Current Affairs
(CONSOLIDATION)

DECEMBER 2019
(PART – II)

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Polity and Governance

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Disha Bill, 2019

Why in News

The Andhra Pradesh Disha Bill, 2019 i.e. Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2019 which provides for **death sentence for offences of rape and gangrape** has been passed recently.

➤ The Bill amends relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure Act, 1973.

Features Different from Existing Laws

➤ A **Women & Children Offenders Registry** is to be established, operated and maintained by the Andhra Pradesh Government in an electronic form. This registry will be made public and will be available to law enforcement agencies.

○ The Government of India has also launched a National Registry of Sexual offenders but the database is not digitized and is not accessible to the public.

➤ **Exclusive punishment of death penalty** in cases relating to rape and murder of a woman where there is adequate conclusive evidence.

○ At present, provision for punishing an offender in a rape case is a fixed jail term leading to life imprisonment or the death sentence.

➤ **Reduces the judgment period:** The judgment will have to be pronounced in 21 working days from date of offence in cases of rape crimes with substantial conclusive evidence.

○ The existing judgment period as per the Nirbhaya Act, 2013 and Criminal Amendment Act, 2018 is 4 months (two months of investigation period and two months of trial period).

➤ **Stringent punishment for sexual offences against children:** The Bill prescribes life imprisonment for sexual offences against children.

○ In cases of molestation/sexual assault on children under the **POCSO Act, 2012**, the punishment ranges from a minimum of three years to a maximum of seven years of imprisonment.

➤ **Punishment for harassment of women through social media:** In cases of harassment of women through email, social media, digital mode or any other form, the guilty shall be punishable with imprisonment.

○ At present, no such provision exists in the Indian Penal Code.

➤ **Investigation Related Provisions**

○ Exclusive special courts in each district of the State to ensure speedy trial. These courts will exclusively deal with cases of offences against women and children including rape, acid attacks, stalking, voyeurism, social media harassment of women, sexual harassment and all cases under the POCSO Act.

○ Constitution of special police teams and appointment of the special public prosecutor in special courts. There is no such provision in existing laws.

Note:

Privilege Motion

Why in News

A Privilege Motion has been moved against the Union Textile Minister Smriti Irani in the Lok Sabha.

Privilege Motion

➢ It is concerned with the **breach of parliamentary privileges** by a minister.

➢ **Breach of Privileges**
   ○ Parliamentary Privileges are **certain rights and immunities** enjoyed by members of Parliament, individually and collectively, so that they can "effectively discharge their functions".
   ○ When any of these rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is **punishable under law of Parliament**.
   ○ **A notice is moved in the form of a motion** by any member of either House against those being held guilty of breach of privilege.

➢ **Role of the Speaker/Rajya Sabha (RS) Chair**
   ○ The Speaker/RS chairperson is the **first level of scrutiny** of a privilege motion.
   ○ The Speaker/Chair can decide on the privilege motion himself or herself or refer it to the privileges committee of Parliament. If the Speaker/Chair gives consent under relevant rules, the member concerned is given an opportunity to make a short statement.

➢ **Rules governing Privilege**
   ○ Rule No 222 in Chapter 20 of the Lok Sabha Rule Book and correspondingly Rule 187 in Chapter 16 of the Rajya Sabha rulebook governs privilege.
   ○ Rules says that a member may, with the consent of the Speaker or the Chairperson, raise a question involving a breach of privilege either of a member or of the House or a committee thereof.

Parliamentary Privileges

➢ Parliamentary privileges are special rights, immunities and exemptions enjoyed by the two Houses of Parliament, their committees and their members.

➢ The Constitution also extends the parliamentary privileges to those persons who are entitled to speak and take part in the proceedings of a House of Parliament or any of its committees. These include the **Attorney General of India and Union ministers**.

➢ The **parliamentary privileges do not extend to the President** who is also an integral part of the Parliament. **Article 361** of the Constitution provides for privileges for the President.

➢ **Article 105** of the Constitution expressly mentions two privileges, that is, freedom of speech in Parliament and right of publication of its proceedings.

➢ Apart from the privileges as specified in the Constitution, **the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**, provides for freedom from arrest and detention of members under civil process during the continuance of the meeting of the House or of a committee thereof and forty days before its commencement and forty days after its conclusion.

➢ It needs to be noted that the **Parliament, till now, has not made any special law** to exhaustively codify all the privileges.

Privilege Committee

➢ It is a **Standing Committee**. It examines the cases of breach of the privileges of the House and its members and recommends appropriate action.

➢ The **Lok Sabha** committee has **15 members**, while the **Rajya Sabha** committee has **10 members**.

Annulment of Election of MLA

Why in News

Recently, the **Allahabad High Court annulled** the election of Mohammad Abdullah Azam Khan, as a **Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Uttar Pradesh on the grounds of being underage at the time of the assembly elections** (2017).

➢ The order was passed on a petition which claimed that the candidate was **less than 25 years of age at the time of filing the nomination** and hence was **ineligible to contest**.

Background

The Constitution of India as well as the Parliament of India has laid down qualifications and disqualifications for being elected as a member of State Legislative Assembly and State Legislative Council.

➢ **Qualifications:**
   ○ **Constitutional Provisions:**
      ● Citizenship of **India**

- **Subscription to an oath or affirmation** before the person authorised by the Election Commission.
- Age **must be not less than 25 years** for the legislative assembly and not less than 30 years for the legislative council.
- Need to possess other qualifications prescribed by Parliament.

○ **Parliamentary Provisions** through **Representation of the People Act (1951)**:

- A person to be elected to the legislative assembly must be an **elector for an assembly constituency** in the concerned state.
- A person to be elected to the legislative council must be **an elector for an assembly constituency in the concerned state** and to be qualified for the governor's nomination, he must be a **resident in the concerned state**.
- He must be a member of a scheduled caste or scheduled tribe if he wants to contest a seat reserved for them. However, a member of scheduled castes or scheduled tribes can also contest a seat not reserved for them.

➢ **Disqualifications:**

○ **Constitutional Provisions:**

- Any **office of profit** under the **Union or state government** (except that of a minister or any other office exempted by the state legislature),
- **Unsound mind** and stands so declared by a court,
- Undischarged insolvent,
- **Not a citizen of India** or has voluntarily acquired the citizenship of a foreign state or is under any acknowledgement of allegiance to a foreign state,
- Disqualified under **any law** made by **Parliament**.

○ **Parliamentary Provisions** through **Representation of the People Act (1951)**:

- Must **not** have been found guilty of certain **election offences** or corrupt practices in the elections.
- Must **not** have been convicted for any offence resulting in **imprisonment for two or more years**. But, the detention of a person under a **preventive detention law** is **not a disqualification**.
- Must **not fail** to lodge an account of **election expenses** within the time.
- Must **not** have **any interest in government contracts**, works or services.

- Must **not be a director** or managing agent nor hold an office of profit in a corporation in which the **government has at least 25 per cent share**.
- Must **not** have been **dismissed from government service** for **corruption** or disloyalty to the state.
- Must **not** have been convicted for promoting enmity between different groups or for the offence of bribery.
- Must **not** have been punished for preaching and practicing social crimes such as untouchability, dowry and sati.

○ On the question of whether a member has become subject to any of the above **disqualifications, the governor's decision is final**. However, the governor should obtain the opinion of the Election Commission and act accordingly.

➢ **Election Petition:**

○ The **Constitution** lays down that no election to the Parliament or the state legislature is to **be questioned except by an election petition** presented to such authority and in such manner as provided by the appropriate legislature.

○ **Since 1966,** the election petitions are **triable by high courts alone**. Whereas the **appellate jurisdiction** lies with the **Supreme Court alone**.

○ **Article 323 B** empowers the appropriate legislature (Parliament or a state legislature) **to establish a tribunal for the adjudication of election disputes**.

- It also provides for the **exclusion of the jurisdiction of all courts** (except the special leave appeal jurisdiction of the Supreme Court) in such disputes.
- So far, no such tribunal has been established.

○ In **Chandra Kumar case (1997)**, the clause of the **exclusion of the jurisdiction of all courts in election disputes** was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

○ Consequently, if at any time an election tribunal is established, an appeal from its decision lies to the high court.

EVMs Not Under RTI Act

Why in News

Recently, the Delhi High Court **quashed** an order of the **Central Information Commission (CIC)** which had held

that **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)** fall within the definition of **'information'** under the **Right To Information (RTI) Act**.

➤ The CIC's order had come on a plea which sought **access to an EVM maintained by the Election Commission (EC)** under the RTI Act.

➤ CIC had observed that EVMs available with the EC in a **material form or as a sample** is a **piece of information** under **section 2(f) of the RTI Act**.

  ○ **Section- 2 (f)** states that "Information" means any material in any form, including Records, Documents, Memos, e-mails, Opinions, Advice, Press releases, Circulars, Orders, Logbooks, Contracts, Reports, Papers, **Samples**, **Models**, Data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a Public Authority under any other law for the time being in force.

➤ With this judgement, **EVMs are out of the purview of RTI ACT**.

Election Commission's Stand

➤ EC **does not maintain any EVM in sample or model form for the purpose of Section 2(f) of the RTI Act**.

  ○ Though it maintains a small number of EVMs for the purposes of **training of election officials** and uses in **awareness programmes** under strict supervision.

➤ All EVMs utilised in the conduct of elections are **securely stored** in **accordance** with the manual on **EVMs issued by the EC and the Representation of the People Act**.

➤ As per **Article 324 of the Constitution,** ECI has plenary powers in matters related to conduct of elections. And **EVMs are integral to the conduct of elections** in India. Its unregulated disclosure may lead to the **threat to the purity and fairness of elections**.

No State Wise Minority Classification: SC

Why in News

The Supreme Court has dismissed a plea seeking guidelines to **"identify and define" religious minorities in every State** to protect their culture and interests.

➤ The petition sought **to recognise Hindus as minorities in the States where they are low in population**.

➤ Currently, the **linguistic minorities** are identified on a state-wise basis thus **determined by the state government** whereas **religious minorities** are determined by the **Central Government**.

  ○ A linguistic minority is a group of people whose mother tongue is different from that of the majority in the state or part of a state.

➤ However, the Supreme court ruled that **languages are restricted state wise but religion is beyond all borders**, especially political borders. Thus, **religion needs to be considered on a pan-India basis** and not state-wise.

Background

➤ **Constitutional Provisions:**

  ○ The term **"Minority"** is **not defined** in the **Indian Constitution**. However, the Constitution recognises only **religious and linguistic minorities**.

  ○ **Article 29:** It provides that any section of the citizens residing in any part of India having a **distinct language, script or culture of its own,** shall have the **right to conserve the same**.

    ● It grants protection to both **religious minorities as well as linguistic minorities**. However, the Supreme Court held that the scope of this article is not necessarily restricted to minorities only, as use of the word **'section of citizens'** in the Article that include minorities as well as majority.

  ○ **Article 30:** Under the article, all minorities shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

    ● The protection under Article 30 is confined only to minorities (religious or linguistic) and **does not extend to any section of citizens** (as under Article 29).

  ○ **Article 350-B:** Originally, the Constitution of India did not make any provision with respect to the **Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities**. But, the **Seventh Constitutional Amendment Act of 1956** inserted **Article 350-B** in the Constitution.

    ● It provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities **appointed** by the **President of India**.

    ● It would be the duty of the Special Officer to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under the constitution.

Note:

➢ **Parliamentary Provisions:**
  ○ **National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992**
    ● The act **defines a minority as "a community notified as such by the Central government"**. Government of India has declared six religions namely, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhist and Parsis (Zoroastrian) and Jain as **religious minorities** in India.
    ● Under this act, the government formed the **National Commission for Minorities which** consist of Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and five Members.
    ● The five Members including the Chairperson shall be from **amongst the minority communities**.
    ● The commission monitors the working of the safeguards provided in the Constitution and in laws enacted by Parliament and the State Legislatures.
    ● It also makes recommendations for the effective implementation of safeguards for the protection of the interests of minorities by the Central Government or the State Governments.

Minorities Rights Day in India

➢ National Commission for Minorities observes the **18th December** as Minorities Rights Day every year.

➢ The day marks the adoption of the **"Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities"** by the **United Nations in 1992**.

➢ The declaration states that States shall protect the existence of the National or Ethnic, Cultural, Religious and Linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.

Packaged Foods Breach Salt and Fat Limits

Why in News

According to a recent analysis by the **Centre for Science and Environment (CSE),** an array of packaged snacks and fast foods breach safe limits of salt and fat content.

➢ CSE relied on the concept of the **Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA)** to calculate the safety limits.

Recommended Dietary Allowance

➢ RDA is a **daily ceiling** on the amount of salt, fat, carbohydrates and trans fats.

