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DGP Appointment

The Supreme Court (SC) has **rejected the pleas** made by five States to implement their own local laws for selection and appointment of their Directors General of Police (DGP).

The court said its directions were issued in **larger public interest** and to protect **the police officials from political interference**.

➢ The petition was filed by Punjab, Kerala, West Bengal, Haryana and Bihar for modification of the apex court order in the procedure to be followed for appointment of Directors General of Police (DGP).

➢ The SC also asked the **Union Public Service Commission** whether it was preparing **panels of senior IPS officers** for each state to **pick its DGP in the last 10 years,** i.e. in sync with its 2006 guidelines given in Prakash Singh case.

➢ Most states **did not follow the SC judgment** and enacted laws doing away with the panel of names recommended by UPSC. The state laws instead provided for an **in-house committee to provide a panel of senior IPS officers** of the state cadre from whom the government could pick its choice.

Background

➢ The judgement is the **follow up of December 12, 2018,** order wherein the SC agreed to hear the States' pleas seeking to **implement their local laws** regarding the **selection and appointment of the police chief**.

➢ Earlier In July 2018, the Supreme Court had **refrained State governments** from appointing DGPs without first consulting the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). It came up with the following guidelines:

○ The State governments concerned have to **send UPSC the names of the probables three months before** the incumbent DGPs are to retire.

○ The UPSC will prepare a **panel of three officers** fit to be DGP and send it back.

○ The UPSC shall, as far as practicable, choose the people within the zone of consideration who have got a **clear two years of service** and must give **due weightage to merit and seniority**.

○ The State, in turn, shall **"immediately" appoint one of the persons** shortlisted by the UPSC.

○ On the practice of States appointing "Acting DGPs", the court **rejected the idea of acting or temporary DGPs,** i.e.. States shall appoint a person as **permanent DGP**.

○ The court also ruled that **any rule or state law on the subject of appointment of police officers** will be kept in suspension. However, the States, which have made laws on police appointments, can move to court seeking modifications of its order.

➢ The court had passed the series of directions on an application made by the Centre for modification of its judgement in **Prakash Singh case of 2006 for reforms and transparency in the State police forces**.

Prakash Singh Case

➢ In **Prakash Singh case of 2006,** the Supreme Court **gave 7 directives** with a view to bring in police reforms.

➢ While passing these directives the Court put on record the deep rooted problems of politicization, lack of accountability mechanisms and systemic weaknesses that have resulted in poor all round performance and fomented present public dissatisfaction with policing. The directives are:

○ **Constitute a State Security Commission (SSC) to:**

- Ensure that the State government does not exercise unwarranted influence or pressure on the police,

Note:

- Lay down broad policy guideline and
- Evaluate the performance of the state police.

○ Ensure that the **DGP** is appointed through **merit based transparent process** and secure a **minimum tenure of two years**.

○ Ensure that other police officers on operational duties (including **Superintendents of Police** in-charge of a district and **Station House Officers** in-charge of a police station) are **also provided a minimum tenure of two years**.

○ Separate the **investigation and law & order functions of the police**.

○ Set up a **Police Establishment Board (PEB)** to decide transfers, postings, promotions and other service related matters of police officers of and below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police and make recommendations on postings and transfers above the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

○ Set up a **Police Complaints Authority (PCA) at state level** to inquire into public complaints against police officers of and above the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police in cases of serious misconduct, including custodial death, grievous hurt, or rape in police custody and at district levels to inquire into public complaints against the police personnel below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police in cases of serious misconduct.

○ Set up a **National Security Commission (NSC)** at the union level to prepare a panel for selection and placement of Chiefs of the Central Police Organisations (CPO) with a minimum tenure of two years.

Way Forward

➢ The Judgment limits significantly the discretion enjoyed by the political executive in the matter of transfers.

➢ The police force should be **insulated from political encroachment** into its hierarchy.

➢ Arbitrary appointment and posting challenges the ethics of public services from political class on one hand and creates instability in the administration. Moreover, this also makes officers in services vulnerable to **political interference, pressure and favoritism leading to corruption in long run in pursuit of power, praise and money**.

Cabinet Decides to Strengthen NE Autonomous Councils

Cabinet has approved the **amendment to Article 280 and the sixth schedule to the Constitution** in order to increase powers of Autonomous Councils in Sixth Schedule areas of North East (NE).

➢ The sixth schedule to the Constitution includes **10 autonomous district councils of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura**.

The 10 autonomous councils **among the 4 states** under schedule six to the Constitution are:

Assam
➢ Bodoland Territorial Council
➢ Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council
➢ Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council

Meghalaya
➢ Garo Hills Autonomous District Council
➢ Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council
➢ Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council

Tripura
➢ Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council

Mizoram
➢ Chakma Autonomous District Council
➢ Lai Autonomous District Council
➢ Mara Autonomous District Council

Sixth Schedule
➢ The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the **administration of the tribal areas in the four northeastern** states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram as **per article 244**.

➢ The **Governor is empowered** to increase or decrease the areas or change the names of the autonomous districts. While executive powers of the Union extend to Scheduled Areas with respect to their administration in 5th schedule, the 6th schedule areas remain within executive authority of the state.

➢ The acts of Parliament or the state legislature do **not apply to autonomous districts** and autonomous regions or apply with specified modifications and exceptions.

➢ The Councils have also been endowed with wide **civil and criminal judicial powers,** for example establishing village courts etc. However, jurisdiction of these councils is subject to **jurisdiction of the concerned High Court**.

Note:

Approved Amendments

➢ Amendment of Article 280 **mandates the Finance Commission to recommend devolution of financial resources**. This will significantly improve the financial resources and powers of the autonomous district councils.

➢ Transfer of **additional 30 subjects,** including departments of Public Works, Forests, Public Health Engineering, Health and Family Welfare, Urban Development and Food and Civil Supply to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council and Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council in Assam.

➢ **Renaming of few existing autonomous councils** as the present jurisdiction of these councils extend to more than one districts.

➢ **Increase in seats** in Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (from 30 to 50 seats), Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council (30 to 40 seats), Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (30 to 42), Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (30 to 40) and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (30 to 34).

➢ Provide for **elected village municipal councils** which will be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice, including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry.

➢ Elections to these **village and municipal councils** will be conducted by the State Election Commission. There will be a provision for anti-defection too.

➢ Reservation of at least **one-third of seats for women** in the village and municipal councils in the sixth schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.

➢ At least **two nominated members** in all autonomous councils will be women.

➢ **Meghalaya** has for the time being **kept out of the purview** of the provision for elected village and municipal councils and one-third reservations for women.

Protests in Mizoram over Citizenship Bill

Apart from the other Northeastern states recently, **Mizoram has also witnessed massive demonstrations** over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016.

➢ This protest was organised by the influential Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) which is a **Mizo multinational student organization** and apex students body in Mizoram state.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016

➢ The Bill amends the Citizenship Act, 1955 to make illegal migrants who belong to certain religious minorities (Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians) from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, eligible for citizenship.

➢ The Bill seeks to reduce the requirement of 11 years of continuous stay in the country to six years to obtain citizenship by naturalization for these communities belonging to these 3 nations.

➢ The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law.

Reasons for Protest

➢ In Mizoram, the **concern is not about Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh** like in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura but about **Chakmas, a tribal and largely Buddhist group**.

➢ The Chakmas are present in parts of the Northeast, and the **Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh,** with which **Mizoram shares an international border**.

➢ The state has seen **ethnic violence,** with instances of arson, names of Chakmas being struck off voters' lists, and denial of admission to Chakma students in college.

➢ MZP which is leading the current agitation, have often cited figures they attribute to the Census. In 1901, there were only 198 Chakmas in Mizoram and by 1991 it was over 80,000.

➢ **According to MZP the growth rate is far more than normally possible** which proves that there has been **influx from Bangladesh**.

➢ At the same time Chakma activists cite a **2015 report** submitted by the government of Mizoram to the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** according to which the **legitimacy of the Census figures between 1901 and 1941 cannot be ascertained** as the same are not available with the Census Directorate, Mizoram.

➢ The report cites Census data that puts the Chakma population at 15,297 in 1951 and 96,972 in 2011.

Note:

Who are Chakmas?
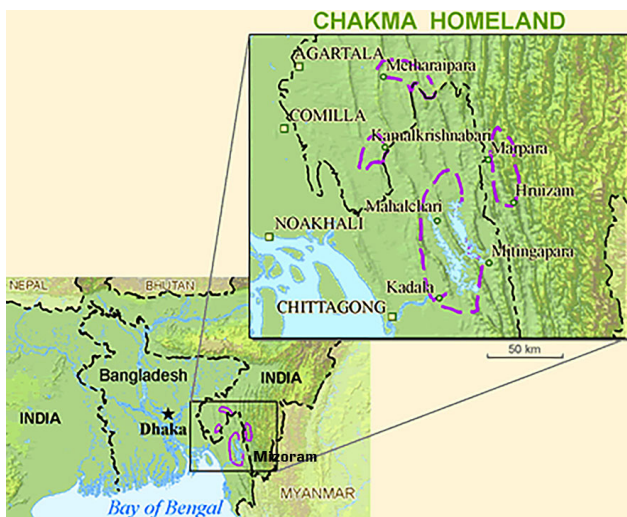
➤ The Chakmas are **ethnic people who lived in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, most of which are located in Bangladesh**.

➤ Chakmas are predominantly Buddhists. They are found in northeast India, West Bengal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

➤ The **Chakmas living in India are Indian citizens**. Some of them, mostly from Mizoram, live in relief camps in southern Tripura due to tribal conflict with Mizos. These Indian Chakmas living in Tripura take part in Mizoram elections too. The Election Commission sets up polling booths in relief camps.

➤ The Chakmas living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts fled erstwhile East Pakistan in 1964-65, since they lost their land to the development of the **Kaptai Dam** on the **Karnaphuli River**.

➤ They also faced religious persecution as they were non-Muslims and did not speak Bengali. They eventually sought asylum in India. The Indian government set up relief camps in Arunachal Pradesh and a majority of them continue to live there even after five decades. (According to the 2011 census, 47,471 Chakmas live in Arunachal Pradesh alone).

Problem With Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh

➤ In the 1960s, the **Chakma refugees were accommodated** in the relief camps constructed in the "vacant lands" of **Tirap, Lohit and Subansiri districts** of the erstwhile **North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA),** a political division governed by the Union government.

➤ In **1972, NEFA** was renamed **Arunachal Pradesh** and made a Union Territory, and subsequently, it attained statehood.

➤ The **locals and regional political parties have opposed resettling refugees** in their land fearing that it may change the demography of the State and that they may have to share the limited resources available for them.

Inclusion of Chakmas in Bangladesh

➤ The **Chakmas opposed their inclusion in undivided Pakistan during Partition**. They later **opposed their inclusion in Bangladesh** when East Pakistan was fighting the Liberation War with West Pakistan, on grounds that they are an ethnic and religious minority group.

➤ A group of Chakmas resorted to armed conflict with Bangladeshi forces under the name 'Shanti Bahini'. The conflict increased the inflow of refugees to India.

➤ In **1997,** the **Bangladeshi government headed by Sheikh Hasina** signed a **peace** accord with the **Shanti Bahini,** which resulted in the **end of the insurgency**.

➤ According to the accord, the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Murang and Tanchangya were acknowledged as tribes of Bangladesh entitled for benefits and a Regional Council was set up to govern the Hill Tracts. The agreement also laid out plans for the return of land to displaced natives and an elaborate land survey to be held in the Hill Tracts.

➤ **Bangladesh** was **willing to take back a section of Chakma refugees living in India,** but most of them were **unwilling, fearing** the return of **religious persecution**.

Granting Citizenship to Chakmas

➤ In **2015,** the **Supreme Court** directed the Centre to **grant citizenship to Chakmas** who had migrated from Bangladesh in 1964-69.

➤ Following this, the Centre introduced amendments to the Citizenship Act, 1955.

➤ The Bill is criticized for making illegal immigrants eligible for citizenship on the basis of religion, which is a violation of Article 14 of the Constitution.

Making our Elections Inclusive and Accessible

The Election Commission of India (ECI) organised the **International Conference on 'Making our Elections Inclusive and Accessible'** on the occasion of **9th National Voters Day** which is observed on **25th January every year**.

Note:

- The **National Voters' Day** is celebrated all over the country every year **since 2011** to mark the **Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on 25th January 1950**.
  - The main purpose of the celebration is to encourage, facilitate and maximize the enrollment, especially for the new voters.
  - The **theme** of National Voters' day 2019 was **"No Voter to be Left Behind"**.
- To mark the occasion, ECI also released the January 2019 issue of its **Quarterly Magazine 'VOICE International'**. The magazine carries rich experiences for knowledge sharing on 'Inclusive and Accessible Elections' across the democracies around the world.
- On the sidelines of the Conference ECI also renewed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation in the field of election management with the **Election Commission of Bhutan**.

- ECI also highlighted its flagship programme, **Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)** for enhancing inclusion among various categories of voters and to encourage their electoral participation.

Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)

- SVEEP, **started in 2009** is the flagship programme of the Election Commission of India for voter education, **spreading voter awareness and promoting voter literacy in India**.
- SVEEP is designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning there of.

Note:

Economic Scenario

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World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2019

Recently, the five-day World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2019 ended with discussions on imminent challenges faced by the global economy, including climate change, growing inequality, and US-China trade tensions.

➢ This year's theme was **Globalisation 4.0,** which includes a strong cultural dimension.
  ❍ Globalisation is a phenomenon driven by technology and the movement of ideas, people, and goods. While Globalism is an ideology that prioritizes the neoliberal global order over national interests.

➢ A **'Digital Declaration',** which calls on businesses to respect the privacy of digital citizens; handle personal data securely and transparently; take meaningful steps to mitigate cyber threats, and ensure everyone can participate in the digital economy as it develops whilst combating online harassment, was also signed.

Waves of Globalisation

➢ **Globalisation 1.0** was pre-World War 1 globalisation, which was launched by a historic drop in trade costs when steam and other forms of mechanical power made it economical to consume goods made far away.
  ❍ This globalization came with almost no government support.
  ❍ There was no global governance.

➢ **Globalisation 2.0** is the post-World War II phase where trade in goods was combined with complimentary domestic policies.
  ❍ The market was in charge of efficiency while the government was in charge of justice.
  ❍ Internationally, Globalisation 2.0 saw the establishment of institute-based, rule-based international governance, specifically the UN, IMF, World Bank, GATT/WTO and many specialized agencies like the Food and Agricultural Organisation and International Labour Organisation.

➢ **Globalisation 3.0 or hyperglobalization, as termed by Arvind Subramanian** created a new world of manufacturing in which high-tech was combined with low wages. This meant factories crossing borders.

➢ **Globalisation 4.0** is a new stage of globalization which involves cutting-edge new technologies like artificial intelligence that powers forward with the explosion of Information Technology (IT).

World Economic Forum (WEF)

➢ The World Economic Forum (WEF) is a **Swiss nonprofit foundation established in 1971,** based in Geneva, Switzerland.

➢ Recognised by the Swiss authorities as the international institution for **public-private cooperation,** its mission is cited as, "committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas".

Note:

➢ Founder and Executive Chairman – **Klaus Schwab**.

➢ Some major reports published by WEF are:

- ○ **Global Competitiveness Report**
  - This monitors the performance of countries based on a set of 12 categories called **'pillars of competitiveness',** namely institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business application and innovation.
- ○ **Global IT Report**
  - WEF along with INSEAD, and Cornell University publishes this report which examines the increasing proliferation of technology and its effects on advancing global prosperity.
- ○ **Global Gender Gap Report**
- ○ **Global Risk Report**
  - It enlists the threats which the world will face in future ranging from geopolitical and geo-economic tensions to environmental degradation and disruptions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- ○ **Global Travel and Tourism Report**
  - It measures set of factors and policies that enable sustainable development of travel and tourism sector.

Declining Pepper Price

A steep **fall in the price of pepper** in the harvest season and low production owing to climate vagaries are the major concerns of **pepper growers (Kerala and Karnataka)** in South India.

Reasons for Decline in Price

➢ **Torrential rain** a few months ago in pepper-growing areas of Kerala and Karnataka caused a sharp decline in crop production.

➢ **High moisture content** owing to the rains has **triggered fungal diseases like quick wilt** and **soft wilt** and has massively destroyed the pepper crop.

