

# OFFICERS'

# Pulse

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## Coverage.

The Hindu  
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## At a Glance & In Depth.

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

**CURRENT AFFAIRS  
WEEKLY**

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



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# News @ a glance

## Polity and social issues

### Health and Wellness Centres under Ayushman Bharat

#### Why it is in News?

- Government of India has launched Ayushman Bharat PradhanMantri Jan ArogyaYojana (PMJAY).

#### About Ayushman Bharat

- PMJAY is a centrally sponsored scheme. **It is entirely funded by Government and the funding is shared between Centre and State governments** as per prevailing guidelines of Ministry of Finance.
- PMJAY provides health coverage up to Rs. 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospitalization to around 10.74 crore poor and vulnerable families (approx. 50 crore beneficiaries).
- PMJAY is an entitlement-based scheme.
- This scheme covers poor and vulnerable families based on deprivation and occupational criteria as per SECC data.
- PMJAY provides cashless and paperless access to services for the beneficiary at the point of service in any (both public and private) empanelled hospitals across India. In other words, a beneficiary from one State can avail benefits from an empanelled Hospital anywhere in the Country.
- Under PMAJY, the States are free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement the scheme through insurance company or directly through the Trust/ Society or mixed model.
- There is no restriction on family size, ensuring all members of designated families specifically girl child and senior citizens get coverage.
- At the national level, the National Health Authority (NHA) has been set up to implement the scheme.
- AnMoU has been signed between National Health Agency (now National Health Authority) and 33 States/UTs to implement PMJAY.

- About 1393 treatment packages are available for the beneficiaries under PMJAY.

#### Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres

- In order to expand access to Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC), under Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), Sub Health Centres (SHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) are being strengthened as Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs).
- The HWCs are to provide preventive, promotive, rehabilitative and curative care for an expanded range of services encompassing reproductive and child health services, communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, palliative care and elderly care, oral health, ENT care, and basic emergency care.
- The services in HWCs will be provided through a Mid-level Health Care Provider (MLHP)/Community Health Officer (CHO) placed at a HWC-SHC and Medical Officer at PHC (Rural/Urban). The MLHP/CHO will undergo a Certificate in Community Health through IGNOU or public university.

#### The key elements for roll out of CPHC through HWC are as under

- Expanded Service Delivery.
- Continuum of Care – Tele-health/ Referral.
- Expanding HR- MLHP & Multiskilling.
- Medicines & Expanding Diagnostics.
- Community Mobilisation and Health Promotion.
- Robust IT System.
- Infrastructure.
- Partnership for Knowledge & Implementation.
- Financing/ Provider Payment Reforms.

### Deletion of UID data

#### Why it is in News?

- The government will seek legal counsel on whether it can delete the biometric data of

young people who choose to quit Aadhaar once they turn 18, UIDAI CEO and Revenue Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey said.

#### About the Legal Opinion sought by Centre:

- The Union Cabinet recently approved amendments to the Aadhaar Act, including a provision that gives a child, on attaining maturity (18 years), the power to withdraw his or her Aadhaar details. This entails that the Unique Authority of India remove all the details, including biometrics of such persons.
- "Regarding the biometric data, that is something we will have to take a legal opinion because if you delete the biometric data, then suppose that person comes again and does enrolment, then how will that operate."
- "Maybe that data could be kept somewhere separate, but how that will function, we will have to take legal opinions," an official said.
- The Aadhaar Act was not passed during the just-concluded Budget session of the Lok Sabha, and so it will have to be reintroduced under a new government.
- The proposal to allow those turning 18 to withdraw from Aadhaar will not benefit those who want to file income tax returns as it is now mandatory to provide Aadhaar details while filing taxes.

### Family Planning for Males

#### Why it is in News?

- According to the latest official data given by Ministry of Health and Family welfare in Parliament, shows abysmal rate of family planning among Indian males.

#### Latest Data:

- According to the latest official data, men in Chandigarh top the country in terms of adopting birth control methods like sterilization and condom for family planning followed by Delhi and Punjab.
- At national level, only 5.9% Indian men use these birth control methods but there are 13 states in the country that have been faring better than the national average.
- Men in Chandigarh are at the top as 28.2% men in the city use birth control methods for family planning, followed by Delhi with 20.2% men use sterilization and contraceptives like condoms.
- Punjab ranks third in the country with 19.5% men practicing birth control methods, followed by Uttarakhand 16.8%,

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai Himachal Pradesh 15.1%, Haryana 12.6%, Jammu & Kashmir 11.7, Uttar Pradesh 10.9%, Rajasthan 8.9%, Sikkim 8.6%, Maharashtra 7.5%, Goa 7.1% and West Bengal 6%.

- Men in some traditional north Indian states like Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have done better in comparison with their counterparts in more progressive southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala in terms of adopting birth control methods.

#### Increase in Population: Nightmare for Policy Makers

- With the population of over 1.34 billion people, India is the second most populous country in the world after China that has a population of 1.41 billion people.
- According to United Nation's projections, India is set to overtake China as the world's most populous country in next five years with the population of both the countries expected to reach 1.44 billion.
- While China's population is expected to become stable by 2030, India's population is set to increase to 1.5 billion by 2030 and 1.66 billion by 2050.
- It's a nightmare for Indian policy makers as the ever-increasing population has been putting extreme burden on the country's resources.
- Increasing male participation in family planning is one way to address the problem.

### Ranking of Hospitals

#### Why it is in News?

- Government does not conduct any survey for ranking of Hospitals in the country.
- However, IT based 'Mera Aspataal application' to collect patients' feedback about their experiences in public health facilities including AIIMS Delhi
- As per patient feedback results analyzed in Mera Aspataal Application in December 2018, a ranking has been released.

#### About the Rankings

- The ranking in the Mera Aspataal Application for the facilities is done on the basis of Patient Satisfaction Score (PSS).
- The PSS is calculated as weighted average of number of satisfied and dissatisfied patients based on the feedback collected in a particular facility. The ranking keeps

changing every month based on the feedback received from the patients.

- AIIMS Delhi is ranked 14th among 22 Central Govt. of Hospitals integrated with Mera Aspataal application in the country.
- However, as per National Institute Ranking Framework of Ministry of Human Resource Development, AIIMS, Delhi has been ranked as number one institute.
- The Mera Aspataal Initiative was launched precisely to find a mechanism to gauge patient reaction to the services offered in the hospital and help improve the services by taking corrective measures.
- As per performance analysis report of Mera Aspataal for period Sept-2016 to Jan-2019, 24 per cent of patients were dissatisfied with the services offered at the public health facilities.
- Major Reasons for dissatisfaction were staff behavior, cost of treatment & cleanliness issues and other reasons like, long waiting time, overcrowding, inadequate information, lack of amenities, etc.
- The patients' feedback including, areas requiring improvement are shared with the respective State Govts. and Central Govt. hospitals for ensuring remedial follow-up actions.
- As reported by some of the hospitals, they are reviewing the feedback regularly with the concerned HODs and senior Administrators and taking corrective steps like sensitizing staff to be polite towards patients and give a patient hearing to their problems, maintain cleanliness in the hospital premises, prescribe drugs available in the pharmacy and investigations available in the hospitals. They are also taking steps to ensure minimum waiting time for patients for accessing various services.

## **DD Arunrabha**

### **Why it is in News?**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 9, 2019 launched a dedicated 24x7 Satellite channel, 'DD Arunrabha' for Arunachal Pradesh during his visit to Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Tripura.
- DD Arunrabha is the Doordarshan's second channel for the northeastern region; DD Northeast was the first one.

- The channel will familiarise people across India with the beauty and the culture of the State.

### **About DD Arunrabha**

- DD Arunrabha is the 24th satellite channel operated by Doordarshan.
- It is equipped with modern facilities including a Digital Satellite News Gathering unit to provide live coverage from remote locations for 24x7 telecast.
- DDK Itanagar's playout facility and the earth stations will ensure seamless transmission of DD Arunrabha.
- It will showcase the rich tradition and diversity of local culture of the state.
- Despite integrating North-East with the country, It will bring alive the magnificence of North-East by airing content sensitive to the needs and aspirations of local population such as news, travelogues, documentaries, films, reality shows, etc.

## **Akshaya Patra Foundation**

### **Why it is in News?**

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, visited Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh tomorrow on 11 February 2019.
- The Prime Minister will then serve the 3rd billionth meal to underprivileged children from schools.

### **About Akshaya Patra Foundation**

- Akshaya Patra is a social start-up, which has turned into a movement that provides food to school children.
- Akshaya Patra serves as an implementing partner of Mid-Day Meal Scheme.
- In its 19-year journey, Akshaya Patra foundation has served mid-day meals to 1.76 million children in twelve states covering 14,702 schools.
- In 2016, Akshaya Patra commemorated the serving of 2 billion cumulative meals in the presence of the then President of India, Pranab Mukherjee.
- The Foundation works closely with the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and State Governments to serve quality, hygienic, and nutritious food to millions of children.

### **About Mid-Day Meal Programmed**

- Mid-Day Meal Scheme is considered to be the largest of its kind programme in the world.
- The program aims to boost enrolment, attendance, and retention in schools and to

improve the health profile of children in the age group of 6-14 years.

## Swachh Shakti 2019

### Why in News?

- Swachh Shakti 2019 Awards were recently distributed by the PM on the occasion of Swachh Shakti 2019 programme.

### Swachh Shakti Programme

- The Swachh Shakti Programme is a national event which aims to bring in to focus the leadership role played by rural women in Swachh Bharat Mission.**
- Launched in 2017, the Programme is a part of ongoing activities under the aegis of the Swachh Bharat Mission, launched on October 2, 2014 by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to achieve a clean and Open Defecation Free (ODF) India by October 2, 2019.
- The programme is attended by women panchs and sarpanchs from across the country.**

The first edition of Swachh Shakti programme was launched from Gandhinagar, Gujarat by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on International Women's Day 2017. The second edition was launched from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

## Safeguarding Land Rights of Scheduled Tribes

### Why it is in News?

- Shri Sudarshan Bhagat, Minister of State for Tribal Affairs in a replied to a written question in Lok Sabha on steps taken for Protection of Scheduled Tribes.

### Constitutional and Legislative Measures

- To protect and safeguarding the land rights and other rights of Scheduled Tribes, following constitutional and legislative measure have been put in place.
- "The Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006" to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land to forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes.
- "Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013" (RFCTLARR Act, 2013) safeguards against displacement of Scheduled Tribes.
- "The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996", also provides that the

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas or development projects and before resettling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas; the actual planning and implementation of the projects in the Scheduled Areas shall be coordinated at the State Level.

- Constitutional provisions under Schedule – V also provide for safeguards against displacement of tribal population because of land acquisitions etc. The Governor of the State, having scheduled Areas, is empowered to prohibit or restrict transfer of land from tribals and regulate the allotment of land to members of the Scheduled Tribes in such cases. Land being a State subject, various provisions of rehabilitation and resettlement as per the RFCTLARR Act, 2013 are implemented by the concerned State Governments.
- "The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987" provides for legal services to members of Scheduled Tribes.
- "The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989" has been introduced to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, to provide for the trial of such offences and for the relief of rehabilitation of the victims of such offences and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
- Apart from the above, this Ministry being the nodal Ministry for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes, implements several schemes and programmes for upliftment and development of Scheduled Tribes in the country.

## GS1 India

### Why it is in News?

- GS1 India, a standards organization set up by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Government e-Marketplace (GeM).
- This will enable GeM's buyers and vendors to access rich, accurate and standardized information on attributes of thousands of products across categories, empowering them to make more informed decisions.

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai

received from Indian nationals mostly women, who were deserted or harassed by their Non-Resident Indian Spouses.

- Since marriage takes place outside India, there are no records or legal documents for further procedures to be initiated against the offender.
- Hence, once the Bill is passed, such practices will be curbed and it will provide much needed relief to all Indian women married to NRIs worldwide.

## About GS1 India

- GS1 India is a Standards body (registered under Societies Registration Act 1860) with founder members comprising Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM, FIEO, IMC, APEDA, Spices Board, IIP and BIS.
- It is affiliated with GS1® a not for profit global standards organisation.
- GS1 India mission is to improve the efficiency, safety and visibility of supply chains across physical and digital channels through the use of global GS1 standards.

## About GeM

- Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is a one stop portal to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments / Organizations / PSUs.
- GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement. It provides the tools of e-bidding, reverse e-auction and demand aggregation to facilitate the government users achieve the best value for their money.
- The purchases through GeM by Government users have been authorized and made mandatory by Ministry of Finance by adding a new Rule No. 149 in the General Financial Rules, 2017.

## Registration of Marriage of NRI Bill

### Why it is in News?

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 13, 2019 approved the introduction of Registration of Marriage of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) Bill, 2019 to create more accountability to Indian citizens living abroad.
- The bill mainly seeks to offer more protection against the exploitation of Indian citizens, mostly Indian women by their NRI partners.

### Background

- The bill has been introduced with the hope of restricting NRI husbands from using marriage as a tool of exploitation and making money and providing better enforcement of rights for the deserted woman under the family laws.
- The introduction of the Bill was necessitated due to numerous complaints

### Key Highlights

- The Bill provides for amendment of the legal framework to act as a deterrent to the erring NRI spouses and creating more accountability and offer protection against exploitation of Indian Citizens, specially women married to NRIs.
- Under the new bill, a marriage between an NRI and an Indian citizen will have to be registered in India or Indian missions and posts abroad within 30 days from the date of marriage.
- After the bill's passing, the necessary changes would be carried out in the Passports Act, 1967 and Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 by insertion of Section 86A.
- According to the proposed amendments, if the marriage isn't registered within 30 days, the passport of the NRI will be revoked, summons and warrant be issued.
- Despite all this, if the NRI fails to appear in court, his properties will be attached and he will be declared 'Proclaimed Offender'.

## National Policy for Domestic Workers

### Why it is in News?

- The Central Government has not enacted any separate law to protect the interest of domestic workers so far.
- However, the Ministry of Labour & Employment is considering to formulate a National Policy on Domestic Workers which is in the draft stage.

### About Key Provisions being considered

- The salient features of the proposed draft National Policy on Domestic Workers are as under:
- Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations.
- Domestic workers will have the right to register as unorganized workers. Such

registration will facilitate their access to rights & benefits.

- Right to form their own associations/unions
- Right to minimum wages, access to social security
- Right to enhance their skills
- Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation
- Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals for grievance redressal
- Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of private placement agencies.
- Establishment of a grievance redressal system for domestic workers.

## Bill on northeast

### Why it is in News?

- The government has introduced a Constitution Amendment Bill in Rajya Sabha to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 Autonomous Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the NE region.
- The Bill is introduced in the wake of protests in the region following the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019, in the Lok Sabha.

### The Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019: Key Proposals

- **The Finance Commission will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them.**
- **The Autonomous Councils now depend on grants from Central ministries and the State government for specific projects.**
- **The proposed amendments provide for elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grassroot level.**
- **The village councils will be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry.**
- At least one-third of the seats will be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura after the amendment is approved.

- The amendment will impact one crore tribal people in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

### Why in Raja Sabha?

- A call was taken to introduce in the Rajya Sabha so that the legislation remains alive even after the House has adjourned sine die.
- Introducing it in the Lok Sabha would have meant that the Bill's life is co-terminus with that of the term of the Lok Sabha.
- The fate of the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019 is uncertain as it was passed by the Lok Sabha but has to be passed by the Rajya Sabha in the current session to become a law.

## Shortfall of defense allocation

### Why it is in news?

- The shortfall in Defence allocation in the interim Budget 2019-20 has left the Services worried as it threatens to derail the capability enhancement and modernisation under way.
- The shortfall is so significant that, for the Navy and the Air Force, the capital allocation does not even meet the committed liabilities (that is, payments for deals already contracted).

### About Defence Budget Allocation

- The share of the three Services in the overall defence budget stands as follows: Army-54%, Navy-14% and Air Force-22%.
- However, the Army, with its large size, has a huge revenue burden compared to the other two Services, and a significant part of it goes for salaries.

## Rehab scheme for Naga cadres

### Why it is in News?

- A Parliamentary panel on Home Affairs, has urged the Centre to conclude the Naga peace Accord.
- It has also advocated to **formulate a rehabilitation-cum-settlement scheme for the cadres of National Socialist Council of Nagaland Isak-Muivah (NSC-IM).**

### About NSCN-IM

- The NSCN-IM is an insurgent group of Nagas, operating in Nagaland, Assam,

Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh. Its objective is to establish Greater Nagaland (Nagalim) consisting of all Naga inhabited areas in Northeast India and it has spearheaded a rebellion for the same.

- The Naga Peace Accord was signed between the Government of India and the Naga armed groups headed by the NSCN-IM in 2015. The accord seeks to end the Naga insurgency.
- The parliamentary panel has raised concerns over Assam government's decision over the continuance of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the state. This is in contrary to the government's claim that the security situation in Assam has improved.

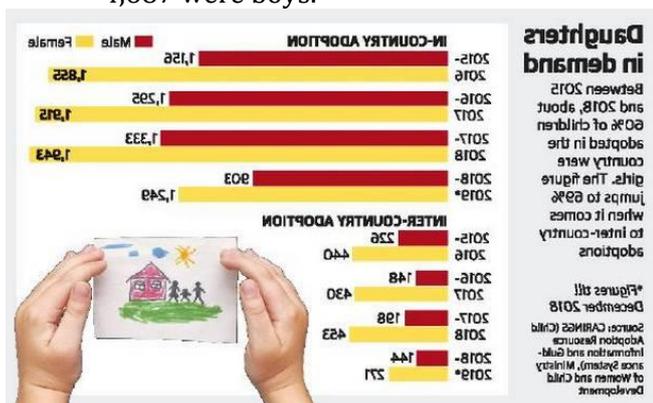
#### About AFSPA

- Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in "disturbed areas".
- An area is considered to be disturbed when there are disputes between religious, racial, language, regional groups, castes or communities that it necessitates the use of armed forces to maintain law and order.

### 60% children adopted are girls

#### Why it is in News?

- Data from the Ministry of Women and Child Development shows that of the 11,649 children adopted, 6,962 were girls and 4,687 were boys.



#### About the Trend

- India has a skewed gender ratio, but the female child happens to be the first choice when it comes to adoption.
- The number of female children placed for in-country adoptions and inter-country adoptions between 2015 and 2018 are relatively higher than male children.
- During this period, about 11,649 children were put up for in-country adoptions; of

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai them 6,962 were girls and 4,687 were boys. Of the 3,011 children that were placed for in-country adoption in 2015-16, as many as 1,855 were female children.

