press in the basement of the finance ministry.
- The occasion is flagged off by preparing halwa when large quantities of the sweet are served by the finance minister to nearly 100 officers and staff of the ministry.
- As part of the ritual, halwa is prepared in a big kadhai (cauldron) and served to the entire staff in the ministry.

Significance of the sweet dish

- To maintain the secrecy of budget, there is a 'lock-in' of the officials involved in making the budget.
- They are required to stay in the ministry and remain cut off from their families till the presentation of the budget by the minister in the Lok Sabha.

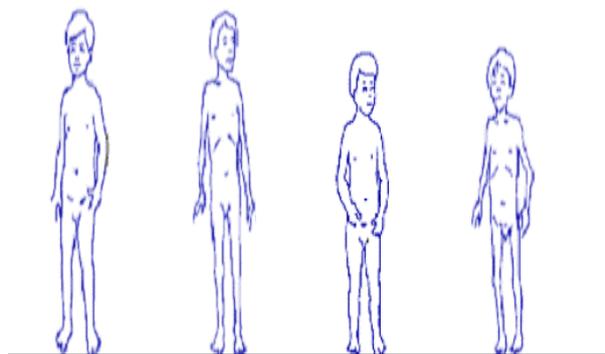
5) 31.4% of Indian children will be stunted by 2022: report

UN world food programme

- The World Food Programme is the UN agency focused on hunger alleviation and food security. Globally, it responds to emergencies, making sure food reaches where it is needed, especially in times of civil wars and natural disasters.
- In India, WFP provides technical assistance and capacity building services to the Government of India.
- WFP is focusing on enabling the country's food-based social safety nets to function more efficiently and effectively in providing food to their target population.
- Ministry of Agriculture is the nodal agency for WFP in India.

What is chronic malnutrition?

- Malnutrition is a group of conditions in children and adults generally related to poor quality or insufficient quantity of nutrient intake, absorption, or utilization.
- 2 types of malnutrition are ACUTE nutrition and CHRONIC malnutrition
- Acute Malnutrition causes **wasting** /thinness which happens due to weight loss due to inadequate nutrition. Wasting results from an acute shortage of food, is reversible with refeeding, and has a relatively high mortality rate.
- Chronic malnutrition causes **stunting**/shortness which happens due to inadequate nutrition over a long period of time leading to failure of linear growth. Stunting is chronic and its causative factors are poorly understood.
- Acute and Chronic malnutrition is the condition when both occur.



<u>Normal</u>	<u>Wasted</u>	<u>Stunted</u>	<u>Wasted and stunted</u>
Normal weight and height	Thinner than normal	Shorter than normal	Thinner and shorter than normal

Why in the news?

- The UN World Food Programme and Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has released a report which is a baseline analysis of the country's progress in achieving the **second** Sustainable Development Goal to **end hunger**. Some facts re:
- The **average per capita consumption** of energy among the 30% poor people of the population is just 1811 kilo calories, much lower than the norm of 2155 kilocalories per day.
- Though food grain yields have risen 33% over the last two decades, but are still only half of 2030 target yields.

- Over the last decade, child stunting has reduced at a rate of just 1% per year, the slowest decline among emerging economies. At this rate it is predicted that by 2022 about 31.4% of children will be stunted.
- Presently, one in 2 children are stunted in states like Bihar and UP and about 1 in 5 children in states like Kerala and Goa. India must double its efforts to stop this growth of chronic malnutrition.

6) Centre set to roll out 'Jal Shakti' scheme for water-starved areas

Why in News?

- The Centre is set to initiate the Jal Shakti Abhiyan for rainwater harvesting and conservation efforts in 255 **water-stressed districts** from July 1, 2019.

What will be done?

- The Abhiyan would look into the progress made in **harvesting, conserving and bore well recharge activities** under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA), works under the Integrated Watershed Management Program of the Ministry of Rural Development, **water body restoration activities** of Jal Shakti Ministry and **afforestation program** of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- Progress of all the works will be monitored real-time through a mobile application and a **web-based dashboard** at indiawater.gov.in
- Though water is a State subject, the **campaign** would be coordinated by 255 central IAS officers of Joint or Additional Secretary-rank, drawn from ministries as varied as Space, Petroleum and Defence, according to a notification issued by the Department of Personnel and Training.
- As part of the initiative, **water conservation plans** will be drafted for blocks and districts.
- Kisan Vigyan Kendras will be roped in to promote **better crop choices** for the farmers and efficient use of water for irrigation.

- **Awareness** for the campaign will be generated through both print and electronic media.
- The campaign would run from **July 1 to September 15** in States receiving rainfall during the **south-west monsoon**, while States receiving rainfall in the **retreating or north-east monsoon** would be covered from **October 1 to November 30**.
- Overall, 313 blocks with critical groundwater levels would be covered, along with 1,186 blocks with over-exploited groundwater and 94 blocks with low groundwater availability.

7) SEZ Bill cleared amid protests

What are SEZs?

- The Special Economic Zone (SEZ) policy in India first came into inception on April 1, 2000.
- SEZs are special demarcated areas in the country that have different regulations to attract foreign direct investment (FDI).
- Such areas are considered outside the customs territory. They are entitled to various tax incentives to boost manufacturing, promote exports as well as generate employment.
- The main objectives of the SEZ Act are:
 1. generation of additional economic activity
 2. promotion of exports of goods and services
 3. promotion of investment from domestic and foreign sources
 4. creation of employment opportunities
 5. development of infrastructure facilities

What is SEZ bill all about?

- The amendment was done to provisions of the SEZs Act, 2005 so as to include the expression "**trust or entity**" in the definition of "person" to set up SEZ.
- The amendment will enable trusts to be considered for grant of permission to set up units in SEZs. The amendments will also provide flexibility to the central government to include in this definition of a person or any entity that the central government may notify from time to time. This will facilitate investments in SEZs.

- The bill also has plans of introducing features including single-window clearance and provisions to ease imports and exports.

What is an ordinance?

- It is a law not passed by parliament but by president on very urgent matter. It is done when parliament is not in session or even 1 house (lok Sabha or rajya sabha) is not in session.
- Article 123 of Indian constitution gives power to the president to promulgate the ordinance.
- An ordinance must be laid before the house once the session starts and must be passed. If it is not passed it shall expire after 6 weeks of the reassembly.
- Even the governor has the power to promulgate ordinance under article 213.

Why in News?

- This SEZ Bill was promulgated as ordinance in March 2019. The opposition asked the government that what was the necessity and urgency to promulgate an ordinance in this matter.
- The opposition also questioned the benefits from SEZ policy as foreign direct investment has fallen by 30% last year.
- They also said that there is no definition to term 'Trusts' in the bill.
- The bill was passed amid protests by both the house and its waiting for presidential assent.

8) Mission on natural language translation

Going local	Language	Mother tongue of speakers (%)
The Ministry of Electronics and IT's Natural Language Translation mission aims to enable access to teaching and researching material in English and one's native language	Hindi and associated languages	43.63
	Bengali	8.03
	Marathi	6.86
	Telugu	6.7
	Tamil	5.7
	Gujarati	4.58
	Urdu	4.19
	Kannada	3.61

SOURCE: CENSUS 2011



The proposed cost of the Natural Language Translation mission is ₹450 crore

Why in news?

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT will soon place proposal for Natural Language Translation- one of the key missions identified by the Prime

Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).

AIM OF THE MISSION:

- To make science and technology accessible to all by facilitating access to teaching and researching material bilingually in English and in one's native Indian language.
- To overcome the language barrier, the government planned to set up an ecosystem which involved the Central and State agencies and start-ups.
- To achieve this, the government plans to leverage a combination of machine translation and human translation.
- The govt. is looking at speech-to-speech machine translation as well as text-to-text machine translation for this additional to human translation.

Lead agency:

- The IT ministry along with Ministry of Human Resource Development and Department of Science and Technology.

About PM-STIAC

- The PM-STIAC is an overarching body that identifies challenges in certain areas of science and technology.
- It then creates a road map to deal with these challenges and presents the recommendations to the Prime Minister.
- Besides natural language translation, other missions identified by the body includes Quantum Frontier, Artificial intelligence, National Biodiversity mission, electric vehicles, BioScience for Human Health and deep ocean exploration.

Significance of the mission:

- Translation activities can also help generate employment for educated unemployed.
- The mission would help not just students but also teachers, authors, publishers, translation software developers and general readers.

9) President's rule for 6 more months in J&K

What is the president's rule?

- According to Article 356 of Indian Constitution, when a state loses its ability to function as per the Constitution, it comes under the direct

control of the central government, which is referred to as the **President's rule**, it is also known as State emergency.

- when the President's Rule is imposed in a state, the President dismisses the state council of ministers headed by the chief minister and the governor carries state administration on behalf of the President.
- A proclamation imposing President's Rule must be approved by both the Houses of Parliament within two months from the date of its issue.
- If any house is not in session or dissolves (Only Lok Sabha can be dissolved) it must be approved within 30 days of the assembly/ first sitting. But it must be approved from the Rajya Sabha.
- But in Jammu and Kashmir the case is different. The state of emergency can be declared when state is not running according to J&K Constitution. If not, for 6 months the GOVERNOR's rule is applied according to Section 92 of J&K Constitution and only then President's Rule is applied according to Indian Constitution.

Why in the news?

- The home minister has moved a bill that in J&K after 6 months rule of Governor is should be brought under President's rule for next 6 months with Parliament's approval.
- The home minister have urged every party to support the bill and help in eliminating militancy.

10) Aadhaar Bill introduced amid Opposition protests

Why in the news?

- Law and IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad introduced Aadhaar amendment bill in the loksabha recently amid protest from opposition parties.

About the Aadhaar amendment bill

- To provide legal backing for voluntary seeding of biometric Aadhaar ID with mobile numbers and bank accounts after the Supreme Court barred mandatory use of 12digit unique identifier by private firms.
- Minister says this is in compliance with SC judgement.

Is privacy invaded?

- Privacy is not being invaded at all as the government had factored in parallel authentication norms to safeguard privacy issues.

Provisions of the bill:

2015 Act	2019 amendment bill
Individual identity verified by authentication	Allows offline verification without authentication
Use of order as proof of Identity is subject to authentication	Individual may voluntarily use his Aadhaar number to establish identity by authentication or offline verification
Fees and revenue collected by UIDAI goes to consolidated fund of India	Creates unique identification authority of India fund (UIDAI Fund).
Disclosure is pursuant to an order of the district court	Disclosure only for orders by High Court
	Aadhaar number for a child will be given with consent of parent or guardian

11) Kerala tops the list for best performing State in health

Why in news?

- Second health index was launched by Niti aayog in which Kerala has emerged as the top ranking state in terms of overall health performance while Uttar Pradesh is the worst.

Who prepares the report?

- The report has been prepared by government think tank NITI aayog in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family welfare with technical assistance from the World Bank.

Highlights

- The second round of the health index took into account the period 2015- 16 (base year) to 2017- 18 (reference year).
- The health index is a composite measure of states and union territories based on 23 health indicators with major weightage to the outcomes. Some of which are as follows
 - **Neonatal mortality rate**
 - 1) Under 5 mortality rate
 - Proportion of low birth weight among new-borns.
 - proportion of districts with functional cardiac care units
 - 2) Full immunization coverage
 - Proportion of specialist positions vacant at district hospitals.
 - The report “Healthy States, Progressive India: Report on rank of states and union territories” has ranking in three categories- largest States, smallest states and union territories to ensure comparison among similar entities.
 - Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have emerged as the second and third best performers.
 - Haryana, Rajasthan and Jharkhand were the top 3 states in terms of incremental performances.

Economy

1) Realty sector wants govt. to tackle NBFC crisis

What is a Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC)?

- An NBFC is a company registered under the Companies Act, 1956 which provide banking services without meeting the legal definition of a bank.
- They engage in the business of loans and advances, acquisition of shares, bonds, etc. issued by Government or local authority. They also deal in other marketable securities of a like nature, leasing, hire-purchase, insurance business, chit business.
- The working and operations of NBFCs are regulated by the RBI.

What is the difference between banks & NBFCs?

- NBFCs lend and make investments and hence their activities are similar to that of banks; however there are a few differences:
 1. NBFC cannot accept demand deposits;
 2. NBFCs cannot issue cheques drawn on itself;
 3. Deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in the case of banks.

Background

- In 2018, the loan defaults of the Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS), a leading NBFC, led to widespread panic over risks in the entire non-banking financial sector.
- The defaults jeopardised investors, banks and mutual funds associated with the sector which created a **liquidity shortage** across the NBFC system.
- (*Liquidity shortage refers to a situation where cash flow is absent at a business or other institution, especially if it cannot gather enough cash to meet its payment obligations to lenders*)

Why in News?

- The real estate sector requested the government to accord high importance to infrastructure growth in the

forthcoming Budget and to provide a solution to the NBFC liquidity crisis.

2) Defaulter count in PSBs has risen 60% since FY15

What are NPA's?

- NPAs are loans made by a bank or a finance company on which repayments or interest payments are not being made on time.
- The loan is considered to be an NPA once the borrower fails to make interest or principal payments for 90 days. In case of Farm Loans, the NPA varies for Short duration crops (interest or principal not paid for 2 crop seasons) and Long duration crops (interest or principal not paid for 1 Crop season).
- (*'long duration' crops are those with crop season longer than one year and crops, which are not 'long duration' crops, are treated as 'short duration' crops*)

Who is a wilful defaulter?

