

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.



News @ a glance

POLITY	3	6) Syrian crisis	18
1) Women Army officers eligible for permanent commission	3	7) 14 MoUs for military spares with Russian firms.....	20
2) Soil Health Card Scheme.....	4	SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	21
3) CHILDLINE 1098	4	1) Doctors warn against use of weight-loss drug - lorcaserin.....	21
4) Cut in Crop Insurance Schemes	5	2) Convalescent plasma therapy	21
5) 22nd Law Commission of India	6	3) Google Station.....	21
ENVIRONMENT	7	4) Ra'ad-II - cruise missile of Pakistan	22
1) New species of urban lizard.....	7	5) 24 MH-60R Multi-Role Helicopters (MRH)....	22
2) Fire lines in Mukurthi National Park	7	6) How small regulatory molecules are generated in plants?.....	22
3) COP 13th CMS.....	8	7) Active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) of drugs.....	22
4) State of bird 2020 Report	9	8) ISRO to launch 10 earth imaging satellites....	23
ECONOMY	11	9) SUTRA PIC - research on 'indigenous' cows..	23
1) RBI's financial year to be realigned	11	PIB ANALYSIS	25
2) NABARD	11	1) World Bank Project to Improve Groundwater Management	25
3) COVID-19 outbreak - a force majeure	11	2) Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)	25
4) LPG prices seen a sharp rise	12	3) Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill 2020.....	25
5) Foodgrain production set to touch a record high	12	4) National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)	26
6) Monetary policy stances.....	13	5) ERO-NET	27
ART & CULTURE	14	6) 'ASKDISHA'	27
1) 22nd edition of Ethnologue	14		
2) Kala Kumbh 2020	14		
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	16		
1) Turkey	16		
2) World Health Organization (WHO).....	16		
3) Pakistan retained on grey list of FATF	17		
4) UNICEF	17		
5) Yemen crisis	18		

News in Depth

AIR NEWS..... 28

- 1) North East Sustainable Development Goals Conclave 2020..... 28
- 2) Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase-II. 28

EDITORIALS 29

- 1) Gearing up to fight the next big viral outbreak..... 29
- 2) “Powering the health-care engine with innovation” 30
- 3) “Nutrition and the Budget’s fine print” 31
- 4) Thinking beyond farm sops..... 32

SCHEMES IN BUDGET 2020- Part 2 34

- 1) Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan(KUSUM) 34

- 2) Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana – “Saubhagya”34

- 3) Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana34

- 4) Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana..35

- 5) Swadesh Darshan35

- 6) Khelo India.....36

- 7) Sagarmala36

- 8) Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana36

- 9) Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)37

- 10) NIRVIK Yojana37

RSTV BIG PICTURE39

- 1) Census - Challenges and Importance39

- 2) India, Portugal ties : Exploring new avenues 40

- 3) India snubs Turkey41

News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Women Army officers eligible for permanent commission

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court dismissed the Union government's submissions that women are physiologically weaker than men as a "sex stereotype" and declared that **Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers are eligible for permanent commission and command posts in the Army irrespective of their years of service.**

Background:

- The induction of women officers in the Army started in 1992. Recruits under the

Women Special Entry Scheme (WSES) had a shorter pre-commission training period than their male counterparts who were commissioned under the Short Service Commission (SSC) scheme.

- In 2006, the WSES scheme was replaced with the SSC scheme, which was extended to women officers. They were commissioned for a period of 10 years, extendable up to 14 years.
- The verdict came on a nearly 10-year-old appeal filed by the government against a 2010 decision of the Delhi High Court to grant SSC women officers permanent commission.

Women in command

For the women in uniform, career progression is now becoming a reality with the Supreme Court directing the Centre to grant permanent commission (PC) within three months. Here is a snapshot of the long years of the fight women officers have conducted against discrimination:

It's an order
Here are some of the salient features of the order:

- Accepts government policy to grant PC to short service commission (SSC) women officers in 10 streams of the Combat Support Arms and Services wings
- SSC women officers are eligible for command assignments and not just staff appointments
- SSC women officers granted PC will be entitled to all consequential benefits, including promotion and financial gains

1992: Centre notifies women eligible for appointment as officers for five years in the Army Postal Service, Judge Advocate General Department, Army Education Corps, Signal Corps, Intelligence Corps, Corps of Engineers, Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering and Regiment of Artillery, among other Corps

Dec. 1996: Ministry of Defence deletes the five-year clause for enrollment

Nov. 2005: The initial process of induction of women officers under the WSES was replaced by SSCs with an

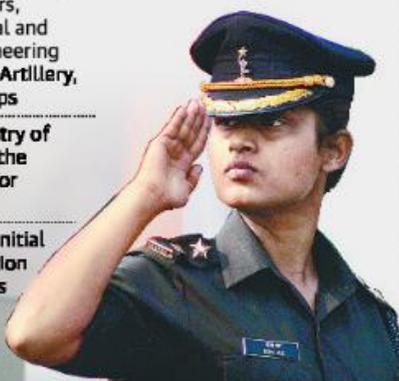
outer period of 14 years. The first batch of women officers under the new scheme entered the Army in 2008

2003 and 2006: Writ petitions filed in the Delhi High Court by advocate

Babita Puniya and several SSC women Army officers for permanent commission and equality of opportunity in the Army

March 2010: Delhi HC holds that women SSC officers of the Air Force and Army who had opted for PC, but not granted that status would be entitled to PC at par with male SSC officers with all consequential benefits. Contempt proceedings were then initiated by the women officers against the Union of India for non-compliance with the HC judgment. Contempt was later stayed

September 2, 2011: The case reaches the Supreme Court in appeal



News in Detail:

- The judgment recorded that the policy statement had endorsed permanent commission for SSC women officers in 10 streams of the 'Combat Support Arms' and 'Services' sections. These are Signals, Engineers, Army Aviation, Army Air Defence, Electronics and Mechanical

Engineers (EME), Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps and Intelligence in addition to the existing two streams of Judge Advocate General (JAG) and Army Education Corps.

- The court noted that "The policy decision of the Union government is a recognition of

the right of women officers to equality of opportunity,”

- The court dismissed the government's stand that only women officers with less than 14 years of service ought to be considered for permanent commission, and those with over 20 years service should be pensioned immediately.
- Applying the judgment retrospectively, the court declared that all serving women officers would be eligible for permanent commission.

2) Soil Health Card Scheme

What is a Soil Health Card?

- SHC is a printed report that a farmer will be handed over for each of his holdings. It will contain the status of his soil with respect to 12 parameters, namely N,P,K (Macro-nutrients) ; S (Secondary- nutrient) ; Zn, Fe, Cu, Mn, Bo (Micro - nutrients) ; and pH, EC, OC (Physical parameters). Based on this, the SHC will also indicate fertilizer recommendations and soil amendment required for the farm.

How can a farmer use a SHC?

- The card will contain an advisory based on the soil nutrient status of a farmer's holding. It will show recommendations on dosage of different nutrients needed. Further, it will advise the farmer on the fertilizers and their quantities he should apply, and also the soil amendments that he should undertake, so as to realize optimal yields.

Why in News?

- The Soil Health Card Day was observed on February 19 to commemorate the day Soil Health Card Scheme. It was launched by the PM Modi on February 19, 2015 at Suratgarh, Rajasthan.

- A 2017 study by the National Productivity Council (NPC) found that the SHC scheme has promoted sustainable farming and led to a decrease of use of chemical fertilizer application in the range of 8-10%.
- Besides, overall increase in the yield of crops to the tune of 5-6% was reported due to application of fertilizer and micronutrients as per recommendations available in the Soil Health Cards.

Benefits of Soil Health Card Scheme:

- The scheme will monitor the soil of the farmers well and will give them a formatted report. So, they can decide well which crops they should cultivate and which ones they should skip.
- The authorities will monitor the soil on a regular basis. One in every 3 years, they will provide a report to farmers. So, farmers need not worry if the nature of the soil changes due to certain factors. Also, they will always have updated data about their soil.
- The work of the government does not stop at listing down measures required to improve the quality of the soil. In fact, they will also employ experts to help farmers in carrying out the corrective measures.
- Farmers will get a proper soil health record, thanks to the Soil Health Card Scheme. Also, they can study soil management practices. Accordingly, they can plan the future of their crops and land.

3) CHILDLINE 1098

Why in News?

- According to data compiled by the CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF), One of every 10 calls made to the emergency helpline 1098 to report abuse against children, was from a survivor desperately seeking help.

About CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF):

- CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF), an NGO, is the nodal agency appointed by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development** to manage CHILDLINE helpline 1098 — a free, emergency phone service for children in need of help.
- CHILDLINE India Foundation was formed in 1999. In 2006-07, the Ministry for Women and Child Development (MWCD) granted the exclusive 'Nodal Mother NGO' status to CHILDLINE India Foundation in order to set up CHILDLINE services across the country.
- The CHILDLINE 1098 service has received a **special mention in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.**



Key Findings of the Report:

- Last year, the CHILDLINE helpline 1098 received a total of 62 lakh calls. The largest number of phone calls were made to seek intervention for abuse cases (17% of the total cases), followed by those pertaining to child labour (13%), education (12%), runaways (11%) and missing children (11%).
- Under child abuse category, **37% of the complaints were about child marriage**, 27% about physical abuse and 13% regarding sexual abuse. The remaining 23% constituted emotional, corporal, domestic and cyber abuse.
- 35% of the sexual abuse cases were committed by neighbours, 25% by strangers and **11% by family members**.

Rescue Procedure:

- “After a child or adult contacts the helpline they reach out to their local partner who contacts the child in need of protection.
- The Target is to reach the child within 60 minutes of receiving a call.
- The child is then rescued and immediately taken to an open shelter and placed before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) within 24 hours.
- Then take action according to the directions of the CWC such as either filing an FIR or sending the child to a hospital or a childcare institution.

4) Cut in Crop Insurance Schemes

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet approved the revamp of the **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** and the Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme. And also the

enrolment in the two schemes has also been made **voluntary for all farmers**, including those with existing crop loans. When the PMFBY was launched in 2016, it was made mandatory for all farmers with crop loans to enrol for insurance cover under the scheme.

About PMFBY:

- PMFBY will provide a comprehensive **insurance cover against failure of the crop** thus helping in stabilising the income of the farmers and encourage them for adoption of innovative practices.
- The scheme is **compulsory for loanee farmers** obtaining Crop Loan /KCC account for notified crops. However, voluntary for Other/non loanee farmers who have insurable interest in the insured crop(s).
- The Maximum Premium payable by the farmers will be 2% for all Kharif Food & Oilseeds crops, 1.5% for Rabi Food & Oilseeds crops and 5% for Annual Commercial/Horticultural Crops.
- The difference between premium and the rate of Insurance charges payable by farmers shall be shared equally by the Centre and State

Objectives

- To provide insurance coverage and financial support to the farmers in the event of failure of any of the notified crops as a result of natural calamities, pests & diseases.
- To stabilise the income of farmers to ensure their continuance in farming.
- To encourage farmers to adopt innovative and modern agricultural practices.
- To ensure flow of credit to the agriculture sector.

About Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS):

- Weather-based Crop Insurance Scheme (WBCIS) is a unique Weather-based Insurance Product designed to provide insurance protection against losses in crop yield resulting from adverse weather incidences.
- It provides payout **against adverse rainfall incidence (both deficit & excess) during Kharif and adverse incidence in weather parameters like frost, heat, relative humidity, unseasonal rainfall, etc. during Rabi**.
- It is not a yield guarantee insurance.

- Major Food crops (Cereals, Millets & Pulses), Oilseeds, Commercial and Horticultural crops are covered under this scheme.

What is the need for the revamp?

- Currently “Every farmer who wants crop insurance has to take this comprehensive product without any customisation. This leads to payment of a higher premium.
- For instance in the current scheme, suppose a farmer in Bihar doesn’t want to take risk coverage for drought or a farmer in Rajasthan wants to opt out from flood coverage, there is no provision.

5) 22nd Law Commission of India

Background

- The Law Commission of India is a **non-statutory body constituted** by the Government of India from time to time. The Commission was originally constituted in **1955** and is **reconstituted every three years**.
- The tenure of the twenty-first Law Commission of India was upto 31st August, 2018.
- Various Law Commissions have been able to make important contributions towards the progressive development and codification of Law of the country. The Law Commission has so far submitted 277 reports.