- In the year 2016-17, as many as 3,210 children were placed under in-country adoptions and of them 1,915 were females. The figures for 2017-18 and 2018-19 (till December 2018) were 3,276 and 2,152, of which the numbers of girl children were 1943 and 1249 respectively.
- **All the figures put together, female children comprise almost 60% of all in-country adoptions.**
- When it came to inter-country adoptions, the number of female children was even higher: 69%.
- According to Central Adoption Resource Authority- the apex regulator of in-country and inter-country adoptions – the trend is a reflection of declining gender bias in India.

### Citizenship, triple talaq Bills lapse

#### Why it is in News?

- The Citizenship (amendment) Bill and The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2018 lapsed as they could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha since both the houses were adjourned sine die (house is dismissed for an indefinite period).
- The Budget session was the last Parliament session of the present government. The 17th Lok Sabha has to be constituted before June 3.
- The legislative procedure states that a Bill which is pending in the Rajya Sabha, after being passed by the Lok Sabha, will lapse on the dissolution of Lok Sabha.
- But if the Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha, the dissolution of Lok Sabha will not lead to its lapse.

#### About the Bills

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to make illegal immigrants (Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan) eligible for Indian citizenship. The Bill also seeks to reduce the requirement of 11 years of continuous stay in the country to six years to obtain citizenship by naturalisation.
- The Triple talaq Bill makes pronouncement of triple talaq void and illegal. It seeks to

make the practice of instant triple talaq a punishable offence with imprisonment of up to three years.

## 5% quota for Gujjars

### Why it is in News?

- The Rajasthan government has passed the Rajasthan Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutes in the State and of Appointments and Posts in Services under the State) Amendment Bill, 2019. The bill comes in the backdrop of two similar bills passed in 2015 and 2017 which were struck down by the Rajasthan High Court.

### Provisions of the Bill

- The bill seeks to provide 5% reservation to Gujjars, Banjaras, Gadia Lohars, Raikas and Gadaria. At present, the communities are provided 1% reservation under More Backward Classes (MBC).

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai

- The bill has increased the OBC reservation in Rajasthan from the present 21% to 26%. It has also increased the income limit for defining creamy layer in OBC from Rs. 2.5 lakh to Rs. 8 lakh/annum.
- The Rajasthan government has also passed a resolution requesting the Centre to include the bill in Schedule IX of the Indian Constitution.
- This is because Rajasthan has breached the 50% cap on reservations set by the Supreme Court. A law enacted and included in the Ninth Schedule gets protection under Article 31-B (validation of certain Acts and Regulations) and is not subject to judicial review.
- However, in 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that all laws including those in the Ninth Schedule would be open to judicial review if they violated the basic structure of the constitution.

## Economy

### New Policy for Overseas Borrowings

#### What is External Commercial Borrowings?

- ECB is basically a loan availed by an Indian entity from a non-resident lender. Most of these loans are provided by foreign commercial banks and other institutions.
- Large number of Indian corporate and PSUs have used the ECBs as sources of investment.

#### Why in News?

- The RBI has rationalized the framework for ECB with effect from January 16, 2019.
- To further improve the ease of doing business in India, the new ECB framework allow all eligible borrowers to raise up to \$750 million per financial year under the automatic route, replacing the existing sector-wise limits.
- The list of eligible borrowers has been expanded to include all entities eligible to receive foreign direct investment (FDI).
- Additionally, port trusts, units in SEZ, SIDBI, EXIM Bank, registered entities engaged in microfinance activities, registered societies/trusts/ cooperatives and non-government organisations can also borrow under the new framework.
- Any entity who is a resident of a country which is financial action task force compliant, will be treated as a recognised lender. This change increases lending options and allows various new lenders in ECB space while strengthening the anti money laundering framework.
- The Minimum Average Maturity Period (MAMP) has been kept at 3 years for all ECBs, irrespective of the amount of borrowing in lieu of various layers of MAMPs as under the earlier framework, except the borrowers specifically permitted in the circular to borrow for a shorter period.

### MSME package

#### What is Debt restructuring?

- Debt restructuring refers to the reallocation of resources or change in the terms of loan extension to enable the debtor to pay back the loan to the creditor.
- It is an adjustment made by both the debtor and the creditor to smooth out temporary difficulties in the way of loan repayment.

#### Background

- In January 2019, the RBI allowed lenders to restructure loans of stressed micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), provided the total fund and non-fund based exposure to such a borrower does not exceed Rs 25 crore.
- To facilitate meaningful restructuring, the restructuring will be applicable to MSMEs that are in default but 'standard' as on January 1, 2019, without an asset classification downgrade.
- A provision of 5% of the total outstanding loan, in addition to the money already set aside to cover potential losses, will have to be made for such borrowers.
- The restructuring has to be implemented by March 31, 2020.

#### Why in News?

- Department of Financial Services has estimated that the RBI restructuring package for small businesses will help recast Rs 1 lakh crore of loans for seven lakh MSMEs.
- The scheme would help free up additional resources which would fuel demand and create further opportunities in the industry.

### Angel tax exemption

#### What is angel tax?

- It is a tax on the excess capital raised by an unlisted company through the issue of shares over and above the 'fair market value' of those shares. This excess capital is treated as income and taxed accordingly.
- This tax most commonly affects start-ups and the **angel investors** who back them.

*(An angel investor is an individual who provides capital for a business start-up, in exchange for convertible debt or ownership equity).*

- Angel tax was introduced in 2012, with the purpose of keeping money laundering in check.

#### Why is Angel tax problematic?

- While the intent of such an angel tax may be justifiable, the arbitrary nature of it means the cost of unintended consequences could be larger than the supposed benefits.
- In trying to curb money-laundering, the Indian Income Tax Act, 1961 gives income tax officials a free hand to harass even

genuine start-ups looking to raise investments for their growth.

- Under the Act, the IT department is free to arbitrarily decide the 'fair market value' of a company's share and tax start-ups if the price at which their new shares are sold to investors is higher than the fair value of these shares.
- Several startups say that they find it difficult to justify the higher valuation to tax officials.

#### Why in News?

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has agreed to compile a list of startups eligible for angel tax exemption, based on their audited financial statements and income tax returns of the previous year.
- The government also decided to raise the maximum time limit below which a firm would be deemed eligible for angel tax exemption to **10 years** from the earlier seven.
- Further, the paid-up share capital threshold below which startups would be eligible for an exemption has been set at **Rs 25 crore**. In cases where the investment exceeds Rs 25 crore, the firms would be eligible for exemption if the angel investors can prove a net worth of Rs 2 crore or more in the previous financial year. For investments below Rs 25 crore, no questions would be asked.

## Real-time information on National Waterways

### About IWAI

- Inland Waterways Authority of India is the nodal statutory body in charge of development and regulation of inland waterways for shipping and navigation. It is headquartered in Noida, Uttar Pradesh.
- Its main function is to build necessary infrastructure in inland waterways, surveying economic feasibility of new projects and also carrying out administration and regulation.
- It undertakes projects for development and maintenance of IWT infrastructure on national waterways through grant received from Ministry of Shipping.

#### Why in News?

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- Moving a step ahead towards ensuring optimum use of National Waterways, the IWAI has launched a new portal **LADIS – Least Available Depth Information System**.
- LADIS will ensure that real-time data on least available depths is disseminated for ship/barge and cargo owners so that they can undertake transportation on National Waterways in a more planned way. It will help transporters by guiding them on the suitability of time of movement.
- Initially LAD information will be available for NW-1, NW-2, Indo-Bangladesh Protocol route and NW-3, along with the date of survey. The facility will be expanded to other NWs also.

## Zero-tariffs for India

### What is 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.
- The GSP programme of U.S. allows market access at nil or low duties for about 3,500 Indian products.

### Eligibility Review of India

- In April 2018, The United States Trade Representative (USTR) launched a GSP eligibility review of India to assess whether India is providing equitable and reasonable market access to products from the US.
- The review is based on complaints from US' dairy and medical device industries alleging that India has implemented a wide array of trade barriers that affecting the US exports in those sectors.

### Why in News?

- Several experts have said that India could lose vital U.S. trade concession under GSP amid a widening dispute over its trade and investment policies.
- Trade tensions between the two countries rose last March when U.S. President Donald Trump notified the imposition of higher import tariffs on steel and aluminium, which affected several countries, including India. In retaliation, India announced counter-tariffs on 29 American goods, worth about \$235 million, but has delayed

implementing them in the hope of resolving the matter.

- The trigger for the latest downturn in trade ties was India's new rules on e-commerce that restrict the way Amazon and Walmart-backed Flipkart do business in India.
- In addition to this, the drive to force global card payments companies such as Mastercard and Visa to move their data to India and the imposition of higher tariffs on electronic products and smartphones.

#### **U.S. to discuss trade, e-com rules with India**

- In order to resolve several trade issues, including the concerns of American CEOs regarding doing business in India and bilateral trade imbalance, U.S. Ambassador Kenneth I. Juster will lead a delegation of officials to hold talks with Union Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu.
- The status of the review of India's eligibility for the GSP is also likely to come up in the meeting. The U.S. delegation will also try to resolve trade imbalance between India and the U.S.
- India's exports to the U.S. in 2017-18 stood at \$47.9 billion, while imports were \$26.7 billion. The U.S. government had earlier raised the issue of unequal trade and tariffs between the two countries, especially India's seemingly high import tariffs on Harley Davidson motorcycles.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Aqua Mega Food Park in AP**

#### **What's in the news?**

- Union Minister of Food Processing Industries Harsimrat Kaur Badal has commissioned the Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.
- The park is the first operationalised mega aqua food park. It is established for processing of fish and marine products in the state.
- The central processing centre of this mega park includes facilities like 1.5 tonnes per hour (TPH) pre-processing line for fish and shrimp, freezing of fish and shrimp at 1.5 TPH, 2,000 metric tonne (MT) cold storage for fish, 1,000 MT cold storage for shrimp, ice plant and food testing laboratory.
- The modern infrastructure for food processing created at the park will benefit farmers, growers, processors and consumers of Andhra Pradesh and adjoining areas immensely and prove to be

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai a big boost to the growth of the food processing sector in the State of Andhra Pradesh.

### **'GiveItUp' campaign**

#### **About the campaign**

- The 'GiveItUp' movement appeals to the rich people to voluntarily give up their subsidy amount given on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders.
- The money surrendered under this movement will be utilized for poor to get LPG connection in rural as well as in urban areas who are still using firewood for cooking.

#### **Why in News?**

- As on 06.02.2019, nearly 1.04 crore LPG consumers have voluntarily surrendered their LPG subsidy under 'GiveItUp' campaign.
- Domestic LPG prices are revised every month in line with international price of LPG with corresponding revision in monthly LPG subsidy under **PAHAL scheme**.

*(Under PAHAL scheme, subsidized LPG cylinders are sold at market rates and consumers are entitled to receive LPG subsidy directly into their bank accounts)*

### **Impact of Cheap Imports on Industrial Production**

#### **What is Anti-Dumping Duty?**

- An anti-dumping duty is a protectionist tariff that a domestic government imposes on foreign imports that it believes are priced below fair market value.
- Dumping is a process where a company exports a product at a price lower than the price it normally charges in its own home market.
- To protect local businesses and markets, many countries impose stiff duties on products they believe are being dumped in their national market.

#### **How it is imposed in India?**

- Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, initiates anti-dumping investigations on the basis of a duly substantiated application filed by the domestic producer with a prima-facie evidence of dumping of goods into the

country causing injury to the domestic industry.

- Such applications are processed under the Customs Tariff Act, 1975 and the proceedings of DGTR are of quasi-judicial nature.
- DGTR critically analyses the submissions and thereafter recommends the appropriate measures to the Department of Revenue for imposition of anti-dumping duty, if necessary.

## Surging Silk

### Sericulture in India

- India, which is the second largest producer of silk in the world, has the unique distinction of being the only country producing all the five known commercial silks, namely, mulberry, tropical tasar, oak tasar, eri and muga.
- The Central Silk Board, a statutory body, under the administrative control of the Ministry of Textiles, has been entrusted with the overall responsibility of developing silk industry in India.
- Silk production in India has increased by 41 per cent since 2013-14.

### Why in News?

- Ministry of Textiles and Central Silk Board have organised a function in New Delhi, during which, Buniyaad Tasar Silk Reeling Machines were distributed to women reelers from tribal areas.
- The machine developed by Central Silk Technological Research Institute will improve the quality and productivity of Tasar silk yarn and reduce the drudgery of women. It is planned to eradicate thigh reeling and replace it with Buniyaad reeling machine by end of March 2020.
- During the event, a mobile application e-cocoon was launched for quality certification in silkworm seed sector.

## Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan

### What's in the news?

- Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PM-SYM) was rolled out by the Ministry of Labour and Employment on 15.02.2019.
- The scheme which was announced in the Interim Budget is likely to benefit 42 crore workers engaged in the unorganized sector of the country.

### Salient Features of PM-SYM

- The scheme is envisaged to provide pensionary benefits to labourers and workers in the unorganised sector whose monthly income is Rs 15,000 per month or less and belong to the entry age group of 18-40 years.
- They should not be covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). Further, he/she should not be an income tax payer.
- This pension yojana shall provide them an assured monthly pension of Rs. 3,000 from the age of 60 years on a monthly contribution of a small affordable amount during their working age.
- An unorganised sector worker joining pension yojana at the age of 29 years will have to contribute only Rs. 100 per month till the age of 60 years. A worker joining the pension yojana at 18 years, will have to contribute as little as Rs. 55 per month. The Government will deposit equal matching share in the pension account of the worker every month.
- The enrolment will be carried out by all the Community Service Centers (CSCs).
- PM-SYM will be a Central Sector Scheme administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and implemented through Life Insurance Corporation of India and CSCs. The amount collected under PM-SYM pension scheme shall be invested as per the investment pattern specified by Government of India.

## National Minimum Wage

### What's in the news?

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment had constituted an expert committee in 2017, under the Chairmanship Dr. Anoop Satpathy to review and recommend methodology for fixation of National Minimum Wage (NMW).
- The Expert Committee has submitted its report on "Determining the Methodology for Fixation of the National Minimum Wage" to the Government of India.

### NMW based on nutritional requirement norms

- Using the nutritional requirement norms as recommended by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for Indian population, the report has recommended a

balanced diet approach which is culturally palatable for fixation of national minimum wage.

- Accordingly, it has proposed that food items amounting to the level of  $\pm 10$  per cent of 2,400 calories, along with proteins  $\geq 50$  gm and fats  $\geq 30$  gm per day per person to constitute a national level balanced food basket.
- Further, this report proposes minimum wage should include reasonable expenditure on 'essential non-food items', such as clothing, fuel and light, house rent, education, medical expenses, footwear and transport, which must be equal to the median class and expenditure on any 'other non-food items' be equivalent to the sixth fractile (25-30 per cent) of the household expenditure distribution as per the NSSO-CES 2011/12 survey data.
- On the basis of the aforesaid approach, the report has recommended to fix the need based national minimum wage for India at **INR 375 per day** (or INR 9,750 per month) as of July 2018, irrespective of sectors, skills, occupations and rural-urban locations for a family comprising of 3.6 consumption unit. It has also recommended to introduce an additional house rent allowance (city compensatory allowance), averaging up to INR 55 per day i.e., INR 1,430 per month for urban workers over and above the NMW.
- Apart from proposing the level of a single national minimum wage at an all-India level, for the purpose of estimating national minimum wages at regional levels it has grouped the states into **five regions** based on a composite index and have recommended region specific national minimum wages.
- The committee has also recommended reviewing the consumption basket every five years, subject to the availability of NSSO-CES data, and within the period of 5 years - revising and updating the basic minimum wage at least in line with the consumer price index (CPI) every six months, to reflect changes in the cost of living.

## MoSPI organizes workshop on GDKP

### What's in the news?

- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in collaboration with

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Kolkata held a one-day workshop in New Delhi on the novel and emerging area of Gross Domestic Knowledge Product (GDKP).

### What is GDKP?

- The idea of GDKP was propounded by Prof. Umberto Sulpasso of the University of Southern California.
- The Gross Domestic Knowledge Product (GDKP) measures a nation's growth and future through four basic pillars:
  - **Knowledge items (Ki)** - identification of both modern and local distinct culture knowledge items in distinct categories.
  - **Country's Knowledge Producing Matrix (CKPM)** - comparison of knowledge produced by government, private institutions, and households as a differentiated way to impact on the GDP.
  - **Country's Knowledge User Matrix (CKUM)** - the value of knowledge bought by individuals and private companies as a way to measure their modernization efforts.
  - **Cost of Learning** - similar to the cost of living to be used as a political reference for government budgeting decisions through education family bonds, education credit card etc. to support young citizens.
- GDKP will allow calculation of the value of specific knowledge items related to national culture produced and how these items change over time.
- In India, for example, these specific knowledge items include the proliferation of cultural and religious teaching (yoga, Veda, and dance schools), religious festivals, and harvest festivals.

## Third round of OALP

### About OALP

- Open Acreage Licensing Policy was introduced in 2016, as part of the new regime in exploration sector called HELP or **Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy**, so as to enable a faster survey and coverage of the available geographical area which has potential for oil and gas discovery.

- What distinguishes OALP from New Exploration and Licensing Policy (NELP) of 1997 is that under OALP, oil and gas acreages will be available round the year instead of cyclic bidding rounds as in NELP.
- OALP gives an option to a company looking for exploring hydrocarbons to select the exploration blocks on its own, without waiting for the formal bid round from the Government. A bidder intending to explore hydrocarbons like oil and gas, coal bed methane, gas hydrate etc., may apply to the Government seeking exploration of any new block.

#### Why in News?

- Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has launched the bidding for the third round of OLAP.
- In the OALP-III, India offers 23 oil and gas and Coal Bed Methane blocks for bidding, expecting up to \$700 million of investment that it hoped will help raise domestic output and cut imports. Total area on offer is about 31,000 square kilometre.

### KUSUM Scheme

#### What's in the news?

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has formulated a Scheme "Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (KUSUM)".
- The Scheme is currently under the process of seeking approval.

#### Objectives of the scheme

- Installation of grid-connected solar power plants each of Capacity up to 2 MW in the rural areas
- Installation of standalone off-grid solar water pumps to fulfil irrigation needs of farmers not connected to grid
- Solarisation of existing grid-connected agriculture pumps to make farmers independent of grid supply and also enable them to sell surplus solar power generated to DISCOM and get extra income.

### Strategic petroleum reserve

#### What are Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)?

- They are huge stockpiles of crude oil established to tackle emergency situations. SPRs significantly help India's energy security and will insulate the country from external price and supply shocks.