- A wilful defaulter is defined as a person who has the resources to repay the loan, but does not do so intentionally, and deploys the money for purposes other than intended.

Twin balance sheet problem & 4Rs Strategy

- Twin balance sheet problem refers to the stress on balance sheets of banks due to NPAs or bad loans on the one hand, and heavily indebted corporates on the other.
- To address this challenge, Economic Survey 2016 recommended the four R's: Recognition, Recapitalization, Resolution, and Reform.
- Banks must value their assets as far as possible close to true value (recognition); once they do so, their financial health must be strengthened by injection of capital (re-capitalisation);
- The underlying stressed assets in the corporate sector must be sold or rehabilitated (resolution), and future incentives for the Private Sector and corporates must be set-right (reform) to avoid a repetition of the problem.

What's in the news?

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told Lok Sabha that the number of wilful defaulters in public sector banks has increased by more than 60% till March 2019 from 2014-15.
- As per RBI's instructions, wilful defaulters are not sanctioned any additional facilities by banks or financial institutions.
- The Finance Minister added that as a result of the government's '**4Rs**' strategy of Recognition, Resolution, Recapitalisation and Reforms, gross NPAs of PSBs and Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) declined to Rs. 8,06,412 crore and Rs. 9,49,279 crore respectively.

3) NPAs down, credit growth picking up: RBI

What is Capital Adequacy Ratio?

- Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) is the capital needed for a bank measured in terms of the assets or loans disbursed by the banks. A notable feature of CAR is that it measures capital adequacy in terms of riskiness of the assets or loans given.
- An appropriate level of capital adequacy ensures that the bank has sufficient capital to expand its business, while at the same time its net worth is enough to absorb any financial downturns.
- The RBI has prescribed the CAR at 9%.

Why in News?

- The RBI has released its half yearly Financial Stability report.

Highlights of the report

- Gross non-performing assets in the banking system have declined for the second consecutive half year to 9.3% as on March 2019. It was 10.8% in September 2018 and 11.5% in March 2018.
- Following **recapitalisation** (*injection of capital by the government to financially strengthen banks*) in public sector banks, the overall Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) of public sector banks improved from 11.3% in September 2018 to 12.2% in March 2019. However, there was a marginal decline in the CAR of private sector banks.

- Credit growth of public sector banks was at 9.6% while private lenders continue to grow at 21%. Overall credit growth marginally improved to 13.2% in March 2019 from 13.1% in September 2018.

4) RBI allows ARCs to buy financial assets from peers

What are ARCs?

- An Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC) is a specialized financial institution that buys the NPAs or bad assets from banks and financial institutions so that the latter can clean up their balance sheets. This helps banks to concentrate in normal banking activities.
- Banks rather than going after the defaulters by wasting their time and effort, can sell the bad assets to the ARCs at a mutually agreed value.

Why in News?

- The RBI has allowed ARCs to acquire financial assets from other ARCs in a bid to accelerate timely resolution of NPAs.

5) Foreign e-commerce firms warned against steep online discounts

Background

- In December 2018, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) issued stricter guidelines that govern FDI in e-commerce firms.
- From February 1, 2019, vendors that have **any stake** owned by an e-commerce company cannot sell their products on that e-commerce company's portal.
- Any vendor who purchases **25% or more** of its inventory from an e-commerce group company will be considered to be controlled by that e-commerce company, and thereby barred from selling on its portal.
- The e-commerce firm will not be allowed to influence the price of a product sold on its portal by giving incentives to particular vendors.
- All vendors on the e-commerce platform should be provided services in a fair and non-discriminatory manner. Services

include fulfilment, logistics, warehousing, advertisement, payments, and financing among others.

Context for these changes

- E-commerce companies can operate under two different models in India.
- **Marketplace based model** where the e-commerce firm simply acts as a platform that connects buyers and sellers. 100% FDI is allowed in e-commerce companies in this model.
- **Inventory based model** where the inventory of goods sold on the portal is owned or controlled by the e-commerce company and is sold to the consumers directly. FDI is not allowed under this model.
- (**Note:** Only in the trading of locally produced food products, up to 100% FDI is allowed in the inventory model, that, too, with prior government approval)
- Large e-commerce companies such as Amazon and Flipkart, while not owning inventory themselves, have been providing a platform for their group companies such as CloudTail and WS Retail respectively.
- This kind of a relationship with vendors is the primary reason for price unfairness in the e-commerce marketplace. It may seem beneficial for end customers. Yet, it has managed to destroy the competitive ecosystem.

Why in News?

- Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal told foreign e-commerce firms such as Amazon and Flipkart that they must ensure compliance with new foreign investment rules aimed at deterring them from providing steep online discounts.
- He added that while the government was prepared to listen to concerns about its new FDI rules, it was committed to protect small traders.

6) Current account deficit tapers; forex hits record high

What is current account deficit?

- Current account is the systematic record of trade (Export and Import) in goods and services. The current account also includes **net income** (such as interest and dividends) and **transfers** from

abroad (such as foreign aid), which are usually a small fraction of the total.

- A current account deficit means the country is importing more goods and services than it is exporting.

What is meant by "Foreign Exchange Reserve"?

- It indicates the reserves held by RBI in the form of foreign currency assets, gold, SDR and reserve tranche. Components of foreign exchange reserve:

1. **Foreign Currency Assets**- Currencies of foreign countries are held in foreign exchange reserves. Apart from currency it also includes foreign currency deposit held by RBI with foreign central banks and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).
2. **Gold Stock of RBI**- The RBI has gold stock as a backup to issue currency and to meet unexpected Balance of Payments (BOP) problems. (*BOP problem occurs when a nation is unable to pay for essential imports or service its external debt repayments*)
3. **SDR Holdings**-Special Drawing Rights (also called "*paper gold*") is a reserve created by the IMF to help countries that have BOP problems. The member countries have to contribute to this account in proportion of their IMF quota. The SDR basket consists of **five** major currencies of the world - the US dollar, Euro, British Pound, Chinese Renminbi and Yen (Japan).
4. **Reserve Tranche**-The reserve tranche is a portion of the required quota of currency that each IMF member country must provide to the IMF. It can be accessed by the member country at any time for its own purposes without a service fee.

Why in News?

- According to the RBI's latest data, India's current account deficit (CAD) for the January-March period narrowed to 0.7% of the GDP, or \$4.6 billion.
- It was at 1.8%, or \$13 billion during the same period of the previous year.

Forex reserves

- The country's foreign exchange reserves hit a record high of \$426.41 billion in June 2019.

- The previous high was attained on April 13, 2018 when it was \$426.08 billion.

Fiscal deficit

- India also reported a fiscal deficit of Rs 3.66 trillion during the first two months of the current financial year. It is 52% of the full-year target.
- (*Fiscal deficit = Total Expenditure of the government - Total Receipts except borrowings*)
- The government aims to restrict the fiscal deficit to 3.4% of the GDP during the current financial year, the same as in 2018-19.

7) Cut logistics cost to 9% of GDP

Logistics in India

- Logistics refer to the overall process of managing how resources are acquired, stored, and transported to their final destination.
- In India, logistics cost accounts for 14% of GDP, much higher than in the US or Europe, where it is 8-9%. This high logistics costs hurt Indian competitiveness.
- The centre is working on a draft National Logistics Policy aimed at promoting seamless movement of goods across the country and reducing high transaction cost of traders.

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Commerce and Industry & Railways, Piyush Goyal, reviewed the draft National Logistics Policy.
- The draft National Logistics Policy has been prepared in consultation with the Ministries of Railways, Road Transport and Highways, Shipping and Civil Aviation.
- Mr. Goyal directed that all four Ministries must work in coordination with each other to reduce logistics costs in the country to 9% of GDP by 2022 from the current 14%.
- The minister also discussed the ways to reduce the time taken for the transport of farm produce such as foodgrains, fruits and vegetables from the farm to the market.

8) Government revamps WPI revision team

About WPI

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

About PPI

- Producer Price Index measures the average change in the price of goods and services either as they leave the place of production, called output PPI or as they enter the production process, called input PPI.
- PPI estimates the change in average prices that a producer receives.
- WPI does not cover services and whereas PPI includes services.

What is a 'base year'?

- It is the year used as the beginning or the reference year for constructing an index.
- For example, suppose the base year is 2012, and the initial value of an index is 100. If the index is 150 in 2019, it means that the value of the index is 50% higher in 2019 than it was in 2012. It is also called the reference year.

Why in News?

- The government has reconstituted the working group tasked with revising the current wholesale price index (WPI).
- The terms of reference (ToR) of the working group include selecting the most appropriate base year for the preparation of a new official series of index numbers of WPI and producer price index (PPI) in India.
- The working group will also review the commodity basket of the current WPI series and suggest additions or deletions of commodities in the light of structural

changes that occurred in the economy since 2011-12.

9) U.S.-China trade war may reduce global growth rate

What is a Trade War?

- A trade war is an economic conflict in which countries raise tariffs or other trade barriers against each other in response to trade barriers created by the other party.
- A tariff is a tax or duty imposed on the goods imported into a nation.
- In a global economy, a trade war can become very damaging to consumers and businesses of both nations.

When did the Trade war between U.S. and China start?

- It all started in January 2018 when the U.S. raised tariffs on washing machine and solar cell imports targeting China and the subsequent retaliatory tariffs by China on U.S. imports.

Why the U.S. started trade war?

- U.S. justifies duties on Chinese imports by accusing China's unfair trade practices like **devaluing** currency

(deliberate downward adjustment of the value of a country's currency relative to another currency) to push its exports.

- It also accuses that the Chinese government deploys unfair ways to force U.S. firms to share technology with Chinese companies to gain access to China's market.

Why in News?

- According to Fitch Ratings, a credit rating agency, the ongoing U.S.-China trade war escalation could reduce world GDP growth upto 0.4% by 2020, and possibly lead to the lowest growth since 2009.
- The agency also predicted that the global GDP growth would slow to 2.7% this year and 2.4% next year.
- China's growth rate is expected to be reduced by 0.6 percentage points and U.S. growth by 0.4 percentage points in 2020.
- These effects are expected to spill over to other trading partners including India who were not directly targeted by the tariffs.

International Relations

1) Pak. blacklisting absolutely a possibility

What is the Financial Action Task Force?

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an intergovernmental organization that designs and promotes policies and standards to combat financial crime.
- Recommendations created by the FATF target money laundering, terrorist financing, and other threats to the global financial system.
- The FATF was created in 1989 by the G7 countries, and is headquartered in Paris.
- There are 38 members, including India and two regional organisations-European Commission and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Grey list and Black list of FATF

- FATF maintains two different lists of countries: those that have deficiencies in their anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing (AML/CTF) regimes but they commit to an action plan to address these loopholes, and those that do not end up doing enough. The former is commonly known as grey list and latter as blacklist.
- As of now there are only two countries in the blacklist — Iran and North Korea — and seven on the grey list, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria and Yemen.
- Pakistan has been under the FATF's scanner since last June, when it was put on the greylist for terror financing and money laundering risks.

Why in News?

- The FATF President said that Pakistan could be put on the blacklist if it did not follow the 27-point check-list on bringing in stricter laws to curb the access of funds to terror groups inside the country.
- Pakistan has already missed two deadlines and decision in this regard would be taken in October 2019 where Pakistan will be assessed on the actions they have taken.

How will it affect Pakistan?

- While greylist includes countries which are considered as safe havens for

supporting terror funding and money laundering, blacklisting will mean severe strictures on the country's banks and credit rating, as well as access to loans and foreign investments.

2) It's premature to count India out of the RCEP, says Centre

What is RCEP?

- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is an economic grouping of the ASEAN's 10 members, plus India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.
- Once concluded, RCEP will create a zero-customs duty zone that contributes 34% of GDP and 40% of world trade. The region is also home to almost half of the world's population.
- Negotiations have been going on since 2013, with one of the major issue being India's reluctance to open up its markets.

Concerns of India

- Imbalance in the negotiations between goods and services is the main concern for India. Member countries are putting pressure on India to commit to zero tariffs on more than 90 percent of tradable goods with few exemptions.
- However, they remain reluctant to India's proposal to allow free movement of Indian skilled professionals in the RCEP region. They are not ready to go beyond 60% of services to bring under the pact.
- Indian industries are worried that with RCEP allowing a wide range of goods to import at zero tariffs, Chinese goods will flood India. It will cause serious damage to the "Make in India" programme.
- Already India's trade deficit with China is unsustainable at \$63 billion in 2017-18. India has trade deficits with other RCEP nations, too, such as South Korea (\$11.9 billion) and Australia (\$10.2 billion).

Opportunities for India

- Despite these concerns, RCEP will offer India an opportunity to engage with China. It will give India a chance to stall some of its unfair practices such as

giving subsidies unethically and stalling Indian products, such as pharmaceutical, on the pretext of quality control.

- RCEP will give Indian exporters a window to be a part of global value chains.

Why in News?

- Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed has recently said that Malaysia would prefer to conclude the RCEP pact with 13 countries that are willing to join immediately, and allow outliers India, Australia and New Zealand to join the pact at a future date.
- Reacting sharply to Mr. Mahathir's suggestion, India said it would be premature to suggest that India could be cut out of the RCEP, if it doesn't agree to join it by the year-end.
- Officials said India is consistently engaged with RCEP negotiations and Indian delegations have a series of meetings planned in the next few weeks to discuss the way forward in RCEP.
- Other countries in the grouping have also been nudging India to show progress on RCEP negotiations in time for a proposed final declaration in November this year.