➢ It is **based on scientific consensus** and has been agreed upon by expert bodies such as the **World Health Organisation** and the **National Institute of Nutrition in India**.

➢ According to RDA, ideally an adult should not consume more than **5 gm of salt, 60 gm of fat, 300 gm carbohydrate and 2.2 gm of trans fat** on every day basis.

Centre for Science and Environment

➢ It is a **public interest research and advocacy organisation** based in **New Delhi**. CSE researches into, lobbies for and communicates the urgency of development that is both sustainable and equitable.

➢ It was established in 1980.

Key Points

➢ CSE analysed samples were collected from grocery stores and fast food outlets in the city.

➢ It found out that given the size of servings and the amount of nutrients per 100 gm, a single packet of packaged item had **more salts and fats than the recommended limits**.

➢ In 2019, **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** proposed **draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations**, which require packaged food companies to declare nutritional information such as calories (energy), saturated fat, trans-fat, added sugar and sodium per serve on the front of the pack.
  ○ The food labels also need to declare, per serve percentage contribution to RDA on the front of the pack.
  ○ Though these regulations are under discussions since 2015 and several drafts have come out on them, they have yet to become law, and to be operationalised.

➢ The CSE concluded that all of the popular snacks and fast foods should display a **'Red Octagon'** on the front of the pack.
  ○ **Red Octagon** is a warning symbol employed in packaged foods in **Chile and Peru**. It has a number and the name of the food component within that indicates how widely off the RDA a particular ingredient is.

○ For example a Red "3.1 Salt" on a pack of potato chip, indicates that the salt it contains is 3.1 times the RDA for snacks.

➤ The **food industry is opposing** the move because all of the packaged food which was tested would come under the red mark.

○ The regulations, as of now, don't apply to fast foods such as burgers and pizzas, even though they were included in the CSE analysis.

Section 144 of CrPC

Why in news

With protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act intensifying at several places across many states, several state governments have imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to curb the protests.

What is Section 144 of CrPC?

➤ **Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)** is frequently used to prohibit assemblies of **five or more individuals**, or to order mobile phone companies to block voice, SMS, or Internet communications in one or more geographical areas.

➤ It empowers a district magistrate, a sub-divisional magistrate or any other executive magistrate specially empowered by the state government in this behalf to issue orders to prevent and address urgent **cases of apprehended danger or nuisance**.

○ The orders may be directed against a particular individual, or to persons residing in a particular place or area, or to the public generally when frequenting or visiting a particular place or area.

➤ No order passed under Section 144 can remain in **force for more than two months from the date of the order**.

➤ The state government can extend this, **but not more than six months**.

Issues Related to Section 144

➤ The term cases of **apprehended danger or nuisance** are too broad and wide enough to give absolute power to a magistrate.

➤ The immediate remedy against such an order is a revision application to the magistrate himself.

➤ An aggrieved individual can approach the High Court by filing a writ petition (article 226) if his fundamental rights are at stake. This however is a time taking process.

How have courts ruled on Section 144?

➤ **Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya case 1967,** the Supreme Court held that "no democracy can exist if 'public order' is freely allowed to be disturbed by a section of the citizens".

➤ **Madhu Limaye vs Sub-Divisional Magistrate case 1970,** a seven-judge bench headed by the then **Chief Justice of India M Hidayatullah** upheld the constitutionality of section 144.

○ The court said that **"law may be abused" is no reason to strike it down**.

○ It further ruled that the restrictions imposed through Section 144 cannot be held to be violative of the right to freedom of speech and expression.

○ Imposition of Section 144 falls under the **"reasonable restrictions"** under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

➤ In 2012, the Supreme Court **criticised the government for imposing Section 144** against a sleeping crowd in Ramlila Maidan.

○ The court held that such a provision can be used **only in grave circumstances for maintenance of public peace**. The emergency must be sudden and the consequences sufficiently grave.

Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth

Why in News

The **newly-formed Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth (CCIG)** held its **first** meeting to discuss issues related to the slowdown in the economy.

➤ The meeting also discussed about the **slowing GDP growth to 4.5% (a six-year low)** as **investment, exports and consumption** have **declined** in the country.

➤ Alongside CCIG, a **Cabinet Committee on Employment & Skill Development** was also constituted in response to rising unemployment in the country.

○ The **Periodic Labour Force Survey** had shown the **overall unemployment rate to be 6.1%** during 2017-18.

Note:

Cabinet Committees

- ➢ Cabinet Committees are **extra-constitutional** in emergence. In other words, they are **not mentioned** in the Constitution. However, the **Rules of Business** provide for their establishment.
  - ❍ These Rules emerge out of **Article 77(3)** of the Constitution, which empowers the President to make rules for the more convenient transaction of the business of the Government, and for the allocation among Ministers.
- ➢ These committees are of two types—**standing and ad hoc**. The **standing** Cabinet Committees are of a permanent nature while the **ad hoc** Cabinet Committees are of a **temporary** nature.
  - ❍ The **Prime Minister** constitutes **Standing Committees of the Cabinet** and sets out the specific functions assigned to them. He can **add or reduce** the number of committees.
  - ❍ The ad hoc committees are constituted from time to time to deal with special problems. They are disbanded after their task is completed.

> **Note:** All committees except Cabinet Committee on Accommodation and Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs are headed by Prime Minister.
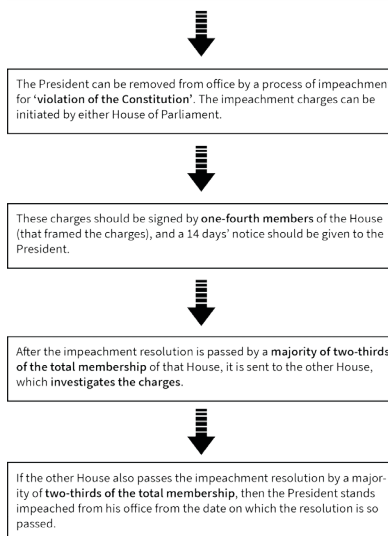
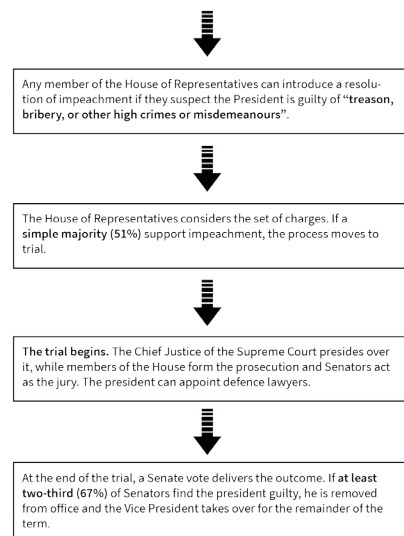# Impeachment of US President

Why in News

Donald Trump has become the **third US President** in history to be impeached by the House of Representatives. The **trial** will now start in the **Senate**.

- ➢ The two prior impeachments were: Andrew Johnson (1868) and Bill Clinton (1998).
- ➢ The legislature of the United States of America i.e. **Congress of the United States** consists of two houses: the Senate, in which each state, regardless of its size, is represented by two senators, and the House of Representatives, to which members are elected on the basis of population.
- ➢ The US Constitution states that the President can be removed for conviction of treason, bribery, or other high crimes or misdemeanour.

Procedure for Impeachment of President of India (Article 61)	Procedure for Impeachment of President of US
The President can be removed from office by a process of impeachment for 'violation of the Constitution'. The impeachment charges can be initiated by either House of Parliament.	Any member of the House of Representatives can introduce a resolution of impeachment if they suspect the President is guilty of "treason, bribery, or other high crimes or misdemeanours".
These charges should be signed by one-fourth members of the House (that framed the charges), and a 14 days' notice should be given to the President.	The House of Representatives considers the set of charges. If a simple majority (51%) support impeachment, the process moves to trial.
After the impeachment resolution is passed by a majority of two-thirds of the total membership of that House, it is sent to the other House, which investigates the charges.	The trial begins. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court presides over it, while members of the House form the prosecution and Senators act as the jury. The president can appoint defence lawyers.
If the other House also passes the impeachment resolution by a majority of two-thirds of the total membership, then the President stands impeached from his office from the date on which the resolution is so passed.	At the end of the trial, a Senate vote delivers the outcome. If at least two-third (67%) of Senators find the president guilty, he is removed from office and the Vice President takes over for the remainder of the term.

- ❍ **In India, the President can be removed only for 'violation of the Constitution'** and the Constitution does **not define the meaning** of the phrase 'violation of the Constitution'.

Good Governance Day

Why in News

The Good Governance Day is observed on **25th December** to mark the **birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee**.

- ➢ On this occasion, a number of initiatives have been taken by the government viz. the launch of **Atal Bhujal Yojana (ATAL JAL)**, naming of **tunnel under Rohtang Pass** as **Atal Tunnel** and the launch of **Good Governance Index (GGI)**.

Atal Bhujal Yojana

- ➢ The Atal Bhujal Yojana (ATAL JAL) is a **centrally sponsored scheme** worth **Rs. 6,000 crore** to be implemented over **5 years** for sustainable management of **groundwater** with community participation.
- ➢ ATAL JAL will promote **panchayat led** groundwater management and **behavioural change** with a primary focus on demand-side management.
- ➢ It is being implemented by the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** (earlier known as Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation).
- ➢ The scheme is being funded by the **Government of India** and the **World Bank** on **50:50** basis.

○ The entire World Bank's loan component and central assistance will be passed on to the States as grants.

➤ The identified over-exploited and water-stressed areas for the implementation of the scheme are **Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh**.

○ The States have been selected according to the degree of groundwater exploitation and degradation, established legal and regulatory instruments, institutional readiness, and experience in implementing initiatives related to groundwater management.

Atal Tunnel

➤ The **8.8-kilometre-long** Atal tunnel under Rohtang Pass is the **world's longest tunnel above an altitude of 3,000 metres**. It has a **fireproof emergency tunnel** built into the main tunnel itself.

○ Rohtang Pass (elevation 3,978 m) is located in the state of **Himachal Pradesh**.

○ It is present on the **Pir Panjal Range** of Himalayas.

○ It connects the **Kullu Valley with Lahaul and Spiti Valleys** of Himachal Pradesh.

○ The **Ravi river rises** west of the Rohtang pass in the Kullu hills of Himachal Pradesh.

➤ It will provide **all-weather connectivity** to **remote areas of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh (UT)** which otherwise remained cut off from the rest of the country for about six months during winters.

➤ The tunnel will help to promote tourism in the region.

Good Governance Index

➤ The Good Governance Index (GGI) has been launched by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions to determine the **status of governance** in the country.

➤ It assesses the impact of various interventions taken up by the State Government and UTs.

➤ **Objectives of GGI:**

○ Provide quantifiable data to compare the State of Governance in the States and UTs.

○ Enable States and UTs to formulate and implement suitable strategies for improving governance.

○ Shift to result-oriented approaches and administration.

Good Governance Day – 25 December 2019

➤ The GGI takes into consideration the following **ten sectors**:

○ Agriculture and Allied Sectors,

○ Commerce & Industries,

○ Human Resource Development,

○ Public Health,

○ Public Infrastructure & Utilities,

○ Economic Governance,

○ Social Welfare & Development,

○ Judicial & Public Security,

○ Environment

○ Citizen-Centric Governance

➤ The States and UTs are divided into three groups — the **Big States, North-East and Hill States, and Union Territories**.

➤ **Findings of GGI:**

○ **Big States: Tamil Nadu topped** the index followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh whereas Odisha, Bihar, Goa, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand are **poor performers**.

○ **North-East and Hill States: Himachal Pradesh** ranked first, followed by Uttarakhand, Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim. Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh are the worst performers in this group.

○ **Union Territories: Puducherry** is the best-governed UT followed by Chandigarh and Delhi. Lakshadweep is the worst performing UT.

Note:

Atal Bihari Vajpayee

➢ Atal Bihari Vajpayee was born on **December 25, 1924** in the erstwhile princely state of Gwalior (now a part of the Indian State of **Madhya Pradesh**).

➢ He entered in national politics during the **Quit India Movement of 1942** which hastened the end of British colonial rule.

➢ He was the Prime Minister of the country in **1996 (for a short period of time) and 1999**. He is the first Prime Minister since Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to have become Prime Minister of India **with two successive mandates**.

➢ He has been elected to the **Lok Sabha nine times** and to the **Rajya Sabha** twice. In **1994**, he was named **India's 'Best Parliamentarian'**.

➢ He was conferred with the **country's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna** in 2015 and **second-highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan** in 1994.

Restructuring of Railway Board

Why in News

The Union Cabinet has approved **restructuring of the Railway Board**.

➢ The **number** of **Railway Board members** will be **reduced to five from existing eight**.