➢ **Cheaper pepper from Vietnam** continues to flood the market through Sri Lanka, and **aided by a low-duty structure** under the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Nations) trade agreement, **SAFTA** (South Asian Free Trade Agreement) and **ISFTA** (Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement) are the major reasons for the declining price.

- ○ Major pepper consuming markets such as Patna, Ranchi, Lucknow, Varanasi, Indore, Delhi etc have been flooded with cheap Vietnamese pepper imported illegally as Sri Lankan produce through the borders of Nepal, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Remedial Measures

➢ The Ministry of Commerce and Industry had imposed a **minimum import price** *(minimum price per tonne that Indian firms have to pay while importing products into India)* on pepper in 2018 to protect domestic pepper farmers but it is yet to make any positive impact.

➢ The **Indian Pepper and Spice Traders, Farmers, Producers and Planters Consortium (IPSTPC)** had urged the Commerce Ministry to **remove black pepper from SAFTA and ISFTA import list** in order to save domestic growers but it is yet to be considered.

South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)

➢ The South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) was agreed to among the seven South Asian countries that form the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

➢ It was formed at 12th SAARC summit in Islamabad, Pakistan in 2004.

➢ SAFTA replaces the earlier South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) and aims to reduce tariffs in order to promote intraregional trade among the SAARC members.

RBI Eases External Commercial Borrowing Framework

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has drawn up a **new External Commercial Borrowing (ECB) framework** in order to further **improve the ease of doing business in India**.

➢ The new framework came into effect immediately (From January, 2019).

External Commercial Borrowings (ECB)

➢ External Commercial Borrowings is a **loan availed by an Indian entity** from a nonresident lender with a **minimum average maturity**.

➢ Most of these loans are provided by foreign commercial banks buyers' credit, suppliers' credit, securitized instruments such as Floating Rate Notes and Fixed Rate Bonds etc.

➢ **Advantages of ECBs:**
  ○ ECBs provide opportunity to **borrow large volume of funds**.
  ○ The funds are available for **relatively long term**.
  ○ Interest rate are also **lower compared to domestic funds**.
  ○ ECBs are in the form of foreign currencies. Hence, they enable the corporate to have foreign currency to meet the import of machineries etc.
  ○ Corporate can raise ECBs from internationally recognized sources such as banks, export credit agencies, international capital markets etc.

New Framework

➢ The **RBI kept the borrowing limit under the automatic route** unchanged at $750 million per financial year but replaced the sector-wise limits.

➢ RBI has **expanded the definition of beneficiaries eligible** for ECBs to include all entities that can receive foreign direct investment. Among those now eligible are: port trusts, units in special economic zones, microlenders, not-for-profit companies, registered societies/trusts/cooperatives and non-government organisations.

➢ The Export-Import Bank (EXIM) and the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has been allowed to borrow overseas from recognised lenders.

➢ The previous four-tier structure has been replaced by **two specific channels: dollar and rupee-denominated ECBs**.
  ○ Earlier, there was a distinction between foreign currency ECBs based on maturity. One was maturity period of three to five years and the other of 10 years. Both have been subsumed into foreign currency-denominated ECBs.
  ○ Indian rupee-denominated overseas borrowings with similar sets of maturities have also been combined into a single rupee-denominated ECBs.

➢ To curb volatility in the forex market arising out of dollar demand for crude oil purchases, the framework provides a **special dispensation to public sector oil marketing companies**.
  ○ It allows them to raise ECB, with an overall ceiling of $10 billion, for working capital purposes with a **Minimum Average Maturity Period (MAMP) of three years** under the automatic route without mandatory hedging and individual limit requirements.

➢ The RBI has decided to keep the **minimum average maturity period at 3 years** for all ECBs, irrespective of the amount of borrowing, except for borrowers **specifically permitted to borrow for a shorter period,** like manufacturing companies.
  ○ Earlier, the minimum average maturity period was five years.
  ○ Further, if the ECB is raised from a foreign equity holder and **utilised for working capital, general corporate purposes or repayment of rupee loans, the maturity period will be five years**.

➢ Any entity who is a resident of a country which is Financial Action Task Force (FATF) compliant, will be treated as a recognised lender.
  ○ This change increases lending options and allows various new lenders in ECB space while strengthening the anti money laundering/combating the financing of terrorism framework.

➢ The **negative list,** for which the ECB proceeds cannot be utilised, would include **real estate activities, investment in capital market, equity investment, working capital purposes (except from foreign equity holder), repayment of Rupee loans (except from foreign equity holder)**.

➢ Earlier in November, 2018 RBI also eased Hedging Norms for External Commercial Borrowings to make the ECB route attractive to firms.

UK Sinha Panel on "Group Insolvency"

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has set up a **11-member working group under the Chairmanship of former SEBI chief UK Sinha** to go into the concept of 'Group Insolvency' and suggest a suitable framework.

Note:

- At present, the <mark>**Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)**</mark> provides for the resolution or liquidation of only individual stressed companies. So a framework within the IBC is sought to be created for the resolution/ liquidation of an entire stressed corporate group having several entities in **multiple National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) jurisdictions**.

- 'Group Insolvency' process may be useful where two or more applications are pending in the same court against debtors in the same Group, such debtor group or creditors of such debtor group can seek joint proceedings.

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 has been the **most successful mechanism to recover debt**.
  - ○ According to a recent RBI report, the average recovery by banks, based on the **amount filed through the IBC, was 41.3% in FY18**, against just 12.4% through other mechanisms such as the SARFAESI Act, Debt Recovery Tribunals and Lok Adalats.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India was **established in 2016** under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

- It is responsible for implementation of the Code that consolidates and amends the laws relating to reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals in a time bound manner for maximization of the value of assets of such persons, to promote entrepreneurship, availability of credit and balance the interests of all the stakeholders.

- It regulates a profession as well as processes.

- It has **regulatory oversight** over the Insolvency Professionals, Insolvency Professional Agencies, Insolvency Professional Entities and Information Utilities.

Existing Laws for Recovering Debts

- **Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI):** Lender can take possession of the assets kept as security over non-repayment of loans.

- **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002:** Proceeds of the crime are attached by the Enforcement Directorate.

- **Recovery of Debts due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993:** A debt recovery tribunal can pass orders for the attachment of assets that were given as security on nonpayment of dues/loans.

> **Note:**
> Earlier in January 2019, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had set up an eight-member expert committee under former <mark>**SEBI chairman U.K. Sinha**</mark> to understand the structural bottlenecks and factors affecting the performance of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME).

Odisha Government's KALIA Scheme

KALIA or **"Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation"** scheme was launched by the Odisha Government for farmers welfare.

- The aim of the scheme is to **accelerate agricultural prosperity and reduce poverty** for encouraging cultivation and associated activities.

- The scheme is being seen as a viable **alternative to farm loan waivers**.

- Under the scheme, around ₹ 10,180 crores will be spent over three years until 2020-21 in providing financial assistance to cultivators and landless agricultural laborers.

Eligibility

- **Small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural household, vulnerable agricultural household, landless agricultural laborers and sharecroppers** (actual cultivators) are eligible under different components of the scheme.

Provision of the Scheme

- **For Cultivators:** All farmers will be provided ₹ 25,000 per family as assistance for cultivation over five seasons. Each family will get ₹ 5,000 separately in the Kharif and Rabi, seasons, for five cropping seasons between 2018-19 and 2021-22. Crop loans up to ₹ 50,000 are interest-free.

- **For Landless Agricultural Households:** Financial Assistance of ₹ 12,500 will be provided to each landless Agricultural Household for Agricultural allied activities like for small goat rearing unit, mini-layer unit, duckery units, fishery kits for fisherman, mushroom cultivation and bee-keeping, etc.

➢ **For Elderly:** The elderly, sick and differently-abled population who are unable to take up cultivation, will be provided ₹ 10,000 per household per year.

➢ **Insurance for cultivators and landless agricultural household:** The KALIA scheme also includes a life insurance cover of ₹ 2 lakh and additional personal accident coverage of the same amount for 57 lakh households.

Advantages of KALIA scheme

➢ KALIA **targets a whole** bunch of **rural activities**.

➢ KALIA scheme **supports farmers farming on a small scale, sharecropping, fishing, animal herding, which are not covered under bank loans,** but are caught in debt traps set up by local moneylenders.

➢ KALIA is considered as a **better alternative to farm loan waiver as loan waivers can be disadvantageous to honest farmers** who repay on time and can discourage them from doing so.

Future of Work: ILO

Recently **International Labour Organization (ILO)'s** Global Commission on the **Future of Work** has published Future of work report 2019 titled **"Work for a brighter future"**.

➢ The report calls on governments to take steps to address the challenges caused by unprecedented transformations going on in the world of work.

Key Findings

➢ According to ILO, Globally **190 million people are unemployed,** while **300 million workers live in extreme poverty**. At the same time wage gaps are growing at a time of declining wage growth.

➢ Technological advances – **artificial intelligence, automation and robotics** – will create new jobs, but those who lose their jobs in this transition may be the least equipped to seize the new opportunities.

➢ **Adopting sustainable practices with clean technologies** will create millions of jobs but other jobs will disappear as countries scale back their carbon- and resource-intensive industries.For example:

○ **Implementing the Paris Climate Agenda** could create 24 million new jobs, but it could still be brutal to the 6 million workers expected to lose their jobs in the transition to a greener economy.

➢ **Changes in demographics** are significant as expanding youth populations in some parts of the world and ageing populations in others may place pressure on labour markets and social security systems, yet in these shifts lie new possibilities to afford care and inclusive, active societies.

➢ The future of work requires a **strong and responsive social protection system** based on the principles of solidarity and risk sharing, which supports people's needs over the life cycle

➢ There is an urgent need to seize the opportunities presented by these transformative changes to create a brighter future and deliver economic security, equal opportunity and social justice – and ultimately reinforce the fabric of our societies.

Recommendations

➢ A **universal labour guarantee** that protects fundamental workers' rights, an adequate living wage, limits on hours of work and safe and healthy workplaces.

➢ **Guaranteed social protection** from birth to old age that supports people's needs over the life cycle.

➢ A **universal entitlement to lifelong learning** that enables people to skill, reskill and upskill.

➢ **Managing technological change to boost decent work,** including an international governance system for digital labour platforms.

➢ Greater investments in the care, green and rural economies.

➢ A transformative and measurable agenda for **gender equality**.

➢ Reshaping business incentives to **encourage long-term investments**.

➢ Place people at the centre of economic and social policy.

➢ **International governance system** be set up to **police the gig economy, and ensure that 'digital labour platforms'** such as Uber and Swiggy respect certain minimum rights and protections.

International Labour Organization

➢ The **International Labour Organization (ILO) was founded in 1919** to promote social justice and thereby contribute to universal and lasting peace.

➢ The ILO is responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards.

➢ It is the **only tripartite United Nations agency that brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers** to jointly shape policies and programmes promoting decent work for all.

Note:

Gig Economy
➢ A gig economy is a free market system in which temporary positions are common and organizations contract with independent workers for short-term engagements.

Mechanism to Prevent Insider Trading

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has prescribed internal controls on sharing of information.

➢ It has decided to **hold company promoters,** irrespective of their shareholding status, **responsible for violation of insider trading norms** if they possess **Unpublished Price-Sensitive Information (UPSI)** regarding the company without any 'legitimate' purpose.

➢ SEBI has specified that the term **"legitimate purpose" will include sharing of the UPSI** in the ordinary course of business by an insider with partners, collaborators, lenders, customers, suppliers, merchant bankers, legal advisors, auditors, insolvency professionals or other advisors or consultants, provided that such sharing has not been carried out to evade or circumvent the prohibitions of these regulations.

➢ Simply put, a promoter who is not an advisor in official capacity or does not hold any position on the board will not be considered a person having **"legitimate purpose"** to hold the UPSI.

➢ It has recommended that the board of directors shall **ensure that a structured digital database** is maintained containing the names of such persons or entities, as the case may be, with whom the information is shared.

➢ SEBI's decision is based on the recommendations of the **TK Viswanathan Committee on fair market conduct**.

Insider Trading

➢ Insider trading refers to the **practice of purchasing or selling** a publicly-traded company's securities while in possession of **material information that is not yet public information**.

➢ Material information refers to any and all information that may **result in a substantial impact on the decision of an investor** regarding whether to buy or sell the security. E.g.:
  ❍ A government employee acts upon his knowledge about a new regulation to be passed which will benefit a sugar-exporting firm and buys its shares before the regulation becomes public knowledge.

Corporate Governance

➢ Corporate governance is the system by which **companies are managed and controlled**. It involves a set of systems, processes and principles which ensures that a company is governed in the **best interest of its stakeholders**.

➢ **'Good corporate governance'** ensures:
  ❍ Adequate **disclosures** and effective **decision making** to achieve corporate objectives.
  ❍ **Transparency** in business transaction.
  ❍ Statutory and legal **compliances**.
  ❍ **Protection** of shareholder interests.
  ❍ Commitment to **values** and **ethical conduct** of business.

➢ The **Global Financial Stability report** recently published by the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** suggests that while corporate governance norms have improved across emerging markets, it **fell in India between 2006 and 2014**.

Kotak Panel Report

The panel constituted by **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** under the chairmanship of **Uday Kotak** has suggested a host of changes for improving corporate governance standards of firms.

➢ **Chairman** of the board **cannot be the Managing Director/CEO of the company**.

➢ Boards should have minimum of **six directors**. Of these 50% **should be independent directors** including at least one woman independent director.

➢ Mandate minimum qualification for independent directors and disclose their relevant skills.

➢ Create a formal channel for sharing of information between the company and its promoters.

➢ Public sector companies should be governed by listing regulations, not by the nodal ministries.

➢ Auditors should be penalized if lapses are found.

➢ SEBI should have powers to **grant immunity** to whistle blowers. Companies should disclose medium-to-long term business strategy in annual reports.

The **TK Viswanathan committee on fair market conduct** submitted its report in August, 2018. Its recommendations are:

➢ Among a number of recommendations on **insider trading,** is the creation of **two separate codes of conduct**.

- ○ Minimum standards on dealing with insider information by listed companies.
- ○ Standards for market intermediaries and others who are handling price-sensitive information.
- ➤ Companies should maintain details of immediate relatives of designated persons who might deal with sensitive information and of people with whom the designated person might share a material financial relationship or who share the same address for a year.
- ➤ **Such information** may be maintained by the company in a searchable **electronic format**. It may also be shared with the SEBI when sought on a case-to-case basis.
- ➤ The committee has recommended **direct power for SEBI to tap telephones** and other electronic communication devices. This is to **check insider trading** and other frauds.
- ○ Currently, SEBI has the **power to only ask for call records** including numbers and durations.

World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2019: UN

According to the **UN's World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2019,** India will continue to **remain the world's fastest-growing economy** in 2019 as well as in 2020.

Key Findings

- ➤ **India**
- ○ India's economy is expected to grow at **7.4% during 2018-19, 7.6% in 2019-20** and **7.4% in 2020-21**.
  - The reasons for high growth projections are **robust private consumption,** a **more expansionary fiscal stance and benefits from previous reforms**.
  - However, for a sustained and a more robust growth, **sustained recovery of private investment** remains a crucial challenge.
- ○ Other major challenge is the **job creation rates in the formal sector,** leaving **many workers underemployed or in low-salary jobs. Strengthening labour market** indicators is a crucial aspect to forge a more inclusive development trajectory.
- ○ **Female labour force participation** remains **low and is declining**.

- ○ Earlier, **International Monetary Fund (IMF) too had projected** India's GDP to expand 7.5% in FY20 and 7.7% in FY21.
- ➤ **Global**
- ○ Global growth is expected to remain at 3% in 2019 and 2020.
- ○ The global economy is facing number of risks, which include an escalation of trade disputes, an abrupt tightening of global financial conditions, and intensifying climate risks.

World Economic Situation and Prospects
WESP is a joint product of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the five United Nations regional commissions (Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and Western Asia).

National Bench of the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)

The Union Cabinet has approved the creation of **National Bench of the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)**.