Composition

- The 22nd Law Commission will be constituted for a period of three years from the date of publication of its Order in the Official Gazette. It will consist of:
 1. a full-time Chairperson;
 2. four full-time Members (including Member-Secretary)

3. Secretary, Department of Legal Affairs as ex-officio Member;
4. Secretary, Legislative Department as ex officio Member; and
5. Not more than five part-time Members.

Functions of the Law Commission:

- Identify laws which are no longer needed or relevant and can be immediately repealed
- Examine the existing laws in the light of DPSP and Preamble
- Consider and convey to the Government its views on any subject relating to law and judicial administration that may be specifically referred to it by the Government through Ministry of Law and Justice (Department of Legal Affairs);
- Consider the requests for providing research to any foreign countries as may be referred to it by the Government through the Ministry of Law and Justice (Department of Legal Affairs);
- Take all such measures as may be necessary to harness law and the legal process in the service of the poor;
- Revise the Central Acts of general importance so as to simplify them and remove anomalies, ambiguities and inequities;

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **Twenty-second Law Commission of India** for a period of three years from the date of publication of the Order of Constitution in the Official Gazette.

ENVIRONMENT

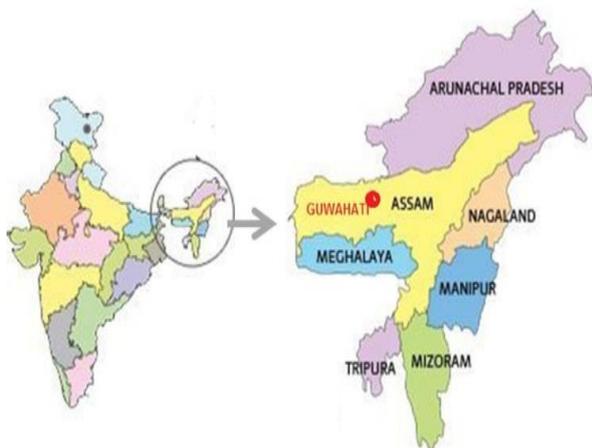
1) New species of urban lizard

Why in news?



- A new species of bent-toed gecko was found in Guwahati.
- It is named *Cyrtodactylus urbanus*, and was earlier thought to be the same as the Khasi Hills lizard.
- It differs from other members of this group in mitochondrial sequence data as well as aspects of morphology such as the number and arrangement of certain pores in males, the number of mid-ventral scales and colour pattern.
- It is the 12th recorded gecko from the Northeast.

About Guwahati's biodiversity



- Guwahati is the largest city in the Northeast.
- Guwahati is home to 26 species of amphibians, 57 species of reptiles, 214 species of birds and 36 species of mammals.
- The city provides that edge for urban biodiversity to thrive because it encompasses 18 hills, eight reserve forests, two wildlife sanctuaries and a

Ramsar site (wetland) besides the Brahmaputra river.

2) Fire lines in Mukurthi National Park

About Mukurthi national Park



- Mukurthi National Park lies at the southwestern end of the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu.
- It is known mainly for the protection of the endangered Nilgiri Tahr *Hemitragus hylocrius*.
- It is part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, which was the first to be declared among the 18 biosphere reserves present in India. Today it forms a key area for the conservation of grassland habitat in the Nilgiris Hills.
- There are several streams, many of which drain into the Bhavani River.
- Pristine patches of shola can be seen all throughout Mukurthi National Park, generally at the heads of streams in the folds of converging slopes.

Why in news?

- The forest department has begun work on construction of **fire lines** in the Mukurthi National Park (MNP).
- Fire lines are described as an artificially formed **break in foliage or forest cover** to control the spread of wildfires by limiting the amount of burnable vegetation available.

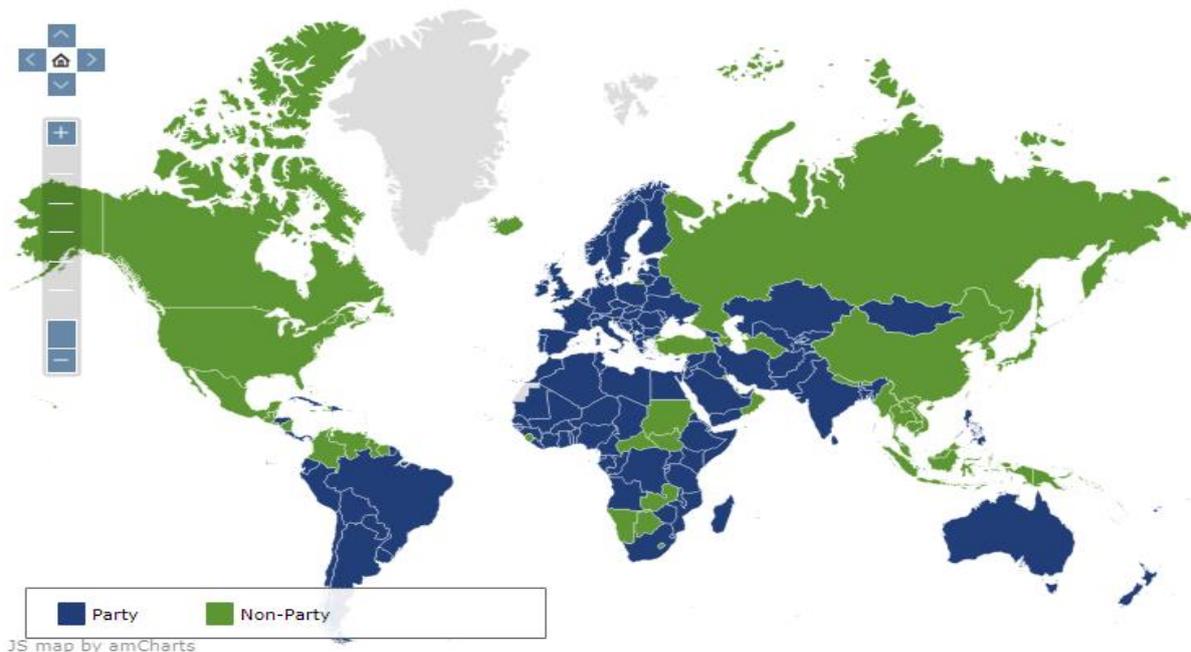
- They are planning to make around 40km of fireline.

3) COP 13th CMS

About CMS:

- Convention on the **Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)** is an international treaty of the United Nations, which provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals (including birds) and their habitats.
- CMS, also known as the **Bonn Convention**, recognizes that States must be the protectors of migratory species that live within or pass through their national jurisdiction and aims to conserve terrestrial, marine, and avian migratory species throughout their ranges.
- CMS **brings together the States through which migratory animals pass, the**

Countries



Conference of Parties (CoP)

- The Conference of the Parties (CoP) is the main decision-making body of the Convention.
- The CoP meets **approximately once every three years**. The last COP (COP12) took place in Manila, Philippines in 2017
- The 13th CoP was held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat from 15 to 22 February 2020. It is the first time India hosted this event.

Range States, and lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range

- Migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on **Appendix I of the Convention**. CMS Parties strive towards strictly protecting these animals, conserving or restoring the places where they live, mitigating obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them.
- Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation are listed in **Appendix II of the Convention**. For this reason, the Convention encourages the Range States to conclude global or regional agreements.
- India has been a party to the convention since 1983.

- The theme of the event was **“Migratory species connect the planet and together we welcome them home”**.



- The Great Indian Bustard was chosen as mascot for this event.
- CMS COP13 was the first of a series of international nature-related meetings in 2020, which will culminate in the UN Biodiversity Conference at the end of this year, when a new global biodiversity strategy for the next decade will be adopted - the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
- **Ten new species were added to CMS Appendices at COP13.** Seven species were added to Appendix I, which provides the strictest protection:
 1. the Asian Elephant
 2. Jaguar
 3. Great Indian Bustard
 4. Bengal Florican
 5. Little Bustard
 6. Antipodean Albatross
 7. the Oceanic White-tip Shark.
- **The Urial, Smooth Hammerhead Shark and the Tope Shark** were listed for protection under Appendix II, which covers migratory species that have an unfavourable conservation status and would benefit from enhanced international cooperation and conservation actions.
- CMS COP13 also adopted the **Gandhinagar Declaration**, which will send a message to the first negotiating session of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework convening in Rome.
- The Declaration calls for migratory species and the concept of '**ecological connectivity**' to be integrated and prioritized in the new Framework, which is expected to be adopted at the UN Biodiversity Conference in October 2020.

Other Policy Measures:

- The COP also agreed on a number of cross-cutting policy measures to address threats to migratory species
- Integrate biodiversity and migratory species considerations into national energy and climate policy and promote wildlife-friendly renewable energy;
- Strengthen initiatives to combat the illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds;
- Mitigate the impacts of linear infrastructure such as roads and railways on migratory species;
- Address the unsustainable use of aquatic wild meat;
- Undertake a review of bycatch levels of sharks and rays, and further implement bycatch mitigation measures for marine mammals in national fishing operations;
- Deepen our understanding of the importance of animal culture and social complexity for the conservation of endangered species;
- To investigate possible trade in CMS Appendix I species and the implications for their conservation status.
- **The first ever report on the Status of Migratory Species, presented to CMS COP13**, shows that despite some success stories, the populations of most migratory species covered by CMS are declining.
- **Ethiopia** has signed the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia.

4) State of bird 2020 Report



Why in news?

- The **State of India's Birds 2020** Report was released at the **13th COP of CMS, Gujarat.**

- It has been prepared with the help of a massive database of more than 10 million observations uploaded by 15,000 birdwatchers on the '**e-bird**' platform.
- This is the **first comprehensive assessment** of the distribution range, trends in abundance, and conservation status for most of the bird species that regularly occur in India.
- **Highlights of the report**
- 867 species of Indian birds assessed in this report.
- 10,000,000 observations by birdwatchers form the basis of the analyses
- 100% increase in the abundance of **peafowl** across the country over the past decades
- 52% of species show **clear declines** over the past decades
- 101 species classified as of High Conservation Concern, and require immediate attention.

ECONOMY

1) RBI's financial year to be realigned

Why in News?

- The board of the Reserve Bank of India has recommended that the financial year of the RBI align with the government's fiscal year (April-March) from the current financial year.

News in Detail

- The RBI's financial year starts from **July and ends in June**.
- For this financial year, 2020-21, it will start on July 1, 2020, and be for nine months up to March 31, 2021.
- Thereafter, all financial years will start on **April 1 every year**, aligned with that of the government.
- The decision to align RBI's financial year with the government's fiscal year was recommended by the **Bimal Jalan committee** that was primarily set up to review the economic capital framework of RBI.

Other recommendations of Bimal Jalan Committee

- It has recommended that the revised **economic capital framework**, under which the RBI decided to transfer Rs 52,637 crore excess provisions to the government, **be reviewed every five years**.
- The committee has recommended a surplus distribution policy which targets not only the total economic capital (as per the extant framework) but also the realised equity level of the RBI's capital.
- Further, in the following years, interim dividend to the government may be paid only under exceptional circumstances, it opined.
- For more details about the Bimal Jalan Committee, refer to *Officer's Pulse Issue No. 12*.

2) NABARD

What is NABARD?

- NABARD is a financial institution that was set up by the Indian government to promote **sustainable agriculture and rural development** in the country.

- The functions of NABARD include the propagation of technological innovations, financial and non-financial solutions, and institutional development.
- NABARD came into existence on 12 July **1982** by transferring the agricultural credit functions of RBI and refinance functions of the then **Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC)**.
- NABARD is **fully owned by the Government of India**.

Why in News?

- A senior agriculture scientist from, Chintala Govinda Rajulu has been named as next chairman of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) by the Banks Board Bureau (BBB).

About Banks Board Bureau (BBB)

- It is an **autonomous** recommendatory body.
- The Bureau will recommend for selection of heads - Public Sector Banks and Financial Institutions and help Banks in developing strategies and capital raising plans.

3) COVID-19 outbreak - a force majeure

Why in News?

- The COVID-19 outbreak in China would be considered a 'force majeure' situation by the Finance Ministry.

News in Detail

- A 'force majeure' situation refers to extraordinary events and circumstances beyond human control.
- It was one of the major demands of industry representatives to deal with supply chain disruptions caused due to COVID-19 outbreak.
- The move provides some relief to companies with central government contracts forced to default on contract obligations due to delays in input shipments from China.
- This would avoid imposition of penalties and other negative consequences on the companies executing government contracts who may be dependent on supplies from affected areas.