➢ The **eight railway services** will be **integrated** into a central service called the **Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS)**. All employees at the management level will come into the Railways through one service — the IRMS.

  ❍ The Indian Railways is organised into service departments such as traffic, civil, mechanical, electrical, signal & telecom, stores, personnel, and accounts.

➢ This is in line with the recommendations of numerous committees, notably **Rakesh Mohan (2001)** and the **Bibek Debroy panel (2015)**.

Restructured Board

➢ The Board will now consist of **five members** – Chairman, who will act as a CEO, along with four members responsible for infrastructure, operations and business development, rolling stock and finance.

Railway Board

➢ The Railway Board was constituted in **1905** as the **chief administrative and executive body** to assist the Minister of Railways.

➢ It consists of a Chairman and **seven members** from different service departments such as traffic, civil, mechanical, electrical and signal & telecom.

➢ There will also be a **Directorate General - Human Resources (DG - HR)** under the Chairman. The Board will also have some independent members, who will be highly distinguished professionals.

➢ The modalities and unification of the services will be worked out by the Ministry of Railways in consultation with the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

➢ The Railways will also **upgrade the 27 General Managers (GMs)** working at zonal levels to secretary level grade – highest in the government of India.

Objective

➢ The integration of service departments will **cut the clutter in decision making** and organise the working of the Railway Board and its zones along more commercial lines. This will also **end departmentalism**.

  ❍ The lack of coordination between the maintenance and traffic staff is said to have played a role in the Khatauli rail mishap near Muzaffarnagar in August 2017.

➢ It will streamline railway operations and provide flexibility the way Railways deploy people. It is a **step towards corporatisation**.

  ❍ **Corporatisation** refers to the restructuring or transformation of a state-owned asset or organization into a corporation.

UGC Issues Norms for Ethics in Higher Education

Why in News

Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has adopted the **Higher Education Quality Improvement Programme Mandate** to improve the quality in higher educational institutions.

➢ **The Quality Mandate** was developed by the **University Grants Commission** (UGC) which contains 5 documents covering the **5 verticals of Quality Mandate**:

- ○ Evaluation reforms
- ○ Eco-friendly and sustainable university campuses
- ○ Human values & professional ethics
- ○ Faculty induction
- ○ Academic research integrity

Key Points

- ➢ The **quality mandate aims at** evolving higher education system to equip the country's next generation with vital skills, knowledge and ethics for leading a rewarding life.
  - ○ Student evaluation plays a crucial role in improving the quality of Higher Education in the country.

Five Documents on 5 verticals of Quality Mandate

- ➢ **Evaluation reforms:** Under this, the report **'Evaluation Reforms in Higher Educational Institutions in India'** has been published in order to make student assessment more meaningful, effective and linked to **'Learning Outcomes'**.
- ➢ **Eco-friendly and Sustainable University Campuses:** The **SATAT** - **Framework for Eco-Friendly and Sustainable Campus development in Higher Educational Institutions** encourages universities to adopt reflective policies and practices to enhance the environmental quality of the campus and to adopt sustainable and green methods in its future.
- ➢ **Human Values & Professional Ethics:** A policy framework **'MulyaPravah – Guidelines for Inculcation of Human Values and Professional Ethics in Higher Educational Institutions'** has been developed to discuss and streamline the process that helps to infuse the culture of human values and ethics in educational institutions.
  - ○ The **guidelines** for values and ethics in higher education call for students to-
    - • **Observe modesty** in their overall appearance and behaviour.
    - • **Maintain good health** and refrain from any kind of intoxicants.
    - • **Maintain harmony** among students belonging to different socio-economic status, community, caste, religion or region.
- ➢ **Faculty Induction:** The guidelines for Guru-Dakshta – A guide to **Faculty Induction Programme (FIP)** will fulfill its main objective to sensitise and motivate the faculty

to adopt learner centred approaches, **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)** integrated learning and new pedagogic approaches to teaching-learning, assessment tools in higher education.

- ➢ **Academic Research Integrity:** UGC is putting up efforts for setting up a **Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics (UGC-CARE)** to continuously monitor and identify quality journals across disciplines. It will be useful to create more awareness and help the cause of promoting academic integrity and ethical publishing.

University Grants Commission

- ➢ It came into existence on **28th December, 1953** and became a **statutory organization** of the Government of India by an **Act of Parliament in 1956**, for the coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research in university education.
- ➢ The **head office** of the UGC is located in **New Delhi**.

India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2019

Why in News

The Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change has released the India State of Forest Report (ISFR), 2019.

- ➢ ISFR is a **biennial publication** of **Forest Survey of India (FSI)**, an organization under the Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change.
- ➢ The ISFR **assesses** the forest and tree cover, bamboo resources, carbon stock and forest fires.
- ➢ The 2019 report for the first time has assessed the qualitative nature of the forest cover, including listing its biodiversity and the type of plants and trees found.
- ➢ It also created a **national forest inventory for the first time** on produce from forests.

Key Findings

- ➢ **Forest Cover**
  - ○ Forest Cover (Area-wise): Madhya Pradesh> Arunachal Pradesh> Chhattisgarh> Odisha> Maharashtra.
  - ○ Forest Cover (Percentage): Mizoram (85.4%)> Arunachal Pradesh (79.63%)> Meghalaya (76.33%).

- ➤ **Increase in Forest Cover**
  - ○ The country's forest cover includes all patches of land with a tree canopy density of more than 10% and more than 1 hectare in area, irrespective of land use, ownership and species of trees.
  - ○ The total forest cover of the country is 7,12,249 sq km which is **21.67% of the geographical area** of the country.
  - ○ The **top five states** to have shown an increase in forest cover include **Karnataka (1,025 sq km) > Andhra Pradesh (990 sq km) > Kerala (823 sq km) > J&K (371 sq km) > Himachal Pradesh (334 sq km)**.
- ➤ **Decline of Forest Cover in North Eastern Region**
  - ○ Total forest cover in the North Eastern region is 1,70,541 sq km, which is 65.05% of its geographical area.
  - ○ There has been a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 765 sq km (0.45%) in the region. **Except Assam and Tripura, all the States** in the region show **decrease** in forest cover.
- ➤ **Forest Cover in Tribal Districts**
  - ○ The total forest cover in the tribal districts is 4,22,351 sq km, which is 37.54% of the geographical area of these districts.
  - ○ There has been a decrease of 741 sq km of forest cover within the Recorded Forest Area/ Green Wash (RFA/GW) in the tribal districts and an increase of 1,922 sq km outside.
  - ○ There has been a decline in tree cover inside forests due to tribal populations getting **"land titles" (patta)** and there has been a rise in trees outside the forest area due to an increase in tree plantation and afforestation activities.

> **Note**
> - ➤ **Recorded Forest Area:** The area recorded as forest in the Government records.
> - ➤ **Green Wash:** The extent of wooded areas generally shown in light green colour on the Survey of India toposheets.

- ➤ **Increase in the tree cover**
  - ○ Tree cover includes all patches of trees less than 1 hectare.
  - ○ The tree cover of the country is estimated as 95,027 sq km which is 2.89% of the geographical area.

- ○ **Maharashtra has had the highest increase in tree cover** and a large part of that is due to horticulture.
- ➤ **In comparison to 2017**
  - ○ The 2019 survey has found an increase of 5,188 sq km in total forest and tree cover in the country.
  - ○ **Tree and forest cover** together made up **24.56% (8,07,276 sq km)** of India's area. In the **last assessment** it was **24.39%**.
  - ○ The nation's tree and forest cover has largely hovered from 21-25% and is short of the **National Forest Policy, 1988**, which envisages 33% to be under such cover.
- ➤ Mangrove cover in the country has increased by 54 sq km (1.10%) as compared to the previous assessment.
- ➤ **Carbon Stock**
  - ○ The total carbon stock of the country was estimated at **7124 million tons**, which is an **increase of 42.6 million tons** from the last assessment.
  - ○ It implies that India is on the right track to achieve its Paris Agreement commitment of 2.5 -3 billion carbon sinks.
- ➤ **Wetlands**
  - ○ The total number of wetlands located within the RFA/GW is 8.13%.
  - ○ Amongst the States, **Gujarat** has the largest area of wetlands within RFA in the country followed by **West Bengal**.
- ➤ **Forest Produce**
  - ○ Dependence of fuelwood on forests is the highest in the State of Maharashtra, whereas, for fodder, small timber and bamboo, dependence is highest in Madhya Pradesh.
- ➤ The analysis reveals that 21.40% of the forest cover of the country is highly to extremely fire prone.

> **National Forest Policy, 1988**
> - ➤ The policy aims at maintaining of environmental stability.
> - ➤ It looks at conserving the natural heritage of the country by preserving the remaining natural forests.
> - ➤ Increasing forest/tree cover in the country through massive afforestation and social forestry programmes.
> - ➤ Creating a massive people's movement for achieving these objectives and to minimise pressure on existing forests.

Note:

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SDG India Index by NITI Ayog

Why in News

NITI Aayog has released the **second edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index (SDG Index 2.0)**.

➤ The index documents the **progress made by India's States and Union Territories** towards achieving the **2030 SDG targets**.

➤ The Index spans 16 out of 17 SDGs which marks an **improvement over the 2018 Index**, which covered only 13 goals.

➤ The SDG India Index has been developed **in collaboration** with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), the United Nations, and the Global Green Growth Institute.

➤ The year **2020 will be the 5th anniversary** of the adoption of SDGs by 193 countries at the UN General Assembly.

Key Points

➤ **Methodology Followed**
  ○ A **composite score** for SDG Index (2019) was computed in the **range of 0–100** for each State/UT based on its aggregate performance across 16 SDGs.
    ● The **higher the score** of a State/UT, the **closer** it is towards **achieving the 2030 national targets**.
  ○ States /UTs are classified based on the SDG India Index Score as follows:
    ● **Aspirant:** 0–49
    ● **Performer:** 50–64
    ● **Front Runner:** 65–99
    ● **Achiever:** 100

➤ **National Analysis**
  ○ India's composite **score improved** from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019-20 with major success **in water and sanitation, power and industry**.

● However, **nutrition and gender equality continue to be problem areas** for India, requiring a more focused approach from the government
  ○ The ranks of **14 states have dropped** in the index **compared to 2018**.
  ○ All states and union territories **except for Delhi** have scored **above 65**.

➤ **State/UT Wise Analysis**
  ○ **States:**
    ● **Kerala** has the **top rank** with a score of 70 followed by **Himachal Pradesh with 69 points**. Further, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana shared the third spot with each state scoring 67 on the Index.
    ● **Bihar** has emerged as the **worst performer** with the **lowest** score of **50**. Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh are also some of the worst-performing states on the index.
    ● **Uttar Pradesh** has shown **maximum improvement** followed by Odisha and Sikkim.
  ○ **Union Territories:**
    ● **Chandigarh** has **topped** the list with the score of 70 followed by **Puducherry** with **66**.

TOP 12, THE STATES	
Kerala	70
Himachal	69
Andhra	67
Tamil Nadu	67
Telangana	67
Karnataka	66
Goa	65
Sikkim	65
Gujarat	64
Maharashtra	64
Uttarakhand	64
Punjab	62

BOTTOM 5, THE STATES	
Bihar	50
Jharkhand	53
Arunachal	53
Meghalaya	54
UP, Assam	55

TOP 5, THE UTs	
Chandigarh	70
Puducherry	66
Dadra & NH	63
Lakshadweep	63
Delhi, A&N Islands, Daman & Diu	61

GOAL-WISE TOP STATE/UTs

Goal 1: No Poverty Tamil Nadu, Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh	**Goal 2: Zero Hunger** Goa and Chandigarh
Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being Kerala and Puducherry	**Goal 4: Quality Education** Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh
Goal 5: Gender Equality Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh	**Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation** Andhra Pradesh and Chandigarh
Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy Sikkim and Puducherry	**Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth** Telangana and Chandigarh
Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure Kerala, Gujarat, Daman and Diu, Delhi and Dadra and Nagar Haveli	**Goal 10: Reduced Inequality** Telangana and Andaman and Nicobar Islands
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities Himachal Pradesh, Goa and Chandigarh	**Goal 12: Sustainable Consumption and Production** Nagaland and Chandigarh
Goal 13: Climate Action Karnataka and Lakshadweep	**Goal 14: Life Below Water** Karnataka
Goal 15: Life on Land Sikkim, Manipur, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep	**Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions** Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry

■■■

Note:

Economic Scenario

Highlights

- *GST Council Meet*
- *National Company Law Appellate Tribunal*
- *Operation Twist*
- *Locust Invasion in Gujarat*

- *Fund Raising Through Initial Public Offer*
- *MGNREGA Trends*
- *Financial Stability Report: RBI*

GST Council Meet

Why in News

Recently, **GST Council** held its **38ᵗʰ meeting** to decide on range of issues like taxation on lotteries, waiver on late fees, setting of industrial parks etc.