- ➤ The National Bench of the Appellate Tribunal will be situated at New Delhi.
- ➤ GSTAT will be presided over by its President and will consist of one Technical Member (Centre) and one Technical Member (State).
- ➤ Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal is the **form of the second appeal** in GST laws and the first common forum of dispute resolution between Centre and States.
- ➤ The appeals against the orders in first appeals issued by the Appellate Authorities under the Central GST (CGST) and State GST (SGST) Acts lie before the GST Appellate Tribunal.
- ➤ CGST Act provides for the Appeal and Review Mechanism for dispute resolution under the GST Regime.
- ➤ The Act empowers the Central Government to constitute, by notification, an Appellate Tribunal known as the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by the Appellate Authority.

Note:

Benefits

➢ A unified GST Appellate Tribunal will decide on cases where there are divergent orders at the state level to ensure that there is uniformity in redressal of disputes arising under GST, and therefore, in the implementation of GST across the country.

➢ The dispute resolution forum is extremely crucial as conflicts arise between several states among themselves and with the Central Government over indirect tax revenues.

Status Paper on Government Debt

Recently, the Ministry of Finance has released the Status Paper on Government debt 2017-18.

Key Findings

➢ Central Government's total debt as a percentage of GDP fell to 46.5% in 2017-18 from 47.5% as of March 2014. But the debt of State Government rose to 24% in 2017-18 and is estimated to be 24.3% in 2018-19.

  ○ The data show that the Central Government is moving in the right direction in terms of meeting the **N.K. Singh Committee recommendations** on public debt but the States are not keeping up with Committee recommendations.

➢ External debt constituted 2.9% of GDP at end-March 2018, implying low currency risk to the Government of India's debt portfolio and its impact on the balance of payments remains insignificant.

➢ The general government liabilities, which include State Government liabilities, rose to 68.2% of GDP in 2017-18 from 67.5% of GDP in 2016-17.

Reasons for Debt

➢ **Bank Recapitalisation:** Infusing capital in state-run banks using recapitalization bonds in 2017-18 increased the total Central Government debt in both absolute terms and as a percentage of GDP that fiscal.

  ○ In 2017-18, ₹ 80,000 crore of recapitalization bonds were used to fund state-run banks.

➢ **UDAY bonds:** The liabilities of States have increased during 2015-16 and 2016-17, following the issuance of **Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY) bonds**.

  ○ UDAY was launched in November 2015 to help loss-making state power distribution utilities turn around financially, with support from their respective State Governments.

N.K. Singh Committee

➢ A panel under former Revenue Secretary, N.K. Singh was constituted by the Government in May 2016 for reviewing the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003**.

➢ This was in view of the new school of thought which believes that **instead of fixed numbers as fiscal deficit targets, it may be better to have a fiscal deficit range as the target,** which would give necessary policy space to the Government to deal with dynamic situations.

➢ **FRBM Act provides a legal institutional framework for fiscal consolidation.** It is now mandatory for the Central Government to take measures to reduce fiscal deficit, to eliminate revenue deficit and to generate revenue surplus in the subsequent years.

  ○ **The Act binds not only the present Government but also the future Government to adhere to the path of fiscal consolidation.**

  ○ The Government can move away from the path of fiscal consolidation only in case of natural calamity, national security and other exceptional grounds which Central Government may specify.

Recommendations

➢ The Committee suggested using debt as the primary target for fiscal policy.

➢ **Debt to GDP ratio of 60% should be targeted with a 40% limit for the Center and 20% limit for the States. The targeted debt to GDP ratio should be achieved by 2023.**

➢ **It said that the 60% consolidated Central and State debt limit was consistent with international best practices, and was an essential parameter to attract a better rating from the credit rating agencies.**

➢ To achieve the targeted debt to GDP ratio, it proposed yearly targets to progressively reduce the fiscal and revenue deficits till 2023.

➢ The Committee suggested that grounds on which the government can deviate from the targets should be clearly specified, and the government should not be allowed to notify other circumstances.

➢ Further, the Government may be allowed to deviate from the specified targets upon the advice of the Fiscal Council in the following circumstances:

○ considerations of national security, war, national calamities and collapse of agriculture affecting output and incomes,

○ structural reforms in the economy resulting in fiscal implications, or

○ a decline in real output growth of at least 3% below the average of the previous four quarters.

Government Debt

➢ Government liabilities are classified as debt contracted against the Consolidated Fund of India (defined as Public Debt) and liabilities in the Public Account, called Other Liabilities.

➢ Public debt is further classified into internal and external debt.

➢ Internal debt consists of marketable debt and non-marketable debt. Government dated securities and treasury bills, issued through auctions, together comprise marketable debt.

➢ Treasury Bills issued to state governments and select central banks, special securities issued to National Small Savings Fund (NSSF), securities issued to international financial institutions, etc. are part of the non-marketable internal debt.

➢ External Debt refers to money borrowed from a source outside the country. External debt has to be paid back in the currency in which it is borrowed.

➢ Other Liabilities include liabilities on account of Provident Funds, Reserve Funds and Deposits, Other Accounts, etc.

World Energy Outlook 2018

The **World Energy Outlook 2018** report released by **International Energy Agency (IEA)** highlights the crucial considerations for the global energy industry in 2040, including the rise in demand for renewables and major fossil fuel concerns.

➢ **Electricity is the special focus of the 2018 edition.** The share of electricity in global energy use is growing while the rise of low-carbon technologies is prompting a major transformation in the way electricity is generated.

➢ It examines future patterns of a **changing global energy system** at a time of increasing uncertainties and finds that major transformations are underway for the global energy sector, from growing electrification to the expansion of renewables, upheavals in oil production and globalisation of natural gas markets.

Findings

➢ **Special Focus: Electricity**

○ Electricity is increasingly the "fuel" of choice in economies that are relying more on lighter industrial sectors, services and digital technologies.

○ Policy support and technology cost reductions are not only increasing its share in global consumption but also putting the power sector in the vanguard of emissions reduction efforts.

○ On the demand side, **efficiency gains** from more **stringent energy performance standards** have played a pivotal role in holding back demand. E.g.: 18 out of 30 IEA member economies have seen declines in their electricity use since 2010.

➢ **Energy Scenario**

○ **Demand**

● Rising incomes and an extra 1.7 billion people, mostly added to urban areas in developing economies will push up global energy demand by more than a quarter to 2040.

● In 2000, Europe and North America accounted for more than 40% of global energy demand and developing economies in Asia for around 20%. By 2040, this situation will be **completely reversed**.

● All the growth comes from **developing economies, led by India**.

○ **Production**

● Fifteen years ago, European companies dominated the list of the world's top power companies, measured by installed capacity; now six of the top-ten are Chinese utilities, i.e **domination of Asia by 2040**.

○ **Shale Gas**

● By 2025, the United States will account for more than half of **global oil and gas production growth** (nearly 75% for oil and 40% for gas).

● This will exert the **pressure on traditional oil and gas exporters** that rely heavily on export revenues to support national development.

○ **Energy Trade**

● International energy trade flows are **increasingly drawn to Asia** from across the Middle East, Russia, Canada, Brazil and the United States.

Note:

- However, new ways of sourcing energy are also visible at local level, as digitalization and increasingly cost-effective renewable energy technologies enable distributed and **community-based models of energy provision**.

- ❍ **Flexibility**
  - The rise of solar Photo Voltaic (PV) and wind power gives unprecedented importance to the flexible operation of power systems. Renewables and coal switch places in the power mix: the **share of generation from renewables** rises from 25% today to around 40% in 2040.
  - By 2040 many countries in Europe, as well as Mexico, India and China, are set to acquire a degree of flexibility.
  - However, conventional power plants remain the main source of system flexibility, supported by new interconnections, storage and demand-side response. E.g.: The European Union's **"Energy Union"** illustrates the role that regional integration can play in facilitating the integration of renewables.

- ➢ **Fossil Fuels**
  - ❍ Coal use rebounded in 2017 after two years of decline, but **final investment decisions** in new coal-fired power plants were well **below the level** seen in recent years.
  - ❍ **Natural gas** will overtake coal in 2030 to become the **second-largest fuel** in the global energy mix.

- ➢ **Emissions and Access**
  - ❍ Countries are set to **meet the national pledges made as part of the Paris Agreement**. But these are **insufficient** to reach an early peak in global emissions.
  - ❍ The projected emissions trend represents a **major collective failure** to tackle the environmental consequences of energy use.
  - ❍ Around 93% of the world's carbon capacity is already in use up to 2040. Carbon capacity refers to the level of CO_2 emissions that can be released without causing significant global warming effects. This means that there is very little space for future fossil fuel projects to be developed over this period without contradicting international objectives around climate change.
  - ❍ In **2017, for the first time,** the number of people **without access to electricity dipped below 1 billion**.

Challenges

- ➢ **Affordability:** The costs of solar Photo Voltaic and wind continue to fall, but oil prices climbed above $80/barrel in 2018 for the first time in four years; and hard-earned reforms to fossil fuel consumption subsidies are under threat in some countries.

- ➢ **Reliability:** One-in-eight of the world's population has no access to electricity and new challenges are coming into focus in the power sector, from system flexibility to cyber security.

- ➢ **Sustainability:** After three flat years, global energy-related carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions rose by 1.6% in 2017. Energy-related air pollution continues to result in millions of premature deaths each year.

International Energy Agency

- ➢ The International Energy Agency (IEA), an **autonomous organisation,** works to ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy to its **30 member countries, 8 association countries and beyond**.

- ➢ It was established in the **wake of the 1973 oil crisis** after the OPEC cartel had shocked the world with a steep increase in oil prices. **The IEA has four main areas of focus, i.e. 4Es**:
  - ❍ Energy **security**,
  - ❍ Economic **development**,
  - ❍ **Environmental awareness** and
  - ❍ **Engagement** worldwide.

- ➢ India became an **associate member of International Energy Agency in 2017**.

- ➢ Mexico officially became the **International Energy Agency's 30th member** country in February 2018, and its first member in Latin America.

- ➢ It is **headquartered in Paris, France**.

Conclusion

- ➢ Rapid, least-cost energy transitions require an acceleration of investment in cleaner, smarter and more efficient energy technologies. Policy makers need to ensure that all key elements of energy supply, including electricity networks, remain reliable and robust.

- ➢ Frameworks put in place by the public authorities also shape the pace of energy efficiency improvement and of technology innovation. Therefore, the National governments will have a significant role to play in the direction of the future global energy mix.

Note:

National Statistical Commission (NSC)

➢ NSC was set up by the Government through a **resolution in 2005**.

➢ The setting up of the NSC followed the decision of the Cabinet to **accept the recommendations of the Rangarajan Commission,** which reviewed the **Indian Statistical System in 2001**.

➢ NSC is the **apex advisory body** on statistical matters as it was constituted to evolve policies, priorities, and standards in statistical matters.

➢ The NSC has **four Members besides a Chairperson,** each having specialization and experience in specified statistical fields.

Domestic Council for Gems & Jewellery

Ministry of Commerce and Industry has announced the formation of a **Domestic Council for Gems & Jewellery** to bring the industry's domestic business stakeholders under one umbrella so that they could evolve a unified approach to promote growth in the sector.

➢ This Council will help in tapping new opportunities in the already existing large domestic market.

➢ The basic objective of the government is making this unorganized sector, organized and structured so that additional jobs can be created.

India Becomes 2nd Top Steel Producer

➢ **India** has **replaced Japan** as **world's second largest steel producing country,** while **China is the largest producer of crude steel** accounting for more than 51% of production, according to World Steel Association (worldsteel).

➢ Others in the top 10 steel producing countries include the United States (4th), South Korea (5th), Russia (6th), Germany (7th), Turkey (8th), Brazil (9th) and Iran (10th).

World Steel Association

➢ The World Steel Association (worldsteel) is a **non-profit organisation** with headquarters in **Brussels, Belgium**. It has another office in **Beijing,** China, (since April 2006).

➢ Worldsteel represents over 160 steel producers (including 9 of the world's 10 largest steel companies), national and regional steel industry associations, and steel research institutes. worldsteel members **cover around 85% of world steel production**.

➢ It was founded as the International Iron and Steel Institute on July 10, 1967 and changed its name to the World Steel Association in October 2008. The association celebrated its 50th year anniversary in 2017.

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY), the flagship scheme of the Central Government for employment generation has crossed the milestone of one crore beneficiaries as on January 14, 2019.

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY)

➢ Under the scheme, the **government incentivizes employers for generation of new employment**.

➢ The Government of **India pays the full employer's contribution of 12% (towards Employees' Provident Fund and Employees' Pension Scheme),** for the new employment generated with salary up to ₹. 15,000 per month.

➢ PMRPY was announced on August 7, 2016 and is being implemented by the **Ministry of Labour and Employment through the Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO)**.

○ Under the scheme employers would be provided an incentive for enhancing employment by reimbursement of the 8.33% EPS contribution made by the employer in respect of new employment.

➢ The entire system of PMRPY is online and AADHAAR based with no human interface in the implementation of the scheme.

➢ A direct benefit of this scheme is that workers have access to social security benefit through Provident Fund, Pension and Death Linked Insurance.

■■■

Note:

International Relations

South Africa's President Visit to India

Recently, President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa arrived in India for a two-day visit.

➢ President Ramaphosa was the chief guest at 70th Republic Day Celebrations in New Delhi.

➢ He is the second president of South Africa after Nelson Mandela to be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations.

Outcome of Visit

➢ During the visit, a **Three-Year Strategic Programme of Cooperation (2019-2021)** was signed which is aimed at further enhancing the strategic partnership between the two countries.

➢ Strategic Programme of cooperation covers overall relations with South Africa in **defense, security, economic, trade & investment relations, development partnership, and capacity building** etc.

➢ Both countries recalled the Strategic Partnership established between India and South Africa through the **Red Fort Declaration of March 1997** in New Delhi and the **Tshwane Declaration of October 2006** in Pretoria, South Africa which reaffirmed the Red Fort Declaration of 1997.

  ❍ **During the visit of President Mandela to India in March 1997, the two countries signed the historic Red Fort Declaration for Strategic Partnership between India and South Africa.**

➢ Both countries emphasized the need to further deepen relations in the political, economic, defense, scientific, consular and socio-cultural spheres.

➢ **International Cooperation**

  ❍ India and South Africa share a common vision on a range of global issues and closely cooperate in multilateral forums like the **UN, BRICS, G-20, Commonwealth, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and IBSA**.

  ❍ Both India and South Africa are **supportive of reforms in UN Security Council (UNSC)** to achieve a more representative and equitable UNSC and **reform in the global governance architecture such as World Trade Organization (WTO)**.

  ❍ India and South Africa also cooperate in the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** as a common platform for cooperation among solar resource-rich countries.

➢ **Diaspora**

  ❍ There are **1.5 million Persons of Indian Origin in South Africa** and constitute **3% of South Africa's total population**.

  ❍ Both countries agreed to **work on the simplification of the visa agreement** to broaden people-to-people interactions and to increase two-way tourism.

History of Indian Diaspora in South Africa

➢ The **major part of the Indian origin community** came to South Africa from 1860 onwards as farm labor to serve as field hands and mill operatives in the **sugar and other agricultural plantations of Natal (which was then a British colony)**.

➢ Most of these initial migrants were from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh with some from eastern UP and Bihar.

➢ The **second wave of Indians came after 1880**. These were the **"passenger Indians"**– called so because they paid their fares as passengers on board a steamship bound for South Africa. This was the community of traders who mainly hailed from Gujarat.

➢ **Defense Relation**

  ❍ **South Africa has a robust defense industry.** India and South Africa have cooperation in the defense sector encompassing a wide range of engagements including defense production, joint collaboration, manufacturing, research and development, training and joint exercises.

Note:

○ South-Africa will participate in India-Africa Field Training Exercise (IAFTX) in March 2019 at Pune, India.

○ India and South Africa also have close naval cooperation through the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS).

➢ **Trade Relation**

○ **Trade between India and South Africa has also increased to $10.7 billion in 2017-18 with an increase of about 13% over the previous year.**

○ Both countries agreed to further enhance bilateral investments.

○ Both nations have agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of the Blue Economy including in the framework of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

➢ **On terrorism**

○ Both countries agreed on early agreement and adoption of the **UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)** and condemned terrorism in all its forms. They share common concerns in the area of terrorism, FATF, cyber-security etc.

➢ **India For Humanity**

○ India has launched the **"India for Humanity"** initiative in South Africa in the context of Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary to provide artificial limbs "Jaipur Foot".

○ "India For Humanity" initiative was launched by **Ministry of External Affairs**.