INDIA AND RCEP

65% of India's goods trade deficit in 2017-18 was with RCEP nations.
Will the pact balloon India's trade deficit further? (in \$ billion)

	India's export to	India's Import from	Total trade	Deficit
China	13.1	73.3	89.4	63.1
Asean	33.8	47	80.8	13.3
S Korea	4.4	16.4	20.8	11.9
Australia	3.8	13.9	17.8	10.2
Japan	4.7	10.9	15.7	6.2
New Zealand	0.35	0.64	0.99	0.29
RCEP	60.2	165.2	225.4	105

	Export	Import	Total trade	Deficit
India's global trade (\$ bn)	300	461.2	761.4	161.4
Share of trade with RCEP	20.1%	35.8%	29.6%	65.1%

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

3) 54 nations back India for UNSC non-permanent seat

About UNSC

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established in 1946 as one of six principal organs of the UN. It is

generally viewed as the apex of the UN system.

- It is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions.
- It is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

Membership

- UNSC consists of 15 Members and each member has one vote.
- The council has five permanent members (P-5) United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France. These permanent members can **veto** any substantive Security Council resolutions, including those on the admission of new member states.
- The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis. Each year the 193-member UN General Assembly (UNGA) elects five non-permanent members for a two-year term.
- The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Why in News?

- India's candidature for a non-permanent seat at the UNSC for a two-year term has been unanimously endorsed by the 55-member Asia-Pacific grouping at the United Nations, including China and Pakistan.
- Elections for five non-permanent members of the UNSC for the 2021-22 terms will be held around June next year.
- India will need the vote of two-thirds of the 193 UN General Assembly members to win a non-permanent seat on the UNSC.
- India has already held a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for seven terms.

4) India in talks to restore U.S. concession

What is the GSP?

- The Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is one of the oldest trade

preference programmes in the world, under which developed countries offer preferential treatment (such as zero or low duties on imports) to products originating in developing countries.

- India, as a developing country, enjoyed special trade benefits from the GSP programme of U.S. which allowed duty-free entry of Indian goods worth \$5.6 billion into the U.S.

Termination of eligibility

- In June, the U.S. decided to terminate India's eligibility for the GSP based on complaints from US' dairy and medical device industries alleging that India has implemented a wide array of trade barriers that are affecting the US exports in those sectors.

Why in News?

- Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal told that the government was negotiating with the U.S. the issue of withdrawing the GSP status to India.

5) India and U.S. resolve to work through their trade differences

What's in the news?

- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in New Delhi and resolved to work through their differences, including tariffs and counter-tariffs imposed by India and the U.S. on each other, Russian defence deal as well as the U.S.'s concerns with India's data restriction norms.

Highlights of the meeting

CAATSA law

- The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) mandates the U.S. administration to impose sanctions on any country carrying out significant defence and energy trade with sanctioned entities in North Korea, Iran and Russia.
- India and Russia signed a \$5 billion contract for the procurement of S-400 air defense systems during last year's annual bilateral summit. The U.S. expressed deep concern over the deal

and threatened to impose sanctions on India under CAATSA.

- Rejecting calls by the U.S. and the threat of sanctions under its CAATSA law, Mr. Jaishankar said that India will take its decision on the purchase of the Russian S-400 anti-missile system in its own national interest.

Oil import

- Mr. Jaishankar also raised India's concerns over growing U.S.-Iran tensions and their impact on India's energy security.
- U.S. reimposed sanctions on Iran in November 2018 after pulling out of a nuclear accord between Iran and six world powers. To reduce Iran's crude oil export to zero, U.S. asked countries including India to stop imports from Iran.
- While India has zeroed out all oil imports from Iran since May 2019, it has maintained a cordial and close relationship with the Iranian government.

Data restrictions

- Mr. Pompeo and Mr. Jaishankar also discussed about India's plans to restrict cross-border data flows.
- In 2018, the RBI directed all payment system operators including Visa, MasterCard, Google and WhatsApp, to ensure that data related to payment systems operated by them are stored only within India.

Trump terms India's high tariffs on U.S. products unacceptable

- US President Donald Trump has demanded India to withdraw retaliatory tariffs imposed by India this month, calling the duties unacceptable.
- Recently, India imposed tariffs on 29 goods imported from the U.S. in retaliation to Mr.Trump's decision last year to impose higher import tariffs on Indian aluminium and steel.
- The retaliatory tariffs will place a burden of \$220-290 million on the U.S., about the same amount imposed by the U.S. on India in 2018.

ENVIRONMENT

1) Bhubaneswar becomes 0.5 degree C hotter due to urbanisation

What is Urbanisation?

- It is the increase in the proportion of people living in towns and cities.
- The important reason of growing urban areas is migration from the rural areas. Most of the developing countries face rapid urbanisation.
- According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (UN DESA) World Urbanisation Prospects 2018, 55% of the world lives in Urban areas. It was 30% in 1950 and is expected to be 68% by 2050.
- In India about 33% of the population lives in Urban areas.
- Due to migration the urban centers, these centers have a lot of stress to provide amenities like drinking water, housing, health services, transportation etc.

Why in News?

- In the recent studies done by IIT Bhubaneswar (Odisha), they have found direct link between urbanisation and temperature increase.
- It was found that local surface temperatures of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar has increased by as much as 40-50% during the period 2001-2010 and there has been a 0.5 degree C increase in absolute local temperature in large cities in the State during the period 2001 to 2010 **solely due to urbanisation.**
- Growth in urban settlement and changes in cropping pattern (move towards Rabi crops (winter crops) than Kharif crops (monsoon crops) have resulted in an increase in local and regional surface temperatures.
- We must recognise the link between these domains so that we can form better policies related to climate change.

2) ASEAN vows to tackle ocean waste

What is ASEAN?

- Association of SouthEast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional & intergovernmental organisation of 10 countries of southeast asia.
- Its members are Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, Myanmar, Philippines, Brunei and Vietnam. They work towards progress of the southeast asia region.

What is single-use plastics?

- According to UN environment, the Single-use plastics, often also referred to as disposable plastics, are commonly used for plastic packaging and include items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled.
- These include, among other items, grocery bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups and cutlery.
- Since the 1950s, growth in the production of plastic has largely outpaced that of any other material, with a global shift from the production of durable plastics to single-use plastics (including packaging).

Why in News?

- ASEAN have decided to come up with a "Bangkok Declaration" on fighting maritime waste. It is a first of its kind which promises to prevent and significantly reduce marine debris.
- According to Ocean Conservancy Report, just 5 nations - China, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Philippines dump more than 4 million tonnes of plastics in the ocean every year.
- The single use plastics are major chunk of the ocean pollution. But the draft of the agreement doesn't focus on the single use plastics produced from the companies during production.
- They also haven't considered the penalties if companies neglect the declaration. The issue of dumping the waste by developed countries like the US, China, Canada etc in ASEAN countries isn't addressed.

- Hence the environmentalists are asking for the revival of the draft. The ocean plastics are adversely affecting marine animals by entering into food systems. This issue must be addressed as soon as possible by all countries.

3) Ranganathittu bird sanctuary to get a solid makeover

About:

- Ranganathittu Bird sanctuary is 6 islet sanctuary in Mandya district of Karnataka. These islets are in Cauvery river.
- Ranganathittu became a “bird sanctuary” in 1940 owing to the initiatives/interest of noted ornithologist Salim Ali.
- The large cormorant, darter, spoonbill, open-billed stork, painted stork, egret, heron, and the lesser whistling teal are some of the famous birds of this area. Over 200 different migratory birds visit this place every year.
- It is also declared as important bird site by Birdlife International (a Non-profit organisation working for the avian conversation)

Why in News?

- Due to devastating flood in river cauvery in 2018 have destroyed the bird sanctuary by uprooting trees and erosion of soil on the islets.
- The forest department has taken an initiative to restore the sanctuary by expanding the islands through soil stabilization using mud bags, boulders etc.

4) 7-year jail for killing mongoose, birds

Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) 1972

- It is a central law protecting animals and plants from poaching and illegal use. It was amended in 2003 and 2006.
- It is applicable to whole India except Jammu and Kashmir.
- It has six schedules which give varying degrees of protection to the species.
- Species listed in Schedule I (tiger, Elephant, etc) and part II of Schedule II (Langur, wild dog, etc) get absolute

protection — offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.

- Species listed in Schedule III (chital, wild pig, nilgai, etc) and Schedule IV (Indian porcupine, Finches, etc) are also protected, but the penalties are much lower
- Schedule V (Crows, rats, fruit bats etc) includes the animals which may be hunted
- The plants in Schedule VI are prohibited from cultivation and planting (Pitcher Plant, Red Vanda, Blue Vanda, etc)
- This act also provides law for establishment of National Board for Wildlife (chaired by PM) which takes prime decisions on environmental conservation in India.

Manas National Park

- The national park is situated in Assam. It is also a UNESCO Natural World Heritage (in danger) site, a Project Tiger Reserve, an Elephant Reserve and a Biosphere Reserve - a unique distinction.
- This Brahmaputra Valley is semi-evergreen forest terrestrial ecoregion. It is the only known home for the rare and endangered Assam Roofed Turtle, Hispid Hare, Golden Langur and Pygmy Hog.

Why in News?

- A court in Assam has given sentence of 7 years of jail to 3 people who poached a mongoose, a hare, a deer and some birds inside the Manas national park under WPA.

5) Kheoni sanctuary

About:

- Kheoni Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Dewas district of **Madhya Pradesh**.
- It is connected to Ratapani Tiger Reserve through corridors. Its dry deciduous forest consists of teak, tendu and bamboo.
- It has fauna of nilgai, palm civet, striped hyena etc.

Why in News?

- For the first time 5 tigers were spotted in the sanctuary. Being breeding ground of herbivores animals, it provides a suitable environment for tigers.
- The staff is being trained to handle tigers’ protection as well local tiger

committee is formed to pull locals into conservation works.

6) Everest turning into a pile of discarded tents, human waste

About Mt Everest

- Also called Sagarmatha, is located in Nepal and is a part of the Great Himalayan Range.
- It is the tallest mountain on earth from the sea level. Its height from the sea level is 8848 m or 29029 ft.
- The first climbers to mount Mt. Everest are **Tenzing Norgay** (Sherpa) and **Edmund Hillary** (New Zealand mountaineer) made the first official ascent of Everest in 1953,

Who are Sherpas?

- Sherpas are the ethnic people who live in Nepal near the mountains. They being skilled mountaineers, help the climbers to climb Mt Everest. The Sherpa job is to set up camp, manage the porters, ensure that loads are evenly distributed and be responsible for the trekking group's safety.

Why in News?

- The garbage issue at Mt Everest is alarmingly increasing. There is an estimate that more than 700

mountaineers can visit the mountain which brings more garbage.

- Last year the sherpas removed 10000 kg of waste from the mountain. This waste contained oxygen cylinders, tents, human waste, food wrappers etc.
- This waste possesses greater challenge to the drinking water downstream.

7) 'Impressive' tortoise discovered in Arunachal

IMPRESSED tortoise (Manouria Impressa)

- They are small tortoises found in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia etc.
- Their IUCN status is vulnerable.
- Males are smaller than females. They are killed for meat and their golden shells.

Why in the news?

- For the first time impressed tortoise was discovered in Arunachal Pradesh (about 5 of them).
- There are 2 species in Manouria genus - Manouria Emys and Manouria Impressa.
- The Asian forest tortoises (Manouria Emys) which is found only in the northeast of Asia is Asia's largest tortoise.
- These discoveries have added a great value to the Indian chelonian (group which represents reptiles like turtles, terrapins and tortoises) diversity.

Science and Technology

1) Dirty Coal to Carbon Quantum Dot

What is a Carbon Quantum Dot?

- Carbon quantum dots (CQDs), carbon nanodots (CNDs), and carbon dots (CDs) are a class of carbon-based nanomaterials whose dimensions are all < 10 nm.
- CQDs were first discovered by Xu et al. in 2004 accidentally during the purification of single-walled carbon nanotubes.
- This discovery triggered extensive studies to exploit the fluorescence properties of CQDs

Properties of CQDs

- Carbon quantum dots have been extensively investigated especially due to their strong and tunable fluorescence emission properties, which enable their applications in biomedicine, optronics, catalysis, and sensing.
- CQDs possess the attractive properties of high stability, good conductivity, low toxicity, environmental friendliness, simple synthetic routes as well as comparable optical properties to quantum dots
- Carbon quantum dots present several attractive biological, physical, and chemical properties

Importance in Biomedical applications.

- CDs are also excellent in vitro and in vivo probes for bioimaging without any functionalization
- They are also useful in delivery of drugs and genes.
- They have a wide range of utilizations in different fields such as bioimaging, cancer therapy, drug/gene delivery, sensing, biosensing, energy conversion and storage, and electrocatalytic and photocatalytic applications.

Why in news?

- A team of scientists in Assam has developed a chemical process that turns 'dirty' coal into a biomedical Carbon Quantum Dot (CDQ) to help detect cancer cells.

Elaboration

- The Indian scientists from (CSIR-NEIST) have chemically produced carbon quantum dots (CQDs) from cheap, abundant, low-quality and high-sulphur coals.

Cost Significance

- This way of production of CQDs is costs one-twentieth the cost of imported CQDs from Japan and USA.
- Even if they sell it at twice the cost of its production at Rs. 50 per ml, it will still be much cheaper than the imported CQDs with market price of up to Rs. 2,000 per ml
- The CSIR-NEIST technology can produce approximately 1 litre of CQDs per day at a low cost to become an import substitute.