#### Status in India

- Currently, India has constructed three strategic petroleum reserves in huge underground rock caverns at Visakhapatnam (1.33 Million Metric Tonnes) on the East Coast, and at Mangaluru (1.5 MMT) and Padur (2.5 MMT) on the West Coast.
- In June 2018, the union cabinet approved Phase-II of SPR programme, which involves creation of additional 6.5 MMT of storage at Chandikhol, Odisha (4.0 MMT) and Padur-II, Karnataka (2.5 MMT).
- These strategic petroleum reserve facilities will help support 22 days of India's crude oil requirements. The global practice is to maintain strategic reserves of at least 90 days of oil imports.
- The construction of the SPRs is being managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), a Special Purpose Vehicle, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

#### Why in News?

- In a boost to energy security of the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the 1.33 MMT Visakhapatnam SPR facility of ISPRL. The cost of the Project is Rs. 1125 crore.
- Giving major push to the Gas Based Economy, PM also dedicated to the nation, ONGC's S1 Vasishta development project located in the Krishna-Godavari (KG) Offshore Basin in Andhra Pradesh. This project will contribute significantly in realising PM's vision of reducing oil imports by 10% by 2020.

### Reducing Crude Oil and Gas Imports

#### What's in the news?

- Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Dharmendra Pradhan has highlighted the major policy initiatives taken by Government during the last four years to enhance production of oil and gas, improving energy efficiency and promotion of bio and alternate fuels.
- It includes finalization of Hydrocarbon Exploration Licensing Policy (HELP)/ Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), formulation of Discovered Small Field (DSF) Policy, survey of un-appraised area of sedimentary basins, setting up of National Data Repository, policy

framework for exploration & exploitation of unconventional hydrocarbons, streamlining of production contracts and fiscal incentives etc.

- Government has also taken a number of initiatives to encourage the use of alternative fuels and incentivize production of ethanol and Biodiesel.
- Government has notified the National Biofuel Policy 2018 to boost availability of biofuels and promotion of advanced biofuels in country.

### **Major steps taken for enhancing the production of CBM and Shale Gas**

- Formulation of Coal Bed Methane (CBM) Policy in 1997 for exploration and exploitation of CBM being natural gas.
- Completion of four rounds of CBM bidding, resulting in allocation of 33 CBM blocks spreading over 16,613 square kilometers.
- Introduction of Unified Licensing Policy under Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) wherein all types of hydrocarbon resources, both conventional and unconventional can be explored and exploited.
- Notification of policy framework for early monetization of CBM gas, which provides for marketing and pricing freedom.
- Notification of policy framework for exploration and exploitation of unconventional hydrocarbons including CBM and Shale gas/oil in existing acreages under Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs), Coal Bed Methane (CBM) contracts and nomination fields.

## **Petrotech 2019**

### **About PETROTECH conference**

- PETROTECH conference is a biennial International Oil & Gas Conference. This India's flagship hydrocarbon Conference provides a platform for national and international experts in the oil & gas industry to exchange views and share knowledge, expertise, and experiences.
- The 13th edition of PETROTECH was held from 10 to 12 February 2019. It was organized by Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Limited, under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

### **PM pitches for responsible oil pricing**

- Inaugurating Petrotech 2019 Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the world must move to a more responsible pricing

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mechanism for oil that balances the needs of the producers as well as the consumers.

- The Prime Minister also highlighted that there is a shift in energy consumption from West to East. The United States has become the world's largest oil and gas producer after the shale revolution.
- He added that solar energy and other renewable sources of energy have become more competitive. They are emerging as sustainable substitutes for traditional energy forms. Natural Gas is fast becoming one of the largest fuels in the global energy mix.

### **Blue Flame Revolution**

- Along with PETROTECH -2019 an exhibition over 13 country pavilions and around 750 exhibitors from over 40 countries, with exclusive areas on the Make in India and Renewable Energy theme was organised.
- The Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan while inaugurating the exhibition called for expanding the supply and availability of energy in a safe and environmentally responsible and sustainable manner.
- He said that India is the third largest consumer of crude oil and petroleum products globally, accounting for 4.5 % of world oil consumption. In addition to the general development of the hydrocarbon industry, the government have also focused on improving the ease of living of the common people by enhancing access to clean cooking fuel which is called the Blue Flame Revolution.

## **Promotion of Khadi**

### **About KVIC**

- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is a statutory body established under the Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956.
- KVIC works under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises with an aim to plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development.

### **Why in News?**

- Minister of State for MSME Giriraj Singh highlighted various initiatives to promote Khadi through KVIC.
  1. Development and implementation of 'Khadi Mark' which was launched by the President in 2013. The Khadi Mark not only guarantees the genuineness of Khadi products but also promotes Khadi as a brand that connotes social, cultural, and environmental values.
  2. MoUs were signed with institutions like Federation of Indian Export Organization (FIEO), World Trade Centre (WTC), Indian Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO), Trade Promotion Council of India, for invigorating business opportunities in overseas markets.
  3. Launching of 'franchise scheme' to expand the sales distribution network.
  4. Tie up with eCommerce platform for online marketing through e-Commerce companies like Paytm.
  5. Opening Khadi Outlets in Post Offices.
  6. KVIC has applied to register "Khadi" as a word mark and "Khadi India" as a Trade mark in 27 classes for various products among 45 classes listed out in the IPR Act at National Level as well as has filed an online application for registering "Khadi" as a trade mark under International bureau in European Union and other countries under 16 different classes.

## National Gas Grid

### What's in the news?

- Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan said that the Government has envisaged to develop the National Gas Grid. At present about 16,788 Km natural gas pipeline is operational and about 14,239 Km gas pipelines are being developed to increase the availability of natural gas across the country.
- These pipelines have been authorized by Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) and are at various stages of execution.

### About PNGRB

- PNGRB was established in 2006 under PNGRB Act, 2006. Its mandate is to regulate refining, transport and marketing of petroleum products. It also ensures enough supply across country, foster fair trade, protect consumer interest and authorise companies that will build and operate fuel pipelines.
- PNGRB is also the authority to grant authorization to the entities for the development of City Gas Distribution (CGD) network in Geographical Areas (GAs) as per PNGRB Act, 2006.

### Objectives of the National Gas Grid

- To remove regional imbalance within the country with regard to access for natural gas and provide clean and green fuel throughout the country.
- To connect gas sources to major demand centres and ensure availability of gas to consumers in various sectors.
- Development of City Gas Distribution Networks in various cities for the supply of CNG and PNG.
- The National Gas Grid together with providing gas connections to households will provide better infrastructure for automobiles using gas. The National Gas Grid will also aid in renewing of the fertilizer sector and also give a boost to the Power and Automotive sector.

## Dealer Owned Dealer Operated CNG stations

### What's in the news?

- Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan has launched the Dealer Owned Dealer Operated (DODO) model for setting up CNG stations.

### Features of the new guidelines

- Entire plot owned by a private owner shall be developed exclusively for setting up of CNG station and allied commercial activities at the discretion of the City Gas Distribution (CGD) entity.
- The plot owner applicant desirous of setting up CNG station will have to enter into a long term agreement with CGD entity.
- The CNG equipment will be installed and commissioned by CGD entity while adhering to all the statutory rules/guidelines related to fire and safety.

a PAN is automatically submitted to the tax department.

- The dealer is required to arrange all the permissions to set up CNG Station including change of land use, necessary clearance, license, etc. at own expense and cost.
- The dealer shall be paid commission by the concerned CGD entity as per the sales achieved based on the fixed dealer commission.

### Significance

- It is expected that these general guidelines shall add a fillip to the CNG business in the country as easy availability of CNG across the country shall encourage more people to switch to eco-friendly and economical CNG.
- The PNGRB has undertaken unprecedented expansion of CGD network, and this will lead to laying of more gas pipelines, increased production and availability of the gas, and also last mile connectivity of the infrastructure to provide CNG and PNG to the consumers.
- More than 1500 CNG stations are presently operating in the country, catering to the demands of over 33 lakh CNG vehicles. After the ongoing 10<sup>th</sup> bidding round, 53% of the country's area and 70% of its population will have access to CGD networks. As more and more CNG stations come up, more than 10% CNG stations may be based on DODO model.

## 95% realty firms have no PAN

### What's in the news?

- In an audit of assessments made by the Income Tax Department on the real estate sector, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) found that 95% of the companies registered with the Registrar of Companies (RoC) did not have a permanent account number (PAN).
- In an analysis of the data of the RoCs in 12 States, the CAG also noted that there were several companies that the tax net had failed to capture and that the department had no mechanism to ensure that all the registered companies had PAN or that they filed their income tax returns (ITR) regularly.
- In order to rectify this, the CAG recommended that the Central Board of Direct Taxes and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs set up an inter-ministerial arrangement so that when a company is registered with the RoC, the application for

## Rural household electricity

### What's in the news?

- A comprehensive private sector survey of 10,000 households has found that only 84% of rural households have electricity connection in the four States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha and Rajasthan.
- This is in contrast to the government's **Saubhagya Scheme** data, which shows that 100% household electrification has been achieved in U.P., Bihar and Odisha; and 99.9% in Rajasthan.
- The study also found that only 75% of all households used electricity from the grid, suggesting that there were several households that relied on off-grid sources of electricity (including solar home systems, rechargeable batteries, mini-grid electricity, and diesel generators) despite having a connection.
- Overall 16% of households use non-grid-electricity sources, half of which also have grid connections. This is an important finding, as there is an assumption that non-grid sources are popular only among un-electrified households.
- About 80% of the households with electricity infrastructure within 50 m said they did not make use of an electricity connection because they could not afford one. Other reasons for choosing off-grid sources included unreliable supply of electricity, inadequate supply of electricity and lack of residence proof.

### About Saubhagya Scheme

- The centre had launched the Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya) scheme was flagged off in September 2017, to provide electricity to all households by December 2018.
- The households identified via the Socio-economic and Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 are provided with free electricity connections and others were charged a nominal fee of Rs. 500.

## Low velocity of cash circulation

### What is Velocity of money?

- It is the rate at which money circulates, changes hands, or turns over in an economy in a given period.

- Higher velocity means the same quantity of money is used for a greater number of transactions and is related to the demand for money.

### Why in News?

- A latest report by the State Bank of India has found that while the currency in circulation has surpassed what it was in the pre-demonetisation days, it is still short of what it should have been and the lower velocity of circulation in larger states points to sluggish economic activity.
- Currency in circulation has gone up to Rs 20.6 lakh crore as on February 1. It was Rs 17.97 lakh crore a week before 86% of the currency was rendered invalid on November 9, 2016.
- The estimates suggest that currency in circulation is still short of trend by at least Rs 1.5 lakh crore. It estimates bank notes in circulation by March 2019 ought to have been at Rs 22.45 lakh crore, but it is expected to reach only Rs 20.9 lakh crore by then.
- With income velocity of money having shown a sharp plunge, it possibly implies that currency of higher denomination (Rs 2,000) is not getting adequately circulated in the economy.
- In larger States like Maharashtra, U.P., and Karnataka, income velocity is far lesser than the national average, while in States like Chhattisgarh, M.P., A.P. and J&K, the velocity is much higher than the average. A declining income velocity of money suggests that a pick-up in economic activity remains elusive.

## CAG on Rafale

### What's in the news?

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India its report tabled in Parliament said that the contract signed in 2016 to acquire 36 Rafale fighter jets from France through the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) was 2.86% lower in value than Audit's aligned price of the bid received in 2007 when the then UPA government had sought to purchase 126 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA).

### Key findings

- The 2016 deal for 36 jets through IGA is 2.86% cheaper than the UPA deal.
- Savings of 17% in India Specific Enhancements in present deal. However, four ISEs were not required and constitute of 14% of the estimated ISE value.

- In terms of faster deliveries, improvement of only one month in the 2016 contract compared to earlier.
- Government could have used the unsolicited offer by Eurofighter to determine a better price with Dassault Aviation.
- In case of a breach of agreement Indian would have to first settle it through arbitration directly with the French vendors. French government would intervene only after all legal options are exhausted.
- Unrealistic estimation of the benchmark price by the Indian Negotiation Team (INT). The benchmark price estimated by INT was 57% lower than the initial offer of French team.
- On the original Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) deal, CAG pulled up IAF for not defining the Air Staff Quality Requirements (ASQR) properly.
- The CAG also observed that the price could have been reduced further had the benefits of waiving of the bank guarantees for the vendor (Dassault Aviation) been passed on to India.

## Banking Sector Reforms

### What's in the news?

- Minister of State for Finance Shiv Pratap Shukla has highlighted major steps by the government on banking sector reforms.
- To strengthen banks and foster a culture of clean and responsible banking, the Government has followed a comprehensive **4 R's approach** of recognition, resolution, recapitalization and reforms.
- A number of steps have been taken to promote the functioning of PSBs, including:
  - i. instituting efficient practices for effective coordination in large consortium loans by restricting number of lenders in consortium,
  - ii. strict segregation of pre- and post-sanction roles and responsibilities for enhanced accountability,
  - iii. ring-fencing of cash flows and use of technology and analytics for comprehensive diligence across data sources for prudent lending,
  - iv. monitoring of loans above Rs 250 crore through specialised agencies for effective vigil,
  - v. enabling faster bill realisation for MSMEs through discounting by banks on the Trade Receivables electronic Discounting System (TReDS),
  - vi. Comprehensive checking of all accounts above Rs 50 crore that turn NPA being checked for wilful default and fraud.

# International Relations

## India-China Trade

### Overview

- India & China signed a Trade Agreement in 1984 which provided for Most Favored Nation Treatment.
- In 1994, the two countries signed an agreement to avoid double taxation.
- The principal items of Indian exports to China are ores, slag and ash, iron and steel, plastics, organic chemicals, and cotton.
- The main items that comprise Chinese exports to India are electrical machinery and equipment, cement, organic chemicals, nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, silk, mineral fuels, and oils. Value added items like electrical machinery dominates Chinese exports to India.

### Trade Deficit

- The exports to China stood at \$13.3 billion and imports from China stood at \$76.38 billion in 2017-18.
- This shows that India has whopping \$63 billion trade deficit with china, which it tries to bring down.
- In recent times, India's Export to China has said be considerably increasing.
- The exports between April and December stood at \$12.7 billion which is closer to last year's exports of \$13.33 billion.

### Steps to bridge trade deficit

- China signed three export protocols with India on rice, fishmeal and tobacco to allow imports of the three items.
- An announcement regarding Chinese import quotas for sugar and rice for 2019 is expected soon which would aid in planning their exports well in time.
- India is also expecting to sign a protocol for export of Indian soyabean meals, cakes and pomegranates to China in the near future.

### Why in news?

- India's exports to China have grown after several years.

## Exercise Cutlass Express

### About

- The annual Exercise Cutlass Express is sponsored by U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) and conducted by Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF).

- It is an exercise designed to improve combined maritime law enforcement capacity, promote national and regional security in East Africa.
- This exercise also helps in information sharing, planning for securing stability in the region.
- The participating nations will be testing their ability to combat illicit trafficking, piracy, illegal fishing, as well as conduct search and rescue operations.
- It is conducted with the support of various international organisations like the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), Combined Maritime Force (CMF) and European Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR).

### Nations Participated

- The participating nations in the exercise Cutlass Express 2019 were Canada, Comoros, Djibouti, France, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Portugal, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, The Netherlands and the United States.
- The Indian Navy was represented in the exercise through INS Trikand.

### Why in news?

- INS Trikand participates in exercise Cutlass Express 2019.

## Bangladesh Civil Servants

### Overview

- India and Bangladesh signed a MoU for training 1800 Bangladesh Civil Servants.
- The Memorandum of Undertaking was signed between India's National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) and the Ministry of Public Administration of Bangladesh.
- National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) is an institute under the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAR&PG).
- Bangladesh Civil Servants will be trained in e-Governance and service delivery, public policy and implementation, information technology, decentralization, urban development and planning, Ethics in Administration and challenges in implementation of SDGs.
- This is second time India is training Bangladesh civil servants.

- 1500 Bangladesh Civil Servants have already been trained in NCGG under the first MoU signed 5 years ago.

#### Why in news?

- India and Bangladesh sign MOU for training 1800 Bangladesh civil servants in National Centre For Good Governance.

## Jobless Basic Income in Finland

### Universal Basic Income

- Universal basic income (UBI) is a model for providing all citizens of a country geographic area with a given sum of money, regardless of their income, resources or employment status.
- The purpose of the UBI is to prevent or reduce poverty and increase equality among citizens.

### Finland Model

- Finland started a two-year trial for 2,000 Finns, chosen randomly from among the unemployed, become the first Europeans to be paid a regular monthly income.
- The basic income was also not stopped even if they got a job.
- The trial period ended in January, after which report was prepared to weight the working of the program.
- The report suggested that the test group was happier and healthier than the other people.
- But this did not increase the jobs, as the basic income was seen as a way of encouraging the unemployed to take up low-paid or temporary work without fear of losing their benefits.
- The major problem is that this basic income in Finland is not taxed even after the beneficiary gets a job and attains a certain income criteria.

#### Why in news?

- Finland's basic income trial boosts happiness, but not jobs.

## India-China-Arunachal

### About

- The Arunachal Pradesh border that China claims to be its own territory is the largest disputed area, covering around 90000 sq. km.
- During the 1962 war, the People's Liberation Army occupied it but they announced a unilateral ceasefire and

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai withdrew respecting the international boundary called Macmahon Line.

- However, it has continued to assert its claim over the territory and from then almost the whole of Arunachal is claimed by China.
- China lays its claim on Arunachal Pradesh (AP) on the basis of its cultural similarity with Tibet.

### PM visit

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the Sela Tunnel Project in Arunachal Pradesh.
- China had objected to Prime Minister Modi's visit to the state.
- China has also said that India should respect Chinese interest and concerns and should not intensify disputes and complicate the border issue.
- The Indian government replied that the State of Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India.

### Why in news?

- India replies to China on Modi's visit to Arunachal.

## H1-B Visa

### Overview

- The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa in the United States under the Immigration and Nationality act.
- This visa allows the U.S. employers to employ foreign workers to their companies on a temporary basis in case of some specialty occupations.
- The duration of such a visa is of 3 years and is extendable up to 6 years.
- According to a report by the New York Times, 70% of H1 B visas were granted to Indians.

### Demanding Reforms

- A group of mostly Indians on H1B visas held a rally outside the White House demanding immigration law reforms.
- They also demanded for automatic green card approval for children who attain 21 years, below which they are designated in H4-dependent visas.
- At the present they can get student visa or an H1B visa or having to self-deport.
- They also demanded for removal of the country caps for Green Card allotments.
- Currently no country may be allocated more than 7% of the total number of Green Cards granted each year.

- In 2017, a bill introduced in the Congress to end the per country cap.
- Several groups including the American Hospital Association, National Iranian American Council and Canadian Bar Association had raised objections to this, concerned that it would crowd out applications from other countries.
- The group is also pushing for legal childhood arrivals (LCAs) to receive any benefits that individuals brought illegally to the U.S. as minors might receive under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- Illegal Immigrants were eligible for DACA benefits if they arrived in the U.S. before turning 16, had lived in the country since at least June 15, 2007.
- The program allowed them to remain in the country legally, enroll in college and acquire employment authorization.