Background

- Disruption in supply of raw materials from China due to the coronavirus outbreak could have a serious impact on several Indian industries, especially the pharma sector.
- According to an analysis by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), China supplies 43% of India's imports of the top 20 goods, including mobile handsets, computers, fertilisers, APIs (active pharmaceutical ingredients) and antibiotics.

4) LPG prices seen a sharp rise

Why in News?

- LPG prices in India have seen a steep rise recently. The recent price hike has been the sharpest since January 2014.

What influences LPG prices in India?

- Domestic prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) are based on a formula — the **import parity price (IPP)**, which is **based on international LPG prices**.
- **Saudi Aramco's LPG price** acts as the benchmark for the IPP and includes the free-on-board price, ocean freight, customs duties, port dues and the like.
- This dollar-denominated figure is converted into rupees before local costs — such as local freight, bottling charges, marketing costs, margins for oil marketing firms and dealer commissions and the Goods and Services Tax — are added.
- This helps the government arrive at the retail selling price for LPG.
- The government resets the LPG price every month, the decision being influenced by international prices and how the rupee has behaved against the dollar in the immediately preceding weeks.

What are the implications for the broader economy?

- At a time when consumer demand, in general, for goods and services in the country has slumped, more cash in the hands of the retail consumer may have helped spur demand. The recent LPG price hike sucks away even more disposable income from those consumers who pay market rates for LPG.
- As a result, household budgets are bound to go up, especially for those not availing the subsidy.

- The increase in LPG price **could spur headline inflation** even further.

5) Foodgrain production set to touch a record high

Why in News?

- According to the Agriculture Ministry's second advance estimates, total foodgrain production is projected to scale an all-time high of almost 292 million tonnes in 2019-20, propelled by record production of both rice and wheat.

Production status 2019-2020

- Production of several crops, including rice and major pulses, was **lower than targeted in the kharif** or the monsoon season.
- However, the abundance of **late monsoon rains** resulted in cumulative rainfall that was 10% higher than the long-period average for the season.
- This helped farmers rake in rabi or winter harvests that were larger-than-expected in almost all crops.
- The Agriculture Ministry expects rice production to reach 117.47 million tonnes, slightly higher than the 116.48 million tonnes produced in the previous year.
- Wheat, which is only grown in the rabi season, will see a major surge in production at 106.2 million tonnes in the current year, from the 103.6 million tonnes in 2018-19.

Other crops

- Despite the government's drive to encourage millets and nutri-cereals, production failed to match targets this year.
- Pulses production was also estimated to come in lower-than targeted 23 million tonnes, although it was still higher than the previous year's harvest.
- Most pulses are dry land crops, grown on land without irrigation and the delay in monsoons in many areas hit kharif harvests although rabi production improved.
- Production of oil seeds was estimated at almost 342 million tonnes, higher than last year but still lower than the target for this year.
- Sugarcane is the only major crop where this year's estimated production of 3,538 million tonnes was significantly lower than last year's output of 4,054 million tonnes.

6) Monetary policy stances

Why in News?

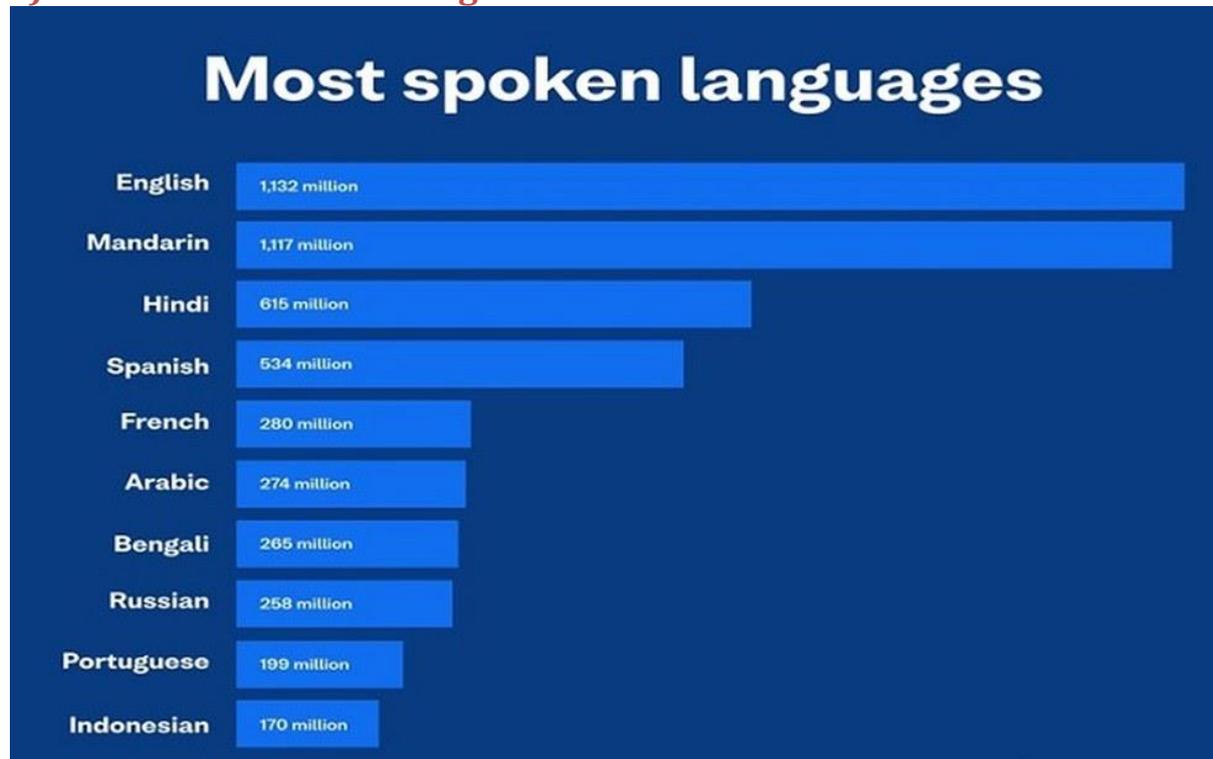
- The monetary policy committee (MPC) unanimously voted for status quo at the February policy review on the back of rising inflation. The MPC decided to continue with the '**accommodative**' stance.
- For details about MPC, refer to the *Officers' Pulse Issue No. 35*.

Policy stances of MPC

- The Indian central bank (and MPC) gives three main types of forward guidance/policy stance to markets
- **accommodative** (in other words, the central bank is telling the market to expect a rate cut anytime),
- **tight** (to indicate an impending rate hikes) and
- **neutral** (this means anything can happen anytime - rate cut or hike)
- Other terms used are by RBI are '**easing**' (meaning, double sure—the rate cut is here and now) and '**calibrated tightening**'.

ART & CULTURE

1) 22nd edition of Ethnologue



Key findings:

- Hindi is 3rd most spoken language in the world with 615 million speakers after English, Mandarin.
- English is at the top of the list with 1,132 million speakers. Chinese Mandarin is at the second position with 1,117 million speakers.
- Bangla, with 228 million native speakers, has been ranked as the 7th most spoken language of the world.
- The 22nd edition covers 7,111 living languages of the world. It also covered 348 languages which have gone out of use in recent history.

Why in News?

- 22nd edition of the world language database Ethnologue was released on the occasion of International Mother Language Day (February 21).

About International Mother Language Day

- UNESCO has been observing February 21st every year as International Mother Language Day to promote mother tongues and increase awareness of the linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world.

- India possesses a very high linguistic diversity index. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India is celebrating **21st February as Matribhasha Divas** all over India with the objective of sensitising people on the need to impart communication skills and proficiency in mother tongue.
- The focus will be on India's vast and diverse language heritage and on ways and means to preserve and support about 3000 mother tongues.

2) Kala Kumbh 2020

Why in News?

- To promote Geographical Indication (GI) crafts and heritage of India, the Ministry of Textiles is organising Kala Kumbh – Handicrafts Thematic Exhibition in various parts of the country through the Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts).

About the exhibition:

- The exhibitions are planned in various major cities like Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. During the exhibitions, the visitors will be able to see a wide variety of handicrafts and by buying these handicrafts they can directly

contribute in the improvement of the livelihood of these artisans and also create awareness of the rich heritage of the country.

GI handicrafts in the exhibition:

- In Bengaluru exhibition, GI crafts like Mysore rosewood inlay, Channapatna lacquerware, Dharwad kasuti embroidery, Kolhapur chappal, Bidriware, Molakalmur hand block printing, Ananthapur leather puppet, Thrissur screwpine, Vishakapatna lacquerware, Sandur lambani embroidery, Jodhpur terracotta, Jaipur handprinted textile, bronze casting, Medinipur mat weaving, Birbhum artistic leather and Khurdah palm leaf engraving are being displayed.
- In Mumbai exhibition GI crafts like Chittoor kalamkari painting, Thrissur screwpine crafts, Pokharan terracotta crafts, Kutch embroidery & crochet crafts, Pingla patachitra, Birbhum kantha embroidery, Jajpur photachitra painting, Madhubani Mithila painting, Kolhapur chappal, Palghar

Worli painting, Kondagaon wrought iron craft, Agate stone crafts and Krishna handblock printing are being displayed.

What is Geographical Indication (GI) tag?

- It originates from a definite geographical territory. It is used to identify agricultural, natural or manufactured goods. The manufactured goods should be produced or processed or prepared in that territory. It should have a special quality or reputation or other characteristics.

Benefits of registration of geographical indications:

- It confers legal protection to Geographical Indications in India
- Prevents unauthorised use of a Registered Geographical Indication by others
- It provides legal protection to Indian Geographical Indications which in turn boost exports.
- It promotes the economic prosperity of producers of goods produced in a geographical territory.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) Turkey

Location and Geography

- Turkey is a country that occupies a unique geographic position, lying partly in Asia and partly in Europe.



- Turkey is bordered by the countries of **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, and Syria**, as well as the **Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea** and **Aegean Sea**.
- The capital is **Ankara**, and its largest city and seaport is **Istanbul**.
- The **Bosphorus strait, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles**—are known collectively as the **Turkish straits**; Turkey's control of the straits, the only outlet from the Black Sea, has been a major factor in its relations with other states.
- The **Tigris and Euphrates** are the most significant rivers, and **Lake Van** is the largest lake.

Why in News?

- Turkish President Erdogan had described the situation in Kashmir as an outcome of “unilateral” actions by India. He also expressed support for the Kashmiri people and expressed solidarity with Pakistan's position on the issue.

- India condemned Turkey to avoid interfering in domestic affairs of India.

2) World Health Organization (WHO)

About

- World Health Organization (WHO) is a **specialized agency** of the **United Nations** established in **1948** to further international cooperation for improved public health conditions.
- WHO defines health positively as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”
- Each year WHO celebrates its date of establishment, **April 7, 1948**, as **World Health Day**.
- It is headquartered in **Geneva**.
- WHO partners with countries, the United Nations system, international organisations, civil society, foundations, academia, and research institutions.
- The organization is financed primarily from **annual contributions** made by member governments on the basis of **relative ability to pay**.

Membership

- As of 2016, the WHO has **194** member states: all of the Member States of the United Nations except for Liechtenstein, plus the Cook Islands and Niue.
- A state becomes a full member of WHO by ratifying the treaty known as the Constitution of the World Health Organization.

World Health Assembly

- The World Health Assembly is the **decision-making body** of WHO.
- It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.
- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.
- The Health Assembly is held **annually** in **Geneva, Switzerland**.

Why in News?

- WHO is repeatedly in news due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.

3) Pakistan retained on grey list of FATF

Background

- Pakistan was given a **deadline of September 2019** to complete the tasks that included shutting down all access to funding of United Nations Security Council designated terrorist groups, including the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad and prosecuting their leadership for any access to finance, as well as tightening laws and banking security norms that deal with them.
- In November 2019, after Pakistan was judged to have complied with only four points of the action plan, the FATF extended the deadline to February, where its statement noted it had been cleared of 14 points.
- The FATF urged Pakistan to “swiftly complete” the remainder of the list.

Why in News?

- Pakistan has been retained on the “**grey list**” of the **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** for another four months.
- For details about FATF, refer *Officers’ Pulse Issue No. 19*.