Environmental Significance

- The process involves the use of environment-friendly reagents and less water than methods elsewhere.
- The process uses the abundant low-quality coal which is not desirable for thermal energy generation due to its high polluting potential.

2) Parkinson's Disease

What is Parkinson's disease?

- Parkinson's disease is an illness that affects the part of your brain that controls how you move your body.
- It comes under the group of neurodegenerative diseases and is characterized by the loss of cells of the brain or spinal cord, which over time leads to dysfunction and disability;
- Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease and Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS) are all examples.
- It is estimated to affect up to 10 million people worldwide

Progression

- It can come on so slowly that you don't even notice it at first.
- In the early stages of Parkinson's disease, your face may show little or no expression. Your arms may not swing when you walk. Your speech may become soft or slurred.

- Parkinson's disease symptoms worsen as your condition progresses over time.

Causes

- The cause of Parkinson's disease is unknown, but several factors appear to play a role, including:
 1. Genes
 2. Environmental triggers
 3. The presence of Lewy bodies (Clumps of specific substances within brain cells)
 4. When Alpha-synuclein is found within Lewy bodies

How does it affect the body?

- Rigid muscles which may be mistaken for arthritis
- Slow movements (bradykinesia)
- Tremors
- Impaired posture and balance.
- Loss of automatic movements.
- Speech changes
- Writing changes
- Walking and balance problems

Who are vulnerable?

- The ones who are 60 years or older are more likely to get it.
- Men are more likely to get it than women
- Ongoing exposure to herbicides and pesticides may slightly increase your risk of Parkinson's disease.
- Having a close relative with Parkinson's disease increases the chances that you'll develop the disease

Cure

- There is no cure for Parkinson's, it's all about managing symptoms.

Treatment

- Drugs for Parkinson's can often help with tremors, stiff muscles, and slow movements.
- Physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy.
- Surgery in some cases

Why in news?

- Scientists from UK have found the earliest signs of Parkinson's disease in the brain years before patients show any symptoms, a discovery that could eventually lead to better screening for at-risk people.

Elaboration

- Serotonin function in the brain was an excellent marker for quantifying how advanced Parkinson's disease has become.

- They found that changes in the serotonin system in the brains of Parkinson's sufferers started to malfunction well before other symptoms occurred.
- Therefore, this can be used as a method to detect Parkinson's much earlier than the conventional symptoms appear

Significance

- Brain imaging of the serotonin system could become a valuable tool to detect individuals at risk of Parkinson's diseases, monitor their progression and help with the development of new treatments

3) Extremely water-repelling cotton

Why in news?

- Researchers at IIT Guwahati have developed an extremely water repelling cotton that can be used for immobilising drugs on them.
- This cotton can then be used as bandages for covering as well as treating the wound because of its property of slow & sustained release of the drug.

Process of making the cotton

- Bovine serum albumin (BSA) protein is dissolved in water and when ethanol is added it forms nanoparticles, which get embedded on the cotton.
- By coating the cotton with BSA, the scientists changed the supremely water-absorbing cotton to repel water.
- The drug to be loaded onto the extremely water-repelling cotton is dissolved in ethanol and the cotton is soaked in the drug-containing ethanol.
- When the cotton is removed, the ethanol evaporates leaving behind the drug molecule on the cotton.
- Super-hydrophobicity returns once ethanol evaporates.

Mechanism of action on the wound

- When the cotton containing the drug comes in contact with water, the air that is trapped gets displaced.
- Water slowly starts penetrating the cotton and comes in contact with the drug molecule and dissolves it.
- The dissolved drug diffuses out of the cotton and thus the slow release of drug

over a period of over several days is achieved.

Significance

- This method if incorporated can help in easing the wound healing worries as it makes the job of a doctor easier to treat them.
- Because of the small dosages and sustained release of the drugs over several days, it can be assured that any potential risk of Anti-microbial resistance is reduced.

4) Mauna Kea

What is it?

- Mauna Kea ("White Mountain") is a dormant volcano on the island of Hawaii, the largest and southernmost of the Hawaiian Islands.
- The highest point in the Pacific Basin, and the highest island-mountain in the world, Mauna Kea rises 9,750 meters (32,000 ft) from the ocean floor to an altitude of 4,205 meters (13,796 ft) above sea level.

Relationship with the locals

- Mauna Kea is sacred to the hawaiian people and the protection of sites or natural and cultural importance is under development.
- Ancient Hawaiians living on the slopes of Mauna Kea relied on its extensive forests for food, and quarried the dense volcano-glacial basalts on its flanks for tool production.

Why in news?

- After years of protests and legal battles, USA officials have announced that a massive thirty-metre telescope project which will allow scientists to peer into the most distant reaches of our early universe will be built on Mauna Kea.
- However, many locals and activists oppose the construction of the telescope as it violates their sacred ground.

Why use Mauna Kea for astronomy?

- Mauna Kea is unique as an astronomical observing site.
- The atmosphere above the mountain is extremely dry -- which is important in measuring infrared and sub-millimetre radiation from celestial sources - and

cloud-free, so that the proportion of clear nights is among the highest in the world.

- The exceptional stability of the atmosphere above Mauna Kea permits more detailed studies than are possible elsewhere, while its distance from city lights and a strong island-wide lighting ordinance ensure an extremely dark sky, allowing observation of the faintest galaxies that lie at the very edge of the observable Universe.
- A tropical inversion cloud layer about 600 meters (2,000 ft) thick, well below the summit, isolates the upper atmosphere from the lower moist maritime air and ensures that the summit skies are pure, dry, and free from atmospheric pollutants.
- The summit atmosphere is exceptionally stable, lacking turbulence for some of the world's best astronomical seeing.
- The very dark skies resulting from Mauna Kea's distance from city lights are preserved by legislation that minimizes light pollution from the surrounding area; the darkness level allows the observation of faint astronomical objects

Is this the first telescope in Mauna Kea?

- No. The Mauna Kea Science Reserve already has 13 observation facilities, each funded by as many as 11 countries.
- Scientists say the summit is one of the best places on Earth for astronomy.

What do the opponents say?

- The opponents say the telescope will desecrate sacred land atop Mauna Kea, a place of religious importance to Native Hawaiians.

5) Trichopus zeylanicus

What is it?

- 'Arogyapacha' (Trichopus zeylanicus) found endemic to Agastyar hills of Kerala is used by the local 'kani' tribe as a health food for getting instant stamina, ever green health and vitality.

About the herb

- The plant is known for its traditional use by the Kani tribal community to combat fatigue.
- Studies have also proved its varied spectrum of pharmacological properties such as anti-oxidant, aphrodisiac, anti-

microbial, anti-inflammatory, immunomodulatory, anti-tumour, anti-ulcer, anti-hyperlipidemic, hepatoprotective and anti-diabetic.

- The lack of a reference genome that hindered extensive research on Arogyapacha.

What is a reference genome?

- A reference genome (also known as a reference assembly) is a digital nucleic acid sequence database, assembled by scientists as a representative example of a species' set of genes.

Why in news?

- Scientists from the University of Kerala have decoded the genetic make-up of Arogyapacha (*Trichopus zeylanicus*)

Arogyapacha genome sequencing

- The lack of a reference genome that hindered extensive research on Arogyapacha prompted the researchers to sequence the whole genome.

Significance of the whole genome sequencing

- The genome data will be a valuable resource to expedite research on Arogyapacha, particularly its secondary metabolism, genetic breeding, and comparative studies.
- Besides, the raw sequence data and genome assembly have been deposited in the US-based public database maintained by the National Centre for Biotechnology Information (NCBI)

6) Chikungunya

What is it?

- Chikungunya is a viral disease caused by chikungunya virus (CHIKV) which is transmitted to humans by infected mosquitoes – including *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus*.

Symptoms

Symptoms appear between 4 and 7 days after the patient has been bitten by the infected mosquito.

- High fever (40°C/ 104°F)
- Joint pain (lower back, ankle, knees, wrists or phalanges)
- Joint swelling
- Rash
- Headache
- Muscle pain

- Nausea
- Fatigue

Chikungunya shares some clinical signs with dengue and can be misdiagnosed in areas where dengue is common.

Diagnosis

- Chikungunya can be detected using serological tests.

Treatment

- There is no particular drug to treat Chikungunya.
- Plenty of rest, drinking fluids, taking medicines such as acetaminophen or paracetamol to reduce fever and pain.

Prevention

- There is no vaccine to prevent Chikungunya
- Recovery from an infection will confer life-long immunity.
- Preventing mosquito bites is a way.

Why in news?

- The Institute of Life Sciences (ILS) has successfully developed antibodies against the Chikungunya virus (CHIKV) infection.

Significance

- With no prior antibodies reported against CHIKV so far, this is the attempt at developing and characterizing the novel highly sensitive and specific antibodies against the virus.

7) Blood transfusion

What is blood transfusion?

- A blood transfusion is the transfer of blood or blood products from one person (donor) into another person's bloodstream (recipient).
- This is usually done as a lifesaving manoeuvre to replace blood cells or blood products lost through severe bleeding, during surgery when blood loss occurs or to increase the blood count in an anaemic patient.
- If your body is missing one or more of the components that make up healthy blood in any way, a transfusion can help supply what your body is missing.

Why do people need blood transfusion?

- It is usually done after an illness or an injury.

What happens during transfusion?

- The blood is made up of several different parts including red and white cells, plasma, and platelets.
- “Whole blood” refers to blood that has all of them.
- In some cases, you may need to have a transfusion that uses whole blood, but it’s more likely that you’ll need a specific component.

What are the different types of blood transfusions?

- A red blood cell transfusion may be used if you have anemia or an iron deficiency.
- Platelets are tiny cells in the blood that help you stop bleeding. A platelet transfusion is used if your body doesn’t have enough of them, possibly because of cancer or cancer treatments.
- A plasma transfusion helps replace the proteins in your blood that help it clot. It may be needed after severe bleeding or if you have liver disease.

What are the different blood types?

There are four blood types:

- A,
- B,
- AB, or
- O.

Every person has one of the above four blood types. In addition, each person's blood is either:

Rh-positive, or
Rh-negative.

Universal donors and recipients

- Type O negative blood is safe for just about everyone. People with type O negative blood are referred to as universal donors; and type O negative blood is used for emergencies in which there is no time to test a person's blood type.
- Individuals who have type AB positive blood are referred to as universal recipients. This means that they can receive any type of blood.

Restrictions

- People who have Rh-positive blood can receive Rh-positive or Rh-negative blood.
- If a person has Rh-negative blood, they should only receive Rh-negative blood.
- Rh-negative blood is used for emergencies when there is not time to test a person's Rh type.

Why in news?

- A young woman who had just become a mother died at the Anantapur Government General Hospital (Andhra Pradesh) after being wrongly administered a wrong blood type. The Blood Bank staff administered B+ blood to Bano, who was O+.

ART and CULTURE

1) Ambubachi Mela

What is it?

- Ambubachi Mela is a 4 day fair which marks the annual menstruation of the goddess at Kamakhya temple, centre for Tantra worship.
- Kamakhya, near Guwahati, Assam is one of 51 shakti peethas or seat of Shakti followers, each representing a body part of Sati, Lord Shiva's companion.

Why in the news?

- Recently Assam celebrated ambubachi Mela at kamakhya.

2) Install Bankim Chandra's statue, says Trinamool

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay

- He was an Indian writer, poet and journalist.
- He is widely regarded as a key figure in literary renaissance of Bengal as well as the broader Indian subcontinent.
- Chattopadhyay's earliest publications were in Ishwar Chandra Gupta's weekly newspaper **Sambad Prabhakar**;
- His first fiction to appear in print was **Rajmohan's Wife**. It was written in English and is regarded as the first Indian novel to be written in English.
- After he felt the pulse of nationalism, started writing in Bengali.
- He wrote 13 novels, of them Kapalkundala, Mrinalini, Devi chaudrani, Chandrasekhar are some of them.
- His Anandamath was the story of a group of monks (sanyasis) who fought the British. This was the source for our national song Vande mataram.

- Vande Mataram and Bangadarshan are magazines he published.

Why in news?

- Members of parliament of Trinamool Congress are demanding a statue of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in parliament premises.

3) Buddhist Relic Unearthed in Andhra Pradesh

Amravati school of art

- Ancient Indian architecture contains 3 major schools - Gandhara, Mathura and Amravati schools.
- Amravati school of art has evolved and flourished for nearly six centuries commencing from 200-100 BC.
- It was patronized first by the Satavahanas and later by the Ikshvakus and also by other groups.
- It is completely indigenous art style and have mainly Buddhist artifacts.
- To make artifacts white marble was widely used.
- The sculptures of Amravati art are mainly narrative and are inspired by jataka tales. Human forms are shown in tribhanga style (3 bends).
- Amravati had a huge stupa whose remains are kept in Chennai museum now.

Why in news?

- A limestone pillar of 3rd century, belonging to Amravati school was found in Parkasm district of Andhra Pradesh.
- It is said to be a part of Buddhist monastery during Ikshvaku period.

PIB Analysis

1) Research by Anthropological Survey of India

What is ASI?

- Anthropological Survey of India is the only research organization to pursue anthropological research in a Governmental setup in India.

Objectives:

- To study the tribes and other communities that form the population of India both from the biological and cultural point of view
- To study and preserve the human skeletal remains, both from modern and Archaeological.
- To collect samples of arts and crafts of the tribes of India.
- To function as a training center for advanced students in anthropology and for administration.
- To publish the results of the research.