#### Why in news?

- Indian H1B visa holders rally demand immigration law reforms.

## India-UAE relations

### Overview

- India and United Arab Emirates (UAE) enjoy strong bonds of friendship based on age-old cultural, religious and economic ties between the two nations.
- Both countries soon established diplomatic relations in 1972 with UAE Embassy in India opening in 1972 and Indian Embassy in UAE opening in 1973.
- Since then, both sides have made sincere efforts to improve relations in all fields.
- India-UAE bilateral relationship has evolved into a significant partnership in the economic and commercial sphere.
- India-UAE trade is around US\$ 52 billion (2016-17) making India the largest trading partner of UAE, while UAE is India's third largest trading partner (after China and US).
- UAE is home to 2.8 million Indian diasporas, the largest diaspora community in the UAE.

### Investment

- Now UAE wants to move from a mere energy supplier to being a strategic long-term partner when it comes to the energy sector to India.
- Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) is very keen to expand its investment

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai portfolio in India, especially in the downstream oil and gas sector.

- The oil and gas industry is usually divided into three major sectors: upstream, midstream, and downstream.
- The downstream sector is the refining of petroleum crude oil and the processing and purifying of raw natural gas, as well as the marketing and distribution of products derived from crude oil and natural gas.

#### Why in news?

- Minister of State in the UAE Cabinet and CEO of ADNOC Sultan Al Jaber attended Petrotech 2019, India's flagship oil and gas conference.

## India-Maldives Visa

### About

- The past Maldives government by Yameen imposed a visa freeze on Indians who had been chosen for jobs in the Maldives.
- More than 2,000 applicants had been left in difficult circumstances as a result of the move.

### Recent developments

- After the new government taking up the charge under President Ibu Solih, the visa rules have been relaxed by both the governments.
- Visa Facilitation Agreement has been signed between both the countries.
- It provides very liberal visa regime for Maldivian nationals to visit India for tourism, business, education & medical purposes.
- It also makes it easier for Indians to travel to Maldives for business purposes.

### Changes

- The agreement will provide the Maldives citizens who receive a visa on arrival in India to change their visa status to medical visas if they require hospitalization during their stay.
- Medical visas will also be granted to attendants to accompany patients.
- The government has also agreed to grant visas for parents and other dependents to live in India while their children attend school.
- Maldives also confirmed that the work permits will be issued within 15 days to Indian employees, and the visa fees will be paid by employers in the Maldives.

- Maldives cabinet passed a mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT) to be signed with India, which is an extradition treaty.

#### Why in news?

- India and Maldives reversed their stance on visa issue.

## Defence Pacts with Germany, Sweden

### Overview

- In the multi polar world, India is trying to consolidate its defence infrastructure by going on cooperation agreements with various nations.
- Russia, Israel, USA are the principle defence equipment suppliers to India.
- Now, India is diversifying its opportunities by going in research and development agreement with various countries based on technology transfer.

### Agreement

- In the light of that India has signed defence pacts with Germany and Sweden.
- The agreement with Germany could help to enhance the defence industry cooperation to strengthen military to military engagement as well as research and development linkages.
- The agreement with Sweden will enable both the countries to share classified information with each other.

### Why in news?

- India signs defence pacts with Germany and Sweden.

## Pulwama Attack

### Overview

- On 14 February, 2019 countries one of the worst attacks on security personnel took place at Awantipora in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district.
- The convoy was on the Srinagar-Jammu highway and was on its way to Pulwama

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- when a suicide bomber driving an explosive-laden SUV crashed into the bus.
- A vehicle carrying more than 350 kg of explosives struck the buses that carried CRPF personnel to Jammu.
- It has claimed the life of 44 CRPF personnel and many of the others being severely injured.
- Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) has claimed responsibility for the attack.
- It is said to be shocking the world, as it was the largest attack on security personnel for the past two decades.

### India's Response

- India has revoked the Most Favoured Nation status given to Pakistan.
- It also asked UN to declare JeM chief Masood Azhar as 'designated terrorist' under its provisions.
- India summoned the Pakistan high commissioner to the foreign ministry to hand over a "very strong" protest.
- India also called back the Indian High commissioner in Islamabad to New Delhi for consultations.

### Response from World Countries

- USA has asked Pakistan to immediately end support to all terror groups as it strongly condemned the Pulwama terrorist attack.
- United Nations and other world countries condemned this attack.
- China condemned the attack but it refused Indian condition to declare Masood azhar as "designated terrorist", stating that the countries must not use counter terrorism for political gains.

### Why in news?

- Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) claimed responsibility for the suicide bomb blast on a CRPF convoy in Awantipora, Pulwama

## Science & Technology

### Successful Flight Test of SFDR

#### About Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)

- It is a missile propulsion technology jointly developed by India and Russia.
- It will help both India's surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles to perform better and enhance their strike range, making them more lethal.
- With it, India can have fastest long-range missiles in two categories, providing full-fledged and multi-layered aerial protection from hostile attacks.
- Its successful use in missiles will mark India's entry into select club of nations that use next-generation missile technology against manoeuvring targets, compromising effectiveness of conventional missiles.



#### What is ramjet?

- Ramjet is a form of air-breathing jet engine that uses the vehicle's forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion without a rotating compressor.
- Fuel is injected in the combustion chamber where it mixes with the hot compressed air and ignites.
- A ramjet-powered vehicle requires an assisted take-off like a rocket assist to accelerate it to a speed where it begins to produce thrust.

#### Why in news?

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight tested the second indigenously developed 'Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)' propulsion based missile system.
- The first test was conducted on June, 2018 successfully.

### National Deworming Day campaign

#### About National Deworming Day

- National Deworming Day is aimed at deworming all preschool and school-age children (enrolled and non-enrolled) between the ages of 1-19 years through the platform of schools and Anganwadi Centers to improve their overall health, nutritional status, access to education and quality of life.
- **Albendazole tablets** are orally administered for the children during the programme.
- The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the nodal agency for the implementation of the National Deworming Day.
- The National Deworming Day is implemented by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare in association with the Department of School Education and Literacy under the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Urban Development, and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
- Bi-annual round of deworming is recommended in the States where the prevalence of Soil-Transmitted Helminths infection is more than 20% and annual round in other states.
- Only two States namely Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have reported less than 20% prevalence and have been recommended for the annual round.

#### Why in news?

- The Health Ministry undertook the 8th round of National Deworming Day campaign across the country on 8th February to reduce the prevalence of parasitic intestinal worms among children.

### Leprosy in spotlight

#### Why in news?

- The Leprosy Case Detection Campaign report has shown that 34,730 cases were detected in 2016, 32,147 in 2017, and 16,097 in 2018.

#### Findings of the report

## Infection trail

States that recorded maximum leprosy cases in three years

Year	2016	2017	2018*
Uttar Pradesh	14,282	13,456	12,583
Bihar	9,142	13,031	14,338
Maharashtra	10,103	9,887	9,836
West Bengal	7,211	8,578	9,175
Chhattisgarh	6,738	7,266	6,499
Odisha	6,044	5,383	6,325
Jharkhand	2,533	3,414	3,979



\*Cases on record as on March 2018 Source: National Leprosy Eradication Programme

- The rise in the number of recorded leprosy cases from 86,147 (in 2013-14) to 90,709 (2017-18), reported a decade and a half after India was declared leprosy-free in 2005, has turned the spotlight on the hotspots for the disease.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has set the goal of zero children with leprosy and deformities by 2020, and less than one patient per million for other newly diagnosed patients.
- Today, though, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra remain the 'hotspots' from which maximum prevalence was detected last year.
- High population density, poor sanitation and inadequate access to nutrition are among the reasons for the number remaining high.
- The Centre says a more aggressive detection campaign is being carried out, explaining the numbers.
- There has been a change in the percentage of new child cases from 9.49% in 2013-14 to 8.15% in 2017-18, with the level having remained almost stagnant at 8.94% in 2015-16 and 8.69% in 2016-17.
- In 2016-17, the proportion of new child cases was more than 10% of the new cases detected in 10 States.

### About Leprosy

- Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by Mycobacterium leprae and it usually affects the skin and peripheral nerves.
- The mode of transmission of leprosy is still not known.

## INAGMET-2019

### About the symposium

- Risks and uncertainties in agricultural production system due to increasing climatic variability and weather extremes

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai have become the prime cause of global food insecurity.

- Considering the urgent need of sharing the agro meteorological knowledge among researchers, policy makers, industry and farmers to learn from each other, identify the technologies/practices and develop a roadmap for risk management, the Association of Agro meteorologists (AAM) has organized a 3-day International Symposium.
- The symposium is jointly organized with India Meteorological Department, Indian Centre of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Indian Agricultural Research Institute and Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- The broad themes of the Symposium are:
  - Weather and Climate Services for Agriculture
  - Monsoon Variability and Predictability
  - Climate Variability and Change : Projections, Impacts and interventions for agroeco systems
  - Agro meteorological information and Geospatial Decision Support Systems
  - Risk transfer : Weather and Crop Insurance
  - Post-harvest management and agricultural marketing
  - Biotic and Abiotic Stress Management in Agriculture
  - Perspectives of Agro meteorological advisories
  - Crop Modelling and Forecasting
  - Water Cycle and Water Use Efficiency for Agriculture
  - Industry Interface for Expanding Agro meteorological Services
  - Interventions for Livestock, Poultry and Fisheries management

### Why in news?

- The Association of Agro meteorologists (AAM) has organized a 3 day International Symposium on "Advances in Agro meteorology for Managing Climatic Risks of Farmers" (INAGMET-2019) at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (India) on 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019.
- The symposium is jointly organized with India Meteorological Department, Indian Centre of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Indian Agricultural Research Institute and Jawaharlal Nehru University.

## Improving Research Ecosystem in the country

### About the schemes:

- The Government has launched various schemes to improve the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions and to attract and retain young researchers, which are as follows:
  - **Prime Minister's Research Fellowship:** To attract the bright and meritorious students into research within the country, attractive fellowship is given.
  - Selected students are given fellowship for 5 years – Rs.70,000/- per month for the first two years, Rs. 75,000/- per month in the third year and Rs.80,000 per month in 4th and 5th year with an annual research grant of Rs. 2 lakhs.
  - **Setting up of Research Parks:** The Government has approved setting up of Research Parks at IIT Kharagpur, IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Guwahati, IIT Kanpur, IIT Hyderabad, IIT Gandhinagar and IISc Bangalore.
  - **Impacting research Innovation and Technology (IMPRINT):** It provides solutions to the most relevant engineering challenges and translating knowledge into viable technology (products or processes) in ten selected technology domains.
  - **Uchhatar Avishkar Yojana (UAY):** It aims to promote innovation of a higher order that directly impacts the needs of the Industry and thereby improves the competitive edge of Indian manufacturing.
  - **Smart India Hackathons** are being organized on yearly basis since 2017 to find out digital solutions to various problems faced by the people and gives hands on working and research opportunity for engineering students.
  - Institution's Innovation Council (IIC) established in 960 Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) for promoting innovation ecosystem within their campuses.

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- A Trainee Teacher Scheme had been initiated in NITs with the objective to attract, motivate and sponsor best graduate engineers for part time M.Tech and Ph.D. programmes.

### Why in news?

- This information was given by the Minister of State (HRD), Dr. Satya Pal Singh today in a written reply to a Lok Sabha question.

## Space Technology in Agriculture Sector

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has been pro-active in using the space technology in agricultural sector.
- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare established a Centre, called Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre, in 2012, for operationalisation of the space technology developed in the ISRO, for crop production forecasting.
- The Department has another centre called Soil and Land Use Survey of India, which uses satellite data for soil resources mapping.
- Currently, the Department is using space technology for its various programmes such as-
  - Forecasting Agricultural Output using Space, Agro-meteorology and Land-based Observations (FASAL) project.
  - Coordinated programme on Horticulture Assessment and Management using geoinformatics (CHAMAN) project.
  - National Agricultural Drought Assessment and Monitoring System (NADAMS)
  - Rice-Fallow Area Mapping and intensification
  - Geo tagging of infrastructure and assets created under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana.
  - Crop Insurance.
- The space technology helps getting fast and unbiased information about the crop situation in the country.
- It provides digital data, which is amenable to various analysis. Because of its synoptic view, it provides images of the whole country in a very short duration.

- Hence, this data can be used for various programmes, which need information on crop type, crop area estimates, crop condition, crop damages, crop growth etc.
- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare had launched KISAN [C(K)rop Insurance using Space technology and geoinformatics] project during October 2015.
- The project envisaged use of high-resolution remote sensing data for optimum crop cutting experiment planning and improving yield estimation.

#### Why in news?

- This information was given by Minister of State for Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Shri Parshottam Rupala in Lok Sabha.

### Space Technology for Border Management

- Union Government has formed a Task Force for identifying areas for use of space technology in improving border management.
- Task Force is headed by Joint Secretary (Border Management) with members from Border Guarding Forces (BGFs) and ISRO.
- Details of the areas identified for use of space technology are as under: –
  - Island development and security
  - Border Surveillance
  - Communication and Navigation
  - GIS and Operations Planning System
  - Border Infrastructure Monitoring

#### Why in news?

- This was stated by the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Kiren Rijiju in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

### TB survivors challenge patent extension

#### Why in news?

- In an attempt to ensure that anti-TB drug Bedaquiline – which is safer and more effective – is made affordable and accessible to everybody with drug resistant TB (DR-TB), two tuberculosis survivors from India and South Africa have filed a patent challenge against Johnson and Johnson's application to extend the patent over the drug.

#### More on the issue:

- The J&J patent application is being challenged on the grounds that the new salt form of Bedaquiline, does not merit patenting under India's Patents Act, 1970 as it is a minor reformulation of the drug without any increase in therapeutic efficacy and is a mere act of patent evergreening.
- In India, the high price of Bedaquiline is a significant barrier for the government to make it available to all patients with drug resistant TB thus exposing patients to less effective drugs with severe side effects.

#### About Bedaquiline

- Bedaquiline is a drug used to treat TB patients with bacteria that are resistant to other anti-TB drugs and thus suffer from multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB).

#### About TB

- Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called Mycobacterium tuberculosis.
- The bacteria usually attack the lungs, but they can also damage other parts of the body.
- TB spreads through the air when a person with TB of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- Most people infected with the bacteria that cause tuberculosis don't have symptoms.
- When symptoms do occur, they usually include a cough (sometimes blood-tinged), weight loss, night sweats and fever.
- Treatment isn't always required for those without symptoms.
- Patients with active symptoms will require a long course of treatment involving multiple antibiotics.

### Defence Innovation Hubs (DIH)

#### About Defence Innovation Hubs (DIHs)

- The Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework of the Government envisages setting up and managing independent Defence Innovation Hubs (DIHs).
- These DIHs will serve as platforms where innovators can get information about needs and feedback from the Services directly and create solutions for India's major defence platforms. This structure is also geared towards attracting more innovators to work for the defence sector in India.

## iDEX

- The Framework to Fund Defence Innovation Hubs under iDEX, approved by the Board of Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO) prescribes the following minimum criterion for setting up Defence Innovation Hubs.
- Any Central Government recognized Incubator including but not limited to:
  - Department of Science and Technology (DST) recognized Incubators.
  - Atal Innovation Mission, NITIAayog created Atal Incubation Centers (AICs) and Established Incubation Centers (EICs).
  - Ministry of MSME recognized incubators.
  - Any other incubator recognized or funded through any Central government scheme.
  - The incubator located in districts mentioned in the list of SME clusters hosted by the Ministry of MSME in collaboration with UNIDO.
  - Incubator / Hub promoted by local industry associations.

### Why in news?

- The Defence Innovation Organisation set up under Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework has announced setting up of two Defence Innovation Hubs (DIHs) in Tamil Nadu (Coimbatore) and Maharashtra (Nashik).

## Gaganyaan

### About Gaganyaan

- Gaganyaan is an Indian crewed orbital spacecraft intended to be the basis of the Indian human spaceflight program.
- The spacecraft is being designed to carry three people, and a planned upgraded version will be equipped with rendezvous and docking capability.
- In its maiden crewed mission, Indian Space Research Organization's largely autonomous 3.7-tonne capsule will orbit the Earth at 400 km (250 mi) altitude for up to seven days with a three-person crew on board.
- The crewed vehicle is planned to be launched on ISRO's GSLV Mk III in 2022. This HAL-manufactured crew module had its first uncrewed experimental flight in 2014.

### Why in news?

- A national review committee on Gaganyaan is slated to meet for the first time on March 5 and 6 and comprehensively scan the contours of the first Indian human mission to space.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) wants to unveil the human mission's details to stakeholders from multiple agencies, and also keep the nation in the loop about the prestigious mission, K.Sivan, ISRO Chairman and Secretary, Department of Space, said.
- He added, "It should also give us the confidence that we are on the right track with such a humongous project."

## Antibiotic-resistant NDM-1 gene

### Why in news?

- The recent detection of the antibiotic resistant (AR) gene NDM-1, first isolated in India, in the Arctic region is a further indication of the globalisation of antimicrobial resistance, said a study.
- The research was conducted in the High Arctic zone (Kongsfjorden region of Svalbard) and scientists were surprised to find a rather robust presence of NDM-1, according to Clare McCann, principal author of the study.

### What is a superbug?

- A superbug, also called multi-resistant, is a bacterium that carries several resistance genes.
- These are resistant to multiple antibiotics and are able to survive even after exposure to one or more antibiotics.
- Like any living organism, bacteria can mutate as they multiply. Also like any living organism, bacteria have a strong evolutionary drive to survive.
- So, over time, a select few will mutate in particular ways that make them resistant to antibiotics.
- Then, when antibiotics are introduced, only the bacteria that can resist that treatment can survive to multiply further, proliferating the line of drug-resistant bugs.

## Indian gut microbiome

### Why in news?

- By studying the faecal samples of over 100 healthy people from Madhya Pradesh and

Kerala, researchers from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Bhopal have decoded the Indian gut microbiome and have created a gene catalogue.

- Constructed using multiple omics approaches such as genomics and proteomics, the catalogue contains details on the different genes coded by the gut bacteria and the functions carried out by the bacteria.

#### Comparitive analysis

- This study also compared the gut microbiome of Indians with people in China, the U.S. and Denmark.
- The Indian gut microbiome showed higher levels of Prevotella bacteria compared to the other populations.
- The presence of these species in high abundance in Indian gut microbiome correlates with the food habits and the diet of the Indian population, which is very different from the other western populations.
- Faecal samples from 53 people from Madhya Pradesh and 57 from Kerala were used to construct the microbial gene catalogue.
- The catalogue contains 1,551,581 genes and 943,395 genes out of them were identified as unique to the Indian population.
- About 9% (almost one million) microbial genes were found unique to our population, and were not identified in the integrated microbial gene catalogue

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constructed from other populations across the globe.