○ It features a year-long series of artificial limb fitment camps in a number of countries spanning the globe.

History of India-Africa Relations

➢ India's relations with South Africa go back to centuries and have a powerful emotional component. It is here that **Mahatma Gandhi began his political career**.

➢ **India was the first country to sever trade relations with the apartheid Government (in 1946)** and it subsequently imposed a complete – diplomatic, commercial, cultural and sports – embargo on South Africa.

➢ India worked consistently to put the issue of apartheid on the agenda and worked with African National Congress (ANC) in its struggle against apartheid.

➢ ANC has maintained a representative office in New Delhi from the 1960s onwards.

➢ **India's relations with South Africa were restored** after a gap of over four decades with the opening of a Cultural Centre in **Johannesburg in May 1993**.

Venezuela Crisis

The leader of Venezuela's National Assembly, Juan Guaido has declared himself as president of Venezuela on January 23, challenging the power of current President Nicolas Maduro, who was recently sworn in as president of Venezuela for a second consecutive term.

➢ The United States has officially recognized Juan Guaido as the legitimate president of Venezuela. Several EU nations, including France, Britain, Germany, and Spain have said they would recognize Guaido if President Maduro doesn't announce new elections.

➢ However, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and China have supported President Nicolas Maduro and called him as the legitimate president of Venezuela.

➢ The US has also imposed sanctions on Venezuela's state-run oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A (PVDSA).

Reasons for the crisis in Venezuela

➢ **Economic Reason**

○ Venezuela has the highest proven oil reserves in the world. The economy of Venezuela is mainly oil-based.

Note:

- During the early 2000s, when oil prices were high, the Venezuelan government had used oil profits to reduce inequality and poverty, providing food subsidies.
- When oil prices dropped in 2014, the government suddenly had to make lots of cutbacks, causing a rise in inflation.
- Currently, the annual inflation rate in Venezuela has reached 1.3 million%. This has led to the scarcity of basic items such as food and medicines and demonstrations against the government.

➢ **Political Crisis and Corruption**

- Current president Nicolas Maduro who took charge after former president Hugo Chávez died in 2013, also faced the charges of corruption and mismanagement of the economy.
- Mr. Maduro was sworn in for a second term recently. But, his main opponents were either boycotted or were banned from running in the election.
- After the result of the election was announced, massive protests erupted in Venezuela.

Impact

➢ **Global**

- Crisis in Venezuela may lead to a rise in global oil prices as Venezuela is a major oil exporter and a member of OPEC.

➢ **India**

- Venezuela is India's fourth-biggest crude oil supplier after Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran and accounts for about 12% of India's total oil imports. So sanctions against Venezuela along with US sanctions on Iran will impact oil availability in the country.
- Sanctions on Venezuela will also impact the payment of roughly $520 million of backlog dividends that Venezuela's state-run oil firm PDVSA owes to ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL).

Note:

Science and Technology

Highlights

UK to Support Nitrogen Research in India

The **United Kingdom** will fund the **South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH),** a group of **50 institutions** to assess and study the quantum and impact of **"nitrogen pollution" in South Asia**.

➢ **Eighteen research institutions in India** are the part of SANH which will study the impacts of the different forms of pollution to form a "coherent picture" of the nitrogen cycle.

   ❍ In particular, it will look at nitrogen in agriculture in **eight countries** — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.

➢ This is a five-year programme established with funds from the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under its **Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)**.

> **Global Challenges Research Fund**
> ➢ The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) is a £1.5 billion fund announced by the **UK Government in late 2015** to support cutting-edge research that addresses the challenges faced by **developing countries**.
> ➢ GCRF forms part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment, which is monitored by the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**.

Nitrogen Pollution

➢ Nitrogen **constitutes 78% of Earth's air**. It is a colourless and odourless **inert gas**.

➢ Nitrogen makes plants grow and is an **essential component for life**.

➢ Nitrogen is **potent greenhouse gas**. Nitrous oxide (N_2O) is **300 times more potent** greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

➢ **Nitrogen pollution is caused by emission of excess of Nitrogen from the use of chemical fertilisers, livestock manure and burning fossil fuels.**

   ❍ Nitrate from chemical fertilisers, manure and industry pollutes the rivers and seas, posing a health risk for humans, fish, coral and plant life.

➢ Gases such as ammonia (NH3) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) contribute to poor air quality and can aggravate respiratory and heart conditions, leading to millions of premature deaths across the world.

➢ Nitrogen pollution is also linked to the loss of biodiversity and ozone depletion.

Need of the Study

➢ According to a study, **nitrogen emissions in India grew** at 52% from 1991 to 2001 and 69% from 2001 to 2011.

➢ The **planetary boundary** of Nitrogen is set at 44 Tg (Tera-grams) per year globally and current application of Nitrogen (primarily through fertiliser usage), is about 150 Tg Nitrogen per year.

   ❍ Planetary boundary is the limits of the earth within which humans can thrive.

➢ The **high doses of fertiliser input** of nitrogen to agriculture combined with **low nitrogen-use efficiency** creates the need for research on nitrogen pollution in South Asia.

➢ This is emphasised by the scale of **nitrogen subsidies** across South Asia at around **$10 billion per year**.

Note:

ISRO Launches Military Satellite and KalamSat

Recently, the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has launched satellites **Microsat-R** and **KalamSat onboard Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) C-44**.

➤ This also marks a technology demonstration of PSLV-DL (D standing for demonstration) for the first time. PSLV-DL is a new variant of PSLV with two strap-on motors.

➤ It provided an alternative to its normal six strap-on motors (side rocket boosters) on PSLV. This will **enable it to carry a slightly higher payload** than its Core-Alone version (in which there is no strap on motors).

Significance of the Mission

➤ **Microsat-R**

   ○ **Microsat-R is a military imaging satellite,** weighing 740 kilograms, which was made by Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).

   ○ This was launched in low orbit. **It is the first time an Indian satellite has been placed by ISRO in a low orbit at an altitude of 274 km.**

➤ **Kalamsat**

   ○ It is a student satellite, **made by Space Kidz India,** weighing just 1.26 kg.

   ○ Kalamsat is the **world's smallest and lightest communication satellite**.

   ○ It is an experimental satellite for studying the communication system of nano satellites, which can be useful in many fields, predominantly disaster management.

➤ **Fourth Stage (PS4) Usability**

   ○ ISRO also used this launch as an opportunity to demonstrate the **usability of the fourth stage of the rocket after the satellites are ejected into orbit**.

   ○ The fourth and final stage of the rocket normally turns into debris after ejecting a satellite.

   ○ Any agency that wants to conduct experiments in space can use the fourth stage until it disintegrates naturally. The fourth stage of the rocket orbits in space for six months to a year. **ISRO is aiming to use this time-frame to enable agencies to run short time experiments.**

   ○ **Kalamsat will be the first to use the fourth stage as an orbital platform.**

Shift in Earth's Magnetic North Pole

British Geological Survey has reported that the **earth's magnetic north pole is moving from** its current position in **Canada to Siberia**.

➤ Since 1831 when it was first measured in the Canadian Arctic it has moved about 2300 kilometers toward Siberia. Its speed jumped from about 15 km/h to 55 km/h since 2000.

➤ The reason is turbulence in Earth's liquid outer core. There is a hot liquid ocean of iron and nickel in the planet's core where the motion generates an electric field.

➤ The Magnetic model which is **updated at every five years** and was supposed to be updated in 2020, but due to the unexpected shift, it has been preponed to 2019.

➤ Scientists think that reason for such shift is **geomagnetic pulses beneath South America** and the **high-speed jet of liquid iron beneath Canada**.

Impact of the Change

➤ The shift is causing geophysicists to **reconsider the world magnetic model** which is used for navigation purposes.

➤ The World Magnetic Model (WMM) is a **standard model of the core and large-scale crustal magnetic field**.

➤ It is used **extensively for navigation** by the United Kingdom and the US for Defence purposes, the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** and the **International Hydrographic Organization (IHO)**. It is also used widely in civilian navigation systems.

> The constant shift is a problem for compasses in smartphones and some consumer electronics. Airplanes and boats also rely on magnetic north, usually as backup navigation.

Geographical Poles vs. Magnetic Poles

> **Geographic Poles**
  ○ The Earth rotates on the geographic north and south poles. The geographic north and south poles are where lines of longitude (meridians) converge in the north. The south and north pole are directly opposite to one another.

Magnetic North / Geographic North Pole
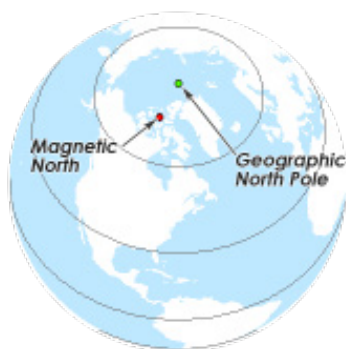
> **Magnetic North Pole**
  ○ The Earth acts as one big magnet.
  ○ The Earth consists of a solid iron core. Surrounding the iron core is an ocean of hot, liquid metal.
  ○ The liquid metal that flows in Earth's core creates electrical currents, which in turn creates our magnetic field.
  ○ The Magnetic North Pole (also known as the North Dip Pole) is a point on Ellesmere Island in Northern Canada where the northern lines of attraction enter the Earth.
  ○ This means that a compass needle point to the Magnetic North Pole – which is different from the geographic north.

International Hydrographic Organization

> The International Hydrographic Organization is an **intergovernmental consultative and technical organization** that was **established in 1921** to support the safety of navigation and the protection of the marine environment.
> India is also a member of IHO.

> The objective of the Organization is to bring about:
  ○ The coordination of the activities of national hydrographic offices
  ○ The greatest possible uniformity in nautical charts and documents
  ○ The adoption of reliable and efficient methods of carrying out and exploiting hydrographic surveys
  ○ The development of the sciences in the field of hydrography and the techniques employed in descriptive oceanography

UNNATI by ISRO

Indian Space and Research Organization (ISRO) has launched a training programme **UNNATI (UNispace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training by ISRO)**.

> UNNATI is a capacity building programme on **nanosatellite development**.
> The programme provides opportunities to the **participants from developing countries** to strengthen their capabilities in assembling, integrating and testing of nanosatellites.
> The initiative **commemorates the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE+50)**.
> UNNATI programme is being conducted by **U.R. Rao Satellite Centre (URSC) of ISRO** for 3 years in 3 batches and has a target to benefit 90 officials from 45 countries.
> The training comprises of theoretical course work on nanosatellite definition, utility, laws governing their impact on space debris, design drivers, reliability & quality assurance and hands-on training on assembly, integration, and testing of nanosatellites.
> The first batch of this programme has started on January 17, 2019, with 30 participants from 17 countries (Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Oman, Panama, and Portugal).

United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE)

> **UNISPACE I,** held from 14 to 27 August 1968, was the first in a series of three global UN conferences on outer space, which focused on raising awareness of the vast potential of space benefits for all humankind.

Note:

➤ **UNISPACE II** conference was held from 9 to 21 August 1982. UNISPACE II addressed the concerns of how to maintain the outer space for peaceful purposes and prevent an arms race in outer space.

➤ **UNISPACE III** conference held from 19 to 30 July 1999. UNISPACE III created a blueprint for the peaceful uses of outer space in the 21st century.

Saturn Rings

➤ Scientists have found that the rings of Saturn are younger than previously thought.

➤ The rings are not more than 100 million years i.e. the period when dinosaurs used to walk on earth.

➤ Previously, it was predicted that the ring system formed along with the planet from icy debris remaining in orbit after the formation of the Solar System.

➤ NASA's **Cassini spacecraft to Saturn** after completing its mission fell into Saturn's gravity. The fall allowed the orbiter to act as a probe and it was able to take the close up data of the planet and the rings.

Saturn

➤ It is the second largest planet after Jupiter in our Solar System.

➤ Saturn is a Jovian planet i.e. it is completely made up of gas.

➤ Four planets in the solar system have rings- Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune and Saturn.

➤ As of now, Saturn has 62 confirmed natural satellites or moons orbiting it.

Cassini

➤ **Launched:** Oct. 15, 1997

➤ **End of Mission:** Sept. 15, 2017

➤ **Significance:** Cassini orbited and studied the Saturn and its moons in detail.
  ❍ Mission also landed the Huygens probe on Saturn's largest moon, Titan, in January 2005.

Yellow Fever Vaccine

Yellow fever, a fatal disease, **spreads through mosquitoes**. It is often associated with jaundice, hence the name yellow.

➤ It is usually compulsory to get vaccinated before traveling to any of the yellow fever-endemic countries in parts of Africa, and Central and South America.

➤ Yellow fever vaccine which is known as **17D** and according to the World Health Organization (WHO) is safe and affordable. However, there have been **reports of multisystem organ failure following vaccination**.

➤ Due to such reports, **vaccine hesitancy** is a growing problem the world over.

Working of a Vaccine

➤ Many vaccines introduce a pathogen inside the body. For example, the yellow fever vaccine is a live, weakened yellow fever virus. Because it is live, the body responds to it the same way as in a full-blown infection.

➤ This ensures that the body knows the vulnerabilities of that virus for the rest of the person's life.

➤ Thus, whenever an invasion happens, blood cells that retain the memory of that virus immediately work towards defeating the nascent invasion much before it can go on to become a full-blown infection.

Vaccine Hesitancy in India

➤ Vaccine hesitancy refers to delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite the availability of vaccination services.

➤ Recently **Delhi High Court underlined the importance of parental consent** in vaccines given to children in school.

➤ The **Health Ministry has commissioned a study on vaccine hesitancy,** to be conducted by its Immunisation Technical Support Unit in association with GAVI, an international organization supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Kyasanur Forest Disease

Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) is a viral haemorrhagic disease endemic to South India.

➤ Better known as 'Monkey Fever', KFD is primarily transmitted through ticks. Doctors treat only the symptoms, for KFD has no known cure.

➤ Infected areas have been reported in villages across four districts of Karnataka (Shivamogga, Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, and Uttara Kannada) – and in Kerala (Wayanad) and Maharashtra (four cases).

➤ KFD virus was first reported in Kyasanur village (in Shivamogga), back in 1957.

➤ The virus belongs to the Flaviviridae family, whose other members are responsible for causing Yellow Fever, Zika and Dengue.

➤ Multiple species of ticks of the genus Haemaphysalis are the principal vectors.

- The center, a new management structure within the organization, will be in charge of all human-related programme at the ISRO, including the Gaganyaan project, that will send three astronauts to orbit the earth.
- Two unmanned flights are scheduled for December 2020 and July 2021, while manned flight is expected to take place by December 2021.

New Delhi Superbug Gene

Soil samples taken in Svalbard (a Norwegian archipelago between mainland Norway and the North Pole) have confirmed the presence of **blaNDM-1** (called as New Delhi Metallo-beta-lactamase-1) into the **High Arctic**.

- blaNDM-1 is an **Antibiotic-Resistant Gene (ARG)** which causes **Multi-Drug Resistance** (MDR) in microorganisms.
- It got **New Delhi** in its name because it was first detected in a **Swedish patient of Indian origin** who travelled to **India in 2008**.

- British scientists later found the **"superbug"** in New Delhi's public water supply. Since then, the resistant gene including new variants found in over 100 countries, including new variants.
- According to researchers blaNDM-1 and other ARGs found in Arctic soils were likely spread through the faecal matter of birds, other wildlife and human visitors to the area.
- Encroachment into areas like the Arctic, reinforces the spread of antibiotic resistance.

Multidrug-resistant organisms
- Multidrug-resistant organisms are bacteria that have become resistant to certain antibiotics, and these antibiotics can no longer be used to control or kill the bacteria.
- Antibiotics are important medicines. They help fight infections that are caused by bacteria. Bacteria that resist treatment with more than one antibiotic are called Multidrug-Resistant Organisms.

Note:

Environment and Ecology

Highlights

- *Himalayan Glaciers Impacted by Climate Change (26)*
- *Bio-fuel Standard for Aviation (26)*
- *International Stocktaking Conference on Tiger Conservation (27)*
- *National Chilika Bird Festival (27)*

- *Two Rhinos Translocated from Kaziranga to Manas (27)*
- *Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin (28)*
- *Pulicat Lake (28)*
- *Golden Langur (28)*

Himalayan Glaciers Impacted by Climate Change

Recently, a study has concluded that the **Chaturangi Glacier,** an inactive tributary of Gangotri glaciers, is receding.