Key Points

➤ **Taxation on Lotteries:** The vote in this issue went in favour **(21 states voted for and 7 states voted against)** of the proposal and a uniform tax rate will come into **effect from March 1, 2020**.

   ❍ At present, there is a dual rate regime for lotteries, with **state-run lotteries taxed at 12%**, while state-authorised lotteries (run by **private players**) face a **28% tax rate**.

➤ The Council also **decided to waive the late fee for GSTR-1 (monthly return that summarizes all sales/outward supplies of a taxpayer) taxpayers** who have not filed returns from July 2017 to November 2019 if all the returns are filed by January 10, 2020.

   ❍ If this deadline is missed, then e-way bills will be blocked for defaulters.

➤ In **Jammu and Kashmir and the northeastern states, tax filing deadline** for November has been extended to the end of the year keeping in mind the situation.

➤ The Council has decided that all entities with **20% ownership by central or state governments** will be exempt from GST payable for long-term land leases (from January 1, 2020) to **facilitate the setting up industrial parks**.

   ❍ **Earlier,** only entities with a 50% government stake were exempt.

➤ It also imposed a **uniform tax rate of 18%** on **woven and non-woven bags** from **January 1, 2020**.

GST Council

➤ It is a **constitutional body** under **Article 279A** for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to **Goods and Service Tax** and was introduced by the Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016.

➤ The GST Council is **chaired by the Union Finance Minister** and other members are the Union State Minister of Revenue or Finance and Ministers in-charge of Finance or Taxation of all the States.

➤ It is **considered as a federal body** where both the centre and the states get due representation.

➤ Every decision of the Goods and Services Tax Council shall be taken at a meeting by a **majority of not less than three-fourths of the weighted votes of the members present and voting**, in accordance with the following principles, namely:

   ❍ the vote of the Central Government shall have a weightage of one third of the total votes cast, and

   ❍ the votes of all the State Governments taken together shall have a weightage of two-thirds of the total votes cast, in that meeting.

➤ Economic Survey 2017-18 also hailed the GST Council for its cooperative federalism which brings together the Center and States and can be applied to many other policy reforms.

Note:

National Company Law Appellate Tribunal

Why in News

The **National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)** has held that the **removal of Cyrus Pallonji Mistry** from the **post of Executive Chairman** of Tata Sons in 2016 was **illegal**.

➢ The Tribunal has set aside a July 2017 order by the Mumbai bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which had upheld Mistry's removal from his position.

➢ The NCLAT also declared the conversion of the 'Tata Sons Limited' **from 'Public Limited Company' to 'Private Limited Company'** by Registrar of Companies **illegal**. It remarked that the decision to convert the company to private was 'prejudicial' and 'oppressive' to the minority shareholders.

➢ In general, this decision by NCLAT will **empower the minority shareholders,** and will force Independent Directors to take their objections more seriously.

  ○ The Code for **Independent Directors,** which is part of the Companies Act, 2013, says that one of their functions is to **"safeguard the interests of all stakeholders, particularly the minority shareholders"**.

National Company Law Appellate Tribunal

➢ The NCLAT was constituted under **Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013** to hear appeals against the **orders of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)**.

  ○ NCLT is the outcome of the Eradi Committee which is quasi-judicial body to deal with corporate disputes that are of civil nature arising under the Companies Act, 2013.

➢ It is also the appellate tribunal for orders passed by the **NCLT(s) under Section 61 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016,** and for orders passed by the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) under Sections 202 and 211 of the IBC**.

➢ Any person aggrieved by any order of the NCLAT may file an **appeal to the Supreme Court**.

Note:

➢ **Minority shareholders:** They are the equity holders of a firm who does not enjoy the voting power of the firm by virtue of his or her below 50% ownership of the firm's equity capital.

➢ **Independent Director: An independent director** is a non-executive director of a company who helps the company in improving corporate credibility and governance standards. He/ She does not have any kind of relationship with the company that may affect the independence of his/ her judgment.

➢ **Public and Private Companies**

  ○ Under the Companies Act, 2013, a company may be formed for any lawful purpose by—

    ● Seven or more persons, where the company to be formed is to be a public company;

    ● Two or more persons (limited to 200), where the company to be formed is to be a private company;

    ● One person, where the company to be formed is to be One Person Company (a private company).

  ○ **Suffix after the Name of the Company:** 'Limited' in the case of a public limited company and 'Private Limited' in the case of a private limited company.

➢ **Registrars of Companies (ROC):** These appointed under Section 609 of the Companies Act are vested with the primary duty of registering companies and Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) floated in the respective states and the Union Territories and ensuring that such companies and LLPs comply with statutory requirements under the Act.

Operation Twist

Why in News

The **Reserve Bank of India** has announced that it will carry out **US-style 'Operation Twist'** to bring down long term interest rates.

➢ **Need of Operation Twist:** Despite a cumulative reduction of 135 basis points in repo rate since January 2019, banks have not been able to pass on the benefits to consumers.

'Operation Twist'

➢ 'Operation Twist' is when the **central bank uses the proceeds from the sale of short-term securities to buy long-term government debt papers,** leading to **easing of interest rates on the long term papers**.

➢ Operation Twist first appeared in 1961 as a way to strengthen the U.S. dollar and stimulate cash flow into the economy.

➢ In June 2012, Operation Twist was so effective that the yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury dropped to a 200-year low.

Key Points

➢ RBI will conduct **simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities under Open Market Operations (OMO)** for ₹10,000 crore each.

➢ It will purchase the long-term maturities (i.e government bonds maturing in 2029), and simultaneously sell the shorter duration ones (i.e. short-term bonds maturing in 2020).

➢ The eligible participants can bid or submit offers in electronic format on **RBI's Core Banking Solution (E-Kuber)**.

Open Market Operations

➢ Open Market Operations (OMO) is one of the quantitative (to regulate or control the total volume of money) monetary policy tools which is employed by the central bank of a country to control the money supply in the economy.

➢ OMOs are conducted by the RBI by way of sale or purchase of government securities (g-secs) to adjust money supply conditions.

➢ The central bank sells g-secs to remove liquidity from the system and buys back g-secs to infuse liquidity into the system.

➢ These operations are often conducted on a day-to-day basis in a manner that balances inflation while helping banks continue to lend.

➢ RBI carries out the OMO through commercial banks and does not directly deal with the public.

➢ The RBI uses OMO along with other monetary policy tools such as repo rate, cash reserve ratio and statutory liquidity ratio to adjust the quantum and price of money in the system.

Benefits

➢ This simultaneous purchase and sale will bring down interest on long term loans which can lead to increase in economic spending.

➢ OMOs are primarily done to maintain ample liquidity in the system, which reflects that the **RBI is keen that banks should transmit lower rates to borrowers**.

➢ The action of Operation Twist by the RBI is encouraging for the market. This step may become a driving factor for long-term economic activity and the addition of new investment stock.

Locust Invasion in Gujarat

Why in News

The **migratory insect – locust** has swarmed the northern parts of Gujarat, causing significant damage to agriculture.

➢ The **locusts**, known as **tiddis locally**, destroyed standing crops of castor, cumin, jatropha, cotton, and potato, and fodder grass in around 20 talukas.

➢ **Gujarat** has **not witnessed such an invasion** of locusts **since 1993-94**.

➢ The locusts emerged in February 2019 from Sudan and Eritrea in Africa's Red Sea Coast and travelled through Saudi Arabia and Iran to enter Pakistan, where they invaded the Sindh province and from there they moved into Rajasthan and Gujarat, where south western monsoon had prolonged this time.

○ The **UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** had issued an alert of a massive locust attack in South Asia covering Pakistan and India.

Note:

○ The **Locust Warning Organization (LWO)** in Jodhpur also noticed the swarms and predicted their trajectory across the international border.

Locust

➢ A locust is a large, mainly **tropical grasshopper** with strong powers of flight. They **differ from ordinary grasshoppers** in their ability to change behaviour (gregarize) and form swarms that can migrate over large distances.

➢ Locusts are generally seen during the months of June and July as the insects are active from summer to the rainy season.

➢ Locusts have a high capacity to multiply, form groups, migrate over relatively large distances (they can fly up to 150 km per day). They can rapidly reproduce and increase some 20-fold in three months.

➢ **Threat to Vegetation:** Adults Locust can eat their own weight every day, i.e. about two grams of fresh vegetation per day. A very small swarm eats as much in one day as about 35,000 people, posing a devastating threat to crops and food security.

➢ **FAO** provides information on the general locust situation to the global community and gives timely warnings and forecasts to those countries in danger of invasion.

➢ **Locust Warning Organisation (LWO),** Directorate of Plant Protection Quarantine and Storage, **Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare**, is responsible for monitoring, survey and control of Desert Locust in Scheduled Desert Areas mainly in the States of Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Fund Raising Through Initial Public Offer

Why in News

Fund raising through **Initial Public Offer (IPO)** in 2019 stood at Rs. 12,362 crore, lowest since 2014 when companies raised Rs 1,201 crore through IPOs.

➢ However, fund-raising through **Offers-For-Sale (OFS) and Qualified Institutional Placements (QIPs)** remained higher in 2019 as compared to 2018.

➢ The overall amount raised through **Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) and Real estate Investment Trusts (ReITs)** was 127% more than in previous year.

Initial Public Offer

➢ An Initial Public Offer (IPO) is the **selling of securities to the public in the primary market**.

○ **Primary market** deals with **new securities being issued for the first time**. It is also known as the new issues market.

○ It is different from secondary market where existing securities are bought and sold. It is also known as the stock market or stock exchange.

➢ It is when an unlisted company makes **either a fresh issue of securities or an offer for sale of its existing securities** or both for the first time to the public.

○ **Unlisted companies** are companies that are not listed on the stock exchange.

➢ It is generally used by new and medium-sized firms that are looking for funds to grow and expand their business.

Offer For Sale

➢ Under this method, **securities are not issued directly to the public but are offered for sale through intermediaries** like issuing houses or stock brokers.

➢ In this case, a company sells securities enbloc at an agreed price to brokers who, in turn, resell them to the investing public.

Qualified Institutional Placements

➢ A Qualified Institutional Placements (QIP) is a way for **listed companies** to raise capital without having to submit legal paperwork to market regulators.

○ These are more cost-efficient and were introduced in India to reduced the dependence of foreign capital in Indian economy.

➢ It is a **method of private placement** whereby a listed company can issue shares or convertible securities to a select group of investors.

➢ But unlike in an IPO, only institutions or **Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs)** can participate in a QIP issuance.

○ QIBs include mutual funds, domestic financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies, venture capital funds, foreign institutional investors, and others.

Infrastructure Investment Trust

➢ InvIT is a collective investment scheme **similar to a mutual fund**, which enables direct investment of

Note:

money from individual and institutional investors in infrastructure projects to earn a small portion of the income as return.

➢ The InvITs are regulated by the **SEBI (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014**.

Real estate Investment Trust

➢ ReITs are securities linked to real estate that can be traded on stock exchanges once they get listed.

➢ The structure of ReITs is **similar to that of a mutual fund**. Just like mutual funds, there are sponsors, trustees, fund managers and unit holders in ReITs.

➢ However, unlike mutual funds, where the underlying asset is bonds, stocks and gold, **ReITs invest in physical real estate**.

➢ The money collected is deployed in income-generating real estate. This income gets distributed among the unit holders. Besides regular income from rents and leases, gains from capital appreciation of real estate also form an income for the unit holders.
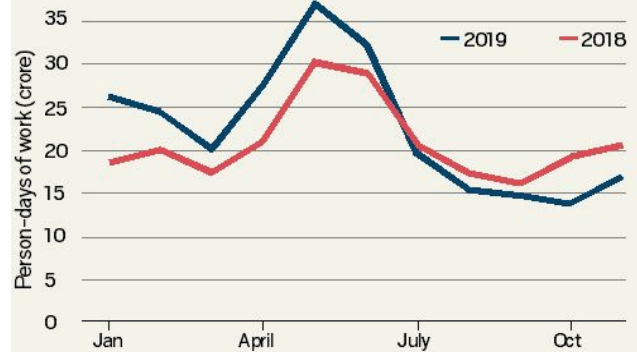
MGNREGA Trends

Why in News

After July 2019, the number of jobs generated under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** has gone down compared to 2018.
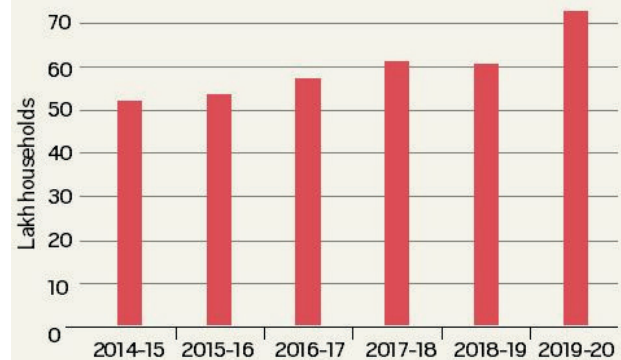
Key Points

➢ There has been a decrease in the number of people who were actually provided work out of the total number of households whose demand for work was registered by the gram panchayat authorities concerned. In 2018-19, demand was registered from 5.88 crore households, and 5.27 crore of them were provided work.