News in Detail

- FATF gave a stern warning to complete the **27-point action plan** it has been given by June 2020 or face being put on the “black list”.
- FATF expressed concern given **Pakistan’s failure to complete its action plan in line with the agreed timelines** and in light of the Terror Financing risks emanating from the jurisdiction.
- According to the FATF summary report, Pakistan needs to continue to work on eight specific areas, including demonstrating it is “identifying and investigating” all terror financing activity in the country, freezing the funds of all designated terrorists and that its prosecutions result in “effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions” against all terror entities in Pakistan.
- Earlier, the **International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG)** of the FATF

recommended that Pakistan be retained on the “Grey List”

- Since 2007, the FATF’s International Co-operation Review Group (ICRG) has **analysed high-risk jurisdictions** and **recommended specific action** to address the ML/FT (money laundering/financing of terrorism) risks emanating from them.

More in News

- The “**black list**” refers to countries for who there has been a “**call to action**” or strict banking and international finance sanctions, a list which at present includes **Iran and North Korea**.
- Pakistan is one of the **12 countries** on the “grey list” or “**other monitored jurisdictions**” that are being reviewed for actions to stop terror financing and money laundering.
- Pakistan has been lobbying to get off the grey list, citing actions already taken, and reportedly has the **backing of Turkey** to be removed from the list entirely.
- Significantly, even Indian government officials said placing Pakistan on the black list might prove counterproductive, as it would not be incentivised to complete the action plan under a deadline.
- Pakistan has been on the grey list in the past as well, including between 2012-2015, after which it was taken off the watch list until 2018.

4) UNICEF

About UNICEF

- UNICEF, acronym of **United Nations Children’s Fund**, formerly (1946–53) United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, is a **special program of the UN** devoted to aiding national efforts to improve the health, nutrition, education, and general welfare of children.
- UNICEF was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Peace in 1965**.
- It is headquartered in **New York City**.
- Since 1996 UNICEF programs have been guided by the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**, which affirms the right of all children to “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health.”

- UNICEF's activities are financed by **both government and private contributions**.
- The **State of the World's Children** report is released by UNICEF.

Why in News?

- UNICEF reported that 19 children died in the recent airstrikes in Yemen.

5) Yemen crisis

Background

- The conflict has its roots in the failure of a political transition following an uprising (part of **Arab Spring**) that forced its longtime authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, in 2011.
- President Hadi struggled to deal with various problems including militant attacks, corruption, food insecurity, and continuing loyalty of many military officers to Saleh.
- Fighting began in 2014 when the **Houthi Shia Muslim rebel movement** took advantage of the new president's weakness and seized control of northern Saada province and neighbouring areas.
- The Houthis went on to take the **capital Sanaa**, forcing Mr Hadi into exile abroad.

What is Arab Spring?

- The Arab Spring was a **series of pro-democracy uprisings** that enveloped several largely Muslim countries, including **Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain**.
- The events in these nations generally began in the spring of **2011**, which led to the name.
- However, the political and social impact of these popular uprisings remains significant today, years after many of them ended.

Foreign interference

- The conflict escalated dramatically in March 2015, when Saudi Arabia and eight other mostly Sunni Arab states - backed by the US, UK, and France - began air strikes against the Houthis, with the declared aim of restoring Mr Hadi's government.
- Saudi Arabia says Iran is backing the Houthis with weapons and logistical support - a charge Iran denies.



Humanitarian crisis

- The civil war has produced an unrelenting humanitarian crisis, with at least 8.4 million people at risk of **starvation** and 22.2 million people - 75% of the population - in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UN.
- Severe acute **malnutrition** is threatening the lives of almost 400,000 children under the age of five.
- Yemen's health system has all but collapsed, while the **world's largest cholera outbreak has killed thousands**.

Why in News?

- Nineteen children were among at least 31 civilians killed in air strikes on rebel-held northern Yemen recently.

Yemen location

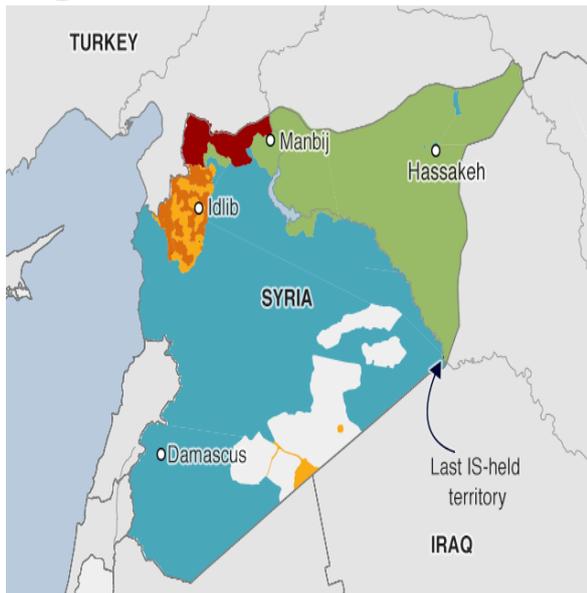
- Yemen is positioned in the **Middle East**.
- It is bounded to the north by **Saudi Arabia**, east by **Oman**, to the south by the **Gulf of Aden** and the **Arabian Sea** and to the west by the **Red Sea**.
- The **Bab el-Mandeb Strait** separates the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen) from Africa (Eritrea and Djibouti).
- **Socotra** (Suqutrā) is Yemen's **most important and largest island**, located in the Arabian Sea.

6) Syrian crisis

Feb 2019



- Kurdish forces
- Turkish-backed Syrian rebels and Turkish military
- Syrian government
- Jihadist forces
- Syrian rebels
- Islamic State group



Source: Conflict Monitor by IHS Markit, 25 Feb 2019

BBC

Background

- Even before the conflict began, many Syrians were complaining about **high unemployment, corruption and a lack of political freedom** under **President Bashar al-Assad**, who succeeded his father, Hafez in 2000.
- In March 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in the southern city of Deraa, **inspired by the "Arab Spring"** in neighbouring countries.
- When the government used deadly force to crush the dissent, protests demanding the president's resignation erupted nationwide.
- The unrest spread and the crackdown intensified.
- The violence rapidly escalated and the country descended into civil war.

What is the war about?

- It is now more than a battle between those who are for or against Mr Assad.
- Many groups and countries** - each with their own agendas - are involved, making the **situation far more complex** and prolonging the fighting.
- They have been accused of **fostering hatred between Syria's religious groups**, pitching the Sunni Muslim majority against the president's Shia Alawite sect.

- They have also allowed the jihadist groups **Islamic State (IS)** and **al-Qaeda** to flourish.
- Syria's Kurds**, who want the right of self-government but have not fought Mr Assad's forces, have added another dimension to the conflict.

Who's involved?

- The Syrian government's key supporters have been **Russia** and **Iran**, while **Turkey**, Western powers and **several Gulf Arab states** have backed the opposition.
- A **US-led global coalition** has also carried out air strikes on IS militants in Syria since 2014 and helped an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias called the **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)** capture territory once held by the jihadists in the east.
- Israel**, meanwhile, has been so concerned by what it calls Iran's "military entrenchment" in Syria and shipments of Iranian weapons to Hezbollah that it has conducted hundreds of air strikes in an attempt to thwart them.

How have the people been affected?

- As well as causing hundreds of thousands of deaths, the war has left 1.5 million people with permanent disabilities, including 86,000 who have lost limbs.
- At least 6.2 million Syrians are internally displaced, while another 5.7 million have fled abroad.
- Neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, which are hosting 93% of them, have struggled to cope with one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history.

Steps taken to end the war

- The **UN Security Council** has called for the implementation of the **2012 Geneva Communiqué**, which envisages a transitional governing body "formed on the basis of mutual consent".
- But nine rounds of UN-mediated peace talks - known as the **Geneva II process** - since 2014 have shown little progress.
- Russia, Iran and Turkey have set up parallel political talks known as the **Astana process**. But they have also struggled to make headway.

Why in News?

- Recent advances by Syrian government forces in Idlib, the last major rebel-held territory in the war-torn country, have triggered a massive displacement.

Syria location and geography



- Syria is located on the **east coast of the Mediterranean Sea** in south-western Asia.
- Syria is bordered by the countries of **Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey**, as well as the **Mediterranean Sea**.
- Its area includes territory in the **Golan Heights** that has been occupied by Israel since 1967.
- **Damascus**, the capital, historically called the **Fragrant City**, is believed to be the oldest continuously inhabited city on the planet.
- Some of Syria's most important cities are **Aleppo, Homs, Hamāh, Mediterranean port of Latakia** and **Al-Qāmishlī**.
- The **Euphrates** and its longest tributary, the **Khabur**, (both rising in the mountains of Turkey) are the major rivers of Syria.

7) 14 MoUs for military spares with Russian firms

Why in News?

- In a step forward towards addressing the issue of regular spares and support for Russian military equipment with the armed forces, 14 MoUs were signed between Indian and Russian companies for setting up joint ventures.

News in Detail

- The MoUs come under the **Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA)** on joint manufacturing of spares in India signed last September for mutual cooperation in manufacturing of spares, components, aggregates and other material related to Russian or Soviet-origin arms and defence equipment.
- One MoU was signed between the **Spetz-Radio Corporation** of Russia and the **Ananth Technologies** based in Hyderabad for the “development, production and manufacture of **small spacecraft for remote sensing**”.
- One important MoU was signed between the **Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL)** and the **Almaz Antey** of Russia for exploring the feasibility of establishing a joint venture in India for the production of various sub systems of “**air defence missile systems like Tunguska, Kavadrat, the OSA-AKA, Pechora** air defence system as well as the **Shilka** self-propelled air defence gun system”.
- There are also agreements on emerging technologies — **Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, blockchain and robotics** based on Russian technologies under the proposed **Indo-Russian Joint Venture ICT Center of Excellence**.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Doctors warn against use of weight-loss drug - lorcaserin

Why in News?

- Indian doctors have cautioned against the use of **lorcaserin** (brand name Belviq or Belviq XR), a **weight-loss drug** that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently said is linked to a **“possible increased risk of cancer.”**

More in News

- Lorcaserin has already been withdrawn from the U.S. market after caution by the FDA because of cancer risk.
- The FDA requested the drug manufacturer to voluntarily withdraw lorcaserin, after a post-marketing trial.
- The agency also said that health care professionals should stop prescribing and dispensing the drug to patients.

2) Convalescent plasma therapy

Why in News?

- A pharmaceutical company in China has turned to plasma taken from people who have recovered from the infection to treat critically ill patients for treating COVID-19 patients.

Convalescent plasma

- **People who have recovered** from COVID-19 disease **would have antibodies** against the virus.
- Infusing the antibodies to critically ill patients is expected to improve the chances of survival.
- The plasma that is transfused contains the antibodies.
- The company had collected plasma from some recovered patients to prepare therapeutic products including convalescent plasma and immune globulin.
- Patients who received plasma therapy showed an improvement in clinical symptoms 12-24 hours after being given the therapy.

Earlier trials

- This is not the first time that plasma from recovered patients has been used to treat people infected with certain viruses for which drugs are not available.
- When Ebola struck Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in 2014, the World Health

Organization prioritised the evaluation of treatment with convalescent plasma derived from patients who have recovered from the disease.

- Treatment with convalescent plasma is a classical, time-tested method.
- It has been used against measles, chickenpox, and rabies.

Timing is crucial

- **Best time** to give convalescent plasma containing antibodies is **before disease develops.**
- As the disease develops, the body has already begun developing antibodies against the virus.
- Infusing convalescent plasma is essentially like topping with more antibodies hoping that increased amount of antibodies will dampen the disease progression.
- Antibodies in the plasma bind to the virus and prevent them from entering the cells.
- But by the time it is given, many cells have already been infected. Hence, convalescent plasma therapy is not very effective.
- In the case of COVID-19, by the time pneumonia is diagnosed it is too late.
- That is the reason why therapy using convalescent plasma is not popular for other viral diseases.

3) Google Station

About

- The **‘Station’** programme was kick-started in India in **2015** as a partnership between **Google, Indian Railways** and **RailTel** to bring fast, **free public WiFi to over 400 of the busiest railway stations by mid-2020.**
- However, the company crossed that number by June 2018, following which more locations were added across the country in partnership with telecommunication companies, ISPs (Internet service providers) and local authorities.

Why in News?

- Google has decided to gradually wind down the ‘Station’ service globally as it believes that better data plans and improving mobile connectivity have made it “simpler and cheaper” for users to get online.