➢ The study was done by scientists from GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment and Sustainable Development and the Centre for Earth Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) using the **satellite data from 1989 to 2016 and kinematic GPS**.

➢ The retreating glacier is an example of the impact of climate change.

Kinematic GPS
Kinematic Global Positioning System (GPS) is a satellite navigation technique used to enhance the precision of data from satellite-based positioning systems.

Findings of the Study

➢ Chaturangi glacier is **retreating at a "considerable rate"** and may vanish in the future.

➢ The Chaturangi glacier **was connected with the Gangotri glacier till 1989 but is now detached** and retreating at the rate of about 22.84 m/year.
  ○ The variability in retreating rate is not only controlled by climate change but is also governed by glacier size, type, topographic setting and debris cover.

➢ The retreating rate of the Chaturangi glacier is higher than the Gangotri glacier because of its smaller size and fast response time to climatic variability.

Impact of Glacier Retreat

➢ **The flow of Ganga:** Since Ganga originates from Gangotri glacier, which is fed by its tributary glaciers, the rapid retreat of glaciers like Chaturangi and Raktavaran will **impact flow and water level in the Ganga**.

➢ **Impact on Human Life:** NASA's 'Land Cover and Land-Use programme' has predicted that **glacial melt will impact water supplies in the Himalayan region**.
  ○ There will also be an **impact on agriculture, including soil loss due to soil erosion, landslides, and floods**.

➢ **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF):** Glacial lakes may also form due to the accumulation of melted ice, which may result in Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF).

Gangotri Glacier
➢ Gangotri Glacier is situated in the **Uttarkashi District of Uttarakhand**.
➢ The Gangotri glacier originates at the **northern slope of Chaukhamba range of peaks in Garhwal Himalayas**.
➢ Gangotri is not a single valley glacier, but a combination of several glaciers. The glacier comprises of three main tributaries, namely **Raktavaran, Chaturangi and Kirti and more than 18 other tributary glaciers**.
➢ The **Bhagirathi,** one of the **main tributaries of the Ganga,** originates from the gangotri glacier. The Ganges has five headstreams—**the Bhagirathi, the Alaknanda, the Mandakini, the Dhauliganga, and the Pindar**—all rise in the mountainous region of northern Uttarakhand.

Bio-fuel Standard for Aviation

To use bio-jet fuel on all military and civilian aircraft, Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), in collaboration with IAF and the oil industry, has brought out a new standard for Aviation Turbine Fuels (ATF).

Benefits

➢ Would enable the oil companies to **manufacture bio-jet fuel for the Indian aviation industry**.

Note:

- ➤ Will align Indian standards with **current international standards**.
- ➤ Will help in **reducing the carbon emissions** and also help India in becoming a **green fuel production hub**.
- ➤ Will help in generating **ancillary income,** increasing remuneration for **tribal and marginal farmers,** and will promote cultivation/collection of oilseeds.
- ➤ Will help in achieving global emission target under **Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)**.
  - ❍ CORSIA addresses the increase in total CO_2 emissions from international aviation above 2020 levels.

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is a **UN specialized agency,** established in 1944 to manage the administration and governance of the **Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention)**.

International Stocktaking Conference on Tiger Conservation

Recently the **3rd Stocktaking Conference on Tiger Conservation** relating to Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) implementation was **held in New Delhi**.

- ➤ This is the second edition to be held in India after 2012 wherein progress against **St. Petersburg Declaration on Tiger Conservation** was measured.
- ➤ The conference was hosted by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority,** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in close collaboration with the **Global Tiger Forum** which is an international, intergovernmental organization for conserving tigers in the world.

St. Petersburg Declaration on Tiger Conservation
- ➤ The declaration was adopted in **November 2010,** by the leaders of **13 Tiger Range Countries (TRCs)** at an International Tiger Forum in **St. Petersburg, Russia**.
- ➤ The declaration's **implementation mechanism** is called the **Global Tiger Recovery Program** whose overarching goal is to double the number of wild tigers from about 3,200 to more than 7,000 by 2022.
- ➤ 13 Tiger range countries are: **Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam**.

National Chilika Bird Festival

- ➤ The second **National Chilika Bird Festival** was held at Mangalajodi in Odisha.
- ➤ The festival is organised to promote eco-tourism and preservation of birds in Odisha.
- ➤ **National Chilika Bird Festival Award** was given to Mangalajodi Eco-tourism Group for their active involvement in bird protection.
- ➤ Mangalajodi, situated in the North Eastern Part of Chilika, is known as the **"Birds Paradise of Asia"** as the place witnesses the highest gathering of more than 10 Lakh species of birds.
- ➤ Chilika Lake lies in the Central Asian Flyway stopover site for migratory birds from the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions during their onward and return migration along the east coast.
- ➤ It is located in the coastal Odisha and is **Asia's largest brackish water lagoon**.
- ➤ With its rich bio-diversity and socio-economic importance, it has been a designated **Ramsar site (a wetland of international importance) since 1981**.
- ➤ Another major attraction at Chilika is Irrawaddy dolphins which are often spotted off **Satapada Island** in Chilka Lake.

Two Rhinos Translocated from Kaziranga to Manas

- ➤ Recently, two rhinos have been translocated to **Manas National Park** from **Kaziranga**.
- ➤ The augmentation of Rhinos is part of the initiative **"Bring Back Manas"**. Manas National Park (MNP) is a UNESCO World Heritage. It is spread across 850-sq km on the Indo-Bhutan border in Assam.
- ➤ Rescued calves were raised at Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) at Kaziranga.
- ➤ Until now more than 50 calves stranded in the wild at Kaziranga National Park for various reasons, in most cases due to floods, have been rescued.

Note:

Rhinos in Asia

➢ Two species of rhino in Asia—**Javan** and **Sumatran**—are **critically endangered**. A **subspecies of the Javan rhino** was declared **extinct in Vietnam in 2011**.

➢ Successful conservation efforts have helped **the third Asian species, the greater one-horned (or Indian) rhino,** to increase in number. Their status was **changed from Endangered to Vulnerable,** but the species is still poached for its horn.

➢ Kaziranga National Park has over 2,200 one horned Rhinos. Along the terai arc, Manas National Park, Jaldapara National Park has about 50 rhinos and Dudhwa Tiger Reserve has over 30 Rhinos.

Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin

A pod of Humpback Dolphins was spotted near the Bandra-Worli sea link in Mumbai.

Habitat

➢ The Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin occurs within the Indian Ocean from South Africa to India.

➢ These dolphins usually live in shallow, coastal waters.

➢ The habitat preference of the dolphins for shallow waters places them in some of the world's most intensively utilized, fished, shipped, modified and polluted waters.

Conservation Status

➢ The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) categorizes the Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin as Endangered.

➢ In India, Dolphins are endangered cetacean species, protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

➢ Indian Humpback Dolphin is listed in Appendix I of The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Pulicat Lake

A three-day Flamingo Festival has begun at Pulicat lake.

➢ It is the second largest brackish water ecosystem in the country after the Chilika lake in Odisha.

➢ The arrival of birds, which usually starts in the month of September, was delayed this year till December because of 47% deficit rainfall in the wake of climate change.

➢ It is located on the border of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with over 96% of it in Andhra Pradesh and 4% in Tamil Nadu.

Golden Langur

Recently, a baby **Golden Langur** was born at langur breeding facility in the **Assam State Zoo, Guwahati**.

➢ The **Central Zoo Authority, New Delhi** entrusted the state zoo with the project for the conservation breeding of **golden langur in Assam in 2011**.

➢ **Gee's golden langur (Trachypithecus geei),** or simply the golden langur, is an **Old World Monkey** found in a small region of **western Assam, India** and in the neighboring foothills of the **Black Mountains of Bhutan**.

➢ It is one of the **most endangered primate species** in India.

➢ It is listed in **Appendix I of CITES,** as **Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species,** and in **Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.

Central Zoo Authority

➢ Central Zoo Authority is a **statutory body** whose main objective is to enforce minimum standards and norms for upkeep and health care of animals in Indian zoos.

➢ Zoos are regulated as per the provisions of **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** and are guided by the **National Zoo Policy, 1992**. The **Wildlife Protection was amended in 1991 to establish the Central Zoo Authority**.

■■■

Note:

Security

Highlights

● Exercise Sea Vigil *(29)*

Exercise Sea Vigil

➤ The Indian Navy has coordinated **Exercise SEA VIGIL,** the **largest coastal defence exercise** off the Indian coast on January 22-23.

➤ The exercise, a first of its kind, is being undertaken along the **entire 7516.6 km coastline** and **Exclusive Economic Zone** of India and involves all the 13 coastal States and Union Territories along with all maritime stakeholders, including the fishing and coastal communities.

➤ The exercise is a part of the major **theatre level tri-service exercise TROPEX [Theatre-level Readiness Operational Exercise]** which Indian Navy conducts every **two years**.

○ 'Tropex' is the country's **biggest inter-service exercise held along the western coast**.

○ It provides opportunity to test combat capability of the **Indian Navy, Indian Army, Indian Air Force (IAF) and Indian Coast Guard (ICG)**.

➤ The conduct of the exercise SEA VIGIL has been facilitated by the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs, Shipping, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Fisheries, Customs, State Governments and other agencies of Centre/ State.

➤ **Post '26/11', operational responsibilities** for coastal security were **entrusted to the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard**. Exercise 'SEA VIGIL' was planned by the Indian Navy in the discharge of these very responsibilities.

➤ Exercise SEA VIGIL aims to comprehensively and holistically validate the efficacy of the measures taken since '26/11'. The exercise will entail both seaward and shore-based monitoring.

➤ The exercise will in addition to **covering the entire coastline, will also go deeper into the hinterland**.

➤ Exercise SEA VIGIL will provide a realistic assessment of the country's strengths and weakness and this will certainly help further strengthening of maritime security and in turn national security.

■■■

Note:

Art & Culture

Highlights

- *Subhash Chandra Bose (30)*
- *Lothal : India's Oldest Port City (30)*
- *Gandhi Peace Prize: 2015-18 (31)*
- *BHARAT PARV (32)*
- *Ladakh's Dard Aryan Tribes (32)*
- *Sangrai dance (32)*

Subhash Chandra Bose

The Prime Minister inaugurated the **Subhash Chandra Bose** museum at Red Fort, Delhi to mark his **122nd birth anniversary on January 23**.

A Brief History

➤ Subhash Chandra Bose (1897-1945) was **twice elected as President of the Indian National Congress, (1938-Haripur and 1939-Tripuri)**.

➤ Owing to political differences, he resigned from the Congress Presidentship in 1939 and organised the **All India Forward Bloc** a faction within the Congress in Bengal.

➤ In Calcutta, Bose organised mass protests and was arrested. He was later put under house arrest from where he escaped. He went to Germany via Afghanistan.

➤ However, in 1943 Bose lost hope that Germany could be of any help in gaining India's independence. He then turned to Asia where he set up the **Indian National Army (INA)**.

➤ INA found support among expatriate Indians and under its aegis Bose formed the **Azad Hind government** which came to **produce its own currency, postage stamps, court and civil code**. It was **recognised by Axis states**.

➤ During the final two years of the war, **Bose with considerable Japanese backing- led the forces of the Indian National Army into battle against the British**.

Contribution to India's Freedom Struggle

➤ In July 1943, Bose reached Japanese-controlled Singapore from Germany and issued from there his famous call, **'Delhi Chalo'**, and announced the formation of the Azad Hind Government and the Indian National Army.

➤ The INA was essentially non-communal, with Muslims quite prominent among its officers and ranks, and it also introduced the innovation of a **women's detachment named after the Rani of Jhansi**.

➤ In November, 1945, a British move to put the **INA men on trial immediately sparked off massive protests all over the country**.

➤ The **INA experience and the wave of disaffection in the British Indian army,** gave way to the **Bombay naval strike of February 1946**.

Lothal : India's Oldest Port City

The word Lothal, like Mohenjo-daro, means the mound of the dead. Lothal is located between the **Bhogavo** and **Sabarmati rivers** near the Gulf of Khambhat in **Gujarat**.

Town Planning of Lothal

➤ The 4,500-year-old city was **mathematically planned**. It had a grid pattern with proper **streets crossing at right angles** and **drainage systems**.

Note:

➤ The **emphasis on cleanliness** can be judged from the **discovery of toilets and lota-like jars** which shows our fixation with washing up goes back all the way to the Harappan Civilisation.

➤ The city was divided into two parts: the upper town and the lower town. The remains of the brick walls there suggest wide streets, drains and bathing platforms.

Lothal Seals
लोथल की मोहरें

Lothal : City of Trade

➤ **Rectangular basin** bound on all sides by **baked bricks** has been found at Lothal that was said to be the **dockyard**.

➤ The discovery of Lothal seals in other ancient cities points to its importance in trade that was conducted with other ancient civilisations. The **dockyard proves the maritime activity of the Harappans**.

➤ Lothal was in the thick of Harappan maritime trade, and beads made from semi-precious stones, terracotta, gold, etc. were popular in areas as far as **Sumer (modern-day Iraq),** Bahrain and Iran.

➤ The Lothal bead-makers were highly skilled as hundreds of carnelian beads in various stages of production and tools and raw materials were recovered.

Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC)

➤ The Indus Valley Civilisation, which is now more popularly referred to as the Harappan civilisation after Harappa, the first of its sites to be excavated in the 1920s by British archaeologist **Sir Mortimer Wheeler**.

➤ Harappan civilisation emerged on the **banks of the river Indus in the second half of the third millennium BCE** and spread across large parts of western India.

➤ A marked feature of this ancient civilization was the vivid imagination and artistic sensibilities exuded by the numerous sculptures, seals, potteries, jewelleries found at the excavation sites.

➤ **Harappa and Mohenjo-daro – the two major sites of this civilization –** are among the earliest and finest examples of urban civic planning. The planned network of roads, houses and drainage systems indicate the planning and engineering skills that developed during those times.

➤ The Harappan Civilisation was widespread as it covered parts of **India, Pakistan** and **Afghanistan**.

➤ It was a **trade based civilization** which had overseas trade links with Mesopotamia attested by the discovery of Harappan seals there and Mesopotamian carnelian beads here.

Important Sites of IVC

➤ **Harappa in present Pakistan –** granaries with big platform, stone symbol of lingam and yoni, mother goddess figure, wheat and barley in wooden mortar, dice, copper scale and mirror.

➤ **Mohenjo-daro in present Pakistan –** bronze dancing girl, the sculpture of bearded priest, the great bath, the great granary.

➤ **Dholavira in Gujarat –** giant water reservoir, unique water harnessing system, stadium, dams and embankments, inscription comprising 10 large sized signs like an advertisement board.

➤ **Lothal (Manchester of Indus Valley Civilisation) in Gujarat –** dockyard, double burial, risk husk, fire altars, painted jar, modern day chess, terracotta figure of ship, instruments for measuring 45, 90 and 180-degree angles.

➤ **Ropar in Punjab –** dog buried with human oval pit burials.

➤ **Balathal and Kalibangan in Rajasthan –** bangle factory, toy carts, bones of camel, decorated bricks, citadel and lower town.

➤ **Banawali in Haryana –** toy plough, barley grains, oval-shaped settlement, the only city with radial streets.

➤ **Alamgirpur in Uttar Pradesh –** impression of a cloth on a trough.

Gandhi Peace Prize: 2015-18

➤ The government has announced the **Gandhi Peace Prize for the years 2015, 2016, 2017** and **2018**.

➤ The following have been honored with the award:
  ○ **Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari** for the year **2015** for their contribution in Rural Development, Education, Development of natural resources.

Note:

○ For 2016 jointly to **Akshaya Patra Foundation** for its contribution in providing **mid-day meals** to millions of children across India and **Sulabh International** for its contribution in **improving the condition of sanitation in India** and emancipation of manual scavengers.

○ **Ekal Abhiyan Trust** for the year **2017** for their contribution in providing **Education for Rural and Tribal Children** in remote areas pan India, Rural Empowerment, Gender, and Social Equality.

○ **Shri Yohei Sasakawa** for the year 2018 for his contribution in **Leprosy Eradication in India and across the world**.

➢ **The Jury of Award**

○ The jury includes the **Prime Minister** as Chairman and comprises of the **Chief Justice of India, Leader of the single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha and two other eminent personalities**.