Research projects

- Were conducted on the impact of Government developmental and welfare programmes on contemporary Indian tribal communities. These are:
 1. Bio-Cultural Diversity, Environment and Sustainable Development,
 2. Man and Environment,
 3. Development and Sustainability,
 4. Community Health, Disease and Genetic Structure of Indian Population
 5. Anthropological Study of De-Notified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Communities

Why in News?

- Union Minister for Culture & Tourism informed Lok Sabha about the research projects conducted by Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) during the last five years on the impact of Government programmes on Indian tribal communities.

2) Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav

About RSM

- Government organizes Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav and various cultural activities every year throughout the country to promote culture.

- And also to protect, preserve & promote various forms of folk art and for creating awareness among people about cultural heritage of our country.

Implementing Agency

- There are seven Zonal Cultural Centers (ZCCs) to promote cultural development programmes for which annual grant-in-aid is given to them by the Government of India.

Why in News?

- This year Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav was organized in Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh (January to March, 2019).

3) Indian Coast Guard (ICG)

Who are they?

- The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) is an armed force that protects India's maritime interests and enforces maritime law, with jurisdiction over the territorial waters of India, including its contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone.
- The Indian Coast Guard was formally established on 18 August 1978 by the Coast Guard Act, 1978 of the Parliament of India as an independent Armed force of India. It operates under the Ministry of Defence.

Roles and Responsibilities of Indian Coast Guard:

- Safety and protection of artificial islands, offshore terminals and other installations
- Protection and assistance to fishermen and mariners at sea
- Preservation and protection of marine ecology and environment including pollution control
- Assistance to the Department of Customs and other authorities in anti-smuggling operations
- Law enforcement in territorial as well as international waters.
- Scientific data collection and support.

Why in News?

- Indian Coast Guard (ICG) recruitment centre will be opened in Uttarakhand

soon. It will be India's fifth ICG recruitment centre.

4) Measures by the government for Make in India' Initiative in Defence Sector.

What is Make in India?

- Make in India is a national program designed to transform India into a global manufacturing hub.
- It contains a lot of proposals designed to urge companies both local and foreign to invest in India and make the country a manufacturing powerhouse.
- The focus of Make in India programme is on creating jobs and skill enhancement in 25 sectors.

In defence Sector

- 'Make in India' programme is being used by the Government for defence procurements by categorizing the capital acquisition proposals under 'Buy (Indian-IDD)' , 'Buy (Indian)' , 'Buy and Make (Indian)' , 'Make' and 'Strategic Partnership Model' categories of Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP)-2016.

Measures taken by government:

- Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) has been revised in 2016 wherein specific provisions have been introduced for stimulating growth of the domestic defence industry.
- A new category of procurement 'Buy {Indian-IDD (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)}' has been introduced in DPP-2016 to promote indigenous design and development of defence equipment.
- Government has notified the 'Strategic Partnership (SP)' Model which envisages establishment of long-term strategic partnerships with Indian entities through a transparent and competitive process, wherein they would tie up with global Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to seek technology transfers.
- The 'Make' Procedure has been simplified with provisions for funding of 90% of development cost by the Government to Indian industry and reserving projects not exceeding development cost of Rs.10 Crore

- Separate procedure for 'Make-II' sub-category has been notified wherein a number of industry friendly provisions has been introduced such as
- Relaxation of eligibility criterion, minimal documentation, provision for considering proposals suggested by industry/individual etc.
- Government has decided to establish two defence industrial corridors to serve as an engine of economic development and growth of defence industrial base in the country.
- An innovation ecosystem for Defence titled Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) has been launched
- The Ministry has instituted a new framework titled 'Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti' which aims to provide boost to the IPR culture in indigenous defence industry.
- The process for export clearance has been streamlined and made transparent & online.

5) Non-Performing Asset (NPA)

What are NPA's?

- A non performing asset (NPA) is a loan or advance for which the principal or interest payment remained overdue for a period of 90 days. Banks are required to classify NPAs further into Substandard, Doubtful and Loss assets.
- **Substandard assets:** Assets which has remained NPA for a period less than or equal to 12 months.
- **Doubtful assets:** An asset would be classified as doubtful if it has remained in the substandard category for a period of 12 months.
- **Loss assets:** As per RBI, "Loss asset is considered uncollectible and of such little value that its continuance as a bankable asset is not warranted, although there may be some salvage or recovery value.

Reasons for Stressed Assets

- As per RBI inputs, the primary reasons for spurt in stressed assets have been observed to be, inter-alia, aggressive lending practices, wilful default / loan frauds / corruption in some cases, and economic slowdown.

- Asset Quality Review (AQR) initiated in 2015 for clean and fully provisioned bank balance-sheets revealed high incidence of NPAs.
- As a result of AQR and subsequent transparent recognition by banks, stressed accounts were reclassified as NPAs and expected losses on stressed loans, not provided for earlier under flexibility given to restructured loans, were provided for.
- Further, all such schemes for restructuring stressed loans were withdrawn.

Steps for NPAs resolutions

- Government has taken comprehensive steps under its 4R's strategy of
 - Recognizing NPAs transparently,
 - Resolving and recovering value from stressed accounts,
 - Recapitalizing PSBs, and
 - Reforms in banks and financial ecosystem to ensure a responsible and clean system.
- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) has been enacted.
 - Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act has been amended to make it more effective.
 - Under the PSB Reforms Agenda,
 1. PSBs have created Stressed Asset Management Verticals to focus attention on recovery,
 2. Segregated monitoring from sanctioning roles in high-value loans, and entrusted monitoring of loan accounts and
 3. Created online end-to-end One-Time Settlement platforms for timely and better realization.

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Finance & Corporate Affairs, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman informed Lok Sabha about the present state of Bank NPA in India.
- As per RBI provisional data on global operations, as on 31.3.2019, the aggregate amount of gross NPAs of PSBs and Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) were Rs. 8,06,412 crore and Rs. 9,49,279 crore respectively.

6) Geet Ramayana

About Geet Ramayana:

- It is a collection of 56 Marathi language songs chronologically describing events from the Indian Hindu epic, the Ramayana.
- It was broadcast by the All India Radio, Pune in 1955–1956.
- Geet Ramayan was acclaimed for its lyrics, music and singing.
- Written by G. D. Madgulkar and the songs composed by Sudhir Phadke, it is considered a "milestone of Marathi light music" and the "most popular" Marathi version of Ramayana.

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting announced that Publications Division will bring out the Hindi adaptation of 'Geet Ramayana' by Shri Datta Prasad Jog.

7) National Policy on Biofuel

What is a Biofuel?

- Any hydrocarbon fuel that is produced from an organic matter (living or once living material) is considered a biofuel.
- These can be used to replace or can be used in addition to diesel, petrol or other fossil fuels for transport, stationary, portable and other applications. Also, they can be used to generate heat and electricity.

Salient Features of National Policy on Biofuels

- **Expansion of Scope of raw material for ethanol production:** Starch containing materials like Corn, Damaged food grains like wheat, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production can be used Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme.
- **Surplus food grains can be used for ethanol production:**
 - It allows the use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.
 - This will benefit Farmers who are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase.

- **Viability gap funding:** The Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries.
- **Categorizations of Biofuels :** Bio-fuels have been categorised into 3 categories to extend appropriate fiscal incentives –
 1. **First Generation (1G):** Bio-Ethanol produced from molasses and biodiesel from non-edible oilseeds (Basic Bio fuels).
 2. **Second Generation (2G):** Bio-ethanol produced from municipal solid waste.
 3. **Third Generation (3G):** Fuels like bio-CNG.

8) Draft National Policy on Domestic Workers

Salient Features of the Draft:

- Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations
- Domestic workers will have the right to register as workers. Such registration will facilitate their access to rights & benefits accruing to them as workers.
- Right to form their own associations, trade unions
- Right to have minimum wages, access to social security, protection from abuse, harassment, violence
- Right to enhance their professional skills
- Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation
- Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals, etc.
- Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of concerned placement agencies.

Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008

- The Central Government has enacted the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 for providing social security to all unorganized workers including domestic workers.
- The Act provides formulation of social security schemes viz. life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits & old age protection by the central Government.
- The state Government are mandated under the act to formulate suitable welfare schemes for unorganized sector workers including domestic workers relating to provident fund, employment

injury benefits housing, education schemes for children, skill up gradation of workers, financial assistance & old age homes.

Why in News?

- A draft National Policy on domestic workers is under consideration of the Central Government.

9) "Healthy States, Progressive India" Report

Purpose of the Report:

- In order to bring about transformational change in population health through a spirit of co-operative and competitive federalism, NITI Aayog has spearheaded the Health Index initiative,
- to measure the annual performance of States and Union Territories (UTs), and
- rank States on the basis of incremental change, while also
- providing an overall status of State's performance and helping to identify specific areas of improvement.

Who developed the report?

- The Index was developed by NITI Aayog with technical assistance from the World Bank through an iterative process in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), States and UTs, domestic and international sector experts and other development partners.

How are they ranked?

- States and UTs have been ranked on a composite Health Index in three categories -Larger States, Smaller States and UTs, to ensure comparison among similar entities.
- The Index is a weighted composite Index based on indicators in three domains:
 1. Health Outcomes;
 2. Governance and Information; and
 3. Key Inputs/Processes

Highlights of the Report:

- Among Larger States: Kerala, Andhra Pradesh & Maharashtra ranked on top in terms of overall performance. Haryana, Rajasthan and Jharkhand are the top three ranking States in terms of annual incremental performance.
- Among Smaller States: Mizoram ranked first followed by Manipur on overall performance, while Tripura followed by

Manipur were the top ranked States in terms of annual incremental performance.

- Among UTs: Chandigarh and Dadra and Nagar Haveli were ranked on top in terms of overall performance (Chandigarh-1 and Dadra and Nagar Haveli-2) as well as annual incremental performance (Dadra and Nagar Haveli-1 and Chandigarh-2).

Why in News?

- NITI Aayog released the second edition of “Healthy States, Progressive India” report.

10) Elephant Bonds

What are Elephant Bonds?

- Elephant Bonds are the 25-year sovereign bonds in which people declaring undisclosed income will be bound to invest 50 per cent.
- The fund, made from these bonds, will be utilized for infrastructure projects.
- It will help State treasury in raising tax revenues, adding beneficiaries in tax base who have not declared their assets previously.

Surjit Bhalla’s Recommendations

- The High Level Advisory Group (HLAG) has made several recommendations for boosting India’s share and importance in global merchandise and services trade.
- It recommended “Elephant Bonds” as a specialized security product providing funds towards Long Term Infrastructure.
- It identifies tax reforms to boost export and investment channels for exports.
- It also made recommendations for reforms in Financial Services Framework for making India a Preferred Destination for financial services.

Why in News?

- A High Level Advisory Group (HLAG) on Trade and Policy, headed by Dr. Surjit S. Bhalla has been constituted by the Department of Commerce.

11) Eligibility for PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme

About PM-Kisan

- PM KISAN is a Central Sector scheme with 100% funding from Government of India

- It has become operational from 1.12.2018.
- Under the scheme an income support of Rs.6000/- per year in three equal instalments will be provided to small and marginal farmer families having combined land holding/ownership of up to 2 hectares.

Eligibility Criteria

- All landholder farmer’s families in the country are eligible for the PM-Kisan Scheme, except those covered under the following exclusion criteria:
 - All Institutional Land holders; and
 - Farmer families in which one or more of its members belong to the following categories :
 1. Former and present holders of constitutional posts, government officials, state or centre.
 2. All superannuated/retired pensioners whose monthly pension is Rs.10,000/-or more (Excluding Multi-Tasking Staff / Class IV/Group D employees)
 3. All Persons who paid Income Tax in last assessment year.
 4. Professionals like Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Chartered Accountants, and Architects registered with Professional bodies and carrying out profession by undertaking practices.

Why in News?

- Union Minister for Agriculture informed Lok Sabha about the eligibility for PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme.

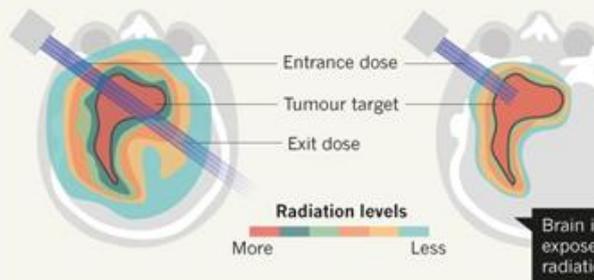
12) Proton Therapy

What is Proton Therapy?

- Proton therapy is a type of Radiation therapy which is also called proton beam therapy.
- It uses protons rather than x-rays to treat cancer. At high energy, protons can destroy cancer cells.
- It can also be combined with x-ray radiation therapy, surgery, chemotherapy, and/or immunotherapy.
- Like x-ray radiation, proton therapy is a type of external-beam radiation therapy.

CLINICAL BENEFITS

Beams of protons can be more tightly focused than beams of X-rays, killing cancer cells while sparing more of the surrounding tissue. This is beneficial for isolated tumours near sensitive parts of the body, such as the spinal cord and brain.



CONVENTIONAL RADIATION THERAPY

Beam passes through the patient, resulting in healthy cells being damaged by the beam.

©nature

PROTON THERAPY

Protons can be tuned to stop at the depth of the tumour and release their energy. Fewer cells are exposed.