More in News

- Users in India will be able to continue using the existing facilities at the over 400 stations via **RailTel**, Google's partner in India for the programme.
- Currently RailTel is providing free Wi-Fi at over 5,600 stations across the country with a number of partners.

4) Ra'ad-II - cruise missile of Pakistan

About

- Ra'ad-II is an **air launched nuclear-capable cruise** missile with a **range of 600 km**.
- The Ra'ad-II weapon system is equipped with state-of-the-art guidance and navigation systems ensuring engagement of targets with high precision.

Why in News?

- Pakistan conducted a successful flight test of the Ra'ad-II missile.

Other missiles of Pakistan

- Earlier Pakistan conducted a successful training launch of **surface-to-surface ballistic missile (SSBM) Ghaznavi**.
- Ghaznavi missile is capable of delivering **multiple types of warheads** up to a range of **290 kilometres**.
- In November 2019, Pakistan had carried out a successful training launch of ballistic missile **Shaheen-I** which was also an SSBM.

5) 24 MH-60R Multi-Role Helicopters (MRH)

About



- Operational and deployed today with the U.S. Navy as the primary **anti-submarine warfare anti-surface** weapon system, the MH-60R SEAHAWK helicopter is the world's **most advanced maritime helicopter**.
- It is the most capable naval helicopter available today designed to operate from

frigates, destroyers, cruisers and aircraft carriers.

- It is built by Lockheed Martin of the USA.

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, cleared the procurement of **24 MH-60R** multi-role helicopters for the **Navy** at a cost of \$2.4 billion.

6) How small regulatory molecules are generated in plants?

Why in News?

- Researchers from National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, and SASTRA University, Thanjavur, have discovered how small molecules called microRNAs are made in plants.

What are MicoRNAs?

- MicroRNAs are small molecules, about 21 nucleotides long, and **help in controlling the levels of proteins in the cell**.
- All aspects of growth and development of plants, whether it is initiation of flowering or control and distribution of hormones in response to external stress, are regulated at various levels in the cell.
- Such regulation is always mediated by proteins – the work horses of the cells.
- At one level, regulation of the processes is about controlling the amount of specific proteins being made in the cells. This is achieved by the microRNAs.

Controlling proteins

- In order to decrease the level of a particular protein in specific cells, the microRNAs destroy the messenger RNA molecules that help with the production of that specific protein in the cell.
- The microRNA molecules do this by cutting down that particular messenger RNA thereby destroying it. This process is called the **silencing** of the messenger RNA.
- The microRNA that achieve this silencing are evolutionarily conserved – that is, they are found in all flowering plants, whether they are mosses or roses.

7) Active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) of drugs

What are APIs?

- Active pharmaceutical ingredient (API), is the term used to refer to the **biologically**

active component of a drug product (e.g. tablet, capsule).

- Drug products are usually composed of several components.
- The aforementioned API is the primary ingredient. Other ingredients are commonly known as "**excipients**."
- The procedure for optimizing and compositing this mixture of components used in the drug is known as "**formulation**".

Why in News?

- Indian pharmaceutical industry is facing production issues due to lockdown in China on account of COVID-19 as China accounted for around 65-70% of India's API import.

More in News

- The Indian pharmaceutical industry is highly dependent on imports.
- Over 60% of its active pharmaceutical ingredients' requirement are met through imports and in some specific Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) like **cephalosporins, azithromycin and penicillin**, the dependence is as high as 80-90%.
- Of the total imports of APIs and intermediates into India, China accounted for around 65-70%.

8) ISRO to launch 10 earth imaging satellites

Why in News?

- According to the latest annual report of the Indian Space Research Organisation for 2019-20, it will send up an unusually large number of 10 earth observation (EO) satellites during 2020-21.

More in News

- Such a pre-ponderance of the EO launches is unprecedented and includes new categories such as the first **Geo Imaging Satellite, GISAT-1**.
- In comparison, only three communication satellites and two navigation satellites are planned for the coming financial year starting April.
- The annual plan mentions 36 missions, another high for a year.
- The EO sats are ostensibly for benign uses such as **land and agriculture watch**. But their images also have a very important use for the military, for keeping an eye on the borders.

- Apart from GISAT-1, the space agency plans to launch a **new series** of high resolution **HRSATs**.
- The upcoming EO satellites include radar imaging satellites **RISAT-2BR2, RISAT- 1A and 2A; Oceansat-3 and Resourcesat-3/3S**.
- The RISAT-2BR2 will form a triad fleet with its predecessors RISAT-2B and RISAT-2B1, all going around 120 degrees apart. They will "increase the frequency of observation in the areas of interest to provide all-weather, day/night imaging services from space".

Present status

- ISRO says **19 national EO satellites, 18 communication satellites and eight navigation satellites** are in service, driving uses from broadcasting, telephony, Internet services, weather and agriculture-related forecasting, security, disaster-time rescue and relief and location-based services.
- Three of the communication satellites are dedicated for military communication and networking.

9) SUTRA PIC - research on 'indigenous' cows

Why in News?

- The government has unveiled a programme to conduct research on 'indigenous' cows.

About SUTRA PIC

- To be funded by multiple scientific ministries, the initiative, SUTRA PIC, is led by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)**.
- It has the Department of Biotechnology, the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research**, the **Ministry for AYUSH** (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy among others and the **Indian Council of Medical Research** as partners.

Five themes

- SUTRA PIC or **Scientific Utilisation Through Research Augmentation-Prime Products from Indigenous Cows**, has five themes:
 1. Uniqueness of Indigenous Cows,
 2. Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Medicine and Health,
 3. Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Agricultural Applications,

4. Prime-products from Indigenous Cows for Food and Nutrition,
5. Prime-products from indigenous cows-based utility items.

More in News

- Researchers from academic organisations as well as “capable voluntary organisations (NGOs) active in India with proven record of accomplishment in executing S&T-based R&D projects,” were invited to apply for funding.

Criticism

- At least 400 scientists have petitioned the DST to withdraw a proposal that solicits research into indigenous cows.
- Their key concerns were that the research programme appeared to endorse the belief that indigenous cows had “special” and “unique” qualities and that this opened the possibility of money being “wasted to investigate imaginary qualities derived from religious scriptures”.

- The programme did not encourage fair comparison with other breeds of cows around the world or other bovine species within India, and that the proposal was “drafted unscientifically from start to finish”.
- They highlighted that scientific funding for several research programmes was wanting and researchers were not getting their fellowships on time.
- They called for withdrawal of the proposal and to encourage open inquiry and encumbering investigators to also “cross check” if effects were seen in indigenous breeds alone or were also visible in “other cow breeds, bovine species or other mammals”.

PIB ANALYSIS

1) World Bank Project to Improve Groundwater Management

Objective of the Program:

- The programme will, among others, enhance the recharge of aquifers and introduce water conservation practices; promote activities related to water harvesting, water management, and crop alignment; create an institutional structure for sustainable groundwater management; and equip communities and stakeholders to sustainably manage groundwater.

About the Programme

- The World Bank-supported programme will be implemented in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh and cover 78 districts.
- These states span both the hard rock aquifers of peninsular India and the alluvial aquifers of the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- They were selected based on several criteria, including degree of groundwater exploitation and degradation, established legal and regulatory instruments, institutional readiness, and experience in implementing initiatives related to groundwater management.
- This programme will contribute to rural livelihoods and in the context of climatic shifts, build resilience of the rural economy.

Why in News?

- The Government of India and the World Bank have signed a \$450 million loan agreement to support the national programme to arrest the country's depleting groundwater levels and strengthen groundwater institutions.

2) Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

What is a Farmer Producer Organization?

- A Producer Organisation (PO) is a legal entity formed by primary producers, viz. farmers, milk producers, fishermen, weavers, rural artisans, craftsmen. A PO can be a producer company, a cooperative society or any other legal form which

provides for sharing of profits/benefits among the members.

- In some forms like producer companies, institutions of primary producers can also become members of PO. FPO is one type of PO where the members are farmers. Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is providing support for the promotion of FPOs.

Benefits

- Small and marginal farmers do not have the economic strength to apply production technology, services and marketing including value addition.
- Through the formation of FPOs, farmers will have better collective strength for better access to quality input, technology, credit and better marketing access through economies of scale for better realization of income.

About the Scheme

- It would be a new Central Sector Scheme titled "Formation and Promotion of Farmer Produce Organizations (FPOs)" to form and promote 10,000 new FPOs.
- Initially there will be three implementing Agencies to form and promote FPOs, namely Small Farmers Agri-business Consortium (SFAC), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).
- States may also, if so desire, nominate their Implementing Agency in consultation with DAC&FW.
- DAC&FW will allocate Cluster/States to Implementing Agencies which in turn will form the Cluster-Based Business Organization in the States.

Why in News?

- The Cabinet Committee has given its approval for 10,000 FPOs to be formed in five years period from 2019-20 to 2023-24 to ensure economies of scale for farmers.

3) Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill 2020

Background:

- India has one of the highest growths in the ART centres and the number of ART cycles performed every year.
- Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), including In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF), has given hope to a multitude of persons suffering from infertility, but it also introduced a plethora of legal, ethical and social issues.
- India has become one of the major centres of this global fertility industry, with reproductive medical tourism becoming a significant activity.
- Clinics in India offer nearly all the ART services—gamete donation, intrauterine insemination (IUI), IVF, ICSI, PGD and gestational surrogacy.
- However, in spite of so much activity in India, there is yet no standardisation of protocols and reporting is still very inadequate.
- The need to regulate the Assisted Reproductive Technology Services is mainly to protect the affected women and children from exploitation.
- The oocyte donor needs to be supported by an insurance cover, protected from multiple embryo implantation and the children born through assisted reproductive technology should be provided all rights equivalent to biological children.
- The cryopreservation of sperm, oocytes and embryo by the ART banks needs to be regulated and the bill intends to make Pre-Genetic Implantation Testing mandatory for the benefit of the child born through assisted reproductive technology.
- **Why in News?**
- Cabinet approved the Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill 2020.
- **Benefits**
- The major benefit of the Act would be that it will regulate the Assisted Reproductive Technology services in the country. Consequently, infertile couples will be more ensured/confident of the ethical practices in ARTs.
- Through the bill, the National Board, the State Boards, the National Registry and the State Registration Authorities respectively will regulate and supervise assisted

reproductive technology clinics and assisted reproductive technology banks.

- The Bill also provides for a National Registry and Registration Authority to maintain a central database and assist the National Board in its functioning.
- The Bill proposes for stringent punishment for those practising sex selection, sale of human embryos or gametes, running agencies/rackets/organisations for such unlawful practices.

4) National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)

Composition:

- The Commission comprise a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson and three full time members (including one lady member).
- The term of office Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Members of NCST is three years from the date of assumption of charge.
- The Chairperson has been given the rank of Union Cabinet Ministries, the Vice Chairperson have the rank of a Minister of State and other Members have the rank of a Secretary to the Government of India.
- Constitution of India under Clause (5) of **Article 338A** has assigned the following **duties and functions to the Commission:**
- To investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Schedule Tribes under the Constitution or under any other law for the time being in force or under any order of the Government and to evaluate the working of such safeguards.
- To inquire into specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the Scheduled Tribes.
- To participate and advice in the planning process of socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and any State.
- To present to the President, annually and at such other times as the Commission may deem fit, report upon the working of those safeguards.
- To make in such reports, recommendations as to the measures that should be taken by the Union or any State for effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare

and socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes.

- To discharge such other functions in relation to the protection, welfare and development and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes as the President may subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament by rule specify.

Why in News?

- 16th Foundation of Day of National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) organised.

5) ERO-NET

News in Detail:

- The award was given to the Election Commission of India (ECI) for the ERO-NET Project.
- ERO-NET is a common database for all States and UTs with data of 91 crore electors. It provides bedrock of electoral roll in providing various web services to Conduct of Elections applications of Election Commission of India.
- ERO-NET standardised forms processing, standard database schema, and a standard template for e-roll printing. It automates the process of electoral roll management starting from elector registration, field verification of electors, decision support system for Electoral registration officers and for providing extensive integrated value-added services.

Why in News?

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has been awarded 'Silver' Award for Excellence

in Government Process re-engineering for digital transformation for the year 2019-20 from Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India.

6) 'ASKDISHA'

About ASKDISHA:

- Artificial Intelligence based ASKDISHA chatbot was developed by Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC).
- The chatbot is a special computer programme designed to simulate conversation with users, especially over the internet.
- The first-of-its-kind initiative by IRCTC is aimed at facilitating accessibility by answering users' queries pertaining to various services offered to railway passengers.