- The study also highlighted the differences in microbiome composition between the two states.
- Samples from Kerala had a higher abundance of short-chain fatty acid producing bacteria such as Faecalibacterium and Roseburia , in addition to Prevotella .
- This may be due to the fact that they consumed an omnivorous diet containing rice, fish and meat.
- Prevotella , the key species in Indian gut was comparatively higher in the Madhya Pradesh population.
- This group consists mostly of people eating a plant-based diet and also showed an enrichment of branched-chain amino acid and lipopolysaccharide biosynthesis pathways.

#### Faecal metabolites

- Using large-scale metabolomics, the study also identified the different faecal metabolites (end products after microbial metabolism) of the Indian samples and mapped their association with the gut microbial species.
- Th research has identified that a drug made and tested in the U.S. may not work for the Indian population.
- So understanding the gut microbiome will help customise drugs and also develop new strategies for tackling the metabolic diseases by correcting the imbalance in the gut microbiome.

## Environment

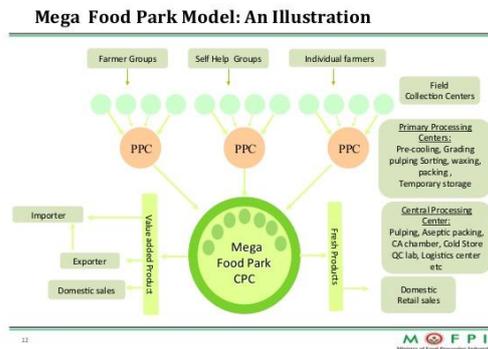
### Mega food park

#### Why in news?

- Cremica Food Park is the first mega food park of Himachal Pradesh.
- The Park is located at Village Singhain Una District of Himachal Pradesh. It is set up at a cost of Rs 107.34 crore.

#### Mega Food Park Scheme

- India's first mega food park 'Sri Mega Food Park', sprawling 147-acre space, was opened in Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh in 2012.



- To give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables, the **Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing Mega Food Park Scheme in the country.**
- The Mega Food Park Scheme is based on “**Cluster**” approach and envisages **creation of state of art support infrastructure** in a well-defined agri/horticultural zone for setting up of modern food processing units along with well-established supply chain.
- Common facilities and enabling infrastructure is created at **Central Processing Centre** and facilities for primary processing and storage is created near the farm in the form of **Primary Processing Centers (PPCs) and Collection Centers (CCs).**
- Under the Scheme, the Centre provides financial assistance up to Rs 50 crore per mega food park project.

### Crying Keelback

#### Why in news?

- Scientists have discovered new species of non-venomous snake named Crying keelback in Lepa-Rada district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Its zoological name *Hebius lacrima*. *Lacrima* in Latin means tear. Globally snakes are represented by 3,709 species. The northeast is home to some 110 species and Arunachal Pradesh accounting for 55 species.

#### About crying keelback



- It has been named so because of dark spot under its eyes looking like black tear that interrupts white stripe running along upper jaw to back of its head and beyond.
- It belongs to genus *Hebius*, which has total 44 species of snakes worldwide. It lives near streams along paddy fields and feeds on small fish, tadpole, frogs and geckos.
- It has combination of a distinctive broad, white, interrupted stripe along its body, three rows of irregular dark blotches (not vertically aligned) on each side, six cream, elongated spots on its anterior part and smooth dorsal scale row.
- This characteristic differentiates it from other snakes in *Hebius* genus.

#### More info

- Several animals, birds, amphibians and insects have been discovered in Arunachal Pradesh in more than two decades in recent past.
- **Arunachal macaque** (*Macaca munzala*) was discovered in 1997 and was recognised as new primate species in 2004. **White-cheeked macaque** (*Macaca leucogenys*), another primate species was discovered in 2015.
- **Leaf deer** (*Muntiacus putaoensis*) was discovered in 2002. **Himalayan forest thrush** was discovered in 2016 and it was given scientific name **Zoothera salimalii** after legendary ornithologist Salim Ali.

## Dolphin Census

### Why in news?

- Odisha's recent annual census of dolphins in its waters have thrown up some shocking numbers, with the aquatic mammals' population declining from 469 in 2018 to 259 in 2019.
- The census covered important aquatic ecosystems in the state including the Chilika lake, India's largest brackish water lagoon, spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts, the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary and its nearby areas within the Bhitarkanika National Park in Kendrapara district, Balasore district and the mouth of the Rushukulya River in Ganjam district.

### Key findings

- The reduction in the number of dolphins compared to last year could be due to the migration of species from the Chilika Lake and other water bodies to the deep sea.
- Gahirmatha is the home of the state's largest dolphin population, having 126 animals. More dolphins were found in Gahirmatha than Chilika due to its bigger areas.
- After Gahirmatha, Chilika had the next largest population at 113, followed by the Rushukulya River in Ganjam district, with 15 dolphins and finally, Balasore, with 5 individuals.
- The dolphin species sighted during the state-wide census included the Irrawaddy, the Bottle Nose and the Humpback.
- Dolphins have been included in Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972, in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and categorised as 'Endangered' on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List.

## Quakes at Palghar

### Why in news?

- Since November 2018, Maharashtra's Palghar district has experienced dozens of small earthquakes.
- This pattern of several small earthquakes occurring in a brief time-window is called an **earthquake swarm**.

### Earthquake swarms

- Earthquake swarms are **generally defined as a sequence of events closely clustered in time and space without a single outstanding shock**.
- There are a series of low magnitude earthquakes that occur in a localized region and over a period of time ranging from days, weeks to even months. When seismic energy piles up inside the Earth and is released in small amounts from certain points, such a series of earthquakes can occur.
- They are differentiated from earthquakes succeeded by a series of aftershocks.
- When seismic energy piles up inside the Earth and is released in small amounts from certain points, such a series of earthquakes can occur.
- Sometimes, these rumblings of the Earth are also accompanied by acoustic or sound emissions.
- The situation cannot be taken lightly as many earthquakes have been preceded by earthquake swarm activity.

### Reasons why earthquake swarms take place

- Swarms are observed in volcanic environments, hydrothermal systems, and other active geothermal areas, according to geophysicists.
- In India, sequences of low-intensity quakes are common in areas that have been hit previously, like Saurashtra in Gujarat and Koyna in Maharashtra, but they are also seen in areas without a history of seismic activity.
- They are the result of seismic activity, **hydro-seismicity** due to water percolation post-monsoon, or magmatic activity in the region.
- In the Rampur area of Himachal Pradesh the earthquake swarm was later attributed to low strength of the earth's crust in the area which could not hold the tectonic energy etc.

### Why Palghar?

- Palghar falls in Zone 3 of the seismic zoning map developed by the Bureau of Indian Standards.
- This means that buildings here must be able to withstand earthquakes of intensity 5.5-6.5 on the Medvedev-Sponheuer-Karnik (MSK) scale.
- Intensity is a qualitative measure of how people experience earthquakes, rather

than the energy released, which is measured by the magnitude scale.

#### Seismic Zone Map of India: -2002

About **59 percent** of the land area of India is liable to seismic hazard damage

Zone	Intensity
Zone V	Very High Risk Zone Area liable to shaking Intensity IX (and above)
Zone IV	High Risk Zone Intensity VIII
Zone III	Moderate Risk Zone Intensity VII
Zone II	Low Risk Zone VI (and lower)

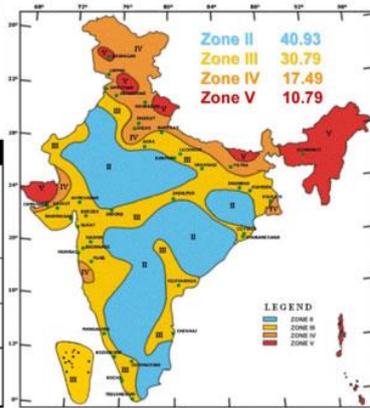


Fig. 1 Seismic zonation and intensity map of India

## Kerala's mystery frog

### Why in news?

- Scientists have discovered a new amphibian a mysterious **narrow-mouthed frog**, that makes only a four-day appearance in seasonal roadside puddles every year in Kerala's Wayanad district.

### About:



- The frog **Mysticellus franki** (named after evolutionary biologist Franky Bossuyt from Brussel's Vrije Universiteit) is not just a new species but also belongs to a completely new genus, Mysticellus (after Latin mysticus, meaning mysterious; and ellus, meaning diminutive, for the frog is just around 3 cm long).
- Researchers first found tadpoles of the species whose physical features and DNA did not match any known species during routine field surveys in Wayanad district in 2013.
- After a long search, the team finally found large groups of around 200 adult frogs in 2015 in a single locality in Wayanad, just metres away from vehicular movement, plantation activities and human settlements.
- Physical features (such as its marbled underside) and DNA studies

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai revealed the frogs to be a completely new species. Adults have two black spots that look like eyes on their backs, a defensive feature.

- Genetic studies further revealed that the frog is around 40 million years old and its nearest relatives live more than 2,000 km away, in south east Asia (including Indo-Burma, Malaysia and Vietnam).
- This south east Asian connection adds strength to the theories that India and southeast Asia were connected in the past by land bridges, suggest the authors.

## India, China lead global greening effort: study

### Why in news?

- In a recent NASA study it has been found that India and China are at the forefront of planting trees.
- In the study, on February 11, 2019 it was said that the world has become more green than 20 years ago.
- India broke its world record by planting 6.6 million saplings in just 12 hours in 2017.

### Key facts related to the report

- India and China contributed one-third to greening the world between 2000-2017, while the two countries have 9% of the land's forest land.
- Only 25 percent of global growth in tree-planted areas is of China, which is only 6.6 percent of the global forestry sector.
- China has become green because of forests (42 percent) and agricultural land (32 percent), whereas in India it is mainly due to agricultural land (82 percent). In this part of the forest (4.4 percent) is very less.
- China is undertaking ambitious programs to increase forests and preserve them with the aim of reducing air pollution, air pollution and climate change.
- This amazing discovery of NASA satellites revealed that these two countries, with the world's largest population, are moving forward in this direction through tree plantation and agro based ambitious programs.
- This result of the study is in contradiction to the general belief that it is said that green areas are declining due to excessive exploitation in countries with large population.
- Researchers have been informed after data that during this time there has been an

increase of 5% in the greenery of the Earth, which is equal to the whole Amazon rainforest area.

- In India and China, food production has increased more than 35 percent since 2000. The use of agricultural facilities and fertilizers has increased the agriculture sector.
- With the help of ground water irrigation in India, food production has increased significantly.
- The situation in the 1970s and 1980s was not correct in India and China in relation to tree plantations.

## Lion conservation plan

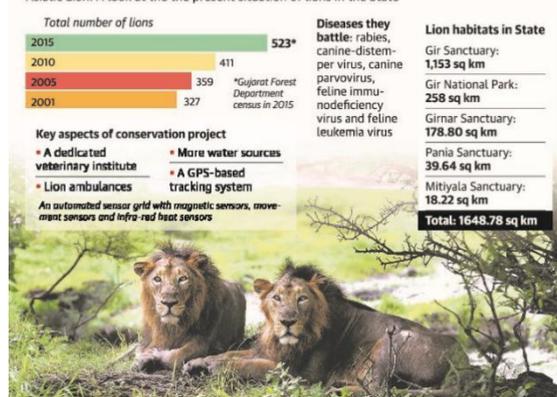
### Why in news?

- Three months after at least 20 lions in Gujarat succumbed to a virus, the Centre and the Gujarat governments have announced a ₹97.8 crore **Asiatic Lion Conservation Project**.

### Details of the project:

#### Saving the roar

The Centre and the Gujarat government have joined hands for the conservation of the Asiatic Lion. A look at the present situation of lions in the State



- A key outcome of the project is to have a dedicated veterinary institute, “lion ambulances”, and back-up stocks of vaccines that may be required.
- There are close to 600 lions in Gujarat, according to State forest officials at the meeting. However, there has been no move yet to translocate lions to a location outside Gujarat.
- There is a committee of experts from both States examining the suitability of Madhya Pradesh as a potential lion reserve.
- The **Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh** was identified to be the most suitable for reintroducing the species, according to a Supreme Court appointed technical expert committee, but there has been no progress on the proposa

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- The SC in April 2013 had ordered the translocation of some lions from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh within six months, but this hasn’t happened.
- This was ordered after several recommendations by expert groups, including the Wildlife Institute of India.
- It emphasized that the long-term survival of the lion as a species was best served if they could be present outside Gujarat, too, so that they are protected against, say, a forest fire, a disease, or calamities.
- While the lion deaths of last year brought these questions to the fore, they also pointed to the stark reality of lion numbers rising to an extent that several of them were now found outside protected areas and involved in human-animal conflict as well as in increasing contact with domestic animals as well as feral dogs, from where they could have contracted the virus.
- The Gujarat government, on its part, has envisaged a ‘Greater Gir’ that includes, other than the existing Gir National Park, sanctuaries in Girnar, Pania and Mitiyala.
- Key aspects of the conservation project include undertaking “habitat improvement” measures, making more sources of water available, creating a wildlife crime cell, and a task force for the Greater Gir region.
- It would also involve having in place a GPS-based tracking system, which would look at surveillance tracking, animal and vehicle tracking. There would also be an automated sensor grid that would have magnetic sensors, movement sensors and infra-red heat sensors.

## Roof Top Solar Power System

### Why in news?

- A number of measures taken to popularize Roof Top Solar Power System 1279MW Rooftop Solar capacity installed.



### What is rooftop solar?

Roof top solar installations are photo-voltaic system that can be installed on the roofs or buildings for generating electricity.

- They are being installed both on top of commercial buildings and residential complexes.
- Roof top solar installations help in providing an alternative eco-friendly source of electricity without depleting our fossil fuels.
- Immense help in those remote locations that are not yet connected to the grid.

### Achievements

- Under the present rooftop solar programme, which was approved by the Government in December 2015, an aggregated capacity of 2100 MW is targeted to be achieved in residential, institutional, social and Government sector through central financial assistance by the year 2019-20.
- As per data captured on the SPIN portal of the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy** (MNRE), a total of 1279 MW capacity grid connected rooftop solar PV systems have been reported installed in the country as on 31.1.2019.
- While no formal study has been commissioned to study the rooftop solar scenario, the Government is taking a number of steps to promote rooftop solar in the country, these include:
  - Providing central financial assistance (CFA) for residential/institutional/social sectors and achievement linked incentives for Government sectors through Rooftop Solar Scheme.
  - Persuading states to notify the net/gross metering regulations for RTS projects. Now all the 36 States/UTs/SERCs have notified such regulations and/or tariff orders.
  - Prepared model MoU, PPA and Capex Agreement for expeditious implementation of RTS projects in Govt. Sector.
  - Allocate Ministry-wise expert PSUs for handholding and support in implementation of RTS projects in various Ministries/Departments.
  - **Suryamitra program** is being implemented for **creation of a qualified technical workforce**.
  - Initiated DG S&D rate contract for solar rooftop systems.

- Creation of SPIN-an online platform for expediting project approval, report submission and monitoring progress of implementation of RTS projects.
- Initiated Geo-tagging of RTS project, in co-ordination with ISRO, for traceability and transparency.
- Facilitated availability of concessional loans from World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) to SBI and PNB respectively, for disbursal of loans to industrial and commercial sectors, where CFA/incentive is not being provided by the Ministry.

## Moving continents created new centipede species

### Why in news?

- Fossils and advanced genetic methods to study relationships between species now tell an intriguing story about a group of **tropical centipedes**.
- Continental drift (the moving apart of continents) almost 100 million years ago created many species of *Ethmostigmus* centipedes in the world's tropics.
- In the Indian peninsula, these centipedes first originated in the southern and central Western Ghats, and then spread across the ranges here, finds a study published in *BMC Evolutionary Biology*.

### What explains its distribution across continents and the diversity of species in peninsular India?



India is home to six, fairly large *Ethmostigmus* centipedes: four dwell in the Western Ghats, one in the Eastern Ghats and one in north-east India.

- Africa, south-east Asia and Australia are also home to other species of *Ethmostigmus* centipedes.
- Using genetic data of 398 *Ethmostigmus* centipedes from published studies, they constructed a species 'time-tree' a network that reveals how species are related to each other and when new species emerged of

nine species (across peninsular India, Africa, Australia and southeast Asia).

- They used three fossil centipedes to calibrate the DNA tree, which gave them the approximate times that the species originated in the past.

#### Common ancestor

- The results suggest that a single ancestor gave rise to all *Ethmostigmus* centipedes in the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana (continents including Australia, Africa and peninsular India comprised this single landmass then).
- The subsequent breakup of Gondwana and the drifting away of different landmasses shaped the early evolutionary history of *Ethmostigmus*. And the *Ethmostigmus* in peninsular India are very unique, says co-author Joshi.
- They started evolving at a time when peninsular India was moving towards south Asia.
- This started around 72 million years ago, in the southern and central Western Ghats.
- The *Ethmostigmus* here dispersed to the Eastern Ghats (now home to *E. tristis*).

## Conservation of migratory species of wild animals (CMS)

#### Why in news?

- The 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals (CMS), an environmental treaty under the aegis of United Nations Environment Programme, is going to be hosted by India during 15th to 22nd February 2020 at Gandhinagar in Gujarat.

#### Migratory species

- Migratory species are those animals that move from one habitat to another during different times of the year, due to various factors such as food, sunlight, temperature, climate, etc.
- The movement between habitats, can sometimes exceed thousands of miles/kilometres for some migratory birds and mammals.
- A migratory route can involve nesting and also requires the availability of habitats before and after each migration.
- India is temporary home to several migratory animals and birds. The important among these include Amur

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Falcons, Bar headed Gheese, Black necked cranes, Marine turtles, Dugongs, Humpbacked Whales, etc.

- The Indian sub-continent is also part of the major bird flyway network, i.e, the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) that covers areas between the Arctic and Indian Oceans, and covers at least 279 populations of 182 migratory water bird species, including 29 globally threatened species.
- India has also launched the National Action Plan for conservation of migratory species under the Central Asian Flyway.

#### CMS

- The **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals** more commonly abbreviated to just the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) or the **Bonn Convention** and CMS COP is known as Global Wildlife conference aims to conserve terrestrial, marine and avian migratory species throughout their range.
- It is an international treaty, concluded under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme, concerned with the conservation of wildlife and habitats on a global scale.
- Since the Convention's entry into force, its membership has grown steadily to include over 120 Parties from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, Europe and Oceania.
- The Convention was signed in 1979 in Bad Godesberg, a suburb of Bonn (hence the name), and entered into force in 1983.
- The depositary is the government of the Federal Republic of Germany.
- The CMS is the only global and UN-based intergovernmental organization established exclusively for the conservation and management of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range.
- CMS and its daughter agreements determine policy and provide further guidance on specific issues through their Strategic Plans, Action Plans, resolutions, decisions and guidelines.
- All maintain on their websites a list of all decisions taken, guidelines issues and Action Plans adopted by the Member States.
- In this respect, CMS acts as a framework Convention. The Agreements may range from legally binding treaties (called Agreements) to less formal instruments,

such as Memoranda of Understanding, and can be adapted to the requirements of particular regions.