➢ The year 2019 has witnessed a dip in the person-days of employment under MGNREGA, which is visible after July.

   ○ In the period before July 2019, the work provided exceeded the corresponding levels for 2018.

   ○ The fall in MGNREGA employment after July has been **largely due to the onset of the southwest monsoon**.

➢ The gap between the number of households demanding MGNREGA work and the number who were provided work has been the highest in 2019-20. This indicates that even if demand fell, supply of work fell even more.

WORK PROVIDED, LAST YEAR & THIS YEAR

DEMAND-SUPPLY GAP

Lack of Funds

➢ The cost of providing a day's work to a single person has been taken at an average of ₹249.86 for 2019-20. For 270.21 crore people, the MGNREGA budget worked out to roughly ₹67,514.67 crore.

➢ But the total budgetary allocation has been only ₹60,000 crore, which also includes provision towards material and administrative expenses.

   ○ Adding to the problem, ₹55,829.62 crore was already spent as on December 24, 2019.

➢ Apart from this, the Centre has revised upwards its original plan of providing 260 crore person-days of work for 2019-20 to 316.73 crore person-days.

   ○ This move came after a decision to augment the number of days of employment per household under MGNREGA from 100 to 150 in flood-affected districts of states such as Karnataka.

Note:

Challenges with Other Schemes

➢ **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)**
  ○ In the first instalment (December 2018 to March 2019), 8.05 crore farmers were covered, with each of them receiving ₹2,000. Those numbers fell to 7.43 crore in the second instalment (April-July 2019) and further to 5.91 crore in the third (August-November).
  ○ In all, the total amount disbursed under the scheme for 2019-20 is ₹32,320.86 crore, which is significantly short of the ₹75,000 crore budgeted for it.
  ○ Further, of the total ₹95,000 crore allocated for the scheme since its inception in 2018, ₹48,421.65 crore (roughly half of the total amount) has been spent up to December 2019.

➢ **PM Awas Yojana-Gramin**
  ○ The number of rural houses built under the scheme has seen a drop to 7.2 lakh in 2019-20 from 47.33 lakh in 2018-19.
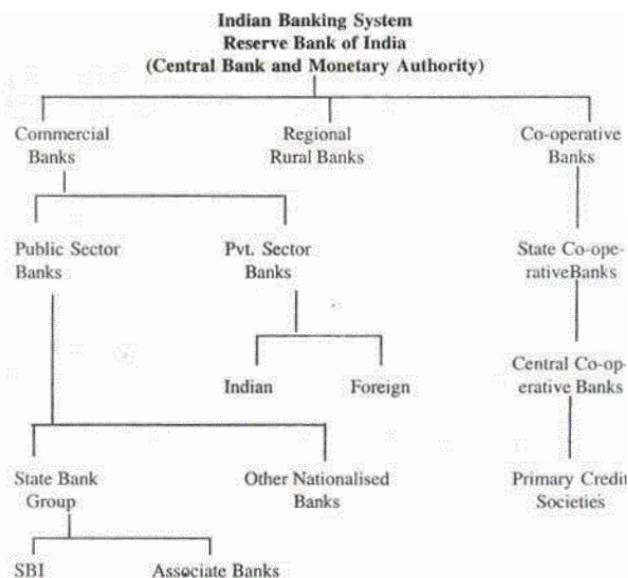
Financial Stability Report: RBI

Why in News

The Reserve Bank of India has released the 20th issue of the Financial Stability Report (FSR).

➢ The FSR reflects the collective assessment of the **Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)** on risks to financial stability and the resilience of the financial system.

➢ The Report also discusses issues relating to development and regulation of the financial sector.

Key Points

➢ **Credit Growth**
  ○ Bank credit is the total amount of funds a person or business can borrow from a bank.
  ○ Scheduled Commercial Banks' (SCBs) credit growth remained subdued at 8.7% year-on-year (y-o-y) in September 2019, down from 13.2% in March 2019.
  ○ Private Sector Banks (PSBs) registered double digit credit growth of 16.5% in September 2019.

➢ **Expected Increase in Gross Non-Performing Asset (GNPA) Ratio**
  ○ SCB's Gross Non-Performing Asset (GNPA) ratio of banks may increase to 9.9% by September 2020 from 9.3% in September 2019.

Indian Banking System
Reserve Bank of India
(Central Bank and Monetary Authority)

  ○ Public Sector Banks' (PSB) GNPA ratios may increase to 13.2% by September 2020 from 12.7% in September 2019.
  ○ For private banks, the ratio may climb to 4.2% from 3.9%, under the stress scenario.
  ○ Foreign banks' (FB) GNPA ratio may increase to 3.1% from 2.9% in September 2019.

Non-Performing Asset

➢ Non-Performing Assets (NPA) refer to a classification for loans or advances that are in default or are in arrears on scheduled payments of principal or interest.

➢ In most cases, debt is classified as non-performing, when the loan payments have not been made for a minimum period of 90 days.

➢ Gross non-performing loans are the sum of all the loans that have been defaulted by the individuals who have acquired loans from the financial institution.

➢ Net non-performing assets are the amount that is realized after provision amount has been deducted from the gross non-performing assets.

➢ All banks' **Capital to Risk-weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR)** improved to 15.1% in September 2019 from 14.3% in March 2019, following the recapitalisation of PSBs by the government.
  ○ CRAR is a measurement of a bank's available capital expressed as a percentage of a bank's risk-weighted credit exposures. It is also known as the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR).

Note:

- CAR = (Tier 1 Capital + Tier 2 Capital)/Risk weighted Assets
- Tier-1 capital, or core capital, consists of equity capital, ordinary share capital, intangible assets and audited revenue reserves. Tier-1 capital is the capital that is permanently and easily available to cushion losses suffered by a bank without it being required to stop operating.
- Tier-2 capital comprises unaudited retained earnings, unaudited reserves and general loss reserves. This capital absorbs losses in the event of a company winding up or liquidating

➢ **Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR)** of all SCBs rose to 61.5% in September 2019 from 60.5% in March 2019 implying increased resilience of the banking sector.
- Provisioning Coverage Ratio (PCR) refers to the prescribed percentage of funds to be set aside by the banks for covering the prospective losses due to bad loans.

Way Forward

➢ The global economy confronted a number of uncertainties – a delay in the Brexit deal, trade tensions, protectionism, oil-market disruptions and geopolitical risks – leading to significant deceleration in growth.

➢ As regards the domestic economy, aggregate demand slackened in second quarter of 2019-20 further extending the growth deceleration.

➢ Reviving the twin engines of consumption and investment while being vigilant about spillovers from global financial markets remains a critical challenge going forward.

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Note:

International Relations

Highlights

- Britain Elections
- Global Refugee Forum
- Indo – US 2+2 Dialogue
- Afghanistan First Country to Recognise Indian Pharmacopoeia

Britain Elections

Why in News

Britain elected Boris Johnson of the Conservative Party as its Prime Minister in the recently concluded elections. This victory gives Boris Johnson a clear mandate to take the United Kingdom out of the **European Union** without any delay.

Key Points

➢ Johnson called for an early election after reaching a new divorce deal with the EU. He turned the poll into a de facto **Brexit referendum**.
  ○ His strategy was to consolidate the pro-Brexit vote, get a fresh mandate in Parliament and then quicken the Brexit process.

> The Brexit Financial Settlement (Divorce Bill) is a sum of money UK needs to pay to the EU for settling all shares of the financial obligations undertaken while being a member of the EU, i.e., it sets out how UK and EU will settle their outstanding financial obligations.

➢ **Brexit:** In 2016, a referendum was held by the U.K. government and the nation voted to leave the EU. Now the process is under the U.K. Parliament for formal withdrawal from the EU.
➢ **Brexit** supporters wanted Britain to take back full control of its borders and reduce the number of people coming here to live and/or work.
➢ **Impact on Britain:**
  ○ It will give a boost to the nationalism with tougher laws on immigration.
  ○ Britain will also have to deal with Brexit's effect on its economy, including the long process of new bilateral trade agreements with many other countries, including India.

Challenges

➢ The road ahead is not smooth even after a timely exit. The **Brexit agreement** itself is **controversial** and it could **erect an effective customs border** between **Britain** and the **island of Ireland** after implementation.
  ○ It raises the concern on Brexit's impact on the **Good Friday Agreement**.

> **The Good Friday Agreement or the Belfast Agreement (1998):** It was a peace agreement between the British and Irish governments and most of the political parties in Northern Ireland, on how Northern Ireland should be governed.

➢ **Negotiating an agreement** on the U.K.'s future relationship with the EU is an equally challenging task.
➢ The **Scottish National Party** swept Scotland's seats which might revive pro-independence sentiments in Scotland.
  ○ Scotland had a **referendum in 2014** on whether it should stay in the U.K. or be independent of it. The referendum **rejected independence** and the Scottish population was in favour of remaining in the European Union.
  ○ Scotland rejected independence by **55% to 45%**.

Global Refugee Forum

Why in News

Recently, the **Global Refugee Forum meeting** was held in Geneva, Switzerland.
➢ It was the first ever meeting of global refugee forum.

Key Points

➢ **Global Refugee Forum** is guided by the **Global Compact on Refugees**.

- The **compact** calls for greater support to refugees and the countries that host them, often among the poorest in the world, and also aims to help refugees become more self-reliant so that they can contribute more to their own future and to that of the host community.

➢ The compact emerged from the **New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016**.

- The United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the declaration in 2016. It reaffirms the importance of the international refugee regime and contains a wide range of commitments by Member States to strengthen and enhance mechanisms to protect people on the move.

➢ It is part of the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

➢ It is a **UN Refugee Agency** and a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting the rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

➢ It was **created in 1950** to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes.

➢ It is headquartered at **Geneva, Switzerland**.

Indo – US 2+2 Dialogue

Why in News

India and the US have recently concluded **second** 2+2 ministerial dialogue in **Washington**.

➢ Several landmark agreements in both defence and Civilian sectors were signed. Few of the important agreements are:

➢ **Industrial Security Annex (ISA)**

- ISA to the General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) will provide a framework for exchange and protection of **classified** military information **between the U.S. and Indian defence industries**.

- Currently, under GSOMIA, such information is exchanged between the Government authorities of the two countries but **not** between **private parties**.

- This will further promote **"Make in India"** in the defence sector. In accordance with the budget announcement (2018-19), the government has

decided to set up two Defence Industrial Corridors in the Country, one in Uttar Pradesh and another in Tamil Nadu.

➢ **Peacekeeping for Indo-Pacific**

- Cooperation in **capacity-building** of UN peacekeepers from Indo-Pacific countries, based on demands from the countries concerned.

- Counter-terrorism efforts were also discussed including dangers of cross border terrorism.

➢ **Tiger Triumph Exercise**

- To hold the India-U.S. joint tri-services 'Tiger Triumph' on an **annual** basis.

- **The first edition** was held in **November 2019** as a **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**.

➢ **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)**

- The CDRI was launched at the UN Climate Action Summit in **New York, USA** in September 2019. It is **headquartered in New Delhi, India**.

- The US is now part of it.

➢ **Water Resource Management**

- Memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Ministry of **Jal Shakti** and the **U.S. Geological Survey** to promote **technical cooperation** in water resources management and water technology.

➢ **Space Situational Awareness (SSA)**

- Cooperation for exchange of information including **space debris and space traffic management**.

- It ensures **navigational safety of our space assets**.

'2+2' Dialogue

➢ It is a format of dialogue where the **defense and foreign ministers or secretaries** meet with their counterparts from another country. 2+2 Ministerial is the highest-level institutional mechanism between the two countries

➢ India holds such talks with **Australia**, at the foreign secretary and defense secretary level but with **Japan** and the **US** at the ministerial level.

➢ With the US this was the second 2+2 meeting (Washington), First was held in New Delhi in September 2018.

➢ US holds such ministerial dialogues with **Australia and Japan** also.

- ➢ **The Young Innovators Internship Programme (YIIP)**
  - ○ Create **internship** opportunities in **key areas of science and economy**.
  - ○ New opportunities for **young entrepreneurs**.
- ➢ **Parliamentary Exchange and Judicial cooperation**
  - ○ **Reciprocal visits** by Parliamentarians from both countries.
  - ○ The U.S. Federal Judicial Center and **India's National Judicial Academy in Bhopal** to cooperate in the area of **counter-terrorism jurisprudence to new** areas of **criminal jurisprudence** including **money laundering, drug trafficking** etc.