Gandhi Peace Prize

➢ The annual award was instituted by the Government of India in 1995 during the commemoration of the 125th Birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

➢ The award carries an amount of ₹ 1 crore, a citation in a scroll, a plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item.

➢ Gandhi Peace Prize is not awarded posthumously.

➢ The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, creed, race or sex.

BHARAT PARV

➢ The 4th edition of the Bharat Parv is being organized by **Ministry of Tourism** in collaboration with other central Ministries and State Governments from January 26-31, 2019.

➢ The prime **objective** is to generate a patriotic mood, promote the rich cultural diversity of the country, to promote the idea of **'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'**.

➢ It includes highlights of the Republic Day Parade Tableaux, performances by the Armed Forces Bands (static and moving), a multi-cuisine food court, Crafts Mela , Cultural Performances from different regions of the country.

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB), a central government's initiative aims to foster national integration by a co-ordinated mutual engagement process between States, Union Territories, central ministries, educational institutions and general public through linguistic, literary, cultural, sports, tourism and other forms of people-to-people exchanges.

Ladakh's Dard Aryan Tribes

Dard Aryan tribe of Ladakh has requested the central government intervention to protect their culture and legacy.

➢ Dard Aryans are believed to be the original descendants of 'pure Aryan race'. The tribe is known for its liberal customs and ornate costumes. Many researchers believe that the 'Aryans of Ladakh' or the 'Brokpas' were a part of Alexander's army and had come to the region over 2,000 years ago.

➢ They live in the villages of Dha and Hanu (commonly called as Dhahanu), Darchik, and Gahanu - situated 163 kms southwest of Leh, the administrative capital of Ladakh.

➢ The rich heritage of the Dard Aryans is under threat due to rapid modernization, migration and religious conversion.

➢ The 'Dard' is derived from a Sanskrit word, 'Daradas', which refers to people who live on hillsides.

➢ According to the **Article 46** of the Constitution of India, the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Sangrai Dance

Sangrai dance is performed by the **Mog tribal community** on the occasion of Sangrai festival during the month of Chaitra (in April) of the Bengali calendar year.

➢ The Mogs are one of the 19 tribes in **Tripura**.

➢ The Mogs are Arakanese descendants who migrated to Tripura through Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Note:

Social Issues

Highlights

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ASER Report 2018

The NGO **Pratham** has released its **13th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) – 2018**.

➢ ASER 2018 is a nation-wide household survey that provides a snapshot of children's schooling and learning for a representative sample of children across rural India.

➢ The survey covered almost 5.5 lakh children between the ages of 3 and 16 in 596 rural districts across the country.

➢ Children in the age group **3 to 16 are surveyed** to find out their enrollment status in school or pre-school. Children in the age group **5 to 16 are assessed one-on-one** to understand their basic reading and arithmetic abilities.

➢ ASER continues to be the only national source of information about children's foundational skills across the country.

Key Findings

➢ The enrollment of children for the age group 6 to 14 has been above 95%, since 2017.

➢ In 2018, the overall proportion of girls in the 11 to 14 age group out of school has significantly fallen from the percentage in 2006. The number of out-of-school girls in India has gone down from 10.3% in 2006 to 4.1% in 2019.

○ The gender gap is shrinking, even within the older cohort of 15- and 16-year-olds. Only 13.6% of girls of that age are out of school — the first time the figure has dropped below the 15% mark.

➢ While 53.1% of students in Class V in rural government schools could read a text meant for Class II in 2008, the corresponding figure for 2018 stood at 44.2%; for comparison, private schools scored 67.9% and 65.1% for the same test in those years.

➢ More than half of Class VIII students cannot correctly solve a numerical division problem and more than a quarter of them cannot read a primary-level text.

➢ There has been a gradual improvement at the Class III level, since 2014. However, even in 2018, only less than 30% of students in Class III are able to read a Class II text and do double-digit subtraction.

➢ A significant percentage of students were not even able to recognise letters appropriate for their class, highlighting a severe barrier to learning.

➢ Nationally, substantial improvements are visible in 2018 in the availability of many school **facilities** mandated by **Right To Education (RTE)**.

➢ ASER also introduced a series of questions on the availability of **sports infrastructure in schools**. In 2018, **about 8 out of 10 schools** had a playground available for students, either within the school premises or close by.

Note:

The Right To Education (RTE) Act

➢ The Constitution **(Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002** inserted **Article 21-A** in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of **6 to 14 years as a Fundamental Right**.

➢ Subsequently, the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009** was enacted as envisaged under Article 21-A It came into **effect on April 1, 2010**.

➢ There is no separate budget for RTE, rather it is subsumed in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) through which it is effected.

➢ Section 3(1) of the RTE Act provides that every child in the age group of 6-14 years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till completion of Elementary Education.

➢ The RTE Act provides for constitutionally created independent bodies like the National and State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights.

➢ Recently, the Rajya Sabha has passed the Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill, 2018 which seeks to amend the Right to Education Act, 2009 to **abolish the no-detention policy in schools**.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)

➢ ASER surveys use **Census 2011** as the sampling frame.

➢ **ASER 2016 followed the 'basic' model,** sampling for **children in the age group 3 to 16. It conducted tests for reading, arithmetic, and English for children in the age group 5 to 16**.

➢ In **2017, ASER** conducted the first alternate-year design known as **ASER 'Beyond Basics',** focusing on **youth in the 14 to 18 age** group in 28 districts across India.

➢ ASER 2017 inquired about what youth are currently doing and aspiring to, in addition to assessing their foundational skills and ability to apply these to everyday tasks.

Way Forward

➢ The Centre should institute a review mechanism involving all States for both government and private institutions, covering elementary education and middle school.

➢ **A public consultation on activity-based learning outcomes,** deficits in early childhood education, and innovations in better performing States can help.

➢ At present, children start learning in a variety of environments: from poorly equipped anganwadi centres to private nurseries. The enactment of the **Right to Education Act** was followed by a welcome rise in enrolment, which now touches 96%.

   ○ Empowering as it is, **the law needs a supportive framework** to cater to learners from different backgrounds who often cannot rely on parental support or coaching.

➢ It is worth looking at innovation in schools and incentivising good outcomes; one study in Andhra Pradesh indicated that bonus pay offered to teachers led to better student scores in independently administered tests in mathematics and language.

Mohan Reddy Committee Recommendations Accepted

All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has accepted the recommendations of the committee headed by **BVR Mohan Reddy**.

➢ The committee was set up to provide **Short and Medium Term Perspectives for Engineering Education**.

Key Recommendations

➢ No **new engineering institutes** should be allowed to set up from **2020**.

➢ Concessions should be made for applications already in the pipeline.

➢ Only requests from existing engineering institutes to either **start programmes in new technologies or convert current capacity in traditional engineering disciplines to emerging new technologies like artificial intelligence or robotics** should be entertained.

➢ Creation of **new capacity in colleges should be reviewed** every two years.

➢ Committee found that the **current capacity utilization in traditional disciplines is just 40% as opposed to 60% seat occupancy in branches such as computer science and engineering, aerospace engineering and mechatronics**.

Note:

○ The committee had urged the AICTE to **introduce undergraduate engineering programmes** in emerging technologies like **artificial intelligence, the blockchain, robotics, quantum computing, data sciences, cybersecurity, 3D printing** and **design**.

➤ The committee found that the **innovation, incubation, and start-up ecosystem is lacking in educational Institutions**. Thus, every education institution should be mandated for the following:

○ **Entrepreneurship should be a minor elective for Undergraduates.**

○ Tinkering Laboratories similar to **Atal Innovation Laboratories** to be set up in every educational institution.

○ Educational Institutions need to set up **incubation centers, mentoring clubs** and accelerator programs.

➤ For approving additional seats in existing institutions, the committee has suggested that the AICTE should only give **approvals based on the capacity utilization of concerned institute**.

Background

➤ Over the last couple of decades primarily in the post-liberalization phase, **India faced the challenge of meeting the fast-growing demand of skilled workforce** emanating from various key sectors of the economy.

➤ Since the requirement could have been met only through **widening the infrastructural base of the education sector by increasing the number of specialized technical institutions,** the country went into institution overdrive.

➤ The **government took the lead by setting up several technical institutions**. The policy continued unabated for about two decades, without any meaningful appraisal or evaluation of institutions being established, **resulting in mushrooming of engineering institutions**.

➤ In 2003, the **UR Rao committee** had warned of the rise in the number of engineering colleges and **suggested that a five-year moratorium on approving undergraduate technical institutions** be put in force in states where the annual student intake exceeded the national average of 150 per million population.

➤ A 2017 study by **Aspiring Minds** found that **95% of engineering graduates were unemployable for the software industry, which accounts for the bulk of engineering jobs**.

➤ In December 2017, an **investigation by The Indian Express** has found there were **no takers for 51% of the 15.5 lakh B.E/B.Tech seats in almost 3,200 engineering colleges** in 2016-17.

➤ The investigation found glaring **gaps in regulation,** including alleged **corruption;** a vicious circle of **poor infrastructure,** labs, and faculty; **non-existent linkages with industry** and the **absence of a technology ecosystem** to nurture the classroom. All this led to **low employability of graduates**.

India Ends PISA Boycott

India and **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** have signed an agreement to enable India's participation in **Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA)** to be held in 2021.

➤ India stayed away from PISA in 2012 and 2015 on account of its dismal performance in 2009, when it was placed 72nd among the 74 participating countries.

➤ India criticized the method saying that questions were "out of context". Thus, India chose not to participate in the 2012 and 2015 cycle of PISA.

What is PISA?

➤ PISA is an international survey **held every three years,** coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

➤ **First conducted in 2000,** the major domain of study rotates between **reading, mathematics** and **science** in each cycle.

➤ It is a competency-based test designed to **assess the ability of the 15-year-old candidates** that measures their reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years to apply their knowledge in real-life situations.

Important features of India's participation in PISA

➤ Schools run by **Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and schools in the UT of Chandigarh will participate**.

➤ PISA uses test items aligned with international benchmarks. OECD has agreed to contextualize the questions for Indian students.

Note:

- Learnings from participation in PISA will help to introduce competency-based examination reforms in the school system and help move away from rote learning. The CBSE and NCERT will be part of the process and activities leading to the actual test.
- It would lead to **recognition and acceptability of Indian students** and prepare them for the global economy in the 21st century.

A Glance at Indian Education System

- **Education in schools is one dimensional,** with an obsessive focus on marks. Further, there is lack of availability of trained teachers at all levels. Quality teachers are the missing link in the Indian education system.
- A **majority of students in the university are unemployable because of their inability to apply their knowledge in real-life situations**. This is because of a poor foundation in schools, where the emphasis is more on rote learning, rather than testing a student's creative skills.
- **As per UNESCO data, India has one of the lowest public expenditure rates on education per student, especially compared to other Asian countries like China.**
- With a literacy rate of about 74%, India lags behind other BRICS nations, which have literacy rates above 90%.

Benefits of PISA

- **PISA data reveals common patterns among high performing school systems.** Likewise, the data also shows that school systems with the greatest improvement have used common tactics at different points in the reform process.
- The data is also used for benchmarking. An International benchmark like PISA can be a healthy driver for reform efforts worldwide.

Criticism of PISA

- Concerns have been raised about **PISA that it has contributed to an obsession with standardized testing relying heavily on quantitative measures** rather than qualitative aspects of education.
- It is criticized for **shifting focus from long-term and enduring solutions to temporary measures** which are being increasingly adopted by countries to improve their ranking.

World Leprosy Day

World Leprosy Day is observed on the **last Sunday of January**. It seeks to increase public awareness about leprosy and focuses on the target of zero cases of leprosy-related disabilities in children.

- The theme for 2019 World Leprosy Day is **'ending discrimination, stigma, and prejudice'**.
- In **India, it is celebrated on the 30th January each year** to commemorate the **death of Mahatma Gandhi**. This day was chosen as a tribute to the life of Gandhi who had a lifelong compassion for people affected by leprosy.
- Recently, **Shri Yohei Sasakawa** has been awarded Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2018 for his contribution in Leprosy Eradication in India and across the world.
- Even though India achieved leprosy elimination (<1 new leprosy case per 10,000 population) in 2005, 60% of the world's leprosy patients are still living in the country.
- Further, a sample survey for leprosy conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in 2008-2011 estimated that there may be 2,50,000 new cases every year.

Steps Taken to Eliminate Leprosy

- In 2017, government launched nationwide **Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC)** which aims at communicating the importance of early detection and treatment of leprosy.
- **National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP):** It focuses on both prevention and cure, especially in endemic regions. A Leprosy Case Detection Campaign was launched in March 2016, involving house-to-house screening and referral of patients for diagnosis.
- Introduction of an **indigenously developed vaccine** for leprosy into the **National Leprosy Elimination Programme (NLEP)**. The vaccine, known as **Mycobacterium indicus pranii (MIP),** has been developed by **National Institute of Immunology**. This vaccine will be administered as a preventive measure to those staying in close contact with leprosy patients.
- Indian research contributed to the development of **Multi-Drug Therapy or MDT,** now recommended by WHO, which led to the shortening of treatment and higher cure rates.
- **Removal of social stigma:** More than laws, people's attitude to leprosy has to change, doing away with discrimination.

Note:

Leprosy

➤ **Leprosy (Hansen's disease)** is an infectious disease caused by **Mycobacterium leprae** that involves the **skin and peripheral nerves**. The disease mainly affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract and eyes.

➤ While the mode of transmission of leprosy is not known, the most widely held belief is that the disease was transmitted by contact between those with leprosy and healthy persons.

➤ More recently, the possibility of transmission by the respiratory route is gaining ground. There are also other possibilities such as transmission through insects which cannot be completely ruled out.

➤ Although leprosy affects both sexes, in most parts of the world males are affected more frequently than females, often in the ratio of 2:1, according to WHO's Global Leprosy Report.

➤ Leprosy is **curable with MDT (multi drug therapy)** and treatment in the early stages can prevent disability. The disease is not hereditary.

Jallikattu Event Held in Tamil Nadu

Recently, events of Jallikattu were organized in many parts of Tamil Nadu.

➤ **Jallikattu is referred to as bull taming event** typically practiced in Tamil Nadu as a part of Pongal celebrations.

➤ The person participating in the event has to **pluck bundles of money or gold tied to the animal's horns**.

➤ The term 'jallikattu' is derived from the **Tamil words 'jalli' and 'kattu'. Jalli refers to gold or silver coins. Kattu means 'tied'**.

➤ It is an **ancient 'sport',** believed to have been practiced some 2500 years ago. It is also **mentioned in the Sangam literature**.

➤ It is controversial because the sport often results in **major injuries and even deaths of both bulls and humans**.

➤ Supreme Court in 2014 banned Jallikattu and bullock-cart races and such events like the Rekla (race-bulls lugging makeshift carts, TN), Kambala (buffalo race in Karnataka), Dhirio (bullfight in Goa), buffalo fight (Assam) in response to Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) and People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) petitions citing cruelty to animals.

Perpetuation and Banning of the Practice

➤ Jallikattu has been considered as the **cultural symbol** of Tamilian pride. However, the court had noted that even the ancient culture and tradition do not support Jallikattu in the form they are conducted today; Tamil culture and tradition is about worshipping the bull considered the vehicle of Lord Shiva.

➤ **Saving Native Bulls:** Proponents of Jallikattu argue that only native bulls are allowed to participate in Jallikattu and these bulls will become extinct if Jallikattu is not allowed to happen; there were more than one million Kangayam bulls in 1990 but now the number is just 15,000.

➤ The practice observes the participation of only native bulls and helps in maintaining their survival. However, the practice violates the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.

  ○ It is also in **contradiction to Article 51A** of the constitution (Fundamental Duties) which states that citizens should safeguard the wildlife and forests and have compassion for living creatures.

Corruption Perceptions Index 2018: Transparency International

India has been ranked at **78th place out of 180 countries** in **'Corruption Perceptions Index' (CPI)** released by **Transparency International** in 2018 against 2017's 81st, where it had come down from 79th in 2016.

➤ The index ranks the countries by their **perceived levels of public sector corruption** according to experts and business people.

➤ It uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

Key Findings

➤ Continued failure of most countries to significantly control corruption is contributing to a **crisis of democracy** around the world.