- The development of models tailored according to the conservation needs throughout the migratory range is a unique capacity to CMS.
  - Appendix I – Threatened Migratory Species.
  - Appendix II – Migratory Species requiring international cooperation.

## Waste- to- energy

### Introduction:

- An analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment has revealed that nearly half of India's waste-to-energy (WTE) plants, meant to convert non-biodegradable waste, are defunct. Further, the country's inability to segregate waste has resulted in even the existing plants working below capacity.

### Waste to Energy

- Most wastes that are generated find their way into land and water bodies without proper treatment, causing severe water and air pollution.
- The problems caused by solid and liquid wastes can be significantly mitigated through the adoption of environment-friendly waste to energy technologies that will allow treatment and processing of wastes before their disposal.
- **The environmental benefits of waste to energy, as an alternative to disposing of waste in landfills, are clear and compelling.**
- Waste to energy generates clean, reliable energy from a renewable fuel source, thus reducing dependence on fossil fuels, the combustion of which is a major contributor to GHG emissions.
- **These measures would reduce the quantity of wastes, generate a substantial quantity of energy from them, and greatly reduce pollution of water and air, thereby offering a number of social and economic benefits that cannot easily be quantified.**

### Findings

- Since 1987, 15 WTE plants have been set up across the country. However, seven of these plants have since shut down. Apart from Delhi, these include plants at Kanpur,

- The key reasons for closure are the plants' inability to handle mixed solid waste and the high cost of electricity generated by them that renders it unattractive to power companies.
- This track record, however, has not stopped the government from betting big on WTE.
- The NITI Aayog, as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, envisages 800 megawatt from WTE plants by 2018-19, which is 10 times the capacity of all the existing WTE plants put together.
- It also proposes setting up a Waste-to-Energy Corporation of India, which would construct incineration plants through PPP models. Currently, there are 40-odd WTE plants at various stages of construction.
- The fundamental reason (for the inefficiency of these plants) is the quality and composition of waste.
- MSW (municipal solid waste) in India has low calorific value and high moisture content.
- As most wastes sent to the WTE plants are unsegregated, they also have high inert content.
- These wastes are just not suitable for burning in these plants.
- To burn them, additional fuel is required which makes these plants expensive to run.

### Constraints in the waste to energy sector

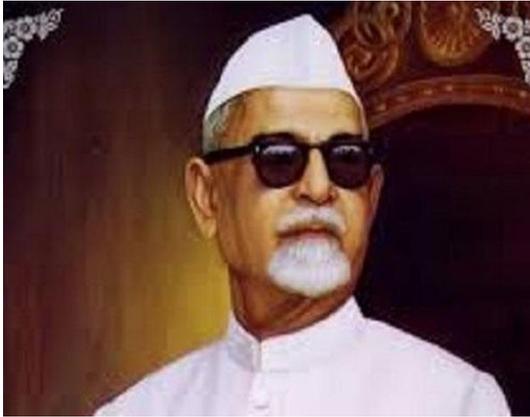
- Waste-to-Energy is still a new concept in the country;
- Most of the proven and commercial technologies in respect of urban wastes are required to be imported;
- The costs of the projects especially based on bio-methanation technology are high as critical equipment for a project is required to be imported.
- In view of low level of compliance of MSW Rules 2000 by the Municipal Corporations/ Urban Local Bodies, segregated municipal solid waste is generally not available at the plant site, which may lead to non-availability of waste-to-energy plants.
- Lack of financial resources with Municipal Corporations/Urban Local Bodies.
- Lack of conducive policy guidelines from State Governments in respect of allotment of land, supply of garbage and power purchase / evacuation facilities.

## Culture

### Dr Zakir Hussain

#### Why in news?

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, paid floral tributes to Dr Zakir Hussain, former President of India, on his birth anniversary at Rashtrapati Bhavan on February 8, 2019.



#### About Zakir Hussain

- Zakir Husain, (born Feb. 8, 1897, Hyderabad, India—died May 3, 1969, New Delhi), Indian statesman, the first Muslim to hold the largely ceremonial position of president of India. His fostering of secularism was criticized by some Muslim activists.
- Husain responded to the nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi's appeal to Indian youth to shun state-supported institutions.
- He helped found the Muslim National University in Aligarh (later moved to New Delhi) and served as its vice-chancellor from 1926 to 1948.
- At Gandhi's invitation, he also became chairman of the National Committee on Basic Education, established in 1937 to design a Gandhian syllabus for schools.
- In 1948 Husain became vice-chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University, and four years later he entered the upper house of the national Parliament.
- In 1956–58 he served on the executive board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- He was appointed governor of Bihar state in 1957 and was elected vice president of India in 1962.

- As the official Congress Party candidate, he was elected president of India in 1967 and served until his death.

### Cultural Heritage Youth Leadership Programme (CHYLP)

#### About CHYLP

- Nodal Agency: Ministry of Culture
- The scheme CHYLP, aims to enrich awareness of Indian culture and heritage amongst the youth in order to promote, understand and develop fondness for India's rich cultural heritage, with a view to develop appropriate leadership qualities amongst youth.
- The focus of the programme was is on less privileged children residing in backward areas by interacting with them in vernacular languages for their better understanding.
- The programme was given to Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), an autonomous organization working under the purview of Ministry of Culture.

#### About CCRT

- The Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) is autonomous organisation under Ministry of Culture of Government of India. Established in May 1979, to support cultural education, with its inception it took over the Scheme-Propagation of Culture among College and School students, which was being implemented by Delhi University since 1970, where a Research and Production Cell was functioning for this purpose.

#### Why in news?

- CCRT allocated Rs.10.00 lakhs for implementation of this scheme.

### Scheme for Pension and Medical Aid to Artistes

#### About the scheme

- The Government is implementing a Scheme namely "Scheme for Pension and Medical Aid to Artistes".
- The objective of the Scheme is to improve financial and socio-economic status of the old aged artistes and scholars who have contributed significantly in their specialized fields of arts, letters etc. but

leading a miserable life or are in penury condition.

- The Scheme has also provision to provide medical aid facility to such Artistes and his/her spouse by covering them under a convenient and affordable Health Insurance Scheme of the Government.

#### Why in news?

- The above information was given by Minister of State (independent charge) for Culture and Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Mahesh Sharma, in reply to an Unstarred Question in the Lok Sabha.

## Tribal Drink (Mahua)

### About TRIFED

- The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) came into existence in 1987.
- It is a national-level apex organization functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India.
- TRIFED has its registered and Head Office located in New Delhi and has a network of 13 Regional Offices located at various places in the country.
- TRIFED, a multi-State Cooperative Society, is promoting and marketing tribal products, tribal art and crafts within the country and abroad by providing marketing support to tribal products through its network of 31 retail outlets "TRIBES INDIA", 37 consignment outlets of various State Emporia and 16 franchise outlets.
- It organizes exhibitions like National Tribal Craft Expo called "Aadi Mahotsav" etc. in which it promotes and markets tribal products.
- It has also begun providing e-commerce platforms to the tribal artisans to sell their products.
- Towards this, TRIFED has entered into agreements with e-commerce platforms like Snapdeal and Amazon who will offer their customers various tribal products and produce through their portals.

#### Why in news?

- Mahua is an alcoholic drink made out of flowers of the Mahua tree and is a popular summer drink.
- The government plans to sell it as a mildly-alcoholic drink.

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai

- To carry this forth, TRIFED has signed a MoU with IIT-Delhi.
- The drink would be mostly sourced from Bastar and sold under the brand name Mahua.
- Mahua longifolia is an Indian tropical tree found largely in the central and north Indian plains and forests.



## Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony

### About Tagore Award

- Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony was instituted by the Government of India from 2012 recognizing the contributions made by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore to humanity at large with his works and ideas, as part of the Commemoration of his 150th Birth Anniversary in 2012, for promoting values of Cultural Harmony.
- It is awarded annually and carries an amount of Rs. One Crore (convertible to foreign currency), a citation in a Scroll, a Plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft / handloom item.
- Prime Minister is the ex-Officio chairman of the selection committee.
- This annual award is given to individuals, associations, institutions or organizations for their outstanding contribution towards promoting values of Cultural Harmony.
- The Award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or gender.
- Normally, contributions made during ten years immediately preceding the nomination are considered.
- Older contributions may also be considered if their significance has become apparent only recently.
- The First Tagore Award - 2012 was conferred upon Pt. Ravi Shankar, the Indian Sitar Maestro and the Second Award - 2013 was conferred upon Maestro Zubin Mehta.

- Shri Rajkumar Singhajit Singh, Chhayanaut (a cultural organization of Bangladesh); and Shri Ram Sutar Vanji have been selected for the year 2014, 2015 & 2016.

### Why in news?

- The President of India will present the Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony to Shri Rajkumar Singhajit Singh; Chhayanaut (a cultural organization of Bangladesh); and Shri Ram Sutar Vanji for the years 2014, 2015 & 2016 respectively on 18.02.2019 at Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra, New Delhi.

## Haj Pilgrimage

**Pilgrims' progress**

As people gear up for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the holiest city for Muslims, a look at some facts

**1,75,025** Muslims from India performed Haj in 2018. Of them, 48% were women

**1,75,000** people have so far registered for Haj this year

**1,300** women performed Haj without a 'mehram' (male companion) in 2018

**2,340** women will perform Haj without 'mehram' in 2019



₹113 crore amount pilgrims will save in 2019 due to the reduction in GST on Haj from 18% to 5%

Pilgrims arriving at the State Haj House in Srinagar.  
FILE PHOTO: NISSAR AHMAD

There are two Islamic countries - Indonesia, from where around 2 lakh people participate and then there is Pakistan from where 1,84,000 people participate. As of today, India already has over 1,75,000 participants and we are aiming to supersede Pakistan this year

MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI  
Union Minister of Minority Affairs

**Amount people from various cities will save this year on air fare (in ₹)**

Srinagar	11,377
Ahmedabad	7,305
Aurangabad	9,373
Delhi	7,967
Gaya	11,027
Guwahati	13,049
Ranchi	11,946
Kolkata	9,787
Hyderabad	7,204

### About Haj Pilgrimage

- Ministry of Minority Affairs is the nodal ministry to conduct Haj pilgrimage in India.
- Haj pilgrimage for the Indian Pilgrims is conducted either through Haj Committee of India (HCOI), which is a statutory organization under the administrative control of Ministry of Minority Affairs or through the Private Tour Operators (PTOs).
- The quota of pilgrims is divided between Haj Committee of India (HCOI) and Private Tour Operators (PTOs).
- The Hajj 2002, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made it mandatory for the PTOs to come through their respective Governments. Therefore, from the year 2002, the Government of India evolved a system under which private operators/ travel agents were registered as PTOs and following the registration were allocated quotas from the overall number of seats specified for PTOs.
- Till the year 2012, the PTO Policy was formulated annually. However, in the year 2013, a five year PTO Policy for Haj 2013-17 was approved by Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. This Policy remained valid till Haj 2017.
- Based on the recommendations of Haj Policy Committee and the evidence based study conducted by IIT Delhi, Ministry framed the

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai  
PTO Policies for Haj 2018 and subsequently for the next five years i.e. Haj 2019-23.

### Why in news?

- Union Minister of Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said that India is likely to overtake Pakistan in terms of the number of pilgrims sent for Haj pilgrimage this year.
- From our country, Muslims participate in Haj in huge numbers.
- There are two Islamic countries - Indonesia, from where around 2 lakh people participate and then there is Pakistan from where 1,84,000 people participate. As of today, India already has over 1,75,000 participants and we are aiming to supersede Pakistan this year," Mr. Naqvi said.
- According to Mr. Naqvi, of the total number of applications received by the Haj Committee of India, around 50% were from women.
- He also said that there was a gradual rise in the number of women willing to participate in the pilgrimage without a mehram (male companion).

## Poem on Jallianwala massacre

### Why in news?

- A poem on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre by acclaimed Punjabi writer Nanak Singh which was banned by the British after its publication in 1920 has now been translated into English.

### About the poem

- Singh was present at Jallianwala Bagh on April 13, 1919.
- He was 22 years old at the time. As the British troops opened fire on the unarmed gathering protesting against the Rowlatt Act, killing hundreds, Singh fainted and his unconscious body was piled up among the corpses.
- After going through the traumatic experience, he proceeded to write "Khooni Vaisakhi," a long poem that narrates the political events in the run-up to the massacre and its immediate aftermath.
- The poem was a strong critique of the British Raj and was banned soon after its publication. Its manuscript was subsequently lost.
- After long years, the poem has been rediscovered and now translated into English by the author's grandson and diplomat, Navdeep Suri.
- It will be published by HarperCollins India next month to mark the centenary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
- Singh (1897-1971) is widely regarded as the father of the Punjabi novel. With little formal education beyond the fourth grade, he wrote an astounding 59 books and received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1962.

## Miscellaneous

### Islamic revolution

#### Why in news?

- Iran marks 40th anniversary of Islamic revolution.

#### About the Iranian Revolution:

- Iranian Revolution, also known as Islamic Revolution or the 1979 Revolution, was a series of events involving the overthrow of the monarch of Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and replacing his government with an Islamic republic under the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a leader of one of the factions in the revolt.
- The reason for the revolution was to stop the oppression under the western secular policies.
- The movement against the United States-backed monarchy** was supported by various leftist and Islamist organizations and student movements.
- A multiclass opposition overthrew an autocratic ruler, leading to the establishment of a theocratic state.
- This outcome contrasts sharply with other modern revolutionary movements, which have been fought in the name of nationalism or socialism and which have concluded with the transfer of power to a secular, modernizing intelligentsia.

### Sarathi Sandesh Vahini

#### Why in news?

- Uttar Pradesh has launched 'Sarathi Sandesh Vahini' mission.

#### About:

- The 'Sarathi Sandesh Vahini' is a mission started by the state family welfare department with an aim to spread awareness regarding family planning in urban and rural areas.
- Under this campaign, vehicles will provide family planning information to the viewers through various documentaries and films.

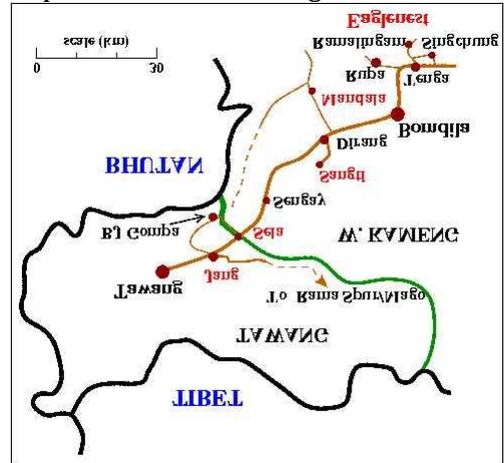
### Sela Tunnel Project

#### Why in news?

- PM Narendra Modi laid Foundation Stone for the Sela Tunnel Project in Arunachal Pradesh across **Sela Pass**.

#### Sela pass:

- Sela Pass is a high-altitude mountain pass located on the border between the Tawang and West Kameng Districts of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The pass connects Tawang for rest of India.



#### About project:

- The Sela pass tunnel will be constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).
- The announcement of the project was done in the Union Budget 2018 by then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.
- The Sela tunnel project will provide all-weather connectivity and reduce travelling time.
- This aids the swift and fast movement of army troops in Tawang which is a strategically-located district located near the border of China.
- The tunnel project will also boost the tourism industry and economic activities in the region as well as north-eastern states.

### Hindi Included as 3<sup>rd</sup> official court language in Abu Dhabi

#### Why in news?

- Abu Dhabi has included **Hindi** as the third official language to be used in its courts, alongside **Arabic and English**.
- It is part of the efforts of Abu Dhabi to improve access to justice.

#### About:

- The inclusion of Hindi language is aimed at helping Hindi speakers to learn about litigation procedures, their rights and duties without a language barrier, in addition to facilitating registration procedures via unified forms available through the ADJD website.

- The adoption of multilingual interactive forms for claim sheets, grievances and requests aim to promote judicial services in line with the plan Tomorrow 2021 and increase the transparency of litigation procedure.
- Indian population in UAE is estimated to be around nine million of which 2/3rd are immigrants from foreign countries and the Indian community in the UAE, numbering 2.6 million, constitutes 30 per cent of the total population and is the largest expatriate community in the country.

## Mohar reservoir project

### Why in news?

- The Chhattisgarh Water Resources Department (CWRD) commenced the work on Mohar Reservoir Project in Balod district without ensuring the land required was acquired and obtaining environment and forest clearances, says the latest Comptroller and Auditor General report on Chhattisgarh.

### About:

- The Mohar reservoir project is proposed across the confluence of **river Dangarh and Dalekasa** with a catchment of 143 square km.
- The gross command area of the project is 1100 hectares.
- The proposed project is expected to irrigate 800 hectares of Kharif paddy and supply 1000 million cubic (1 TMC) water by feeder canal to Kharkhara reservoir for 500MW power plant of NSPCL in Bhilai.

## Vande Bharat: India's fastest train takes off

### Why in news?

- The inaugural trip of India's first semi-high speed train, Vande Bharat Express, was flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the New Delhi railway station.
- The train, named 'Train 18' at the concept stage, is a plush 16-coach, air-conditioned, self-propelled train set and doesn't have a locomotive.