Afghanistan First Country to Recognise Indian Pharmacopoeia

Why in News

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has formally recognised the Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP), recently.

- ➢ It is a reputable book of standards for drugs. Now it will be used in Afghanistan to ensure quality of health products.

Indian Pharmacopoeia

- ➢ It is an officially recognized book of standards as per the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules 1945 thereunder.
- ➢ As per the Second Schedule of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, IP is designated as the official book of standards for drugs imported and/or manufactured for sale, stock or exhibition for sale or distribution in India.
  - ○ It specifies the standards of drugs manufactured and marketed in India in terms of their identity, purity and strength.
- ➢ Standards prescribed in the IP are authoritative in nature and are enforced by the regulatory authorities for quality control of medicines in India.
- ➢ It is being published as an official document for improving quality of medicines by way of adding new and updating existing monographs by the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission.

Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission

- ➢ It is an **autonomous institution** under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** which is responsible to set standards of drugs in the country.
- ➢ It promotes public and animal health in India by bringing out authoritative and officially accepted standards for quality of drugs including active pharmaceutical ingredients, excipients and dosage forms, used by health professionals, patients and consumers.
- ➢ It also develops IP Reference Substances (IPRS) that act as fingerprints for identification of an article under test and its purity as prescribed in the IP monographs.

The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940
- ➢ It is an act of Parliament which regulates the import, manufacturing and distribution of drugs in India.
- ➢ Its objective is to ensure that the drugs and cosmetics sold in India are safe, effective and fulfils the safety standards and parameters.

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Note:

Science and Technology

Highlights

- Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle
- Water Hyacinth Helps Detect Herbicide Pollution
- Electro-Kinetic Streaming to Tap Energy from Water
- Strand Hogg
- Space Force by USA
- CST-100 Starliner

Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle

Why in News

Recently, the **Supreme Court** of India has directed the government to look into the feasibility of **Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV)** to deal with air pollution.

➢ Research is ongoing at the **International Research Center for Hydrogen Energy at Kyushu University, Japan** on FCEVs based on **hydrogen cell technology**, also known as **'fuel cells'**.

➢ In this context the Indian government is studying the research closely as it readies a hydrogen-fuelled blueprint.
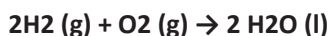
Fuel Cell

➢ Fuel cells and batteries **convert chemical energy into electrical energy** and are very useful forms of galvanic cell.

➢ A galvanic or voltaic cell is an electrochemical cell that converts chemical energy into electrical energy through the **redox reactions** that occur within the cell.

➢ Galvanic cells that are designed to convert the energy of combustion of fuels like hydrogen, methane, methanol, etc. directly into electrical energy are called fuel cells. One of the most successful fuel cells uses the reaction of hydrogen with oxygen to form water.

Key Points

➢ **Mechanism:** The **Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV)** combines hydrogen and oxygen to generate an electric current and **water is the only byproduct**.

Hydrogen + Oxygen = Electricity + Water Vapour

$$2H_2 \text{ (g)} + O_2 \text{ (g)} \rightarrow 2 H_2O \text{ (l)}$$

➢ **Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV)** engines are **similar to the conventional internal combustion engines** because they also **rely on a constant supply** of fuel (hydrogen) and oxygen.

  ○ However, there are **no moving parts** in the fuel cell, so they are **more efficient and reliable**.

➢ **Stationary fuel cells are the largest and most powerful** fuel cells. These are being designed to provide a cleaner, reliable source of on-site power to hospitals, banks, airports and homes.

➢ The successful development of the technology would **provide energy for transportation and electric power**.

➢ **Hydrogen fuel tanks** are made from **highly durable carbon fibre**. Some FCEVs have a triple-layer hydrogen tank made of woven carbon fibre.

Advantages

➢ FCEVs produce much **smaller quantities of greenhouse gases** and none of the air pollutants that cause health problems.

➢ Fuel cells **emit only heat and water as a byproduct** and are **far more energy-efficient** than traditional combustion technologies.

➢ FCEVs **do not need to be plugged in for charging,** like battery-powered EVs.

➢ There is a **wide availability of resources for producing hydrogen**.

Disadvantages

➢ The **process of making hydrogen needs energy,** often from **fossil fuel** sources, which raises questions over hydrogen's green credentials.

➢ Handling of hydrogen is a safety concern because it is **more explosive** than petrol.

Note:

drishti

➢ These vehicles are expensive and fuel dispensing pumps are scarce.

Status in India

➢ In India, so far, the definition of **Electric Vehicles** only covers **Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs)**.
  ○ BEVs have **no internal combustion engine or fuel tank** and run on a **fully electric drive train powered by rechargeable batteries**.

➢ The Government of India has launched **FAME India Scheme** with the objective to support hybrid/electric vehicles market development and manufacturing ecosystem. It also covers Hybrid & Electric technologies like Mild Hybrid, Strong Hybrid, Plug in Hybrid & BEVs.

➢ The **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, under its Research, Development and Demonstration (RD&D) Programme,** has been supporting various projects on hydrogen and fuel cells.

➢ The **Ministry of Science and Technology** has supported two networked centres on **hydrogen storage** led by IIT Bombay and Nonferrous Materials Technology Development Centre, Hyderabad.

Water Hyacinth Helps Detect Herbicide Pollution

Why in News

Researchers have used **invasive plant water hyacinth** to produce **carbon nanoparticles** which can be used for **detecting** a commonly used **herbicide — pretilachlor**.

➢ The nanoparticles were found to be **selective and sensitive** for the **detection of the herbicide**.

Key Points

➢ **Carbon Dots:**
  ○ The water hyacinth without chlorophyll is powdered and heated at 150 degree Celsius to **convert it to carbon dots**.
    ● When a nanoparticle is **less than 10 nanometre** it is known as a **dot or nanodot**.

➢ **Working Principle:**
  ○ The **carbon dots** gives a green fluorescence under **UltraViolet (UV) light**, due to the presence of **oxygen functional groups** on the surface of the dot.
  ○ The fluorescence intensity of carbon dot **increases** in the **presence** of the **herbicide**.

  ● The electron transfer between the dot and the herbicide enables the fluorescence enhancement.
  ● The carbon dot is **extremely sensitive** to **pretilachlor** and could detect even very small quantity of it.

➢ **Advantages:**
  ○ The detection of herbicides through carbon dots is a **commercially viable option** compared to the currently available sensors in the market as the raw material i.e. water hyacinth is readily available.
  ○ It will help to convert waste material like the water hyacinth to produce useful technology.

Water Hyacinth

➢ Water hyacinth is a free-floating aquatic plant native to **South America**. It is considered as an **invasive alien species**.

➢ Single plant of water Hyacinth is capable of duplicating itself every **nine** days.

➢ It is also referred to as the **terror of Bengal** given its effect on the local ecology and lives of the people.

➢ It has an effect on irrigation, hydroelectric generation and navigation.

➢ It also leads to a drastic reduction in fish production, aquatic crops and an increase in diseases caused by mosquitoes.

Electro-Kinetic Streaming to Tap Energy from Water

Why in News

The **Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati (IIT-G) researchers** have developed materials that can **produce energy from flowing or stagnant water in households**.

Note:

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➢ The decentralised energy model involves a large number of small generation devices which can generate energy in every household and the excess energy can be transferred to energy-deficient areas nearby.

Key Points

➢ The generation of energy from water in various forms like river flow, ocean tides, stagnant water and even raindrops is now known as **"Blue Energy"**.

❍ These are the traditional form of blue energy and there have been efforts to harness the power of water in other ways. One such out-of-the-box blue source is electrokinetic energy.

➢ Two different methods have been employed to harvest energy from the flowing water and the stagnant waters.

➢ **Electro-Kinetic Streaming Potential:**

❍ By this method, energy can be harvested from flowing tap water.

❍ When fluids stream through tiny channels that are charged, they can generate an electrical voltage, which may be harnessed through miniaturised generators.

❍ Although the exploration of such electrokinetic phenomena and their possible use for energy conversion have been known for over half a century, they have not been harnessed because of low efficiency arising from the unsuitability of channels for the fluid stream.

➢ **Contrasting Interfacial Activities:**

❍ These entail different types of semiconducting materials to generate power from stagnant water.

❍ Devices were fabricated with doped graphene flakes for generating power by dipping in a bucket of water in the stagnant water source to "complementary charge transfer activities".

● Graphene is the sheet produced by oxidation followed by reduction of natural graphite flakes.

● Graphene was modified to manipulate its electron density so that even stagnant water in contact with this form of graphene can produce energy.

Streaming Potential

➢ It is the potential difference at zero current produced by the convective flow of charge due to a pressure gradient (flow of liquid) through a charged capillary, membrane, plug, or diaphragm.

StrandHogg

Why in News

The Union Home Ministry has alerted States, warning them about the vulnerability of the **Android operating system** to a bug called 'StrandHogg'.

About StrandHogg

➢ It is a vulnerability in android which allows **real-time malware applications** to pose as genuine applications and access user data of all kinds.

➢ It can **listen** to the conversations, access photo album, read/send messages, **make calls**, **record** conversations, **get login credentials** to various accounts, access private images, files, contact details, call logs and location information without being apparent to the affected users.

Space Force by USA

Why in News

Recently, the US President signed the **National Defense Authorization Act, 2020** directing the establishment of the **U.S. Space Force (USSF)** as the **sixth branch of the armed forces**.

➢ The establishment of USSF comes after the launch of a new Pentagon Command named **Spacecom** (Sept, 2019).

Key Points

➢ The USSF will be the **sixth formal force** of the U.S. military, after the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard and will be headquartered at the **Pentagon**.

➢ **Objectives:**

❍ Maintaining and enhancing the competitive edge of the **Department of Defense** (DOD) in space.

❍ Developing military space professionals, acquiring military space systems, maturing the **military doctrine** for space power and organizing space forces, etc.

❍ Effectively organizing the defence for US interests in space, especially related to satellites used for navigation and communication.

> ➢ **Concerns: China and Russia** have apprehensions regarding this development. It is being perceived as increasing **weaponization of outer space** and turning cosmos into a battlefield.

CST-100 Starliner

Why in News

CST-100 Starliner is a space capsule which failed its first test flight. Its objective was to **ferry astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS)**.

Key Points

➢ The capsule **CST-100 Starliner** was built by **Boieng**.

➢ **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** relies on Russia to get its astronauts on the space station. This failure is likely to **push back** further **NASA's attempt at resuming human spaceflight** from the United States.

➢ **NASA** has contracts with **Boeing and SpaceX** to build spacecraft to ferry astronauts to and from the ISS.

     ○ SpaceX's **Crew Dragon** capsule is scheduled to launch in 2020. It will be a crewless flight, and if it succeeds, SpaceX could be in a position to send astronauts into space.

International Space Station

➢ The International Space Station (ISS) is a habitable artificial satellite - the single **largest man-made structure in the low earth orbit**.

➢ It circles the Earth in roughly **92 minutes** and completes **15.5 orbits per day**.

➢ The ISS programme is a **joint project** between **five** participating space agencies: **NASA (United States), Roscosmos (Russia), JAXA (Japan), ESA (Europe), and CSA (Canada)** but its ownership and use has been established by intergovernmental treaties and agreements.

➢ Its first component was launched into orbit in **1998** and its development and assembly still continues.

➢ It serves as a microgravity and space environment research laboratory in which crew members conduct experiments in biology, human biology, physics, astronomy, meteorology, and other fields.

➢ It is expected to operate until 2030.

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Note:

Environment and Ecology

Highlights

- COP 25 Ends Without Concrete Outcome
- EU Green Deal
- First Meeting of National Ganga Council
- Rhinos to be Re-introduced in Uttarakhand

- Bar-headed Goose Spotted in Kerala
- Hoolock Gibbon
- Amur Falcon
- Annual Flamingo Festival at Pulicat Lake

COP 25 Ends Without Concrete Outcome

Why in News

The 25th edition of the **Conference of the Parties, Madrid (COP25)** to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** ended without any outcome on the **creation of a system of credits for reduction of emissions** for the second year in a row.

➢ Earlier, COP24 at Katowice (Poland) 2019 also couldn't decide on issues like the creation of new carbon markets, emission reduction targets, etc.

➢ This was the **longest climate COP meeting** ever in 25 nearly annual editions.