News in Detail:

- Indian Railways had introduced the services of Artificial Intelligence based ASKDISHA chatbot in October 2018.
- The ASKDISHA Chatbot was initially launched in English language but in order to further enhance the customer services rendered and to further strengthen the services of the chatbot, IRCTC has now powered voice enabled ASK DISHA to converse with customers in Hindi language.
- **Why in News?**
- Online Chatbot 'ASKDISHA' upgraded to converse with Railway customers in Hindi language.

News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) North East Sustainable Development Goals Conclave 2020

News in Detail:

- The Conclave is being organised in association with the North Eastern Council, Government of Assam, Tata Trusts, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS).
- The 3-day event will see representations from the highest offices of all the State Governments of the North East, Central Ministries, academia, civil society and international development organizations.
- The technical sessions would include sessions pertaining to SDG localisation in the northeast, economic prosperity and sustainable livelihoods, climate adaptive agriculture, health and nutrition, education, skill development and entrepreneurship, connectivity and infrastructure development & inequality and exclusion.
- NITI Aayog has the mandate of overseeing the adoption and monitoring of SDGs at the national and sub-national level.
- Progress in the northeast region is crucial in this decade of action for the country to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Why in News?

- NITI Aayog is organising “Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Conclave 2020:

Partnerships, Cooperation and Development of North Eastern States” in Guwahati.

2) Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase-II

About:

- SBM (G) Phase-II will be implemented from **2020-21 to 2024-25**. It will focus on Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF Plus), which includes ODF sustainability and Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM).
- The program will also work towards ensuring that no one is left behind and everyone uses a toilet.
- The ODF Plus programme will also converge with MGNREGA, especially for grey water management and will also complement the newly launched Jal Jeevan Mission.
It will be implemented with a total outlay of Rs. 1,40,881 crores. Of this Rs.52,497 crore will be allocated from the budget of D/o Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- The fund sharing pattern between Centre and States will be 90:10 for North-Eastern States and Himalayan States and UT of J&K; 60:40 for other States; and 100:0 for other Union Territories, for all the components.

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Phase II of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen).

EDITORIALS

1) Gearing up to fight the next big viral outbreak

Context:

- Recently, the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) in China urged other countries including India to regularly test their preparedness not just to diagnose and treat diseases, but also to prevent them.

Global Health Security Index

- The World Health Organization (WHO)'s Global Health Security Index finds that no country is adequately prepared.
- It assesses 195 countries across six categories — prevention, early detection, rapid response, health system quality, standards, and the risk environment.
- India is ranked 57th with a score of 46.5 which is above the global average of 40.2 out of 100.

Health agenda to deal with epidemics:

- The prospect of new outbreaks puts four items on the health agenda
- early detection and prevention;
- better collaboration across health service providers;
- more investment in health systems, outcomes, and education; and
- better care of the environment and biodiversity.

Challenges before India:

Physical infrastructure and human resource constraints

- Health expenditure by the government in India is less than 1.5% of Gross Domestic Product, which is low for a middle-income country.
- According to WHO, India has only 80 doctors per 1,00,000 people.

Emergence of new pathogens and environmental degradation

- One of the many dimensions of new pathogens that is getting increased attention is the link with environmental degradation.
- Highest air pollution readings are being recorded in Indian cities, the interaction between particulate matter from pollution and viral respiratory tract infections,

especially in the young and the elderly, as well as the malnourished, has been increasingly noted .

India's health status and climate shocks:

- India's health status is being worsened by climate shocks. India is regarded as the most climate-vulnerable country because of the impact of severe temperature increases and declines in rainfalls.
- Research is increasingly connecting global warming to vector-borne viruses.

Health and biodiversity

- Nearly two-thirds of known pathogens and three-quarters of newly emerging pathogens are spread from animals to humans.
- This dangerous trend for disease spillovers from animals to humans can be traced to increased human encroachment on wildlife territory; land-use changes that increase the rate of human-wildlife and wildlife-livestock interactions; and climate change.

Way forward:

Better Detection, Awareness and Quarantining

- Thailand's track record in disease prevention, early detection, and rapid response linked to investments in its public health system serves as an example for country like India.
- When the deadly Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), also caused by a coronavirus, broke out in 2015, Thailand quickly notified the WHO of its first confirmed case and acted transparently to arrest the spread in stark contrast to delayed notification by China's officials of the recent outbreak.

Protocols for surveillance

- Clearer protocols for all types of surveillance are needed in all States, and these protocols need to be communicated to health professionals at all levels and the public in local languages.
- Policymakers must take forceful action to prevent the spread of the new virus and heed the urgent warnings of global public health professionals about new pathogens.

Regular stress tests on Preparedness

- Countries need to conduct regular stress tests for their preparedness to deal with health emergencies.
- Each State in India should do this to expose crucial gaps in areas such as adequacy and supply of diagnostic equipment, health facilities, hygienic practices, and prevention and treatment protocols.

Public- Private Partnerships

- Partnerships between private and public sectors, and between countries can sustain supply chains and bolster the medical capacity of countries struggling to cope.

Increase investment in health and education:

- Investing more, and more efficiently, in health and education prepares populations and strengthens health services.

Kerala model:

- Kerala's experience in 2018 with the deadly Nipah virus showed the value of investing in education and health over the long term.
- The availability of equipment for quick diagnosis, measures to prevent diseases from spreading, and public information campaigns all helped to keep the mortality rate from the Nipah virus relatively low.
- Public health professionals helped in the information exchange with WHO and other international bodies.
- Thus more outbreaks may likely happen in the future; the best response is better preparedness.

2) "Powering the health-care engine with innovation"

- Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), or the national health protection scheme was launched by Prime Minister 18 months ago which is a watershed moment for the Indian health-care service delivery ecosystem.
- The government has taken a big step by rolling out world's largest and most ambitious publicly funded health-care assurance programme.
- The scheme is currently being implemented in 32 of 36 States and Union Territories.
- It has provided 84 lakh free treatments to poor and vulnerable patients for secondary and tertiary ailments at 22,000 empanelled hospitals, countrywide.

- Under PM-JAY, there is one free treatment every three seconds and two beneficiaries verified every second.
- As the scale of this scheme grows, a key area of focus is to expand the secondary and tertiary hospitals empanelled under PM-JAY and ensure their quality and capacity while keeping the costs down.
- **Refer Schemes section of Pulse 36 for information about the scheme.**

Need for Augmenting Physical and Human Infrastructure Capacity

- In the coming years, considering 3% hospitalisation of PM-JAY-covered beneficiaries, the scheme is likely to provide treatment to 1.5 crore patients annually.
- This means physical and human infrastructure capacity would need to be augmented vastly.
- At present, there is one government bed for every 1,844 patients and one doctor for every 11,082 patients.
- Conservative estimates suggest that we would need more than 150,000 additional beds, especially in Tier-2 and -3 cities.

Role of startups in health care:

- While a comprehensive long-term strategy will focus on expanding hospital and human resources infrastructure, an effective near-term approach is needed to improve efficiencies and bridge gaps by mainstreaming innovation in the Indian health system.
- It is estimated that there are more than 4,000 health-care technology start-ups in India.
- Start-ups are working to bring innovative technologies and business models that leapfrog infrastructure, human resources, cost-effectiveness and efficiency challenges in Tier-2 and -3 cities.
- Artificial Intelligence platforms that aid in rapid radiology diagnoses in low resource settings, tele-ICU platforms to bridge the gap in high-skilled critical care personnel, centralised drone delivery of blood, medicines and vaccines to reach remote locations cost-effectively and reliably.

Challenges associated

- The mainstreaming of health-care innovations, is lined with challenges at every step.

- Non uniform regulatory and validation standards
- Long gestational period limits the operational liquidity of the start-up.
- Lack of incentives and adequate frameworks to grade and adopt innovations.
- Face procurement challenges in both public and private procurement.

Way forward:

- There is a need to facilitate standardised operational validation studies that are required for market adoption, to help ease out the start-up procurement process.
- To accelerate this process of mainstreaming innovations within the hospital system in India, we need to focus on identifying promising market-ready health-care innovations that are ready to be tested and deployed at scale.
- Through Ayushman Bharat, India has the unique opportunity to develop a robust ecosystem where hospitals actively engage with health-care start-ups by providing access to testbeds, communicating their needs effectively and adopting promising innovations.

3) “Nutrition and the Budget’s fine print”

- Global Hunger Index, reported that India suffers from “serious” hunger, ranked 102 out of 117 countries. Just a tenth of children between six to 23 months are fed a minimum acceptable diet.
- While there are well-equipped schemes to address malnutrition, funding and policy gaps are problem areas.

Multiple dimensions of malnutrition:

- There are multiple dimensions of malnutrition that include calorific deficiency, protein hunger and micronutrient deficiency.

Calorific deficiency

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme

- The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme provides a package of services including
 1. supplementary nutrition,
 2. nutrition and health education,
 3. health check-ups and referral services addressing children, pregnant and lactating mothers and adolescent girls,

4. key groups to address community malnutrition,
5. tackle calorific deficiency and beyond.

Mid-Day Meal Scheme

- The objective of the scheme is to enhance the enrollment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improve nutritional levels among school going children studying in Classes I to VIII of Government, Government - aided schools, Special Training centres (STC) and Madarasas and Maktabas supported under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Protein hunger

- Pulses are a major contributor to address protein hunger.
- A scheme for State and Union Territories aims to reach pulses into welfare schemes such as Mid-Day Meal, Public Distribution System, ICDS.

Micronutrient deficiency

Horticulture Mission

- The Horticulture Mission can be one of the ways to address micronutrient deficiency effectively.
- In 2018-19, the Government of India launched a national millet mission which included renaming millets as “nutri-cereals” also launching a Year of Millets in 2018-19 to promote nutritious cereals in a campaign mode across the country.

POSHAN Abhiyaan:

- Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition or POSHAN Abhiyaan, the National Nutrition Mission is a major initiative to address malnutrition.

Problem lies not with the schemes:

- Though there are numerous schemes to address malnutrition, yet we lag behind because of the following factors.

Underutilisation of resources

- The revised estimates being lower than the budgetary allocation points out the underutilisation of the available resources.
- With underspending, allocations for subsequent years will also be affected, limiting the possibility of increasing budgets and the focus on nutrition schemes.

Absence of agriculture nutrition linkage

- According to the National Sample Survey Office, about three-fifths of rural households are agricultural in India and malnutrition rates, particularly in rural

areas are high according to National Family Health Survey-4 which emphasises the importance of agriculture-nutrition linkage.

Not hitting the bull's eye

- POSHAN Abhiyaan had 72% of total expenditure going into “Information and Communication Technology whereas its convergence of schemes that are crucial to address nutrition, thus deviating from its main focus.

So how can we bring about better nutrition in India?

- With the largest number of undernourished people in the world, India needs to hasten to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 of ‘Zero Hunger’ by 2030.
- The Economic Survey notes that “Food is not just an end in itself but also an essential ingredient in the growth of human capital and therefore important for national wealth creation” which emphasises that India should give special attention to nutrition.
- The following are suggestions to move forward:
 - Focus on nutrition-related interventions,
 - Intensify the convergence component of POSHAN Abhiyaan, using the platform to bring all departments in one place to address nutrition;
 - Direct the announcement to form 10,000 farmer producer organisations with an allocation of ₹500 crore to nutrition-based activities;
 - Promotion of youth schemes to be directed to nutrition-agriculture link activities in rural areas;
 - Give explicit emphasis and fund allocation to agriculture-nutrition linked schemes; and
- For example, Recognising the importance of this link, Ministry for Women and Child Development launched the Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh in 2019.
- Ensure early disbursement of funds and an optimum utilisation of schemes linked to nutrition.
- Nutrition goes beyond just food, with economic, health, water sanitation, gender perspectives and social norms contributing to better nutrition. This is why implementation of multiple schemes can contribute to better nutrition.

- According to the World Food Programme and World Bank, malnutrition affects cognitive ability, workforce days and health, impacting as much as 16% of GDP.
- In that sense, while Budget 2020-21 looks toward an ‘Aspirational India’, fixing the nutrition problem of India, can make a difference not just to better nutrition but to build a wealthier nation too.