### Details of the Vande Bharat Express:

#### Fast forward

The semi-high speed Train 18, which has been recently rechristened Vande Bharat Express, can run up to a maximum speed of 160 kmph. A look at Indian Railways' new showpiece train

**16**  
air-conditioned coaches, including two executive class

**TRAVEL PLANNER**  
▪ The bookings have begun and it will run commercially from February 17 from Delhi to Varanasi five days a week. The train is expected to complete the journey in 8 hours  
▪ From Delhi to Varanasi, an air-conditioned

**1,128**  
total passenger capacity



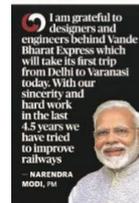
chair car ticket will cost ₹1,760, while the executive class fare will be ₹2,310. The fares are inclusive of catering charges

**MADE IN INDIA**  
Train 18 was designed and built by Integral Coach Factory, Chennai under the government's Make in India Initiative

**MORE SUCH TRAINS**  
Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said tendering process has started for 30 such trains and PM's nod has been sought to operate 100 of them

#### KEY FACILITIES

- Automatic doors
- GPS-based audio-visual passenger information system
- On-board WiFi hotspot
- Seats that can be rotated in executive class (see photo)
- Pantry facility in each coach
- Bio-vacuum toilets
- Dual mode lighting, personalised for each seat
- Regenerative braking system to save power



## Galentine's Day is the new Valentine's

### Why in news?

- The American phenomenon of Galentine's Day, celebrated on February 13th has grown in popularity with each passing year, and also gained in terms of its **message of female empowerment**.
- It was conceived as a defiant response to Valentine's Day — a statement that the traditional romantic love is not the only kind worth honoring

# News in-depth

## General Studies-1

### Communalism: Caught between two extremisms

#### Context

- Recent instances of attacks on the minority communities in India by fringe elements representing majority communities has led to increasing polarisation in the society.
- This has led to radicalisation of certain segments of the minority community which threatens the secular fabric on which India was created.
- This article discusses on reasons for increasing polarisation among different communities.

#### Overview

- Several recent reports suggest that global jihadi organisations such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) have recruited a few Indian Muslim youth primarily by exploiting the latter's local grievances to serve their own global goals.
- Many analysts had assumed until recently that **Indian Muslims were immune to extremist propaganda** because of **both the syncretic and moderate nature of Indian Islam and the democratic and secular character of the country which made them feel they were equal participants in the political process.**
- But according to the author these assumptions are now problematic, as several factors have been at work in the past three decades that challenge this conventional wisdom because of the following reason:
  - **Increasing influence of Saudi Wahabism:** As there is increasing trend of Muslims emigrating to Saudi Arabia and West Asia Countries, **they get impacted by the conservative form of Islam (Wahabism) practiced there, and when they return they pass on the** fundamentalist form of Islam to their relatives.
  - **Islam practiced in West Asian countries** is fundamentally different from form of Islam practiced in Indian Subcontinent, **characterised by the Hanafi sect based on the most liberal school of Islamic jurisprudence.**
  - Moreover, traditionally Indian Islam has been greatly influenced by Sufi teachings and is, therefore, tolerant and accepting of religious diversity.
  - According to the author, so far Islam practiced in India had natural defences against extremism in belief and practice. The ideological infiltration of Wahhabism/Salafism has eroded some of these defences and made a section of Muslims more insular and, therefore, open to extremist ideas.
  - On the other hand, the rise of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism from the 1990s also poses a threat to secularism.
  - Increasing trend of violence against the minority community like mob lynching, communal riots and lack State action against perpetrators has led to **alienation & suspicion among the members of minority community on Secular nature of the country**
  - This has led to increasing radicalisation of the youth in the minority community and made them easy recruits for religious fundamentalist and extremist organisation in the community.

#### Way Forward

- Opinion leaders and religious scholars from within the Muslim community have the primary duty to confront and defeat the malign Wahhabi-Salafi influence on Indian Muslims in order to **preserve the liberal and syncretic nature of Indian Islam thus pre-empting the spread of extremist ideology among Minority youth.**

- **The Centre and the States should take concrete steps, such as quick and impartial action against those responsible for creating violence in the security and ensuring that they are treated with fairness and dignity.**
- Thus enabling the country to keep the promise made to the minorities by our Constitution makers that “India will continue to remain as a safe place for minorities”.

## **Politics of Cow and use of NSA**

### **Context**

- The Madhya Pradesh government recently detained five people under the National Security Act (NSA) for allegedly committing offences related to cattle laws.
- The use of the National Security Act for cattle offences seems contentious, given its purpose and intent.

### **When NSA is used?**

- The NSA lets governments — both at the Centre and in states — to detain somebody for “preventing him from acting in any manner prejudicial to the defence of India, the relations of India with foreign powers, or the security of India”, or “if satisfied with respect to any foreigner that with a view to regulating his continued presence in India or with a view to making arrangements for his expulsion from India, It is necessary so to do, make an order directing that such person be detained.”

### **Why use of NSA for cow slaughter is a bad sign for Indian democracy?**

- The police could have prosecuted them under laws that ban cow slaughter.
- The NSA provides for a maximum of one year in prison through an executive order without trial or bail.
- The recent case is possibly the first time when this law is being used against those suspected of offences against cows.

**name of religion**, to reassure minorities that the state will not shirk its responsibility of providing them physical

- The act amounts to gross misuse of a law meant solely to prevent activities that endanger the country’s security or public order.
- There was no evidence of security or order being under grave threat, in this case.
- Even in a recent case of plot to murder Prime Minister was booked under only Unlawful Activities Prevention Act not under National Security Act.

### **What are the larger concerns?**

- India has become habituated to the abuse of preventive detention laws.
- In recent times, they have been wrongly invoked against political dissenters and vocal critics, with total disregard for constitutional freedoms.
- The present move would imply a breach of limits by the law-enforcers to demonstrate ideological adherence to majoritarian beliefs.
- It is a threat to the freedom of movement and vocation, and the dietary choices, of those who do not share the majority community’s reverence for cow.
- The Supreme Court too had earlier warned against the dangers of a socio-political framework based on disrespect for an inclusive social order.
- It issued some guidelines and wanted the states to take preventive and remedial measures against mob violence and public lynching.

### **Way Forward**

- The State must take a prudent approach while invoking harsh laws to punish offences related to cow slaughtering, and also give equal importance in implementing other Directive Principles of State Policy under Part-4 of the Indian Constitution.

## General Studies-2

### India-Saudi Arabia

#### Trade

- Saudi Arabia is a stable and trusted supplier of oil to India whereby Saudi Arabia contributes about 20% of India's crude requirement.
- Saudi Arabia continues to invest in several refinery projects within India.
- India-Saudi bilateral trade is around US\$ 27 billion during 2017-18 thereby making Saudi Arabia our 4th largest trading partner.
- However, majority of the trade basket is dominated by trade in crude oil and there is a requirement of further diversification in trade basket by promoting Indian agricultural and pharma products and financial & ITES exports from India.

#### Indian community

- About 2.7 million of Indian community resides in Saudi Arabia and thereby makes them the largest expatriate group in Saudi Arabia.
- However, there are concerns of labor exploitation, denial of basic rights, induced religious conversions, etc of Indians living in Saudi Arabia.

#### Strategic Partnership

- Delhi Declaration (2006) and the Riyadh Declaration (2010) elevated India-Saudi Arabia bilateral relations to the level of 'Strategic Partnership'.
- This included joint development of defense products, enhanced cooperation to strengthen maritime security in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean regions, etc

#### On Iran

- Saudi Arabia considers containment of Iran as its top foreign policy priority and for which it has receive support from United States, Israel and other Arab countries.
- India as of now has only come under pressure from US to sever ties with Iran whereby India has able to maintain strategic autonomy and balance its relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- However, this aspect of balancing and maintaining strategic autonomy is to be tested.

#### On Terrorism

- Post-9/11, both countries have expanded the scope of their partnership to fight terrorism such as in the form of intelligence sharing, etc.
- However, there seems to be no considerable pressure from Saudi Arabia upon Pakistan to reduce terrorism in India and Afghanistan.

#### Way forward

- While Saudi is important for India's oil needs; Iran is gateway of Central Asia.
- When Saudi is moving close to Pakistan by planning to enter into CPEC, Saudi cannot afford to miss India.
- New Delhi is sure to continue this balancing act even as it seeks to strengthen the Saudi pillar of India's West Asia policy.

### GSP

#### What is GSP?

- The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a U.S. trade program that began in 1976 and is designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for up to 4,800 products from 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories.

#### Benefit of GSP

- GSP provide opportunities for many of the world's poorest countries to use trade to grow their economies and climb out of poverty and it also boosts American competitiveness by reducing costs of imported inputs used by U.S. companies to manufacture goods in the United States.

#### WTO & GSP

- Under the normal trade laws, the WTO members must give equal preferences to trade partners. There should not be any discrimination between countries.
- This trade rule under the WTO is called the Most Favored Nation (MFN) clause.
- At the same time, the WTO allows members to give special and differential treatment to from developing countries (like zero tariff imports). This is an exemption for MFN.
- The MSP given by developed countries including the US is an exception to MFN.

#### US-India and GSP

- The US govt. may withdraw the Generalized System of Preferences status to India since the US govt intends to reduce trade deficit

it has with large economies. Indian exports to the U.S. in 2017-18 was at \$47.9 billion and imports at \$26.7 billion.

- US has alleged that India has 'unequal tariffs' which are in favour of India, whereby India imposes high tariffs on import of US products while US has low tariffs for the import of same product from India. Eg: Motorcycles, agricultural products, medical devices, etc.
- US during the on-going global trade war has imposed higher tariffs on import of several goods from India such as Aluminum while India has threatened to retaliate with equal value of tariffs.
- US technology companies have criticized the data localization imposition for all companies operating in India and the recent tightening norms for FDI in e-commerce.

### Possible Solutions

- Both countries should speed up efforts for a comprehensive trade package rather than attempt to focus on concerns related to each separate product.
- The U.S. should wait for the Indian election to be completed before taking any drastic step on trade.
- India should attempt to plug the trade gaps that have emerged due to US-China trade war and replace Chinese products in US with Indian exports.
- India must attempt for the current trade policy of US govt under Donald Trump to not cause long term damage to B2B Indo-US relations.
- India has provided assurance to import oil from US, purchase Defence products, etc to reduce Indo-US trade deficit.

## Iran Revolution

### Overview

- Iranian Revolution, also known as Islamic Revolution or the 1979 Revolution, was a series of events involving the overthrow of the monarch of Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.
- It also made to replace his government with an Islamic republic under the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, one of the leaders in the revolt.
- The reason for the revolution was to stop the oppression under the western secular policies.

- The movement against the United States-backed monarchy was supported by various leftist and Islamist organizations and student movements.

### Outcome of revolution

- A multiclass opposition overthrew an autocratic ruler, leading to the establishment of a theocratic state.
- It is a form of government in which governance is done in name of immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided.
- This outcome contrasts sharply with other modern revolutionary movements, which have been fought in the name of nationalism or socialism and which have concluded with the transfer of power to a secular, modernizing intelligentsia.

### Current Situation

- Currently, Iran's leaders are under pressure with a weak economy and social tensions rising at a time when U.S. President Donald Trump is becoming increasingly hostile towards Tehran.
- Over these years, Iran saw an eight-year-long war with Iraq, near-total isolation in West Asia, and economic sanctions etc.
- As of 2015, the literacy rate among Iran's adult population was 93%. More than 60% of university students in Iran are women. Access to health care has also improved for large sections of society.

### Anti-Western Sentiments

- The American support to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in 1980 augmented anti-Western sentiments and further helped the clergy-dominated regime to consolidate its power in the country.
- It is important to note that the Iranian-Saudi rivalry is being played out to this day in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon and other parts of West Asia.
- However, the most important lesson of the revolution and its aftermath is the demonstration of Iran's remarkable staying power as a state and a nation in the face of a very hostile international arena.

### The Iranian Spirit

- Iran has gone through unprecedented economic sanctions since the revolution, a process that intensified in the past decade and a half to force Tehran to give up its presumed nuclear aspirations.

- The Iranian people put up with grave hardship for four decades but did not surrender their national sovereignty.
- This is because the state of Iran/Persia has been in existence since time immemorial, and in its present contours from the early 16th century, its citizens have developed a sense of innate pride and confidence in the state's staying power against the heaviest odds.
- The development of Persian nationalism has been a gradual process that, one can argue, culminated in the underlying thrust of the revolution.
- Persian nationalism draws upon its glorious pre-Islamic heritage, as described in the Shahnameh, Iran's epic par excellence.

### Way forward

- Tehran will have to deal with the U.S.'s unilateral and hostile policies with help from other countries.
- Iran should also fix its system, tackle corruption and hold government departments accountable for the decisions they take.
- It is also time for the government, which is celebrating the anniversary of the fall of an autocratic monarch, to rethink its approach towards dissent and personal freedoms.

## Appointment of Judges post retirement to various bodies

### Context

- Judiciary and Executive should remain mutual watchdogs than mutual admirers, and post-retirement offers can lead to erosion of judicial independence.
- The debate regarding the propriety of judges accepting post-retirement jobs from Government in the light of recent appointments need to be revisited.
- The executive has a major say in appointments to quasi-judicial bodies and the executive is also a major litigant at the same time.
- Immediate acceptance of post-retirement assignments certainly creates a dent on public confidence in judicial independence.
- As many as 70 out of 100 Supreme Court retired judges have taken up assignments.
- They are in the form of assignments to National Human Rights Commission, National Consumer Disputes Redressal

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Commission, Armed Forces Tribunal, Law Commission of India, etc.

### Recent Appointments made

- In 2018, Justice A.K Goel was appointed as the Chairman of National Green Tribunal on the same day of his retirement as Supreme Court judge.
- Justice R.K Agrawal was appointed as the Chairman of the National Consumer Redressal Commission (NCDRC) May 2018, within a few weeks after his retirement from Supreme Court.
- Justice Antony Dominic was appointed the Chairman of the State Human Rights Commission by the Kerala Government, within a week of his retirement as the Chief Justice of the High Court of Kerala during May 2018.
- However, Former CJI Justice Lodha had stated that he would not take any post-retirement benefit for a period of two years after retirement.

### Suspicion that the Appointments to new posts had decided before or post-retirement?

- These appointments, which took place within a short span of the retirements of the said judges, have raised quite a few eyebrows.
- The immediate appointments suggest that decisions regarding their post-retirement assignments were already taken, at least in principle, by the respective governments even during the tenure of the judges.
- Even before their retirements, rumours were rife amongst the members of the bar regarding the finalization of their post-retirement posts.
- This certainly casts a cloud over judicial decisions rendered during their tenure in cases involving stakes of the respective governments.

### Situations of conflicts of interest

- Judges accepting jobs under the Executive certainly creates situations of conflicts of interest.
- It tends to undermine public faith in judicial independence. In the recent 'master of roster case,' the Supreme Court reiterated that public confidence was the greatest asset of the judiciary.
- Government sponsored post-retirement appointments will continue to raise a cloud of suspicion over the judgments the best judges delivered while in service.

- This is not to suggest, even remotely, that their judgments are wrong or biased. The only endeavour is to underline the fact that immediate post-retirement appointments of the said judges create a cloud over the sanctity of those judgments, irrespective of their merits.
- As it is well settled, the actual existence of bias is not required to spoil or impair the quality or efficiency of the sanctity of judicial process; the perception of bias, founded on grounds which are not too far-fetched and hypothetical, trace of a bad or undesirable substance of judicial process.
- The significance of the oft-quoted adage 'justice should not only be done but also seem to be done' gets more profound in this context.
- When a judge is expecting a post-retirement job from the government, normally he will be in a position not to invite displeasure from the government at least in the year of his retirement.
- There is a common complaint that such judges do not dare to invite displeasure from the government by expecting post-retirement jobs
- The faith of the people is the bed-rock on which the edifice of judicial review and efficacy of the adjudication are founded.
- Erosion of credibility of the judiciary, in the public mind, for whatever reasons, is greatest threat to the independence of the judiciary.

#### Way Forward

- Analysts advocated for a cooling off period for Judges, saying that "pre-retirement judgments are influenced by a desire for a post-retirement job".
- Better suggestion is that for two years after retirement, there should be a gap (before the appointment), because otherwise, the government can directly or indirectly influence the courts and the dream to have an independent, impartial and fair judiciary in the country would never actualise.
- Regarding a "cooling off" period for appointment of retired judges as mooted by former CJs Justice Kapadia, Justice Lodha and Justice Thakur assumes relevance.
- There should be a policy decision to introduce a cooling-off period after retirement before taking up new appointments.

- It is time for the Supreme Court to invoke the methodology to regulate post-retirement appointments for judges.
- Such a process must sufficiently insulate the judiciary from the charge of being a recipient of government largesse.

### Deadly brew: on illicit liquor deaths

#### Context

- The death of more than 100 people to toxic alcohol in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand has exposed the thriving sale of illicit liquor in the region.
- India remains among the countries with a high number of alcohol-related deaths, with poor governance, corruption and distorted policies contributing to such periodic tragedies.

#### Measures taken by the government so far

- The governments in U.P. and Uttarakhand cannot evade responsibility for the death of so many people.
- The majority of them in Saharanpur district of U.P. Preliminary investigation has confirmed the well-entrenched system of illicit liquor vends that are known to exist in the region.
- Several factories producing hooch in U.P. were unearthed within a couple of days of the episode.
- Several liquor-related deaths have been taking place, it took this staggering number of casualties for the authorities to acknowledge the presence of free-flowing illicit liquor.
- The Yogi Adityanath government prides itself on its law and order measures but its failure to crack down on these dens exposes the hollow claims.
- It has tried to put the blame for previous incidents on political opponents hatching conspiracies.

#### Reasons behind this incidents

- Several instances of toxic alcohol poisoning in India, including the Malvani hooch tragedy in Mumbai in 2015 that killed 106 people, have been **attributed to the lack of affordable liquor for the poor.**
- **High taxes and excise raise prices, and cheap brews are peddled by criminal organisations, often in collusion with law enforcement personnel.**
- In U.P., **many communities have protested the sale of cheap liquor in**

**pouches that are freely distributed during social events.**

- **An enlightened policy is needed to strike a balance, curbing illicit flows with zero tolerance, discouraging consumption through social campaigns and reviewing levies on less harmful beverages.**

#### Way forward

- At the moment, it is essential to make an example of those who participated in the sale of the lethal brew, and investigate any nexus with the authorities.
- If it is true that the suspects had a history of dealing in hooch, the Special Investigation Team constituted by the U.P. government should find out how they continued to operate their trade.
- In parallel, it is vital that **the capacities of the health system be upgraded to handle victims of toxic alcohol.**
- Toxicity often comes from **drinking methanol, which results in blindness, tissue damage or death.**
- Timely treatment through **haemodialysis, infusion of sodium bicarbonate and ethyl alcohol can save lives.**

### Every drop matters

#### Context

- A ready supply of safe blood in sufficient quantities is a vital component of modern health care. However, in 2015-16, India was 1.1 million units short of its blood requirements.
- There were considerable regional disparities, with 81 districts in the country not having a blood bank at all.
- Yet, in April 2017, it was reported that blood banks in India had in the last five years discarded a total of 2.8 million units of expired, unused blood (more than 6 lakh litres).

#### Concerns over safety and quality of the blood being received

- Blood is received through professional donation (who accept remuneration) and replacement donation (which is not voluntary). Blood is also donated voluntarily and without remuneration and it is considered to be the safest.
- To prevent transfusion-transmitted infections (TTIs), collected blood needs to be safe as well. Due to practical constraints, tests are only conducted post-collection. Thus blood donor selection relies on

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai donors filling in health questionnaires truthfully.