Key Points

➢ **"Chile-Madrid Time for Action" declaration:**
  ○ The summit passed the declaration calling on countries to **improve** their current pledges **to reduce greenhouse gas emissions**.
  ○ It also endorsed to help poor countries that are suffering the effects of climate change, although **any new funds were not allocated for the purpose**.
  ○ It called on the **"urgent need" to cut planet-heating greenhouse gases** in line with the goals of the 2015 Paris climate change accord.
    ● The Paris Accord established the common goal of **avoiding a temperature increase of more than 1.5 degrees Celsius** by the end of the century.
    ● So far, the world is on **course for a 3 to 4 degree Celsius rise,** with potentially dramatic consequences for many countries, including rising sea levels and fiercer storms.

➢ **Disagreements:**
  ○ The Summit **couldn't** reach a **final agreement** on **Carbon markets**.
    ● Carbon markets allow for buying and selling of carbon emissions with the objective of reducing global emissions.
  ○ On the definition and composition of **Climate finances**.
    ● Climate finances refer to local, national or transnational financing—drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change.
  ○ The **voluntary commitments** to be made by nations towards emission reductions.
  ○ The key **polluting countries** responsible for **80% of the world's** emissions **did not make any substantial announcement** while smaller countries announced their targets to reduce emissions in the coming years.
    ● It backtracks on a principle of the **1992 convention of the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)** that states that rich countries have the biggest historical responsibility for emissions and should pay to help the poor to fix the problem.

➢ The **next Climate Summit will be held in Glasgow (Scotland) in 2020** which will decide about the liability for damages caused by rising temperatures.

EU Green Deal

Why in News

In the background of the failure of the global community to reach any agreement in the recently concluded **COP 25,**

the European Union (EU) has come up with a climate action plan known as the **European Green Deal**.

➢ The European Union is the **third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases** in the world after **China** and the **United States**.

Major Decisions under Green Deal

➢ **Achieving Climate Neutrality**

○ To become **"climate neutral" by 2050** and to achieve this, a law will be brought which will be binding on all member countries. A law will turn the political commitment into a legal obligation and will trigger the investments as well.

○ The **EU is now the first major emitter** to agree to the 2050 climate neutrality target laid down in the **Paris Agreement**.

● **Climate neutrality** is achieved when a **country's emissions are balanced by absorptions and removal of greenhouse gases** from the atmosphere. It is also expressed as a state of net-zero emissions.

● **Absorption** can be increased by creating more carbon sinks like forests, while **removal** involves technologies like carbon capture and storage.

Note: Bhutan and Suriname are the only carbon neutral countries in the world.

➢ **Increasing 2030 Emission Reduction Targets**

○ **Increase the reduction in its emissions to at least 50%** and work towards 55% in the near future.

● Earlier, the EU had committed to reduce its emissions by 40% by 2030 from 1990 levels under the Paris Agreement. This was already the most ambitious emission reduction targets among developed countries.

● For example, USA had agreed to cut emissions by 26-28% by 2030 from 2005 levels but after withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, it is under no obligations now.

● The EU is one of the major emitters to retain the 1990 baseline for emission cuts which were originally mandated under the **Kyoto Protocol** for all developed countries. Most other countries have shifted their baselines to 2005 or even later under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

➢ **Sectoral Plans:** It **includes sectoral plans** to achieve these targets which include making the steel industry carbon-free by 2030, new strategies for transport and energy sectors, a revision of management of railway and shipping to make them more efficient and more stringent air pollution emission standards for vehicles.

Achievements

➢ The EU has been **doing better than other developed countries on reducing emissions**.

➢ In terms of emission reductions, it probably is on track to meet the **target of 20% by 2020**, unlike any developed country outside the EU.

○ Canada reported a 4% reduction from 2005 levels. Japan reported an 8% reduction from the 2013 baseline.

Concerns

➢ The **EU has not been fulfilling all its climate obligations** because Kyoto Protocol requires rich and developed countries to provide finance and technology to developing countries to help them fight climate change. EU is **helping very less, especially for adaptation needs of developing countries**.

○ This is the main reason why developing countries like India and China, have been repeatedly raising the issue of unfulfilled obligations of developed countries.

➢ The Green Deal is **inadequate** for achieving the emission reductions because big emitters and large developing countries like China and India are not immediately scaling up their climate actions. Withdrawal of the USA has also negatively impacted the step towards climate change mitigation.

Way Forward

➢ Other countries need to raise their ambitions and the reduction targets and their policies should be in line with the global environmental agreements.

➢ EU should be more helpful towards developing nations so that its efforts do not get wasted and every nation is equally contributing towards conservation of the planet.

First Meeting of National Ganga Council

Why in News

Recently, the Prime Minister chaired the **first meeting of the National Ganga Council at Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh**.

Note:

National Ganga Council

➢ The National Ganga Council is **chaired** by **Prime Minister**.

➢ The National Ganga Council is formed under the **Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986**.

➢ It has been given overall responsibility for the superintendence of pollution prevention and rejuvenation of River Ganga Basin, including Ganga and its tributaries.

➢ National Mission for Clean Ganga(NMCG) acts as an implementation arm of the National Ganga Council.

    ❍ NMCG was established in the year 2011 as a registered society.

    ❍ It has a two-tier management structure and comprises of Governing Council and Executive Committee.

    ❍ The aims and objectives of NMCG are:

      ● To ensure effective control of pollution and rejuvenation of the river Ganga by adopting a river basin approach to promote inter-sectoral coordination for comprehensive planning and management.

      ● To maintain minimum ecological flows in the river Ganga with the aim of ensuring water quality and environmentally sustainable development.

➢ The **first meeting** of the Council was aimed at reinforcing the importance of a **'Ganga-centric' approach** in all departments of the concerned states as well as relevant Central Ministries.

➢ The National Ganga Council, also known as the National Council for Rejuvenation, Protection, and Management of River Ganga was set up in **2016**. It **replaced** the **National River Ganga Basin Authority (NRGBA)**.

Key Points

➢ The **'Namami Gange'** should holistically evolve to **'Arth Ganga'** i.e. a sustainable development model with a focus on **economic activities related to Ganga**.

➢ **Setting up of a digital dashboard** where data from villages and urban bodies to be **monitored** on a daily basis by **Niti Ayog and Ministry of Jal Shakti**.

➢ The need to increase the efficiency of **district Ganga committees** for effective implementation of the **Namami Gange Programme**.

➢ The **potential of religious and adventure tourism** in the Ganga river basin area to be explored in future. As the income generated from tourism activities would help to generate sustainable income for cleaning the Ganga.

➢ It also encouraged zero budget farming and to build plant nurseries on the banks of Ganga.

Rhinos to be Re-introduced in Uttarakhand

Why in News

Recently, the **Uttarakhand State Wildlife Board** has cleared a proposal by the **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** to introduce rhinoceroses in the **Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR)**.

➢ Around 10 **rhinos** will be brought in CTR in the **first phase** and 10 more would be added subsequently. A proposal will be sent to the Center for transporting rhinos from either Assam or West Bengal or both.

Key Points

Reason for translocation

➢ This has been done to boost tourism and revive the habitats of species that survive on low-height grass.

    ❍ Rhinos reduce the size of elephant grass by eating it which would encourage species thriving on lower-height grass like- Hog Deer, Cheetal, Sambar and Swamp Deer.

➢ **Geographical terrain and environmental conditions** in CTR are suitable for rhinos.

    ❍ Valley habitats bounded on either side by the lower Himalayas (north), Shivalik Hills (south) and the Ramganga Reservoir (east) are the ideal sites. They would act as natural barriers to rhino movement and will minimise man-animal conflict.

➢ The rhino's range, **once continuous** across the **flood plains of the Indus, Ganges and the Brahmaputra**, now limited to small fragmented pockets in India and Nepal as a result of anthropogenic pressures and poaching, as per the WII experts.

    ❍ Re-introduction into habitats in the historic range would create safety-net populations for the species and also restore their ecological role in these faunally-degraded habitats.

Note:

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Wildlife Institute of India

➢ It is an autonomous institution under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**.

➢ It was established in **1982**.

➢ It is based in **Dehradun, Uttarakhand**.

➢ It offers training programs, academic courses, and advisory in wildlife research and management.
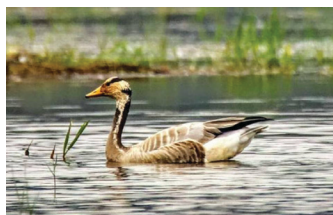
Corbett Tiger Reserve

➢ It is located in **Nainital district of Uttarakhand**.

➢ The **Project Tiger** was launched in 1973 in **Corbett National Park**, which is part of Corbett Tiger Reserve.

➢ **Ramganga, Sonanadi, Mandal, Palain and Kosi** are the major rivers flowing through the Corbett National Park.

➢ There are **50 Tiger Reserves** in India as of August, 2019.

○ Rhinos are poached because their **horns are considered an aphrodisiac**.

➢ Every translocated animal would be fitted with a **GPS radio-collar** for monitoring their **ranging patterns, foraging habits, demography and habitat use**.

○ The data will be shared with the Forest Department which would be responsible for the safety of these re-introduced rhinos.

Bar-headed Goose Spotted in Kerala

Why in News

A **Bar-headed Goose** has been spotted in **the wetlands of Karingali Puncha** in Pathanamthitta District of **Kerala**.

➢ In general, large flocks visit the **Koonthankulam bird sanctuary at Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu**. It is very rare that the bird is **spotted in Kerala**.

➢ The **wetlands of Karingali Puncha** is a major birding spot in the district. It reported the **highest bird count in the Asian Waterbird Census of 2015**.

Bar-headed Goose

➢ **Scientific Name:** Anser Indicus

➢ **Habitat**

○ Bar-headed geese are found in **central China and Mongolia** and they breed there.

○ They start migration to the **Indian sub-continent** during the winter and stay till the end of the season.

➢ **Special Feature**

○ They are one of the birds which can **fly even at very high altitude**. They come to India and return to their homes by **crossing the Himalayan ranges** - one of the most high-altitude migrations in the world.

○ The capacity of bar-headed geese to **transport and consume oxygen** at high rates in **hypoxia distinguishes this species** from similar lowland waterfowl.

➢ **IUCN Status:** Least Concern

Note:

Hypoxia: It is a condition of the body in which the tissues are starved of oxygen.

Asian Waterbird Census

➢ Every January, thousands of **volunteers** across Asia and Australasia visit wetlands in their country and count waterbirds. This citizen science programme is the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC).

○ Australasia comprises of Australia, New Zealand and some neighbouring Islands.

➢ The AWC was **initiated in 1987** in the Indian subcontinent. The census covers the **entire East Asian** – Australasian Flyway and a **large part of the Central Asian Flyway**.

➢ The main **objective** is to obtain annual information of waterbird populations at wetlands in the region, the status of wetlands, and encourage interest in waterbirds and wetlands among the public and thereby promote conservation.

➢ The AWC is an **integral part** of the global waterbird monitoring programme, the **International Waterbird Census (IWC)**, coordinated by Wetlands International.

Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary

➢ Situated in Tamil Nadu, it was **declared as a sanctuary in 1994**.

➢ It is an important protected area known for the **congregation of migratory and local water birds** – the grey pelican, the painted stork, the greater flamingo, the bar-headed goose, the open bill stork, the black ibis and other common species like egrets, cormorants and herons, among others.

Hoolock Gibbon

➢ The tailless Hoolock Gibbon is the **only ape found in India**.

➢ The primate is native to eastern Bangladesh, Northeast India and Southwest China.

➢ The Hoolock Gibbon is categorised into **two types**:

   ○ **Western Hoolock Gibbon:**

   ● It inhibits in **all the states of the northeast, restricted between the south of the Brahmaputra river and east of the Dibang river**. And outside India, it is found in eastern Bangladesh and north-west Myanmar.

   ● It is listed as **Endangered** under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

   ○ **Eastern Hoolock Gibbon:**

   ● It inhabits specific pockets of **Arunachal Pradesh** and **Assam** in India, and in southern China and north-east Myanmar outside India.

   ● It is listed as **Vulnerable** under the IUCN Redlist.

➢ In India, both the species are listed on **Schedule 1 of the Indian (Wildlife) Protection Act, 1972**.

Amur Falcon

➢ Amur falcons, the **world's longest travelling raptors** start travelling with the onset of winters.

➢ The raptors breed in southeastern Siberia and northern China, and migrate in millions across India and then over the Indian Ocean to southern Africa before returning to Mongolia and Siberia. Their **22,000 kilometre migratory route** is one of the longest amongst all avian species.

➢ They get their name from the **Amur River** that forms the **border between Russia and China**.

➢ **Doyang Lake in Nagaland** is better known as a **stopover for the Amur falcons** during their annual migration from their breeding grounds to warmer South Africa. Thus, **Nagaland** is also known as the **"Falcon Capital of the World"**.

➢ The birds are the **least concern** under **the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List**, but the species is **protected** under the **Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972,** and the **Convention on Migratory Species**, to which India is a signatory (which means it is mandatory to protect the birds).