4) Thinking beyond farm sops

- Agriculture is a crucial segment for inclusive development and provides stimulus to the economy, especially when it is not doing too well.
- Since the country has several targets and commitments to be achieved in the next decade, it is imperative to lay a strong foundation by launching measures that can stem falling farm growth.

Focus areas:

Address the disparity in agriculture expenditure and growth drivers

- Expenditure on livestock and fisheries, the sector which contributes to higher growth must be increased, as they are mainly connected with resource-poor families in rural areas and also to raise the decelerating growth rate.
- The expenditure on research and development in agriculture needs to be raised from nearly 0.40% of agriculture GDP to 1% as it pays huge dividends in the long run in ameliorating poverty and improving livelihoods compared to any other investment.

Expand the implementation of Climate smart villages

- India’s dependency on agriculture and recurring climate-induced disasters makes it imperative to expand the implementation of Climate Smart Villages of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research-National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) across the nation.

Strengthening the Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)

- FPO’s are currently facing operational and structural issues governed by different Acts and funded by various sources, may be strengthened by bringing them under one institution, preferably an FPO Development and Regulatory Authority.

- A structured impetus must be given to build block chain based e-market places connecting farmers, traders, agencies, institutions and exporters on a common platform to check price fluctuations and harness decentralisation.
- Affordable technologies must be developed and deployed particularly in rural and remote areas where digital literacy of farmers has improved considerably.
- Key farm institutions and organisations in the front line of farm service, dealing with perishables and low shelf life commodities, must digitalise so that they are efficiently managed.

Private sector involvement

- Small-scale investment measures or an incentive-based system is essential to scale up sustainable practices such as agroforestry, climate-smart agriculture, ecosystem services, conservation agriculture and others.
- Increasing corporate social responsibility will help to tap more private investments besides encouraging private players in potential areas where production sustainability is possible.

Establish farm data agency

- The government must establish a farm data agency, which can consolidate, collate and maintain farm data available at various platforms.
- The farm data agencies can facilitate beneficiaries identification, better targeting of subsidies, and support systems of various developmental programmes.

Commissioning ease of farming index

- It is necessary to ascertain the progress made by national and State governments on the key indicators of farming.

- The exercise can be done with active involvement of proven private/public institutions or international agencies which stands away from the conventional assessment of effectiveness of agriculture policies and programmes that are part of the farm support system.
- The exercise may foster cooperative and competitive federalism besides encouraging States which are lagging behind to catch up.

Need of the hour

- The need of the hour is setting up two institutions;
- A national agricultural development council on the lines of the Goods and Services Tax Council under the chairmanship of Prime Minister for effective coordination and convergence of States on key reforms and policies.
- Farmers' welfare commissions (both at the Centre and State level), as an independent institutional mechanism which will act as a neutral platform for assessing all agriculture-related issues and schemes.
- It is pertinent to deliberate on an 'Indian Agricultural Service' on the lines of the Agricultural Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture.
- To deal effectively with increasing droughts and floods and other extreme events, transfer of some subjects to the concurrent list is of prime importance.
- Thus, the right mix of direct benefits and price support with focused investment on resource conservation will bring stability in a farmer's income.

SCHEMES IN BUDGET 2020- Part 2

1) Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan(KUSUM)

- **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** launched the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthan Mahabhiyan (PM KUSUM) Scheme for farmers for **installation of solar pumps and grid connected solar and other renewable power plants** in the country. The scheme consists of three components:
 - **Component-A:** 10,000 MW of Decentralized Ground Mounted Grid Connected Renewable Power Plants.
 - **Component-B:** Installation of 17.50 lakh standalone Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps.
 - **Component-C:** Solarisation of 10 Lakh Grid-connected Solar Powered Agriculture Pumps.
- The scheme aims to add solar and other renewable capacity of 25,750 MW by 2022 with total central financial support of Rs. 34,422 Crore including service charges to the implementing agencies.

Benefits of the Scheme:

- The Scheme will have substantial environmental impact in terms of savings of CO2 emissions. All three components of the Scheme combined together are likely to result in saving of about 27 million tonnes of CO2 emission per annum.
- Further, Component-B of the Scheme on standalone solar pumps may result in saving of 1.2 billion liters of diesel per annum and associated savings in the foreign exchange due to reduction of import of crude oil.
- The scheme has direct employment potential. Besides increasing self-employment the proposal is likely to generate employment opportunity equivalent to 6.31 lakh job years for skilled and unskilled workers.

2) Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana –“Saubhagya”

- Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana –“Saubhagya” is a scheme to ensure **electrification of all willing households**

in the country in rural as well as urban areas. The objective of the ‘Saubhagya’ is to provide energy access to all by last mile connectivity and electricity connections to all remaining un-electrified households in rural as well as urban areas to achieve universal household electrification in the country.

- **Rural Electrification Corporation (REC)** has been designated as nodal agency for the Saubhagya scheme.
- **Eligibility:** The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 instalments through electricity bill.

3) Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana

- The Government of India has launched the scheme “Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana” for rural electrification. The erstwhile Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) scheme for village electrification and providing electricity distribution infrastructure in the rural areas has been subsumed in the DDUGJY scheme. **Rural Electrification Corporation** is the Nodal Agency for implementation of DDUGJY.

Objectives

- To provide electrification to all villages
- Feeder separation to ensure sufficient power to farmers and regular supply to other consumers
- Improvement of Sub-transmission and distribution network to improve the quality and reliability of the supply
- Metering to reduce the losses

Components of the scheme

- Separation of agriculture and non-agriculture feeders facilitating judicious rostering of supply to agricultural & non-agricultural consumers in the rural areas;
- Strengthening and augmentation of sub-transmission & distribution (ST&D)

infrastructure in rural areas, including metering at distribution transformers, feeders and consumers end;

- Rural electrification

4) **Pardhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana**

- The PMSSY, a Central Sector Scheme, under **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**, aims at correcting the imbalances in the availability of **affordable tertiary healthcare facilities** in different parts of the country in general, and augmenting facilities for quality medical education in the under-served States in particular.

Background:

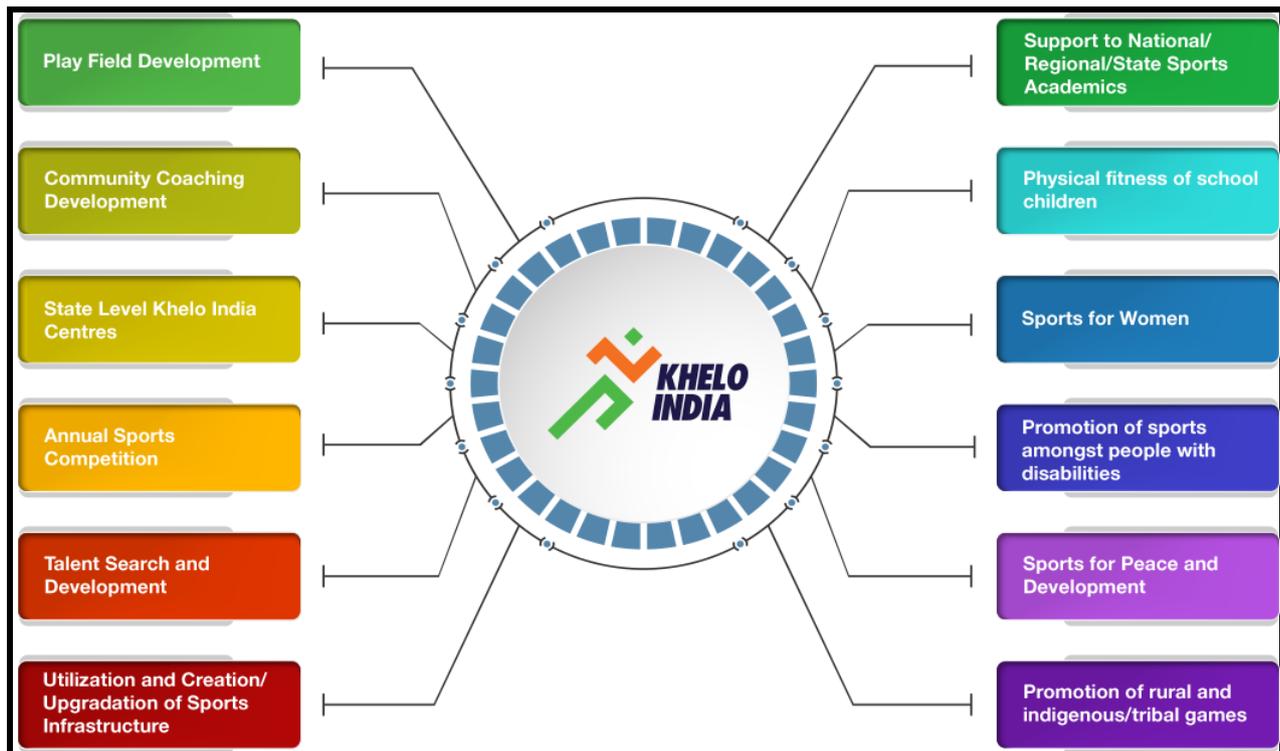
- The PMSSY was announced in 2003 with objectives of correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/reliable tertiary healthcare services and also to augment facilities for quality medical education in the country. PMSSY has two components -
 1. Setting up of AIIMS-like institutions; and
 2. Up-gradation of existing State Government Medical College (GMCs).

5) **Swadesh Darshan**

- It is one among the flagship schemes of the **Ministry of Tourism** for development of thematic circuits in the country in a planned and prioritised manner.
- The Scheme is **100% centrally funded** and efforts are made to achieve convergence with other schemes of Central and State Governments and also to leverage the voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and Corporate Sector.

The scheme has following objectives:

- Position tourism as a major engine of economic growth and job creation;
- Develop circuits having tourist potential in a planned and prioritized manner;
- Promote cultural and heritage value of the country to generate livelihoods in the identified regions;
- Enhance the tourist attractiveness in a sustainable manner by developing world class infrastructure in the circuit/destinations;
- Follow community based development and pro-poor tourism approach;
- Create awareness among the local communities about the importance of tourism for them in terms of increased sources of income, improved living standards and overall development of the area.
- Create employment through active involvement of local communities;
- They are identified as **tourist circuits** under this scheme. Tourist Circuit is defined as a route having at least three major tourist destinations which are distinct and apart. Circuits should have well defined entry and exit points. A tourist who enters should get motivated to visit most of the places identified in the circuit.
- A Circuit could be confined to a State or could be a regional circuit covering more than one State/Union Territory. These circuits may have one dominant theme and other sub-themes.
- Projects under the scheme shall be under the following identified themes; **Eco-tourism, Wildlife, Buddhist, Desert, Spiritual, Ramayana, Krishna, Coastal, Northeast, Rural, Himalayan, Tribal and Heritage.**



6) Khelo India

- The Khelo India programme has been introduced to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level by building a strong framework for all sports played in our country and establish India as a great sporting nation.
- Talented players identified in priority sports disciplines at various levels by the High-Powered Committee will be provided annual financial assistance of INR 5 lakh per annum for 8 years.

7) Sagarmala

- The Sagarmala project seeks to **develop a string of ports around India's coast**. The objective of this initiative is to promote "Port-led development" along India's 7500 km long coastline.
- It aims to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.
- The **Union Ministry of Shipping** has been appointed as the nodal ministry for this initiative.

Components of Sagarmala Programme are:

- **Port Modernization & New Port Development:** De-bottlenecking and

capacity expansion of existing ports and development of new greenfield ports

- **Port Connectivity Enhancement:** Enhancing the connectivity of the ports to the hinterland, optimizing cost and time of cargo movement through multi-modal logistics solutions including domestic waterways (inland water transport and coastal shipping)
- **Port-linked Industrialization:** Developing port-proximate industrial clusters and Coastal Economic Zones to reduce logistics cost and time of EXIM and domestic cargo
- **Coastal Community Development** Promoting sustainable development of coastal communities through skill development & livelihood generation activities, fisheries development, coastal tourism etc.
- **Coastal Shipping & Inland Waterways Transport:** Impetus to move cargo through the sustainable and environment-friendly coastal and inland waterways mode.

8) Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana

- PM Kisan SAMPADA Yojana is a comprehensive package which will result in the creation of **modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet**. It will not only provide a big boost to the growth of

food processing sector in the country but also help in providing better returns to farmers and is a big step towards doubling of farmers income, creating huge employment opportunities especially in the rural areas, reducing wastage of agricultural produce, increasing the processing level and enhancing the export of the processed foods. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY)" will be implemented by **Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI)**.