➤ A **general lack of political will, weak institutions** and few political rights create an environment where corruption flourishes with little opposition.

➤ More than **two-thirds of countries score below 50,** with an average score of only **43**.

➤ **Denmark and New Zealand** top the Index with 88 and 87 points, respectively. **Somalia, South Sudan,** and **Syria** are at the bottom of the index, with 10, 13 and 13 points, respectively.

- The **highest scoring region is Western Europe** and the European Union, with an average score of 66, while the lowest scoring regions are Sub-Saharan Africa (average score: 32) and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (average score: 35).
- With score of 71, the **United States** lost four points since last year, **dropping out of the top 20 countries** on the CPI for the first time since 2011. The low score comes at a time when the US is experiencing threats to its system of checks and balances as well as an erosion of ethical norms at the highest levels of power.

Indian Scenario

- India marginally **improved its score** to 41 (from 40 in 2017).
- Massive public mobilisation against corruption and voter turnout resulted in new governments and anti-corruption reforms in India, Malaysia, the Maldives, and Pakistan.
- Despite these encouraging developments, these are yet to translate into solid action against corruption.

Way Forward

- To make real progress against corruption and strengthen democracy around the world, **Transparency International calls on all governments to**:
  - **strengthen the institutions** responsible for maintaining checks and balances over political power, and ensure their ability to operate without intimidation;
  - **close the implementation gap** between anti-corruption legislation, practice and enforcement;
  - **support civil society organisations** which enhance political engagement and public oversight over government spending, particularly at the local level;
  - **support a free and independent media,** and ensure the safety of journalists and their ability to work without intimidation or harassment.

Transparency International
- Transparency International, an **international non-governmental organization** which is based in **Berlin,** Germany was founded in 1993.
- Its nonprofit purpose is to take action to combat corruption and prevent criminal activities arising from corruption.
- It publishes other reports such as the **Global Corruption Barometer**.

Global Risk Report 2019: World Economic Forum

World Economic Forum has recently released the Global Risk Report 2019.

- It **enlists the threats which the world will face in future** ranging from geopolitical and geo-economic tensions to environmental degradation and disruptions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- The report presents the results of the Global Risks Perception Survey conducted by the World Economic Forum.

Findings of the Report

- The report has predicted the following major risks under five categories:
  - **Economic**
    - Asset bubbles in a major economy
  - **Environmental**
    - Extreme weather events
    - Failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation
    - Natural disasters
    - Man-made environmental disasters
    - Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
    - Failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation
  - **Geo-Political**
    - Weapons of mass destruction
  - **Societal**
    - Large-scale involuntary migration
    - Water crises
    - A spread of infectious diseases
  - **Technological**
    - Data fraud or theft
    - Cyber-attacks
    - Critical information infrastructure breakdown

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Grameen)

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Grameen), the scheme to provide housing for the rural poor has achieved only 66% of its target to complete one crore houses by 2019.

Note:

➢ According to data provided, some of the most laggard States as of July 2018 were Maharashtra, which had provided land for only 890 of 1.39 lakh landless beneficiaries and Assam, which had provided land for 574 of 48,283 landless beneficiaries.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin (Ministry of Rural Development)

➢ **Objective:** To help rural people below the poverty line (BPL) in construction of dwelling units and upgradation of existing unserviceable kutcha houses by providing assistance in the form of a full grant.

➢ **Beneficiaries:** People belonging to SCs/STs, freed bonded labourers and non-SC/ST categories, including widows or next-of-kin of defence personnel killed in action, ex servicemen and retired members of the paramilitary forces, disabled persons and minorities.
  ○ Beneficiaries are chosen according to data taken from the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011.

➢ **Timeline:** The project will be implemented in a span of three years and expected to boost job creation in rural areas.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (Ministry of Urban Affairs)

➢ The Mission is being implemented during 2015-2022 and will provide central assistance to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and other implementing agencies through States/UTs.

➢ All statutory towns as per Census 2011 and towns notified subsequently would be eligible for coverage under the Mission.

➢ It has the following provisions:
  ○ In-situ Rehabilitation of existing slum dwellers using land as a resource through private participation
  ○ Credit Linked Subsidy
  ○ Affordable Housing in Partnership
  ○ Subsidy for Beneficiary-led individual house construction/enhancement

➢ In the spirit of cooperative federalism, the mission provides flexibility to the States for choosing the best options amongst the above four verticals to meet the demand of housing in their states.

➢ Process of project formulation and approval in accordance with the mission Guidelines has been left to the States so that projects can be formulated, approved and implemented faster.

Regional Conference on Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)

Recently the Department of Empowerment of persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment organised Regional Conference on **"Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)"** in Mumbai.

➢ It was the second of a series of Regional Conferences to be held across the country wherein Programme Implementing Agencies (PIAs) from the western region namely, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Goa participated.

➢ Since this scheme was **revised in 2018,** the Regional Conference was organized in order to **disseminate the provisions of the revised scheme and bring the Department closer to implementing agencies**.

Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme

➢ **DDRS is a Central Sector Scheme** of Government of India which is being implemented **since 1999** for providing **financial assistance to NGOs working for education and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities**.

➢ The objectives of the scheme are:
  ○ To create an **enabling environment** to ensure equal opportunities, equity, social justice and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
  ○ To encourage voluntary action for ensuring effective implementation of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**.

➢ NGOs are being **given assistance under DDRS** for providing a wide range of services to children/persons with disability, e.g.
  ○ programmes for pre-school and early intervention
  ○ special education
  ○ vocational training and placement
  ○ community based rehabilitation
  ○ manpower development
  ○ psycho-social rehabilitation of persons with mental illness
  ○ rehabilitation of leprosy-cured persons, etc.

➢ The "Scheme to Promote Voluntary Action for Persons with Disabilities" was **revised and renamed** as the Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS) from **April 2003**.

Note:

Ten Threats to Global Health in 2019: WHO

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has released a list of "Ten threats to global health in 2019".

Ten Threats and India

➢ **Air pollution, climate change**
  ○ Nine out of 10 people are breathing polluted air across the world.
  ○ India, with 18% of the world's population, sees 26% of the global premature deaths and disease burden due to air pollution.

➢ **Noncommunicable diseases**
  ○ Noncommunicable diseases, such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. are collectively responsible for over 70% of all deaths worldwide.
  ○ India has been named as the "diabetes capital of the world". India's current estimated cancer burden — over 1.5 million new cases — is predicted to nearly double in coming 20 years.

➢ **Global influenza pandemic**
  ○ WHO has said that the world may face another influenza pandemic. But, the only thing we don't know is when it will hit and how severe it will be.

➢ **Fragile, vulnerable settings**
  ○ More than 1.6 billion people (22% of the global population) live in places where challenges such as drought, famine, conflict, and population displacement and weak health services have left them without access to basic care.
  ○ The massive distress in India's farm sector has engendered waves of internal migration for work. This migrant population often live in unhygienic conditions with very little access to basic care.

➢ **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)**
  ○ The ability of bacteria, parasites, viruses, and fungi to resist antibiotics threatens our ability to fight with them.
  ○ Drug resistance is driven by the overuse of antimicrobials in people and in animals, especially those used for food production, as well as in the environment.
  ○ AMR is also a result of the rampant over-the-counter sale of medications without the prescription of a registered medical practitioner.

  ○ India, China, and the Russian Federation accounted for 47% of the global incidence of MDR-TB (Multidrug-Resistant- Tuberculosis) in 2016. India has an AMR policy but the implementation is poor.

➢ **Weak primary healthcare**
  ○ Primary health care is usually the first point of contact for people having any health concerns. Ideally it should provide comprehensive, affordable, community-based care throughout life.
  ○ Many countries do not have adequate primary health care facilities. This neglect may be due to a lack of resources in low- or middle-income countries and possibly also due to focus on single disease programmes in the past few decades.
  ○ In India, the primary care arm of Ayushman Bharat, with a proposed 1,53,000 health and wellness centers, has received less attention than Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (i.e. The insurance aspect of Ayushman Bharat).
  ○ Rural health statistics for 2017, in India, shows around 8,000 posts of doctors in primary health centers are vacant (against a requirement of almost 27,000), and almost 2000 of the total 25,000 Primary Health Centres have no doctors at all.

➢ **Vaccine hesitancy**
  ○ Vaccine hesitancy – the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines – threatens to reverse progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases.
  ○ Vaccination prevents 2-3 million deaths a year, and a further 1.5 million could be avoided if global coverage of vaccinations is improved.

➢ **Dengue**
  ○ Dengue, a mosquito-borne disease that causes flu-like symptoms is lethal and kills up to 20% of those with severe dengue.
  ○ WHO estimates 40% of the world is at risk of dengue, with around 390 million infections annually.
  ○ Dengue's season is lengthening significantly in India. Until November 25, 2018, India saw 89,974 dengue cases and 144 deaths.

➢ **HIV**
  ○ According to the WHO, nearly a million people every year die due to HIV/AIDS. Since the beginning of the epidemic, more than 70 million people have acquired the infection, and about 35 million people have died. Today, around 37 million people worldwide live with HIV.

Note:

○ India has launched a ''Test and Treat Policy'', made HIV treatment the right of every individual. India has also enacted the HIV/AIDS Act, 2018 which makes anti-retroviral therapy a legal right for Indians with HIV/AIDS.

➢ **Ebola, other high threat pathogens**

○ WHO identifies diseases and pathogens that have the potential to cause a public health emergency but lack effective treatments and vaccines.

○ This list includes Ebola, Zika, Nipah, Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and disease X, which represents the need to prepare for an unknown pathogen that could cause a serious epidemic.

○ While India saw no case of Ebola, but several Indian states battled Zika in October-November 2018, and at least 17 people died of Nipah infection in Kerala during April and May, 2018.

Hike in Monthly Pensions under National Social Assistance Programme

The Ministry of Rural Development has proposed that the **monthly pensions** of the elderly poor, disabled and widows should be increased from the current **₹200 to ₹800 under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)**.

➢ For those **above the age of 80,** the proposal is to increase the **pension from ₹500 to ₹1,200 per month**.

➢ This will have an additional annual cost implication of ₹18,000 crore on the Government.

➢ A study has also been launched to **consider doubling the number of people** covered by the scheme.

➢ In order to increase the coverage, discussions are also being held with the State governments on a proposal to **merge the Central and State pension schemes**.

➢ Currently, **Below Poverty Line (BPL) criteria** is used to determine the number of **people covered under NSAP**.

○ However, several States, including Rajasthan, Telangana, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, have **already shifted to Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 (SECC-2011) data** for their own pension schemes.

Background

➢ In October, 2018 a **panel of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** on disability and elderly persons has recommended few measures for the welfare of senior citizens:

○ Centre should **increase its contribution** to the pension scheme for elderly persons from ₹ **200 to ₹ 2,000 per month**.

○ India should adopt the **"time bank"** scheme to take care of senior citizens who are living alone without any support from their family.

○ A **nodal police officer** to deal with issues of senior citizens living alone should be appointed at **district level**.

○ **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** funds should be utilised for constructing **old age homes**.

Time Bank Scheme

➢ Under the 'time bank' scheme, people save **time and volunteer** to take care of the elderly who need help.

➢ The **number of hours** they spend with of senior citizens are deposited into their **personal account of social security system**.

➢ When volunteers themselves get old and need someone for help, he/she could use the 'time bank' and a volunteer is assigned to take care of him/her.

➢ **Switzerland** and the **UK** are following the 'time bank' scheme while Singapore is considering to implement it.

➢ In its **December, 2018 order the SC** had urged the Government of India to **relook at these pension schemes** and overhaul them to bring about **convergence and avoid multiplicity**.

○ It ordered the central and the state governments to make the grant of pension to the elderly more realistic, depending upon the availability of finances and the economic capacity of the governments.

Constitutional Provisions

➢ **Article 41** of the Constitution of India directs the State to provide public assistance to its citizens in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want within the limit of its economic capacity and development.

➢ **Article 42** provides that the State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

Note:

National Social Assistance Programme

➢ The **National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)** is a welfare programme being administered by the **Ministry of Rural Development**.

➢ This programme is being implemented in **rural as well as urban areas**.

➢ The programme was first launched on **15th August 1995 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme**. It was brought within the umbrella of **'Core of Core' schemes** of the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) in 2016.

➢ Currently, it has **five components namely**:

  ❍ Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme **(IGNOAPS)** - since inception of NSAP in **1995**

  ❍ National Family Benefit Scheme **(NFBS) - 1995**

  ❍ **Annapurna Scheme -** launched in **2000**

  ❍ Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme **(IGNWPS)** - launched in **2009**

  ❍ **Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme**- launched in **2009**

➢ The National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS) was part of NSAP and was subsequently transferred from the Ministry of Rural Development to the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.

Central Schemes

➢ The central schemes are divided into **Central Sector Schemes** and **Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS)**.

➢ **Central sector schemes:**

  ❍ These schemes are **100% funded by the Central government**.

  ❍ Implemented by the **Central Government machinery**.

  ❍ Formulated on **subjects mainly from the Union List**.

  ❍ E.g.: **Bharatnet, Namami Gange, National Ganga Plan, etc**.

➢ Centrally Sponsored Schemes are the schemes by the centre where there is financial participation by both the centre and states.

  ❍ Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) are again divided into **Core of the Core Schemes, Core Schemes and Optional schemes**.

  ❍ Currently, there are **6 core of the core schemes** while **22 core schemes**.

  ❍ Most of these schemes **prescribes specific financial participation by states**. For example, in the case of MGNREGA, state governments have to incur 25% material expenditure.

❍ The **6 core of the core CSS** are:

  • National Social Assistance Programme

  • Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Program

  • Umbrella Scheme for Development of Scheduled Castes

  • Umbrella Programme for Development of Scheduled Tribes

  • Umbrella Programme for Development of Minorities

  • Umbrella Programme for Development of Other Vulnerable Groups

Oxfam Report on Inequality

The international rights group, Oxfam released its annual study before the start of the five-day World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

Key Findings

➢ **GLOBAL**

  ❍ Only **26 people on the earth** now own the same amount of resources as the 3.8 billion people own. This highlights the **intensity** of the **concentration of wealth**.

  ❍ The governments are exacerbating inequality by **underfunding** public services, such as healthcare and education, on the one hand, while **under-taxing corporations and the wealthy,** and failing to clamp down on tax avoidance, on the other.

    • When public services are neglected, **poor women and girls suffer most. E.g:** Girls are pulled out of school first when the money is not available to pay fees, and women clock up hours of unpaid work looking after sick relatives when healthcare systems fail.

    • Also, cutting taxes on wealth **predominantly benefits men** who own 50% more wealth than women globally, and control over 86% of corporations.

  ❍ **Unpaid work done by women** across the globe amounts to a **staggering $10 trillion a year,** which is 43 times the annual turnover of the world's biggest company Apple.

➤ **INDIA**
  ○ India's **top 10% of population holds 77.4%** of the total national wealth. The top 1% hold 51.53% of the national wealth, while the remaining 99% make do with almost 48%.
    ● The **top 1% of India's wealthiest got richer by 39%** compared to 3% growth in the incomes of the bottom 50%.
    ● The **poorest 10% (13.6 crores)** Indians have been living under the burden of debt since 2004.
  ○ **Even in India women and girls are hardest hit** by rising economic inequality.
  ○ In India, the **unpaid work done** by women looking after their homes and children is **worth 3.1% of the country's GDP**.
  ○ The Oxfam study also referred to **India's poor 108th ranking on the WEF's Global Gender Gap Index of 2018,** stating that households that rely primarily on female earners tend to be poorer **because of gender pay gap**.
  ○ The various intersections of caste, class, religion, age and sexual orientation have further implications on women inequality as a process. Although, India has many laws that deal with violence against women, but their implementation remains a challenge, mostly because of a **deeply patriarchal society**.
  ○ Women's ability to undertake paid work is not merely determined by **economic considerations but also by social norms**. E.g.:
    ● It is understood that a woman's primary role is to **take care of the house** and her family and any income generating work is secondary to this role.
➤ Recommendations
  ○ All governments should set concrete, timebound targets and action plans to reduce inequality as part of their commitments under **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-10: Reduce Inequalities)**. These plans should include action in the following three areas:
    ● **Universal free** health care, education, pensions, child benefits and other public services that also work for women and girls should be delivered.
    ● **Freeing up of women's time** should be a key objective of government spending. Investment must be made in public services including water, electricity and childcare that reduces the time needed to do this unpaid work.