Research in India

- In India, Tata Memorial Centre (TMC), a grant-in-aid Institution under Department of Atomic Energy, has initiated collaboration with Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) for research in proton therapy.

Why in News?

- The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare) informed Rajya Sabha about the present status of Research on Proton Therapy in India.

13) Cyber Coordination Centre (CyCord) portal

What is Cyber Crime?

- Cybercrime is any criminal activity that involves a computer, networked device or a network.
- While most cybercrimes are carried out in order to generate profit for cybercriminals, some cybercrimes are carried out against computers or devices directly to damage or disable them, while others use computers or networks to spread malware, illegal information, images or other materials.
- A primary impact from cybercrime is financial, and cybercrime can include many different types of profit-driven criminal activity, including ransomware attacks, email and internet fraud and identity fraud, as well as attempts to

steal financial account, credit card or other payment card information.

- Cybercriminals may target private personal information, as well as corporate data for theft and resale.

Objective of Cyber Coordination Centre (CyCord) portal:

- Primary objective of the Cyber Coordination Centre is to provide a platform to the Law Enforcement Agencies and other stakeholders to collaborate and coordinate their efforts to resolve cybercrime, and for other cyber related issues like sharing case studies/research findings, experience sharing, formulation of research problems, finding solutions to complex cyber issues, etc.

When was it launched?

- Cyber Coordination Centre (CyCord) portal was launched by Prime Minister of India in December, 2018 at DGPs/IGPs Conference.

14) New National Rubber Policy

About Natural Rubber

- Natural Rubber (NR) is a commercial plantation crop from the tree species, *Hevea brasiliensis* is grown in tropical humid climatic conditions.
- Traditional rubber-growing states comprising Kerala and Tamil Nadu account for 81% of production.
- India is currently the sixth largest producer of NR and the 2nd largest consumer of NR globally. Around 40% of the total NR consumption in India is at present met from import of rubber.
- The Rubber Act, 1947 provides for the development of the rubber industry under the control of the Union.
- The Rubber Board, headquartered at Kottayam, Kerala, is under the administration of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

National Rubber Policy

- The Department of Commerce brought out the National Rubber Policy in March 2019.
- The National Rubber Policy includes several provisions to support the Natural Rubber (NR) production sector and the entire rubber industry value chain.

- The Policy covers new planting and replanting of rubber, support for growers, processing and marketing of natural rubber, labour shortage, grower forums, external trade, Centre-State integrated strategies, research, training, rubber product manufacturing and export, climate change concerns and carbon market.

Why in News?

- The Minister of Commerce and Industry informed Lok Sabha about the New National Rubber Policy.

15) Revision of the of Wholesale Price Index

What is WPI?

- A wholesale price index (WPI) is an index that measures and tracks the changes in the price of goods in the stages before the retail level – that is, goods that are sold in bulk and traded between entities or businesses instead of consumers.

Need of revision of WPI:

- The current series of Wholesale Price Index (WPI) with 2011-12 as base year was introduced in May 2017. Since 2011-12, significant structural changes have taken place in the economy. Accordingly, the Government has constituted the Working Group for the revision of current series of Wholesale Price Index (Base 2011-12) under the Chairmanship of Dr. Ramesh Chand, Member, NitiAayog.

Nodal implementing Agency:

- The Office of Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade will be the nodal office for the Working Group and will process the report / recommendation of the Group for further necessary action.

The Terms of Reference of the Working Group are:

- To select the most appropriate Base Year for the preparation of a new official series of Index Numbers of WPI and Producer Price Index (PPI) in India.
- To review commodity basket of the current series of WPI.

- To review the existing system of price collection in particular for manufacturing sector.

Why in News?

- The Government of India has decided to constitute a Working Group for the revision of the current series of Wholesale Price Index (Base 2011-12).

16) Draft National Logistics Policy

What is the main Aim?

- The main Aim is to reduce the logistics cost from the present 14% of GDP to less than 10% by 2022.

Nodal Agency:

- It has been prepared by the Department of Logistics, Ministry of Commerce and Industry in consultation with the Ministries of Railways, Road Transport and Highways, Shipping and Civil Aviation.

What is the need?

- India's logistics sector is highly defragmented and complex with involvement of more than 20 government agencies, 40 PGAs, 37 export promotion councils, 200 shipping agencies and 36 logistic services.
- The Indian logistics sector provides livelihood to more than 22 million people and improving the sector will facilitate 10 % decrease in indirect logistics cost leading to the growth of 5-8% in exports.
- The worth of Indian logistics market would be around USD 215 billion in next two years compared to about USD 160 billion currently.

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Commerce and Industry reviewed the draft National Logistics Policy and the proposed action plan for implementation of the policy.

17) World Bank's Program to Eliminate TB

About Tuberculosis

- TB is an infectious disease caused by the bacillus Mycobacterium tuberculosis. It typically affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can also affect other sites.

- The disease is spread when people who are sick with pulmonary TB expel bacteria into the air, for example by coughing.
- The probability of developing TB disease is much higher among people infected with HIV, and also higher among people affected by risk factors such as under-nutrition, diabetes, smoking and alcohol consumption.

Features of Agreement:

- The World Bank supported program will support the government's National Strategic Plan to end TB in India by 2025. It will cover 9 States of India.
- The \$ 400 Million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) has a 19-year maturity which includes a 5-year grace period.

Strategy of the Program:

- To provide financial incentives to private sector care providers for reporting cases of TB and ensuring that their patients complete the treatment regimen.
- To provide Direct Benefit Transfers to patients for acquiring the critical nutrition needed during treatment.
- To strengthen the detection, treatment and monitoring of Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis and track progress in the detection of additional drug resistance.

Why in News?

- India has signed a loan agreement worth 400 million dollar with the World Bank to help treat and eliminate Tuberculosis from the country.

18) M-15

What is M-15?

- M-15 is a blend of 15 % methanol and 85 % Gasoline.

About:

- In May 2018, the Government of India notified mass emission standards for flex-fuel Methanol M15 or M100 and Methanol MD 95 vehicles.
- Use of blended fuel M-15 in BS-IV cars can result in lowering down greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by about 5 to 10 % thereby improving air quality.
- M-15 fuel blending is available as an option and there is no proposal to make such blending mandatory in the near future.

Why in News?

- The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways informed Lok Sabha about the use of Methanol to reduce GreenHouse Emissions.

Blended Power

Niti Aayog to move a proposal for **15% petrol blending with methanol**

Diesel will also be blended if sufficient methanol available

METHANOL WILL COST LESS THAN ₹20 A LITRE

METHANOL WILL BE PRODUCED FROM COAL

Petrol blending will lower cost by **at least 10%**

Minor tweak in engines needed to run on blended **M-15 fuel**

It will reduce fuel import bill by **\$100 billion by 2030**

News in-depth

News on AIR

1) UAE launches anti-money laundering platform

- The UAE's **Financial Intelligence Unit** launched the new anti-money laundering platform 'goAML', which has been open for registration since May.
- All financial entities and Designated Non-Financial Businesses or Professions have to register on this system.
- More than 900 entities including, banks, insurance companies and money exchange centres, are required to register on the platform and 50 percent of them have already registered.
- The platform will help the FIU prevent money laundering, financing of terrorism and other illicit financial activities.

What are Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs)?

- Worldwide, Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) play a leading role in the prevention of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing (AML/CTF) activities.
- They are responsible for receiving, processing, and analyzing reports made by financial institutions or other entities in accordance with the requirements of domestic AML/CTF laws and regulations.

Why in News?

- The UAE has become the first country in the Gulf to launch a new reporting platform developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to curb organized crimes.

2) Council of Europe restores Russia's voting rights

About Council of Europe

- The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organization whose aim is to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. It includes 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union.

Background:

- Russia was stripped of its voting rights after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russia responded by boycotting the assembly. Since 2017, the country also refused to pay its share of 33 million Euro to the human rights watchdog.
- It had threatened to quit the body altogether if it is not allowed to take part in the upcoming election.
- Despite strong opposition from Ukraine, the assembly voted 118 in favour and 62 against, with 10 abstentions. The move paves the way for Russia to participate in the election of a new secretary general for the pan-European rights body.

Why in News?

- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has voted in favour of restoring Russia's voting rights, five years after they were revoked over its illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

3) One Nation One Ration Card

Why One Nation One Ration Card?

- The national portability of Ration cards will ensure all beneficiaries especially the migrants in getting access to Public Distribution System (PDS) across the nation from any PDS shop of their own choice.

- This will provide freedom to the beneficiaries as they will not be tied to any one PDS shop and reduce their dependence on shop owners and curtail instances of corruption.

Current status:

- **Integrated Management of PDS (IMPDS)** is a system that is already operational in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana and Tripura wherein a beneficiary can avail his share of food grain from any district in the State.
- The availability of Point of Sale (PoS) machines needs to be ensured at all the PDS shops to implement the scheme. Around 78% of Fair Price Shops have so far been automated by installing electronic PoS devices.
- In the recent meeting, other states also assured that IMPDS will be implemented at the earliest. There will also be creation of a Central Repository of all Ration Cards to help national level deduplication.

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution announced that the government is moving towards One Nation One Ration Card.

4) Go Tribal Campaign

- The collaboration aims to create awareness and promote tribal arts and crafts as well as aid in socio-economic welfare of over 700 Indian tribes. The campaign was launched by Tribal Affairs Ministry and TRIFED in association with Amazon Global.
- The event also saw the global Launch of “Tribes India” through Amazon Global Selling, under which Tribes India and

Amazon Global Marketing will launch Tribes India products globally through Amazon.com.

What is TRIFED?

- TRIFED is an organization under Ministry of Tribal Affairs and is engaged in marketing development of tribal products including tribal art and craft under the brand name “**TRIBES INDIA**”.

Why in News?

- Minister of State for Tribal Affairs, launched the “Go Tribal Campaign” by Tribes India at an event in New Delhi.

5) Ladakh Singhey Khababs Sindhu Festivals

- Ladakh Singhey Khababs Sindhu Festivals is a tourist's promotional festival in Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir.



- It is celebrated on the bank of Indus River at Leh. The festival presents the Indus River as a symbol of multi-dimensional cultural identity of India that got its name from the Indus River.
- It is celebrated every year since 1997 for 3 days in the month of June.
- Folk songs and dances are performed and local handicrafts and ethnic foods are being exhibited before the tourists during the festival.

Hindu Editorials

1) On Why south Asia must Cooperate

Context:

- When the US and China play their card in the South Asian region, a shared vision is essential for India and South Asian Region to exercise its interests, And, Sustainable Development Goals targets can be a focus-point to achieve the integration of the nations of the region.
- While the USA is withdrawing from South Asian arena, it is important for India to leverage its proximity to the countries in the region to push its Act East policy forward.
- Significance:
- South Asia covers only about 3.5% of the world's land surface area but hosts a fourth of its population, making it a region of significant importance for international development.
- In spite of the geographic proximity countries in this region enjoy and their common socio-cultural bonds, this is one of the world's least integrated regions.
- Intra-regional trade is a meagre 5% of the total trade these countries do globally, while intra-regional investment is less than 1% of the region's overall global investment. South Asia's average GDP per capita is only about 9.64% of the global average. Accounting for more than 30% of the world's poor, the region faces myriad economic and environmental challenges.

Ideas discussed.

- Common Challenges and Cooperation among South Asian Nations.
- Varying performance on Achieving Sustainable Development Goals by the countries.
- Bringing everyone together on achieving SDGs.

1) Common Challenges and cooperation

- While the countries share a host of common development challenges, economic cooperation remains less than adequate. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the

Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Initiative have been undertaken to bring the countries closer together, economically and socially, and there is scope for more.

- A shared vision of attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides enormous opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and convergence (3C) of these nations..

BIMSTEC?

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is an international organisation of seven nations of South Asia and SouthEast Asia.
- The BIMSTEC member states— Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand , Nepal and Bhutan —are among the countries dependent on the Bay of Bengal.

BBIN?

- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative is a sub-regional architecture of countries in Eastern South Asia, a subregion of South Asia.
- It meets through official representation of member states to formulate, implement and review quadrilateral agreements across areas such as water resources management, connectivity of power, transport, and infrastructure
- South Asian countries could benefit a lot by adopting a regional framework of cooperation that can support, strengthen and stimulate the SDGs. The SDGs highlight not only the importance of regional approach towards achieving the goals but also the regional synergy and resulting positive value additions towards achieving the SDG 2030 Agenda.

2)Varying performance on Achieving Sustainable Development Goals by the countries and opportunity for cooperation.

- In the SDG Index 2018, which is an assessment of countries' progress, among 156 countries only two South

Asian countries, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, are in the top 100. India is ranked 112th.

- Most South Asian countries have made good progress in ending extreme poverty, but they face persistent challenges to goals related to industry, innovation and infrastructure, zero hunger, gender equality, education, sustainable cities and communities and decent work and economic growth.
- The country-level data shows that India is performing well in Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production), Goal 13 (climate action) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) while doing poorly in goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure).
- Like India, Bangladesh is doing well in Goals 1, 6, 12 and 13 but poorly in Goals 2 and 9, and lagging behind in Goal 7 (affordable and clean energy). While doing well in Goals 1 and 12, Pakistan needs improvement in Goals 2, 4, 5 and 9, similar to India and Bangladesh. It also needs improved performance with respect to Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth).
- Thus, there are a lot of similarities among these three big economies of South Asia with respect to achieving some specific SDGs as well as exhibiting poor performance in some common goals. Hence, a regional strategic approach to tackle these common development challenges can bring enormous benefits to South Asia.