Objectives of PM Kisan Sampada Yojana

- Creation of modern infrastructure for food processing **mega food parks/ clusters and individual units**
- To create effective backward and forward linkages - linking farmers, processors and markets
- To create robust supply chain infrastructure for perishables

9) Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)

- Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) is a **credit-linked subsidy** programme aimed at generating self-employment opportunities through establishment of micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector by helping traditional artisans and unemployed youth. Any **individual above 18 years of age is eligible**. For setting up of projects costing above Rs.10 lakh in the manufacturing sector and above Rs. 5 lakh in the business /service sector, the beneficiaries should possess at least VIII standard pass educational qualification. General category beneficiaries can avail of margin money subsidy of 25 % of the project cost in rural areas and 15% in urban areas.
- For beneficiaries belonging to special categories such as scheduled caste/scheduled tribe/OBC /minorities/women, ex-serviceman, physically handicapped, NER, Hill and Border areas etc. the margin money subsidy is 35% in rural areas and 25% in urban areas.
- It was introduced by merging the two schemes that were in operation till 31.03.2008, namely Prime Minister's

Rojgar Yojana (PMRY) and Rural Employment Generation Programme (REGP)

- PMEGP is a **central sector scheme** administered by the **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MoMSME)**.
- At the national level, the Scheme is being implemented by **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)**, a statutory organization under the administrative control of the Ministry of MSME as the single nodal agency.
- At the State level, the Scheme will be implemented through State KVIC Directorates, State Khadi and Village Industries Boards (KVIBs) and District Industries Centres (DICs) and banks.

Objectives

- To generate continuous and sustainable employment opportunities in Rural and Urban areas of the country
- To provide continuous and sustainable employment to a large segment of traditional and prospective artisans, rural and urban unemployed youth in the country through setting up of micro enterprises.
- To facilitate participation of financial institutions for higher credit flow to the micro sector.

10) NIRVIK Yojana

- Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (ECGC) has introduced the Export Credit Insurance Scheme (ECIS) called **NIRVIK** to enhance loan availability and ease the lending process.
- It is an insurance cover guarantee that will cover up to 90% of the principal and interest. The cover will include both pre and post-shipment credit.
- The ECGC currently provides credit guarantee of up to 60% loss.
- The enhanced cover will ensure that Foreign and Rupee export credit interest rates will be below 4% and 8% respectively for exporters.

Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India

- ECGC Ltd is wholly owned by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

- The Government of India had initially set up **Export Risks Insurance Corporation in 1957**.
- After the introduction of insurance covers to banks during the period 1962-64, the name was changed to **Export Credit &**

Guarantee Corporation Ltd in 1964. It was changed to ECGC Ltd in August 2014.

- Its objective was to promote exports from the country by providing credit risk insurance and related services for exports.

RSTV BIG PICTURE

1) Census - Challenges and Importance

Mapping the populace The census enumeration exercise will be done in three phases



HOUSE LISTING: Comprising 34 categories, it will be done from April to September, 2020

ENUMERATION: Comprising 28 categories, it will be held between February 9 and 28, 2021

REVISION: It will be done from March 1 to 5, 2021

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

- There will be a "third gender" category this time
- Government teachers will conduct the enumeration exercise
- Data will be collected on a web-based application developed under the Registrar General

THE OUTLIERS: There are around 45,000 villages in the country with no internet connectivity. For them, data can be gathered on paper

MANDATORY CLAUSE: Every citizen is compelled by law to participate in the Census exercise, and denial could lead to criminal action

Why in News?

- Amid rising instances of field enumerators coming under attack across at least three states for some of the ongoing NSS surveys and gathering mistrust over CAA and NRC, the house-listing operation and the updation of the National Population Register, set to begin in April for Census 2021, could run into rough weather.
- The survey system is already in "deep trouble" and given the increasing instances of such attacks, conducting household surveys with the Census as the frame would be "very tough" going ahead, Pronab Sen, former Chief Statistician of India and Country Director for the India Programme of the International Growth Centre, said.

What is the Background?

- Amid the backdrop of protests and rallies on the new citizenship law, the National Sample Survey Office field officials have been attacked in some areas of Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.
- Sen said that this could have an effect not just on the Census but on other surveys as well.

What are the highlights of census 2021?

- Except for the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand the next census of India to be conducted in 2021 with March 1, 2021 as the reference date.
- The Census 2021 **will be conducted in 18 languages out of the 22 scheduled languages (under 8th schedule) and English**, while Census 2011 was in 16 of the 18 scheduled languages declared at that time.
- It also **will introduce a code directory** to streamline the process.
- The option of "Other" under the gender category will be changed to "**Third Gender**".
- For the first time in the 140 year history of census in India, data is proposed to be collected through a mobile app by enumerators and they will receive an additional payment as an incentive.
- The Census data would be available by the year 2024-25** as the entire process would be conducted digitally and data crunching would be quicker.

What are the issues of caste data collection?

- The Ministry of Home Affairs had declared that the Other Backward Class (OBC) category would be included in the Census 2021 earlier in 2018.
- But the Registrar-General of India (RGI) has said that only SC/ST will be included as the unreliable nature of caste data collection decreases the credibility of the results.
- There has been delay in publishing the census data cause the 2011 caste data, collected as part of the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC), is yet to be released by the Centre.
- Even a committee formed under former vice-chairman of NITI Aayog, Arvind Panagariya to find a way to publish the 2011 Socio-economic and Caste Census data failed to provide any tangible outcome.
- The last caste-based census was conducted by the British in 1931.

What are the advantages of a digital census/paperless census?

- A paperless census will drastically reduce the storage space for physical files.
- As all data will be stored electronically, the government will save up on a substantial amount of physical storage space.
- Digital census will reduce the environmental burden by saving the trees required for paper manufacturing industries.
- The use of technology in census will also help pave the way for other technologies, such as artificial intelligence and Internet of Things, to take root in India.
- It will also help cut the project cost of census.
- As the records mentioned on pages could easily be tampered now going digitally, any tampering with the data will invite punishment under the Information Technology Act, 2000.

What are the disadvantages?

- Digital data is more prone to the piracy.
- The data collected digitally can be used by various private agencies for personal use if breached.
- There will be serious security concerns if the breached data be used by our enemy countries.
- It would be difficult to register digitally for people who are digitally illiterate.

Conclusion

- The Census 2021 will be conducted in two phases: the house listing phase with 34 parameters from April 2020 to September 2020 and the population enumeration phase with 28 parameters from February 9 2021 to February 28 2021.
- In a first time move, the process will now also include an optional mobile application that the 30 lakh enumerators can download on their own personal devices for data entry.

2) India, Portugal ties : Exploring new avenues



Why in news?

- India and Portugal signed seven agreements to boost cooperation in a range of areas after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa held extensive talks.
- The pacts provide for cooperation in areas of investment, transport, ports, culture and industrial and intellectual property rights.
- Portugal is an important country for India in Southern Europe, and bilateral ties have witnessed a steady progress in the last 15 years.

What is the background?

- In October 2005, Portugal extradited Abu Salem and Monica Bedi to face terror charges.
- Prime Minister Modi visited Portugal in June 2017 during which 11 agreements were signed covering a large number of areas including space, avoidance of double

taxation, nano-technology, biotechnology and higher education.

- Sousa arrived here on a four-day visit, his first to India.
- The last visit by a Portuguese President to India was in 2007.

What are the agreements signed?

- A Cooperation Agreement was signed between India and the Republic of Portugal in the field of Maritime Transport and Ports on 14 February 2020.
- The objective of the agreement is to strengthen the coordination of Maritime transport between the two countries.
- The agreement will open avenues for cooperation to promote Maritime Transport between India and Portugal for better operation of their merchant fleets.
- It will also enhance cooperation to harmonize and unify their position with International Organization Institution, forums and conferences related to Maritime and Port activities.
- It will also help the two countries to coordinate accession to international conventions.

What are the investments of Portuguese in India?

- Portugal ranks 50th in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India with total cumulative FDI inflows amounting to USD 42.10 million (as of 31 December 2017).
- Portuguese investments in India are: Martifer in the metals sector; Efacec in Industrial Machinery, Equipment & Tools sector; Euroamer Garuda, a subsidiary of Euroamer investments in the Real Estate sector in Bangalore; Sodecia in 2011 acquired Automotive Ancillary Services Group; Petrotec Group investments focused on production, marketing and providing technical support for oil industry distribution and retail areas etc.
- Portuguese investments in India are: Martifer in the metals sector; Efacec in Industrial Machinery, Equipment & Tools sector; Euroamer Garuda, a subsidiary of Euroamer investments in the Real Estate sector in Bangalore; Sodecia in 2011 acquired Automotive Ancillary Services Group; Petrotec Group investments focused on production, marketing and providing technical support for oil industry distribution and retail areas.

What are the investments of India in Portugal?

- Indian investments in Portugal are in the range of USD 150 million while precise figures are not available.
- Portugal has initiated a Golden Visa scheme to attract non-European investors to Portugal.
- 24 Indians made investments under the Portuguese Golden Visa Scheme till December 2016.
- Indian company Zomato has invested Euro 11 million in Portugal.

Conclusion

- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited Portugal in June 2017, during which 11 MoUs were signed covering different fields including avoidance of double taxation, nano-technology, biotechnology, space and higher education.
- India and Portugal have seen significant progress in their relationship for the past 15 years.

3) India snubs Turkey



Why in News?

- Reacting strongly to Recep Tayyip Erdogan's comments on Jammu and Kashmir India said that it rejected all the references made and called upon the Turkish leadership to "not interfere" in India's internal affairs.
- Turkish President Erdogan had on Friday reiterated his country's support to Pakistan on Kashmir, telling a joint session of Pakistan parliament that India's decision to revoke the erstwhile state's special status had "aggravated the troubles of their Kashmiri brothers and sisters".

What is the Background?

- Besides joining hands on Kashmir, Erdogan extended Turkey's support to Pakistan against the application of political pressure by the inter-governmental Paris-based Financial Action Task Force.
- Erdogan's endorsement of Pakistan's stance on J&K has been a sore point in its relations with India.

What is the history of India-Turkey relations?

- During the Turkish War of Independence, the people of India contributed funds for the Turkish cause – which was partly used to train and assist the Turkish Army and partly for establishing the first Turkish bank (Isbank).
- Diplomatic relations between India and Turkey were established in 1948.
- Bilateral relations are characterized by warmth and cordiality.
- The two countries share common values including commitment to secularism and democratic principles.
- Indian economic progress and technological advancement have been instrumental in recent upsurge in interest towards India in Turkey.

Why has the relations soured recently?

- Turkey and India, though not the best of friends, have been trying for the past three decades to overcome their differences, and strike a balance in ties, with a little give and take from both sides.
- But the relation appears to have nosedived of late under the Presidentship of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has taken on the mantle of becoming a "global Islamic leader".
- Bilateral relations have soured to an extent that India has decided to call off an upcoming visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Ankara later this month, which would have been his first stand-alone official visit to the nation since taking over in 2014.

- Erdogan has been openly cosying up with Pakistan, especially its Prime Minister Imran Khan.
- His sharp statement on Kashmir at the UN General Assembly last month, where he raked up the UN resolutions, and accused the world of ignoring the plight of "eight million people stuck" in Kashmir, have not gone down well with India.
- Turkey has also markedly increased its defence cooperation with Pakistan. Ankara is building four MILGEM medium-sized warships for the Pakistan Navy, in a deal estimated to be worth over \$1 billion.
- According to the deal, two ships would be built in Turkey and the other two in Pakistan under technology transfer.
- The two countries last year also inked a \$1.5 billion deal for the supply of 30 Turkish attack helicopters - in the largest defence deal between the two sides.

What is the Turkish stance on Indian issues?

- Turkey supports "multilateral dialogue" on Kashmir and offers to mediate between India and Pakistan.
- Thus, it is against India's stance of Kashmir being a bilateral issue.
- Turkey supports Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's position on Kashmir which is again anti-India
- On India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Turkish stance has been to push for Pakistan's case along with India's.
- Turkey supports India's bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. But, Turkey is a member of the group called Uniting for Consensus which opposes expansion of permanent membership in the Security Council and this group includes Pakistan.

Conclusion

- Focus should be Trade and Economic ties. Turkey needs a new market as Europe is not welcoming Turkey. The two nations are also exploring cooperation in areas such as construction, infrastructure development, renewable energy, and tourism.

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