- In the case of professional donors there is a higher chance of there being TTIs in their blood, as these donors may not provide full disclosure.
- In the case of replacement donation, there could be a higher chance of TTI's because replacement donors, being under pressure, may be less truthful about diseases.
- Even the conducted test may not be fool-proof. These tests may not be fool proof as there is a window period after a person first becomes infected with a virus during which the infection may not be detectable. This makes it crucial to minimise the risk in the first instance of collection. Collecting healthy blood will also result in less blood being discarded later.

#### How is it regulated?

- Blood is considered to be a 'drug' under the Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940. Therefore, just like any other manufacturer or storer of drugs, blood banks need to be licensed by the Drug Controller-General of India (DCGI). For this, they need to meet a series of requirements with respect to the collection, storage, processing and distribution of blood, as specified under the Drugs & Cosmetics Rules, 1945.
- Blood banks are inspected by drug inspectors who are expected to check not only the premises and equipment but also various quality and medical aspects such as processing and testing facilities. Their findings lead to the issuance, suspension or cancellation of a licence.

#### Governance issues

- The regulatory framework which governs the blood transfusion infrastructure in India is scattered across different laws, policies, guidelines and authorities.
- In 1996, the Supreme Court directed the government to establish the National Blood Transfusion Council (NBTC) and State Blood Transfusion Councils (SBTCs). The NBTC functions as the apex policy-formulating and expert body for blood transfusion services and includes representation from blood banks. However, it lacks statutory backing (unlike the DCGI), and as such, the standards and requirements recommended by it are only in the form of guidelines.

- This gives rise to a peculiar situation — the expert blood transfusion body can only issue non-binding guidelines, whereas the general pharmaceutical regulator has the power to license blood banks. This regulatory dissonance exacerbates the serious issues on the ground and results in poor coordination and monitoring.

#### **Need of the hour**

- The present scenario under the DCGI is far from desirable, especially given how regulating blood involves distinct considerations when compared to most commercial drugs.
- In order to ensure the involvement of technical experts who can complement the DCGI, the rules should be amended to involve the NBTC and SBTCs in the licensing process.
- Given the wide range of responsibilities the DCGI has to handle, its licensing role with respect to blood banks can even be

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai delegated to the NBTC under the rules. This would go a long way towards ensuring that the regulatory scheme is up to date and accommodates medical and technological advances.

- A collaborative regulator can, more effectively, take the lead in facilitating coordination, planning and management. This may reduce the regional disparities in blood supply as well as ensure that the quality of blood does not vary between private, corporate, international, hospital-based, non-governmental organisations and government blood banks.

#### **Way Forward**

- The aim of the National Blood Policy formulated by the government back in 2002 was to “ensure easily accessible and adequate supply of safe and quality blood”.
- To achieve this goal, India should look to reforming its regulatory approach at the earliest.

## General Studies 3

### Auditor's account

#### Introduction

- The Comptroller and Auditor-General of India has submitted its price-redacted audit report on the process to acquire 36 Rafale fighter jets.
- The report, which had been widely awaited in the wake of a string of revelations on procedural deviations in the negotiations to acquire the French Rafale jets and political allegations of financial irregularities in the deal, was tabled in the Rajya Sabha on the last day of the 16th Lok Sabha.

#### End to controversies?

- Pegged at 2.86%, the price advantage in the contract over the 2007 offer is marginal. It is a far cry from the 9% saving claimed by the government. The CAG has found fault with Dassault Aviation being allowed to retain the gains made by the absence of a bank guarantee, which, if executed, would have come with significant charges. Disappointingly, the CAG has not quantified this amount, though it declares that it should have been passed on to the Defence Ministry.
- The 2007 price offered by Dassault included bank charges, and its absence in the 2016 contract is a clear benefit to the company. In other words, the 'advantage' is lower than the 2.86%.
- While the key question of pricing is sought to be resolved by the CAG by comparing the auditors' aligned price with the INT's computation, some issues remain unaddressed. The original issue of bringing down the total acquisition from 126 to 36 aircraft does not draw much comment.

#### 'A month's gain on delivery, even that unsure'

- One of the key reasons cited by the Centre for entering into an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with France for 36 Rafale fighter jets was to ensure quick availability of aircraft to meet the IAF's critical operational needs.
- However, the audit report has revealed that there is an improvement of only one month when compared with the terms as per the 2007 proposal for the supply of 126 jets. The auditor also noted that the Indian Negotiation Team (INT) had

apprehensions about the achievement of even this delivery schedule.

#### 'Limiting ISEs to cut outgo not a saving'

- On the Rafale's India Specific Enhancements (ISE), which cost more than €1.3 billion of the €7.87 billion deal, the CAG stated that there was a saving of 17.08% when compared with the equivalent value as per the bid received in 2007. However, the audit noted that four enhancements were inessential as per technical and staff evaluations and that the cost of these four items constituted about 14% of the ISE estimated cost.
- However, the Defence Ministry has stated that scaling down the requirement to limit cash outgo cannot be considered as saving.
- While auditing the earlier process, the CAG found that ISEs were upgrades allowed to be made so that Dassault's bid would be compliant with qualitative requirements. Dassault was not the lowest bidder in the earlier process, and its technical bid had been rejected. Perhaps, this presented an opportunity to the present regime to reopen the entire process to buy Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) and invite fresh bids. However, it chose the IGA route with France, possibly for diplomatic reasons.

#### Way Forward

- The CAG identifies as a major problem the fact that the technical requirements are too narrowly defined for most vendors to comply with. The message from the report is that defence acquisition processes require reforms and streamlining.

### Surveying India's unemployment numbers

#### Introduction

- The Centre for Monitoring India Economy (CMIE), a private enterprise, has demonstrated over the past three years that fast frequency measures of unemployment can be made.

#### Household survey

- The Government of India does not produce any measure of monthly unemployment rate, nor does it have any plans to do so.

- The CMIE decided to fill India's gap in generating fast frequency measures of household well-being in 2014. In its household survey, called the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS), the sample size was 172,365 as compared to that of the official National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), which was 101,724.

### Key findings

- The most important message from the data is that India's labour participation rate is very low by world standards and that even this low participation rate fell very sharply after demonetisation. The average labour participation rate was 47% during January-October 2016. The world average is about 66%.
- Immediately after demonetisation in November 2016, India's labour participation rate fell to 45%; 2% of the working age population, i.e. about 13 million, moved out of labour markets.
- The data show that it was not the employed who lost jobs and decided to stop working. The employed mostly retained their jobs. But it was largely the unemployed who decided that the labour markets had been so badly vitiated after demonetisation that they gave up looking for jobs any further. In short, they lost hope of finding jobs in the aftermath of demonetisation.
- As more and more unemployed left the labour market, the unemployment rate fell. This is because the unemployment rate is the ratio of the unemployed to the total labour force. This fall gave misleading or at least confusing signals, almost implying that the unemployment rate was falling in a positive sense. In reality it was a reflection of an exodus of the unemployed from the labour markets — a fall in the labour participation rate.

### On female labour

- Specifically, India's female labour participation rate is very low and falling. Researchers have shown that this fall is because of rising household incomes that reduce the need for women to join the labour force; increased enrolment in higher education by women which delays their entry into the labour force, and cultural and security factors that keep women away from the labour market in India. Further, it is evident that employers are also biased against hiring women.

- The CPHS shows that the situation with respect to women's participation in the labour force is extremely poor. The entire brunt of demonetisation and GST was borne by women.
- Male labour participation rate was 74.5% in 2016. This dropped to 72.4% in 2017 and then to 71.7% in 2018. In contrast, female labour participation was as low as 15.5% in 2016 which dropped to 11.9% in 2017 and then 11% in 2018.
- Although female labour participation is substantially much lower than male participation, the few women who venture to get employment find it much more difficult to find jobs than men. The unemployment rate for men was 4.9% in 2018 and that for women in the same year was much higher — 14.9%.
- This higher unemployment rate faced by women in spite of a very low participation rate indicates a bias against employing women.

### Way Forward

- Drawing women into the labour force by removing the impediments they face to at least bring their participation levels close to global standards is critically important for India to gain from the demographic dividend opportunity it has. This window of opportunity is open only till 2030.

## The shape of the job's crisis

### Introduction

- The recently leaked NSSO's periodic labour force survey is a matter of much controversy, with the two members of the National Statistical Commission have resigned citing the delay in its release.

### Heading towards demographic disaster

- The NSSO data have shown that while the open unemployment rate (which does not measure disguised unemployment and informal poor quality jobs that abound in the economy) by the usual status never went over 2.6% between 1977-78 and 2011-12, it has now jumped to 6.1% in 2017-18.
- It also shows that as open unemployment rates increased, more and more people got disheartened and fell out of the labour force; in other words, they stopped looking for work. The result is that labour force participation rates (LFPR, i.e. those looking

for work) for all ages, fell sharply from 43% in 2004-5 to 39.5% in 2011-12, to 36.9% in 2017-18.

- This shows up in the growing numbers of youth who are **NEETs**: not in education, employment or training. They are a potential source of both our demographic dividend but also what is looking to be a mounting demographic disaster.

#### Across education categories

- The unemployment rate (based on estimates of the Annual Survey, Labour Bureau) rose over 2011-12 to 2016 from 0.6% to 2.4% for those with middle education (class 8); 1.3% to 3.2% for those who had passed class 10; 2% to 4.4% for those who had passed class 12; 4.1% to 8.4% for graduates; and 5.3% to 8.5% for post-graduates. Even more worrying, for those with technical education, the unemployment rate rose for graduates from 6.9% to 11%, for post-graduates from 5.7% to 7.7%, and for the vocationally trained from 4.9% to 7.9%.
- For an economy at India's stage of development, an increase of workers in agriculture is a structural retrogression, in a direction opposite to the desired one. Between 2004-5 and 2011-12, the number of workers in agriculture fell sharply, which is good, for the first time in India's economic history. Similarly, the number of youth (15-29 years) employed in agriculture fell from 86.8 million to 60.9 million between 2004-5 and 2011-12.
- However, after 2012, as non-agricultural job growth slowed, the number of youth in agriculture actually increased to 84.8 million till 2015-16 and even more since then. These youth were better educated than the earlier cohort, but were forced to be in agriculture.

#### Drop in manufacturing jobs

- Even worse, manufacturing jobs actually fell in absolute terms, from 58.9 million in 2011-12 to 48.3 million in 2015-16, a whopping 10.6 million over a four-year period. This is consistent with slowing growth in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- What is tragic is the growing number of educated youth (15-29 years) who are "NEET". This number (70 million in 2004-5) increased by 2 million per annum during 2004-5 and 2011-12, but grew by about 5

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai million per annum (2011-12 to 2015-16). If that later trend continued it would have increased to 115.6 million in 2017-18.

- These youth ("NEET" and unemployed) together constitute the potential labour force, which can be utilised to realise the demographic dividend in India.

#### Conclusion

- The number of new entrants into the labour force (currently at least 5 million per annum), and especially educated entrants into the labour force will go on increasing until 2030. It will thereafter still increase, though at a decelerating pace. By 2040 our demographic dividend — which comes but once in the lifetime of a nation — will be over.
- China managed to reduce poverty sharply by designing an employment strategy (underpinned by an education and skills policy) aligned to its industrial strategy. That is why it rode the wave of its demographic dividend.

### The PM-KISAN challenge

#### Introduction

- The agriculture sector employs over 50% of the workforce either directly or indirectly, and remains the main source of livelihood for over 70% of rural households. However, the droughts of 2014 and 2015, ad-hoc export and import policies, lack of infrastructure, and uncertainty in agricultural markets have adversely affected agricultural productivity and stability of farm incomes.
- To allay some misgivings of the distress, the government announced its decision to transfer Rs 6,000 every year directly to 12 crore farmers holding cultivable land up to 2 hectares through the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme.

#### Inadequate financial support

- The merit of cash transfers over loan waivers and subsidies lies in their potential greater efficiency in enabling poor households to directly purchase the required goods and services as well as enhance their market choices. Therefore, the impact of a welfare measure such as PM-KISAN can only be realised through financial support that provides farmers with adequate purchasing power to meet their daily basic necessities.

- Given that India's poverty line is Rs 32 per person per day in rural areas and Rs 47 in urban areas, according to the Rangarajan Committee, the income support of Rs 17 a day for a household by PM-KISAN, is largely insufficient for even bare minimum sustenance of vulnerable farmers.
- Moreover, given the volatile market and price fluctuations in different regions, it is important to **index the cash transfers** to local inflation. The failure of an ambitious plan of Direct Benefit Transfer in kerosene in Rajasthan is a case in point, where the cash transferred to families has been insufficient to purchase kerosene, as the market price increased substantially.

### Implementation issues

- While cash transfers to households may appear simple, the scheme requires significant implementation capabilities. In a country where a majority of the States have incomplete tenancy records and land data are not digitised, identification of beneficiaries is daunting.
- The results of a joint study conducted by NITI Aayog and the Union government's Department of Food in 2016 suggest that the government's pilot programmes to replace subsidised food grains with cash in three Union Territories (Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Puducherry) have failed due to data inconsistencies.
- While 50% of the people received less cash, 17% received more than they were entitled to. More than 40% of the money transferred could not be verified to have reached the beneficiaries.
- In the absence of updated land records and complete databases, the scheme may end up benefitting only those who hold land titles and not the small, marginal or tenant farmers who are the most vulnerable. Besides, the scheme does not provide a clear design of transfers and a framework for effective grievance redress.

### A comparison

- The effectiveness of cash transfer schemes like PM-KISAN can be studied by comparing it with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).
- A month of MGNREGA earnings for a household is more than a year's income support through PM-KISAN anywhere in the country.

- PM-KISAN is a targeted cash transfer programme and MGNREGA is a universal programme. Any rural household willing to do manual work is eligible under the Act. According to the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census, around 40% of rural households are landless and depend on manual labour. The landless can earn through the MGNREGA but are not eligible for the PM-KISAN scheme.
- Further, it is unclear how tenant farmers, those without titles, and women farmers would be within the ambit of the scheme. There is also substantial evidence to demonstrate that universal schemes are less prone to corruption than targeted schemes. In targeted programmes, it is very common to have errors of exclusion, i.e., genuine beneficiaries get left out.
- It is in some of these contexts that strengthening an existing universal programme such as the MGNREGA would have been a prudent move instead of introducing a hasty targeted cash transfer programme.
- While Rs 75,000 crore has been earmarked for PM-KISAN, the MGNREGA allocation for 2019-20 is Rs 60,000 crore, lower than the revised budget of Rs 61,084 crore in 2018-19.

### Way Forward

- PM-KISAN is an ambitious scheme that has the potential to deliver significant welfare outcomes. However, the current top-down, rushed approach of the government ignores governance constraints and is therefore likely to result in failure.
- An alternative bottom-up strategy and well-planned implementation mechanism would allow weaknesses to be identified and rectified at the local level. The most effective modalities can then be scaled nationally and ensure success.

## The state of the States

### Introduction

- India was one among the 193 United Nations member states to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015.
- The SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018, released to the public in December 2018 by NITI Aayog, is a useful comparative account of how well different States and Union

Territories have performed so far in their efforts to achieve these goals.

#### Four categories

- In this effort, it has not been possible to establish suitable indicators for three of the 17 goals, including climate action (SDG-13). This is on account of either lack of identification of appropriate indicators or of the inability to compare different States.
- On the whole, 62 indicators representing 14 goals have been identified based on their measurability across States over time.
- Based on a scale of 0 to 100, the States are categorised into four groups: achievers, front runners, performers, and aspirants. Achievers are those States which have already accomplished the set target. Front runners are those States that are very close to realising them. A majority of the States are categorised as performers and some lag behind as aspirants.
- Although classification sounds like an appropriate thing to do, there is arbitrariness in the exercise in the sense that in a unitary range, those States with scores till the midpoint are categorised as aspirants and a cluster of States in a close range of progress are termed as performers.
- A few States are designated as front runners. The three front runner States — Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Himachal Pradesh — assume values of 66, 69 and 69, respectively, as against a range of States with values between 50 and 64. With the national score being 57, almost 17 States qualify as above or equal to the national score.
- Plotted on a graph, there is a negatively skewed distribution of scores with a reasonable tail to the left, a fat presence in the middle, and a tapering to the right. This needs to be recognised in classification; otherwise the arbitrariness with which the classification is made somewhat hints at a purposive designation of a few States in two extremes and a major share of them in between.

#### The problem of averaging

- Further, when one reads into the performance on various SDGs, it is found that many States fall into the aspirant category, especially for SDG-5 (gender equality), SDG-9 (industry innovation and

- These kinds of differences could well be emerging owing to a different number of indicators considered under different SDGs as well as their corresponding variability across the States. This is evident in the variation of scores across different goals. For instance, in case of goals 1 and 2, the range for the majority of the States is between 35 and 80. For goals 3 and 6, the range is between 25 and 100. Again, for goal 5, it ranges between 24 and 50.
- Given these variations across different goals, merely averaging them not only compromises on robustness but also masks the disaggregated story to a large extent. Not only does the feature of the progress performance pattern need to be recognised in such classification but also the pathway of progress in development indicators, which has a character removed from linearity.
- Given that this is a measure of progress towards a target, the States near the target get a value closer to one compared to those which are away from the target assuming a lower value. These values are determined in relative terms in the sense that they represent the unitary position of the States within the available scale of gap between the minimum achieved and the target. Such positioning conveys a linear distance, which does not differentiate a given distance between two States which have performed well compared with another pair of States which are far from achieving the target.
- The difference in progress between the three front runner States is three points. This is perhaps not similar to the distance between the performing States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which too have a three-point difference. Such comprehension of achievement is limited as regards to comparing States, let alone designating them into four categories.

#### What can be done?

- Finally, the process of aggregation adopted to present the summary index of compliance with the targets being a simple average assumes that each of the goals as well as the corresponding set of indicators are equally important and can substitute for each other. This also overlooks the

aspect of inter-dependence of various goals, although it is upfront stated in the exercise. To ensure minimum robustness of this measure, a geometric average would have served towards avoiding perfect substitutability of one goal with the other. It means achievement of progress in one goal cannot compensate for compromise in another. While this exercise serves as a report card of performance of States as regards compliance with the SDGs, its scientific adequacy is compromised with arbitrariness that presents a stereotypical pattern of performance rather than bringing out surprises.

- The choice of indicators representing specific goals need not necessarily be guided by availability but also their explicit independence from one another. This may help in making a uniform set of indicators for each of the goals with proper representation without duplication.

### **Conclusion**

- On the whole, this performance assessment may not be misleading, but it does not help us understand the relative significance of compliance in some goals that helps in compliance of the other. Thus, performance assessment of SDGs while overlooking the strict interdependence of them may not be rewarding.