3) Initiatives taken on this regard.

- In a study titled 'SDGs Needs Assessment and Financing Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective', Bangladesh has undertaken exemplary initiatives for analysing its available resources and additional funding requirements for SDG implementation, suggesting that the country requires an additional \$928 billion to fully implement the SDGs.
- India has formulated some pragmatic plans and initiatives to improve food and nutrition security from which many of the neighbouring countries can benefit. To address institutional and

infrastructural deficits, South Asian countries need deeper regional cooperation.

- On financing the SDGs in South Asia, countries can work towards increasing the flow of intra-regional FDI. The private sector too can play a vital role in resource mobilisation.

4) Bringing everyone together on SDG.

- While SAARC remaining passive and remains unsuccessful in promoting cooperation, common understanding on regional integration and cooperation in achieving the SDGs can unleash a powerful integrating force that can help bring South Asia together. Thus, the initiative will contribute to eradicating poverty.
- In sum, regional cooperation is mandatory to bring in prosperity in the region while challenging the common problem together.

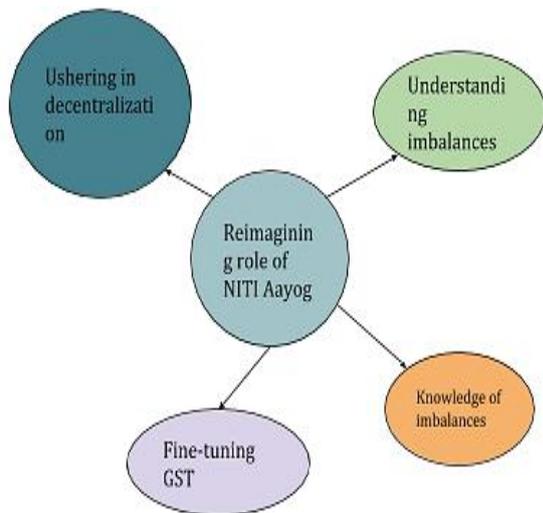
2) Reimagining the NITI Aayog.

Context:

- The idea of new India and its aspirations are on the discussion table of policy makers.
- In this scenario, it is important to revisit India's Fiscal federalism and consider redesigning it.
- Here, Niti Aayog lacks some powers which if given can contribute much to the building of a new India in terms of new fiscal federal structure.

Significance:

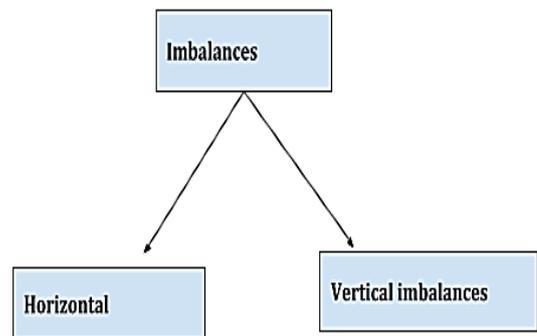
- The makers of the constitution called India as a union of states for upholding the unity and integrity of the nation. The institution of Niti Aayog acts as an agent which boosts India's fiscal federalism.
- Here, reimagining the role of NITI Aayog for it to act as a transforming agent that **contributes to strengthening of "Fiscal Federalism"** as well as evening the growth of states of India, the author has suggested four ideas and put those as **the four pillars** for doing the same. The following picture depicts the same.



- Reimagining the role of NITI Aayog. (four pillars to achieve the goal of healthy fiscal federalism)
- Knowledge of Imbalances
- Understanding imbalances
- Ushering in decentralization
- Fine-tuning the GST.

3) Knowledge of Imbalances

- We should know there is an imbalance in the fiscal distribution.
- In general, federations face vertical and horizontal imbalances. A vertical imbalance arises because the tax systems are designed in a manner that earns much greater tax revenues to the Central government when compared to the State or provincial governments; the Constitution mandates relatively greater responsibilities to the State governments.



Differing levels of attainment by the States due to differential growth rates and their developmental status in terms of the state of social or infrastructure capital.

Tax system yields larger revenue to Central government compared to states

- Traditionally, Finance Commissions have dealt with these imbalances in a stellar manner, and they should continue to be the first pillar of the new fiscal federal structure.

2) Understanding the imbalances

- There are two types of imbalances
- Type1- the adequate provision of basic public goods and services imbalances.
- Type2- Growth accelerating infrastructure or the transformational capital deficits imbalances. It is historically conditioned or path dependent.
- Hence, removing these two imbalances clearly comprises two distinct policy goals and calls for following the Tinbergen assignment principle.
- **Tinbergen's rule-** This refers to a rule of thumb which states that policymakers trying to achieve multiple economic targets need to have control over at least one policy tool for each policy target. This is because the achievement of certain economic targets precludes the achievement of others]

- Thus, here, Niti Aayog 2.0 can play a very great role in dealing with the type 2 imbalances.
- However, now, Niti Aayog is toothless to take up the transformational intervention, and so, it must be given some powers that Planning commission had, even if not on the same lines but for exercising some discretion on how to allocate funds.
- NITI Aayog 2.0 should receive significant resources (say 1% to 2% of the GDP) to promote accelerated growth in States that are lagging, and overcome their historically conditioned infrastructure deficit, thus reducing the developmental imbalance.

3) Ushering in decentralization.

- Another step towards reforming NITI Aayog is ushering in decentralization as intra-State regional imbalances are likely to be of even more than inter-State ones.
- Thus, decentralisation, in letter and spirit, has to be the third pillar of the new fiscal federal architecture.
- Action required is the amendment of the articles contributed by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments.
- Thus, the articles 266/268/243H/243X of our Constitution will need to be amended to ensure that relevant funds directly flow into the consolidated fund of the third tier(panchayats and municipalities).

4) Fine-tuning the GST

- It is central to the idea of reinvigorating the fiscal federal structure of India and that is possible with “flawless” or model GST.
- Thus, India will be able to truly actualise the “grand bargain” and see the GST as integrating factor that holds the four pillars together by creating the new fiscal federal architecture and strengthening India’s cooperative federalism.
- For instance, we need to quickly achieve the goal of a single rate GST with suitable surcharges on “sin goods,” zero rating of exports and reforming the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) and the e-way bill.

- The GST Council should adopt transparency in its working, and create its own secretariat with independent experts also as its staff. This will enable it to undertake further reforms in an informed and transparent manner.
- [**Sin goods?** A **sin** tax is an excise or sales tax specifically levied on certain **goods** deemed harmful to society and individuals, for example alcohol and tobacco, candies, drugs, soft drinks, fast foods, coffee, sugar, gambling and pornography]
- Altogether, the ideas involved in the four pillars for establishing new fiscal federal structure in India seemed to be great for reforming the role of Niti Aayog to play a transformative function in India.

3) Right to a minimally decent life

Context:

- The aftermath of the horrific tragedy in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, where the systemic failure of health care has killed over a hundred children. Here, the failure to provide basic rights to the citizens is called into question.

Significance:

- Here, like the constitutional principle of a basic structure, it is time to consider and analyse an equally best doctrine for conforming the provisions of basic rights implied in our law of the land.
- These basic rights must be viewed primarily as positive rights not against interference from the state (negative rights) but as the need of providing it in its terms.
- Also, just as individuals are punished for legal violations, the government of the day must also be punished for the violation of these basic rights.
- Defaulting governments must be held legally accountable. The systematic violation of basic rights must be treated on a par with the breakdown of constitutional machinery.

Ideas discussed

- A solid Necessity- When basic needs are not met, we feel vulnerable and helpless.
- Security and Subsistence- a right is something that is owed to us; it is not a

favour. Thus, its providing security for maintaining Subsistence.

- Vulnerability and Accountability-The right to make one's vulnerability public, be informed about the acts of commission and omission of the government regarding anything that adversely affects the satisfaction of basic needs, to critically examine them and to hold state officials publicly accountable.
- Further, we can explore each idea

1) A solid Necessity.

- What are basic rights? How are they different from other fundamental rights?
- Basic rights flow from basic needs such as physical security or subsistence. Needs are different from wants. You may want a chocolate every morning but don't need it. Needs depend on the way human bodies are constituted.
- They are a solid necessity; one cannot get on without them. And, there is no substitute for it at all.
- The state does everything at its disposal to satisfy all basic needs of its citizens, particularly of those who cannot manage to get the basics for themselves. We feel aggrieved when the state fails to take this responsibility.

2) Security and Subsistence.

- Basic rights are claims on the state to provide us with goods and services that satisfy our basic needs. When something is identified as a basic right, it puts the state under a duty to enable its exercise.
- Then, the state becomes its guarantor. For instance, the right to physical security, the first basic right, is socially guaranteed when the state provides its people a well-trained, professional police force.
- These rights are basic also because many intrinsically valuable rights can be enjoyed only once these rights are secured. When society and its government evade on its commitment to do so, we hold them accountable.
- And, the right to minimum economic security and subsistence includes clean air, uncontaminated water, nutritious food, clothing and shelter.

3) Vulnerability, and accountability.

- The right to make one's vulnerability public, be informed about the acts of

commission and omission of the government regarding anything that adversely affects the satisfaction of basic needs, and to critically examine them and to hold state officials publicly accountable is a basic right on a par with the right to physical security and subsistence. Hence, vulnerability

- And, the rights are inevitably linked to each other. And, our life must not fall below a certain level of existence.
- Here, these three basic rights can be summed up in a single phrase, the right to a minimally decent life. This is a threshold right. A society may soar, strive for great collective achievement.
- Thus, the government routinely abdicate responsibility for the suffering they directly or indirectly cause. This is why we must ask why governments are not immediately and severely penalised when they undermine the exercise of these basic rights.
- Altogether, enjoyment of basic rights should be made possible to citizens by the government involved and failing to do so by them should be made a punishment under the law.

4) On state of Indian prison

Context:

- The Prison Statistics India 2016, published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) is different from its earlier versions on account of its omission of certain key demographic data.
- Nevertheless, though there are inadequacies, the report raises a number of alerts those pointing towards issues in India's prison.
- [National Crimes Records Bureau-NCRB was set-up in 1986 to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators, based on the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Task force (1985)]

Significance:

- The report claims that at the end of 2016, there were 4,33,033 people in prison; of them 68% were undertrials, or people

who have yet to be found guilty of the crimes they are accused of.

- India's under-trial population remains among the highest in the world and more than half of all undertrials were detained for less than six months in 2016.
- This suggests that the high proportion of undertrials in the overall prison population may be the result of unnecessary arrests and ineffective legal aid during remand hearings.

Concerns discussed

- No demographic details
- Data on prisoner release
- Mental health concerns

1) No demographic details

- The NCRB's failure to include demographic details of religion and the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe status of prisoners, which are crucial to understanding India's prison population is a concern as it is instrumental in revealing the problematic overrepresentation of Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis among under-trials in prisons.
- Another concern is instrumental in revealing the problematic overrepresentation of Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis among under-trials in prisons.
- Administrative, or 'preventive', detention is used by authorities in J&K and other States to unfairly detained persons without charge or trial and circumvents regular criminal justice procedures.

2) Data on prisoner release

- The report has the number of prisoners eligible to be released and actually released, under Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which allows under trials to be released on a personal bond if they have undergone half of the maximum term of imprisonment they would have faced if convicted.
- For instance, In 2016, out of 1,557 under trials found eligible for release under Section 436A, only 929 were released.
- The 2016 prison statistics do not mention the number of prison visits by official and non-official visitors which typically include district magistrates and judges, social workers and researchers.

- Here, the number, while not as disaggregated as it should be, must nevertheless be used to provide some information on independent monitoring of prisons.
- And, it is essential to uncover torture and other forms of ill-treatment, increase transparency and balance the power asymmetry in prisons.

3) Mental health concerns

- Again, the relevance of prison visits is underlined by the number of "unnatural" deaths in prisons, which doubled between 2015 and 2016, from 115 to 231. The rate of suicide among prisoners also increased by 28%, from 77 suicides in 2015 to 102 in 2016.
- This indicates indicator perhaps of the magnitude of mental health concerns within prisons.
- In sum, the information in the report can help to address the problems in jails up to an extent.
- However, the NCRB's failure to bring in a comprehensive report encompassing all the adequate records on Indian criminal system and status of prison is against the right to know and exercising of democratic dissent.
- Altogether, there should be an all-encompassing system in place to manage the criminal justice system and in particular, in managing prisons in India.

5) On Taking Firm steps to emancipation

Context:

- Since Independence Muslims have been treated as a vote bank by political parties and so-called secular parties; the community has only been used by the political class with very little having been done for them.

Significance:

- Now, the number of seats won by Muslims in the election could force the community to ponder over their welfare, how to remedy the situation and improve their lives as they remain backward despite all the welfare initiatives of the government involved.

- Thus, in order to change this, the community will have to take three radical steps.
- Demanding a uniform civil code for all Indian religious communities.
- To abolish the burqa as it constricts the freedom of women.
- To abolish the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), a non-statutory body set up in 1973 in the time of Indira Gandhi, whose eye was on the Muslim vote bank.