● **End the under-taxation** of rich individuals and corporations. Tax avoidance and evasion by corporates and the super-rich should be eliminated. Tax system should be redesigned to make it fair, with developing countries having an equal seat at the table.
➤ Shortcomings
  ○ Oxfam determines global inequality on the basis of one's net wealth—assets minus liabilities and excludes income altogether, ignoring purchasing power parity, standard of living, pension funds and future claims of investments which are **major parameters for measuring inequality**.
    ● E.g.: A large section of Indian population **invests in the education and career building** of their children. That may be a liability today but is also an investment for tomorrow. Liabilities with income is not the same as liabilities without income.

NITI Aayog-led Committee to Monitor Pricing of Drugs

The Union government has formed **Standing Committee on Affordable Medicines and Health Products (SCAMHP) under NITI Aayog**.

➤ The objective of the committee is to **recommend medicines for price control**. Thus, diluting the central role of the **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)** in setting drug prices.

WATCHDOG ON A LEASH

■Current ■Change

Essential medicines automatically fall under price control
Essential medicines delinked from price control

Health ministry prepares the list of essential medicines, DoP incorporates it into Schedule 1, NPPA fixes the prices
NITI Aayog panel to be recommending body to NPPA on pricing

NPPA fixes prices for medicines on the non-scheduled list
The new panel to be recommending body on pricing

NPPA exercises Para 19 powers in public interest
The new committee may encompass Para 19 powers

➤ SCAMHP will be a **recommending body** to NPPA regarding prices of drugs and health products.

Note:

➢ At present, the health ministry prepares the list of drugs eligible for price regulation. The Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) then incorporates National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) into Schedule 1 of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO). Following this, NPPA fixes the prices of drugs in this schedule.

➢ The committee may take a matter related to pricing for examination, **suo motu or on the recommendations of Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), NPPA or the department of health and family welfare**.

➢ The new committee can also exercise powers **under Para 19 of Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO)**.

  ❍ In 2013, the government had delegated these powers to NPPA, which it can exercise for setting the price cap of scheduled and non-scheduled drugs in public interest.

Concerns

➢ The new committee has **broad discretionary powers** to intervene in any aspect including related to the functions of the NPPA which could be **used to dilute the pricing regime**.

➢ Earlier NPPA was taking strict action against those companies found to be overcharging. This will **weaken the functions of NPPA** as an enforcement body.

National Girl Child Day

The Ministry of Women & Child Development celebrated National Girl Child Day (NGCD) on 24th January 2019 in Delhi.

➢ The theme of NGCD 2019 was **"Empowering Girls for a Brighter Tomorrow"** and was celebrated with objectives of generating **awareness** on the issue of declining **Child Sex Ratio (CSR)** and create a positive **environment around valuing the girl child**.

➢ The celebrations also marked the **4th anniversary of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** Scheme which was launched in 2015.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme

➢ The trend of decline in the Child Sex Ratio (CSR), defined as the number of girls per 1000 of boys between 0-6 years of age, has been unabated since 1961.

➢ The decline from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001 and further to 919 in 2011 is alarming.

➢ The decline in the CSR is a major indicator of women disempowerment.

➢ CSR reflects both, pre-birth discrimination manifested through gender-biased sex selection, and post-birth discrimination against girls.

➢ Two most prominent reasons for the decline in child sex ratio are:

  ❍ Social construct discriminating against girls

  ❍ Easy availability, affordability and subsequent misuse of diagnostic tools

➢ The government has announced the **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative to ensure survival, protection, and empowerment of the girl child**.

➢ This is a joint initiative of the **Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development**.

■■■

Note:

Miscellaneous

Highlights

- *Bharat Ratna Award (45)*
- *Salt Satyagraha Memorial (45)*
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- *Super Blood Wolf Moon (48)*
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Bharat Ratna Award

President Ramnath Kovind has conferred the Bharat Ratna, on former President **Pranab Mukherjee,** along with social activist **Nanaji Deshmukh (posthumous)**, and Assamese musician **Bhupen Hazarika (posthumous)**.

- ➢ The Bharat Ratna (Jewel of India), instituted in 1954 is the **highest civilian award** of the Republic of India.
- ➢ It is awarded in recognition of exceptional service/ performance of the highest order in any field of human endeavour.
- ➢ The recommendations for the Bharat Ratna are made by the Prime Minister to the President with a maximum of three nominees being awarded per year.
- ➢ Recipients receive a **Sanad** (certificate) signed by the President and a medallion; there is no monetary grant associated with the award.
- ➢ Bharat Ratna recipients rank seventh in the Indian order of precedence.

Salt Satyagraha Memorial

The Prime Minister inaugurated the National Salt Satyagraha Memorial at Dandi in Navsari district, Gujarat on January 30, to mark Mahatma Gandhi's 71st death anniversary.

- ➢ At the memorial site, he unveiled the statues of Mahatma Gandhi and Satyagrahis who had marched with him during the historic Dandi Salt March in 1930.
- ➢ The Dandi memorial encapsulates the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi- Agrah for Swadeshi, Swatchagrah and Satyagraha.

- ➢ As a part of the civil disobedience movement against the British rule, 80 satyagrahis led by Gandhi marched 241 miles from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to the coastal village of Dandi and made salt from sea water, breaking the Salt Law imposed by the British.

Global Aviation Summit 2019

The **Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India, in collaboration with Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)** has organized first of its kind Global Aviation Summit in Mumbai.

- ➢ The theme of Global Aviation Summit is **"Flying for all - especially the next 6 Billion"**.
- ➢ The Summit aims to provide a platform for the stakeholders to brainstorm over the future of the aviation industry and identify the growth areas.
- ➢ It also gives the opportunity to highlight the latest concepts like drones, air taxis, new jets, and ultra-light aerial electric vehicles etc.
- ➢ Vision 2040 for the aviation sector was also launched during the summit.
- ➢ The vision document highlights the growth potential in different sub-sectors of Indian aviation and the key action steps which are required to be taken to achieve the desired objective.

Education Institutions Ranking by Times Higher Education

London Based Times Higher Education has released the ranking of institutions under its Times Higher Education Emerging Economies Ranking.

Note:

- The 2019 ranking comprises of **nearly 450 universities from 43 countries, across four continents**.
- **India has improved its performance with 49 institutions making it to the list.**
- Indian Institute of Science is at the 14th place, followed by the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay which is at 27th.
- India has 25 universities in the top 200, a rise from 17 in 2018.
- China remains the most represented nation in the annual 2019 listing, with four institutions among the top five and 72 institutions in total.

National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC)

India's first National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC) has been inaugurated in Mumbai.

- The National Museum of Indian Cinema will provide a storehouse of information to the people.
- It will also **help filmmakers, film students, enthusiasts and critics** to know and **evaluate the development of cinema** as a medium of artistic expression, not only in the country but also in all parts of the world.
- The museum is **housed in a 19th century heritage bungalow, Gulshan Mahal,** along with another newly built state-of-the-art NMIC building.
- The new museum building has **four exhibition halls,** whose themes are:
  ○ Gandhi and Cinema;
  ○ Technology, Creativity and Indian cinema;
  ○ Cinema across India;
  ○ Children's Film Studio.
- **Raja Harishchandra made by Dadasaheb Phalke in 1913** was the **first silent feature film in India** and **Ardeshir Irani's Alam Ara in 1931** was the first feature film with sound.

District Mineral Fund

The Ministry of Mines has requested State governments to complete the audit of District Mineral Fund (under Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana) expenditure for the financial year 2017-18.

Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY)

- **Objective:** To minimize/mitigate the adverse impacts, during and after mining, on the environment, health and socio-economic conditions of people in mining districts and also to ensure a sustainable livelihood for the affected people.
- It is implemented by the **District Mineral Foundations (DMFs)** of the respective districts that use the funds collected from the miners.
- District Mineral Foundation (DMF) is a **trust set up under Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Amendment Act (MMDRA) 2015** as a non-profit body in those districts affected by the mining operations.
- **60% of the funds will be utilized for high priority areas such as drinking water supply, health care, sanitation, education, skill development, women and child care, the welfare of aged and disabled people and environment conservation.**
- **40% of the fund** will be utilized for physical **infrastructure, irrigation, energy, and watershed development**.

ROSHNI

It is an **app to help visually impaired,** to differentiate between new post demonetization currencies of India.

- It has been developed by **IIT Ropar, Punjab**.
- Earlier the visually impaired persons differentiated the currencies based on the length and width of the note, but after demonetization it has become very difficult for them to identify the denomination, due to similarity in the sizes of new and old notes.
- The user has to bring the currency note in front of phone camera and the App would provide audio notification intimating the currency note denomination to the user.
- It is the first of its kind Android App and it works well in broad range of light conditions and holding angles.
- The **Seeing AI App by Microsoft** is the only **other App** that facilitates recognition of both old and new Indian currency notes, but it is an iOS (iPhone OS) App and not available for visually impaired.

Note:

Indian Africa Field Training Exercise

➢ **Indian Africa Field Training Exercise (IAFTX)** is scheduled to be conducted in Pune from 18 March to 27 March 2019.

➢ It aims at synergysing humanitarian mine action, joint peace operations and to boost strategic and military cooperation, **between African countries and India**.

Global Talent Competitive Index-2019

India has secured **80th rank** on the **Global Talent Competitive Index**.

➢ It measures the ability of countries to compete for talent.

➢ It is released by **INSEAD business school** in partnership with **Tata Communications and Adecco Group**.

➢ Its theme is **"Entrepreneurial Talent and Global Competitiveness"**.

➢ This Index takes into account variables such as ease of hiring, gender earnings gap, and prevalence of training in firms.

➢ India's biggest challenge is to improve its ability to attract and retain talent.

➢ India needs to address its poor level of Internal Openness particularly with respect to weak gender equality and low tolerance towards minorities and immigrant.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

The **15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)** was held in **Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)** from January 21 to January 23, 2019.

➢ Its theme was **"Role of Indian Diaspora in building a New India"**.

➢ It was organized by the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in association with the government of Uttar Pradesh**.

➢ PBD is normally celebrated on **9th January**. However, this time dates were shifted to allow the guests attending the event to get an opportunity to **participate in the 'Kumbh Mela' at Prayagraj** and to attend the **Republic Day parade**.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

➢ Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated once in **every two years** to strengthen the engagement of the overseas Indian community with the Government of India and reconnect them with their roots.

➢ January 9 commemorates **Mahatma Gandhi's return to India** from South Africa in 1915.

➢ It is celebrated on **January 9** to mark the contribution of the Overseas Indian community in the development of India.

➢ PBD conventions are being held every year **since 2003**.

➢ These conventions enable networking among the overseas Indian community and to share their experiences in various fields.

➢ During the event, individuals of exceptional merit are honored with the prestigious **Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award** to appreciate their role in India's growth.

World Economic Outlook Report

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has released an update of its biennial **World Economic Outlook Report 2018**.

➢ India's GDP is forecasted to expand 7.5% in FY20 and 7.7% in FY21. China's growth is seen at 6.2% in both years.

➢ According to the report, India's economy will pick up growth in 2019, benefiting from lower oil prices and a slower pace of monetary tightening than previously expected, as inflationary pressures ease.

➢ The global economy is projected to grow by 3.5% in 2019 and 3.6% in 2020.

African Asian Rural Development Organisation (AARDO)

An international workshop on fisheries and aquaculture has called for regional cooperation among member countries of the African Asian Rural Development Organisation (AARDO) to develop joint fisheries management plans.

Note:

- African - Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO), **headquartered in New Delhi, was formed in 1962,** is an autonomous inter-governmental organization comprising 33 members from Africa and Asia.

- It was earlier known as Afro-Asian Rural Development Organization.

- AARDO is one of the **earliest examples of South-South cooperation** in rural development in the Afro-Asian region. The Organization was set up with a view to promote coordinated efforts, exchange of experiences and cooperative action for furthering the objectives of development of the **rural areas**.

- India is one of the **Founder Members of the Organization** and is the largest contributor in terms of membership contribution.

- The first Afro-Asian Conference on Rural Reconstruction was held in New Delhi in January 1961.

Super Blood Wolf Moon

The Super Blood Wolf Moon, a total Lunar Eclipse, was visible in many parts of the world on January 20-21.

- It was visible in North America, Central America, and South America. But the total lunar eclipse was not visible in India.

- Super Blood Wolf Moon is a lunar eclipse in which the moon appears to be red in color as a result of scattered and refracted sunlight around Earth.

- This super blood moon is called as Super Blood Wolf Moon because in many cultures the first full moon of the year is named as Wolf Moon.

Related Terms
- **Lunar Eclipse:** A lunar eclipse occurs whenever the moon passes through Earth's shadow, also known as its umbra.
- **Super Moon:** Super Moon occurs when the full moon is at the closest point of its orbit to the Earth, which is also called the perigee. The moon appears brighter and bigger than the usual full moon.
- **Blood Moon:** The moon turns into red color during the height of the eclipse as some light reaches it even though the moon is in the shadow of the Earth. Fine particles in the atmosphere like dust scatter the blue component of the solar spectrum.

- **Blue Moon:** When two full moons appear in the same calendar month, the second is termed a "blue moon".

RailWire

RailWire WiFi at 746 railway stations across the country has emerged as one of the world's largest and fastest public WiFi networks.

- Within a month Rail Wire has around 2.6 crores logins and over 9,400 TeraBytes (TB) data consumption.

- Free WiFi services to commuters are being provided under 'RailWire', RailTel's retail Broadband initiative.

- RailTel is a 'Mini Ratna', a central public sector undertaking (PSU) under the Ministry of Railways.

- RailTel provides WiFi at rural railway stations which are small stations catering to rural populations that do not have access to state-of-the-art telecom infrastructure.

- RailTel is also playing a major role in developing Telecom Networks of national interests like National Knowledge Network, National Optical Fiber Network etc.

- WiFi has been provided to railway stations either through the Universal Service Obligatory Fund (USOF) of the Union Government or through railway stations' own or other funding.

Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)
- USOF was envisaged in the new telecom policy - 1999 (NTP'99).
- NTP provided that the resources for meeting the Universal Service Obligation (USO) would be raised through a 'Universal Access Levy (UAL)', which would be a percentage of the revenue earned by the telecom operators.
- USOF was given statutory status by the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act, 2003.
- The USOF has to be utilized exclusively for meeting the Universal Service Obligation.
- Universal Service Obligation is defined as access to telegraph services to people in rural and remote areas at an affordable and reasonable price.
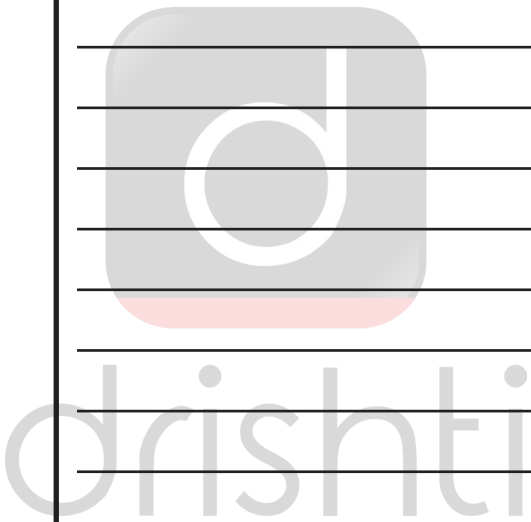
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Note:

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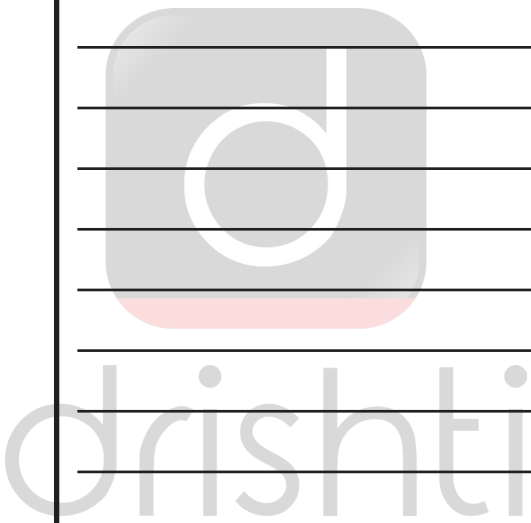
Summary

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Summary