1) Demanding a uniform civil code

- It means an abolition of the outdated feudal Sharia law. The law is a reflection of social conditions at a particular historical stage of a society's development. So, as society changes, the law too must change.
- How can a medieval law be applicable in the 21st century? The abolition of Sharia will not mean the abolition of Islam. Almost the entire old non-statutory Hindu law was abolished by the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 — but Hinduism has not been abolished by that.
- Sharia treats women as inferior. It permits talaq (verbal) only to Muslim men, not women, and is thus a Damocles sword over the latter. [Democles sword- an allusion to the imminent and ever-present peril faced by those in positions of power or anybody in general]

2) to abolish burqa

- It must be women's choice and not to be imposed up on her.

3) To abolish the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB).

- The AIMPLB comprises reactionary clerics and other people most of whom have reactionary mindsets whose aim is to protect and continue the outdated feudal reactionary Sharia law, which in fact harms Muslims.
- In total, there should a proper policy arrangement in place to reform the way average Muslim majority live their lives.

6) On India cannot afford to fall out of free trade agreement negotiations

Context:

- ASEAN, which first promoted the RCEP idea in 2012, is putting pressure on all stakeholders to complete the last-mile negotiations.
- The ASEAN summit, which ended in Bangkok on Sunday, agreed to send a three-member delegation to New Delhi to take forward the talks.
- RCEP includes ASEAN's FTA partners — India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand — and the FTA would encompass 40% of all global trade among economies that make up a third of global GDP.
- India has been keen to join. But six years into negotiations, its concerns remain: opening its markets for cheaper goods from countries like China and South Korea; and ensuring that RCEP countries open their markets for Indian manpower (services).

India's Interest, concerns and significance

Interest-

- Joining RCEP

Concerns

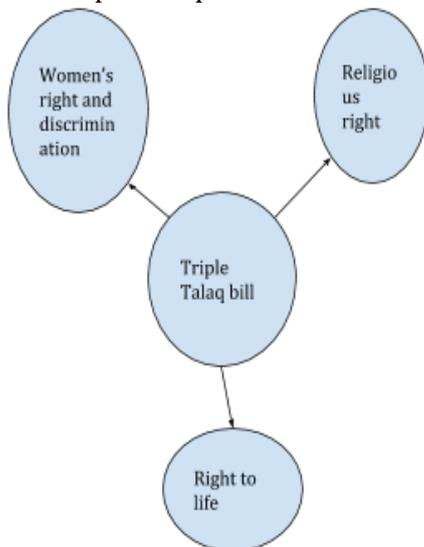
- India has a trade deficit with as many as 11 of the RCEP countries, and it is the only one among them that isn't negotiating a bilateral or multilateral free trade agreement with China at present
- Giving up the chance to join RCEP would mean India would not just miss out on regional trade, but also lose the ability to frame the rules as well as investment standards for the grouping.
- To put things into perspective, at a time of global uncertainties and challenges to multilateralism and the international economic order, a negative message on RCEP would undermine India's plans for economic growth. Thus, joining RCEP is a pivotal aim in this regard.

Big picture

1) On Triple Talaq bill, 2019

Context:

- The government introduced a fresh triple talaq bill in the Loksabha amid vehement protests by opposition members who claimed that it was violative of the constitution.
- The Muslim women(protection of Rights on Marriage) bill , 2019 became the first legislation to be tabled in parliament by the Narendra Modi dispensation in its second term, with Law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad asserting the legislation was a must for gender equality and justice.
- The bill was introduced following a division of votes, with 186 members supporting and 74 opposing it.
- The bill was introduced in the lower house to replace an ordinance issued before by the NDA government.
- Now, in January 2019 as the contentious bill remained pending in Rajya Sabha, though it was passed by the Loksabha. The bill proposes to make the practice of instant triple talaq banned.



Dimensions of Triple Talaq bill

When the Supreme Court has already declared the triple talaq or Talaq-e-biddat as unconstitutional as it challenges Right to equality, is it necessary to have a law on the same?

- It is necessary to get the people involved into the book of the law as it deters the wrong doers.
- Here, the apex court gave the effect to uphold the right to equality by declaring it null and void. And, the bill, if made law, will take care of the enforcement part of it.

Will the law empower Muslim women?

- The law is only dealing with practicing of Triple-Talaq and not addressing other aspects of Muslim women and their rights.
- However, it is the first step towards achieving the goal of providing right to equality to all citizens regardless of gender, and religion rights.

Did the Muslim community like it?

- They have taken ban of Supreme court for granted as the Muslim community and Maulanas haven't declared the law void, and, instead, they encourage and practice it normally in their community.
- So, the current regime's policy initiative on Triple Talaq is in the right direction.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Ordinance, 2019 bill

- The bill makes instant triple talaq (talaq-e-biddah) in any form — spoken, in writing or by electronic means such as email, SMS and WhatsApp illegal and void, with up to three years in jail for the husband.
- As the triple talaq ordinance of 2018 was to expire on 22nd January 2019 and also because the triple talaq bill of 2018 could not be passed in the parliament session, the government has re-promulgated the ordinance on 10th January 2019.
- On 12th January 2019, the president of the India Ram Nath Kovind approved the ordinance of 2019.
- Now, it is on the table of parliament.

Does the bill violate any provision?

- No, it does not violate any constitutional rights as claimed by the community.
- Here, politics and religion should be kept apart, and this issue should be viewed as only on humanitarian basis. Also, right to

equality is the prime concern here.

2) On tackling Ocean pollution

Context:

- The Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Region was adopted by the leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which includes four of the world's top polluters.
- ASEAN members Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand, along with the worst offender China, throw the most plastic waste into oceans, according to a 2015 report co-authored by environmental campaigner Ocean Conservancy.
- The declaration was commended by environmentalists as a good first step for the region, though doubts remained that implementation will be a challenge as the group has a code of non-interference that would leave necessary policymaking in the hands of individual member countries.
- So, neither the declaration nor its accompanying Framework of Action specifically mention bans on single-use plastic or imports of foreign waste, as environmental groups previously demanded ahead of the summit.
- The declaration came ahead of the G20 summit in Japan, which assembles 20 major economies and also aim to tackle marine plastic pollution. Here, this is an analysis of how to tackle ocean pollution.
- [ASEAN: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten countries in Southeast Asia, which promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural integration among its members and other countries in Asia. ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original member countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined on 8 January 1984, Vietnam on 28 July 1995, Laos and

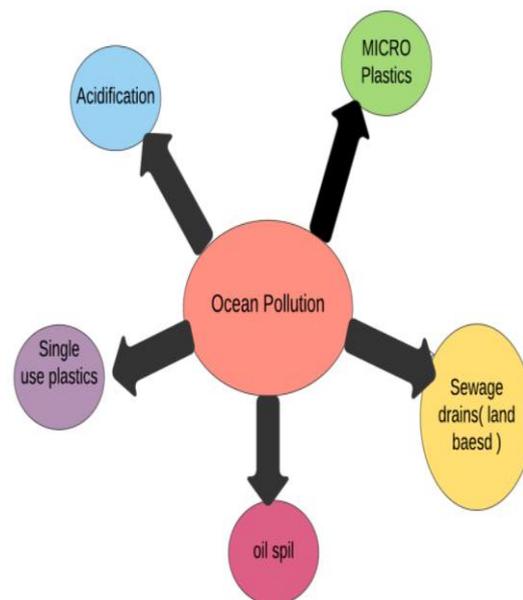
Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999.]

Significance:

How big a problem is ocean pollution?

- The concern is huge as 4-10 million tonnes of plastic goes into the sea every year on an average
- 80 percent of land waste goes into the sea in the form of plastic waste.
- So, it is a huge task for any individual country to check this menace of plastic pollution.
- In the case of India, it generates 62 million tonnes of waste every year. Of which the 10-12 Percent are plastic waste. And, single use plastics are part of it and the rag-pickers have no incentives collecting these single use plastics. Thus, pollution from plastic is a big issue as far as the ocean pollution is concerned.

Causes of ocean pollution



Concerns discussed

- The plastics which are already got into Ocean should be collected which is an expensive task and not every country can afford to do so. Here, the cooperation help in tackling it better. Thus, ASEAN block and the declaration can do something to deal with the problem.
- But, there is a need to review the whole production process from mining through the entire value chain so that we can reduce our waste generation in all processes involved. It's not only about

recycling but reducing and reusing the things in the entire value chain. Plastics production itself is going to double. Thus, all of that are going to be in the ocean.

- Implementation is a concern too.

Conventions related to ocean

- [**Marpol convention**-The MARPOL Convention is the main international convention covering prevention of pollution of the marine environment by ships from operational or accidental causes. It is a combination of two treaties adopted in 1973 and 1978 respectively and updated by amendments through the years.]

UNCLOS

- [The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), also called the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea treaty is the international agreement that resulted from the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III), which took place between 1973 and 1982.
- The Law of the Sea Convention defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources.]
- Here, **land-based pollution** cannot be ignored as it generates more plastic waste and conventions are to be made to address the said concern
- The Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Region
- **It should be more than a talking table and action is required.**

Actions suggested

1. Technological intervention
2. Industrial effluent should be treated from the source.
3. Responsibility to producers in case of plastic packaging.
4. Post consumption should be their responsibility.
5. Also, Individual responsibility cannot be ignored.
6. Reduced use of microbeads based products for preventing it to go into the ocean.

- **Microbeads-** Microbeads are manufactured solid plastic particles of less than one millimetre in their largest dimension. They are most frequently made of polyethylene but can be of other petrochemical plastics such as polypropylene and polystyrene. We can usually see them in cosmetic products such as face-wash..

Way forward

- ASEAN initiative will feed into the G20 Summit's initiatives on the same.
- Municipal waste are to be dealt with collectively and individually(bottom up approach)
- Life-style changes and industrial processes should be aligned according to the motives of the Bangkok declaration. There should be a road map to achieve the same.
- Imperative actions should be taken combinely. Consumption pattern should be reduced in such a way to reduce the single use plastic usage.
- Biggest polluters have to take the lead, for instance, China.
- Banning of plastic is suggested like how France has banned the use of plastic cutlery.
- **Altogether, the irreversible damage is already done in the case of ocean pollution. However, the combined effect lifestyle changes by the individuals and policy initiatives to change the pattern of consumption by Government involved can go a long way to tackle this menace of ocean pollution.**

3) On Bihar Encephalitis Deaths and State of Medical care

Context:

- The death of over 130 children in Bihar due to acute encephalitis syndrome has once again put the spotlight on the state of healthcare sector in the economy.
- The supreme court cognizance of the matter and said the deaths are a matter of grave concern and directed the centre and the Bihar government to file their response on medical care facilities.
- A study conducted by the Indian Medical Association found that deaths could have

been prevented if a health awareness campaign been conducted and correct information is been provided to the families.

- Meanwhile, NitiAayog released the 2nd edition of its report "Healthy States, Progressive India". Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra emerged as the top ranking states based on historical performance across health indicators while Haryana, Rajasthan and Jharkhand topped the index based on incremental performance; Chhattisgarh was the worst performing state on this parameter. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh emerged as the worst performing states in the country.
- **[Encephalitis-**The infection may be bacterial or viral. In some cases, encephalitis may be the result of an immune system disorder.
- Encephalitis is inflammation of the brain. Severity is variable. Symptoms may include headache, fever, confusion, a stiff neck, and vomiting. Complications may include seizures, hallucinations, trouble speaking, memory problems, and problems with hearing.]

Significance:

Now, look at the Right to medical care angle.

1. What is the state of government hospitals in the country?
2. Infrastructure is poor.
3. Rural health care sector?
 - Bihar and UP constitutes a major chunk of rural population and the health care is run by Central Primary Healthcare centres. To strengthen the Primary health care system National Rural Health mission was launched and later, it was changed to National Health mission
1. For 14 years, 2005-2019 Health human resources, drugs, supply chain-Management, Technology, Finances, governance, etc are not growing at an adequate rate.
2. And, dearth of medical staff, doctors, nurses and health care facilities are added to the woes of inaccessibility of primary Health care in rural areas.
3. Thus, rural health care suffer more than urban ones. Also, most of the medical practitioners refuse to be posted in rural

areas added to the problem of health care.

Other concerns or challenges

- As of today, India has one doctor for 1,700 people, compared to the WHO norm of 1:1000.
- Ie- 1:1700 instead of 1:1000. Obviously, medical doctors lack in numbers to serve the sector.

Health care accessibility and facilities are unevenly distributed. why?

- South started building on Health care sector much earlier than the northern states like UP and Bihar. Here, in order to reduce the gap, centre and state government need to work in coordination.

Concerns

Availability

- Health care facilities should be there, Medical practitioners should be available.

Accessibility

- Health care centres or hospital to be accessible to people across the country.

Affordability

- Drugs price and other services should be made affordable.

Now, in Bihar, what happened? Lessons learned?

- The authority and people lacked good practices like accessibility to safe drinking water and proper disposal of excreta.
- They failed to learn from the past and the compromised sanitation and malnutrition have led to the demise of approximately 150 children.
- Had all said been in place, we could have saved many lives even though the disease hit the population.
- Again, here, management plays a greater role in providing health care to people.
- And, the INA study found that deaths could have been prevented if the correct information could have been provided to the people on anomalies. This is a government job. And, they failed to cater to this need of people in Bihar.

Way forward

- Need more focus on Sanitation and nutrition in terms of policy initiatives, in terms of awareness creation, in terms of giving information on accessibility, etc.

- In terms of administration in hospital to increase the quality of services, there needs to be audits and surprise inspections, etc.
- Need more tertiary care hospital.[Ayushman Bharat is making sure of it]
- Scheme like Ayushman bharat need to connect with Ayushman Mitra for fast hospitalization and emergency should not be denied.