Annual Flamingo Festival at Pulicat Lake

Why in News

The **annual Flamingo Festival** is to be held in January at **Pulicat lake**.

➢ The Pulicat lake supports **rich biodiversity and high biomass of fishes and planktons** which is utilised as food resources by visiting birds. Thus, about 75 aquatic and terrestrial bird species visit the sanctuary every year.

➢ The number of birds is much higher than usual due to abundant rains in 2019.

Pulicat Lake

➢ It is the **second-largest brackish water** ecosystem in the country **after the Chilika Lake** (Odisha).

➢ 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.

➢ The large varieties of birds like grey pelicans, painted storks, visit the site annually.

   ○ **Grey Pelican and Painted Stork** both are **near-threatened** species under **IUCN Red List of Threatened Species**.

■■■

Note:

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Art & Culture

Highlights

- *Earliest Sanskrit Inscriptions in South India Found in A.P.*
- *Ajanta and Ellora Caves*
- *Madan Mohan Malaviya Jayanti*
- *Sahitya Akademi Awards 2019*
- *Hunar Haat*
- *Kalka - Shimla Heritage Route*
- *Belum Caves Festival*
- *Kalaripayattu*

Earliest Sanskrit Inscriptions in South India Found in A.P.

Why in News

The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** has discovered the **earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India** which is also an **earliest epigraphic evidence** (Epigraphy is the study of ancient inscriptions) for the **Saptamatrika cult**.

- Saptamatrikas are a group of **seven female deities** worshipped in **Hinduism** as personifying the energy of their respective consorts.
- Another inscription in **Prakrit language and of Brahmi characters** belonging to the **1st century A.D.** was also found.

Key Points

- **Inscriptions related to Saptamatrika:** The found inscription records the **construction of a Prasada (temple), a mandapa** and **consecration of images** by a person named Kartika at the temple of **Goddess Saptamatrika** at Tambrape.
- **Location:** Tambrape is the **ancient name** of **Chebrolu, Andhra Pradesh**.
- **Earlier References to Saptamatrika:** Earlier references to Saptamatrika worship have been found in the early Kadamba copper plates and the early Chalukyas and Eastern Chalukya copper plates **dated around 600 A.D.**
- **Language and Characters:** All the available records proved that the found inscription (also known as **Chebrolu inscription**) is in **Sanskrit and in Brahmi characters**.
- **Issued by:** Satavahana king Vijaya in 207 A.D.

- So far the **Nagarjunakonda inscription of Ikshavaku king Ehavala Chantamula** issued in the 4th century A.D. was considered the earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India.

Satavahanas

- In the Deccan, the Satavahanas established their independent rule after the decline of the Mauryas. Their rule lasted for about **450 years**.
- They were also known as the **Andhras**.
- The Puranas and the **Nasik and Nanaghad inscriptions** remain important sources for the history of Satavahanas.
- The **founder** of the Satavahana dynasty was **Simuka**. The greatest ruler of the Satavahana dynasty was **Gautamiputra Satakarni**.
- There was remarkable progress in the fields of trade and industry during the Satavahana rule. The greatest port of the Satavahanas was **Kalyani on the western Deccan and Gandakasela, Ganjam on the east coast** were the other important seaports.
- The Satavahanas **patronized Buddhism and Brahmanism**. Brahmanism was revived by the Satavahanas along with the performance of asvamedha and rajasuya sacrifices.
- They also **patronized the Prakrit language and literature**.

Ajanta and Ellora Caves

Why in News

Two tourist visitor centres set up at Ajanta and Ellora caves by the Maharashtra government have been shut due to their pending water and electricity dues worth ₹5 crore.

Note:

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Ajanta Caves

➢ **Location:** Ajanta is a series of rock-cut caves in the **Sahyadri ranges (Western Ghats)** on Waghora river near Aurangabad in **Maharashtra**.

➢ **Number of Caves:** There are a total of 29 caves (all buddhist) of which 25 were used as Viharas or residential caves while 4 were used as Chaitya or prayer halls.

➢ **Time of Development**

  ○ The caves were developed in the period between **200 B.C. to 650 A.D**.

  ○ The Ajanta caves were inscribed by the Buddhist monks, under the patronage of the **Vakataka kings** – Harishena being a prominent one.

  ○ Reference of the Ajanta caves can be found in the travel accounts of **Chinese Buddhist travellers Fa Hien** (during the reign of Chandragupta II; 380- 415 CE) and **Hieun Tsang** (during the reign of emperor Harshavardhana; 606 - 647 CE).

➢ **Painting**

  ○ The figures in these caves were done using **fresco painting**.

  ○ The outlines of the paintings were done in red colour. One of the striking features is the **absence of blue colour** in the paintings.

  ○ The paintings are generally **themed around Buddhism** – the life of Buddha and Jataka stories.

➢ **UNESCO Site:** The caves were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in **1983**.

Ellora Caves

➢ **Location:** It is located nearly 100 Kms away from Ajanta caves in the **Sahyadri range of Maharashtra**.

➢ **Number of Caves:** It is a group of **34 caves** – **17 Brahmanical**, **12 Buddhist** and **5 Jain**.

➢ **Time of Development**

  ○ These set of caves were developed during the period between the **5th and 11th centuries A.D.** (newer as compared to Ajanta Caves) by various guilds from Vidarbha, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

  ○ That is why the caves reflect a natural diversity in terms of theme and architectural styles.

➢ **UNESCO Site:** The Ellora complex was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in **1983**.

➢ The most remarkable of the cave temples is Kailasa **(Kailasanatha; cave 16)**, named for the mountain in the Kailasa Range of the Himalayas where the Hindu god Shiva resides.

Sahyadri Range

➢ Western Ghats are locally known by different names such as **Sahyadri in Maharashtra, Nilgiri hills in Karnataka** and **Tamil Nadu** and **Anaimalai hills and Cardamom hills** in **Kerala**.

➢ The Western Ghats are a north-south chain of mountains or hills that mark the western edge of the Deccan plateau region.

➢ Western Ghats are comparatively higher in elevation and more continuous than the Eastern Ghats. Their average elevation is about 1,500 m with the height increasing from north to south.

➢ **Anaimudi (2,695 m)**, the highest peak of Peninsular plateau is located on the Anaimalai hills of the Western Ghats followed by Dodabetta (2,637 m) on the Nilgiri hills.

➢ Most of the Peninsular rivers such as **Krishna and Cauvery** have their origin in the Western Ghats.

Note:

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Madan Mohan Malaviya Jayanti

Why in News

The Prime Minister of India paid tribute to **Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya** on his **158th birth anniversary (25th Dec, 2019)**.

Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya

➢ Born on 25th December 1861, in **Allahabad (now Prayagraj)** in Uttar Pradesh, Malviya played a key role in the Indian independence struggle against British rule and **founded the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in 1916**.

➢ He is also remembered for his role in **ending the Indian indenture system**, especially in the **Caribbean**.

  ○ Indentured labour was a system of bonded labour that was instituted following the abolition of slavery in 1833.

  ○ Indentured labour were recruited to work on sugar, cotton and tea plantations, and rail construction projects in British colonies in West Indies, Africa and South East Asia.

➢ He **popularized the term 'Satyamev Jayate'**. However, the phrase originally belongs to the **Mundaka Upanishad**. The term now is the **national motto of India**.

➢ He was given the **title of 'Mahamana' by Mahatma Gandhi** and the second President of India, **Dr. S.Radhakrishnan** gave him the status of a **'Karmayogi'**.

➢ **Devnagri** was introduced in the British-Indian courts because of Malviya's efforts with the British government. This is still considered as one of his greatest achievements.

➢ Madan Mohan Malviya was expelled from the Brahmin community for expressing his views on caste discrimination and Brahmanical patriarchy. He worked immensely for Hindu-Muslim unity. He is known to have given famous speeches on **communal harmony**.

➢ He helped establish the **Hindu Mahasabha (Great Society of Hindus) in 1906**, which brought diverse local Hindu nationalist movements together.

➢ Malaviya's consciousness toward the public led to the launch of his own Hindi-language weekly, the **Abhyudaya (1907); the Leader of Allahabad**, an English-language daily (1909); and the Hindi monthly the **Maryada (1910)**. He also served as the chairman of the board of Hindustan times and facilitated the launch of its Hindi edition.

➢ He died on 12th November, 1946, at the age of 84.

➢ In **2014**, he was posthumously **conferred with Bharat Ratna**, the country's highest civilian award.

Sahitya Akademi Awards 2019

Why in News

Recently, Sahitya Akademi has announced its **annual Sahitya Akademi Awards** in **23 languages**.

➢ The awardees will receive an **engraved copper-plaque**, a shawl and an amount of **Rs. 1 lakh**.

  ○ Indian film-maker Satyajit Ray is the **designer of this plaque**.

Sahitya Akademi Awards

➢ Sahitya Akademi award was established in **1954**. It is a literary honour that is conferred **annually** by Sahitya Akademi – **India's National Academy of letters**.

➢ Award is presented to the most outstanding books of literary merit published in any of the **23 major Indian languages recognized by the Akademi (including English)**.

➢ Sahitya Akademi award is the **second-highest literary honour** by the Government of India, **after Jananpith award**.

➢ **Criteria:**

  ○ The author must be of **Indian Nationality**.

  ○ Book/work eligible for the award must be an outstanding contribution to the language and literature to which it belongs.

  ○ When equal merit for books of two or more are found, certain criteria like total literary contribution and standing of authors shall be taken into consideration for declaring award.

Note:

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Hunar Haat

Why in News

Recently, the Governor of Maharashtra inaugurated a Hunar Haat in Mumbai.

➢ Hunar Haat is an **exhibition of handicrafts and traditional products** made by artisans from the **minority communities**.

➢ These are organised by **the Ministry of Minority Affairs** under **USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills & Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development)** scheme.

○ The USTTAD scheme aims to promote and preserve the **rich heritage of the traditional arts & crafts of the minority communities**.

➢ These Haat aim to **provide market exposure and employment opportunities** to artisans, craftsmen and traditional culinary experts.

➢ It envisages boosting the skills of craftsmen, weavers and artisans who are already engaged in the traditional ancestral work.

➢ 'Hunar Haat' has proved to be an "Empowerment Exchange" for master artisans and craftsmen.

➢ The next 'Hunar Haat' will be organised at Lucknow from 10th to 20th January 2020.

Kalka - Shimla Heritage Route

Why in News

The Indian Railways has started a **seven coach glass-enclosed vistadome train** (Him Darshan Express) on the **heritage Kalka-Shimla route**. The train will provide passengers a panoramic view of the hilly region.

➢ Luxurious coaches with glass ceiling are termed as Vistadome coaches. These have see-through window screens.

➢ The Kalka Shimla railway line was declared a **UNESCO World Heritage** in 2008 and was listed under **"Mountain Railways of India"**. It has been a great tourist attraction since then.

○ The Mountain Railway of India, besides Kalka - Shimla Railway, consists of two other railways:

● The **Darjeeling Himalayan Railway** located in the foothills of the Himalayas in West Bengal (Northeast India)

● The **Nilgiri Mountain Railways** located in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu (South India).

➢ The Kalka Shimla Railway is a **96.6 kilometer long**, single track working rail link built in the mid-19th century to connect Shimla.

Belum Caves Festival

Why in News

Andhra Pradesh Government will be hosting the Belum Caves festival in January 2020 to popularise the Belum caves.

➢ The name **'Kandanavolu Sambaralu'** has been proposed for the festival. **Kandanavolu** was the **ancient name of Kurnool** district.
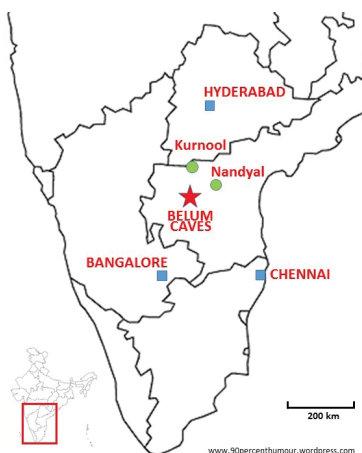
Key Points

➢ **Location:** Belum Caves, also known as Belum Guhalu in Kurnool district of **Andhra Pradesh is the second-longest** cave in the **Indian subcontinent open to the public**.

○ The **longest natural cave** in the Indian subcontinent is **Krem Liat Prah caves in Meghalaya**.

➢ **Formation:** The cave is **more than a thousand year old**, and was formed by the **constant flow of underground water** over a period of time.

➢ **Geographical Features:** These caves are renowned for their **speleothem structures** (Speleothems are secondary mineral deposits formed in a cave), such as **stalactite and stalagmite** formations.

> **Stalactites and Stalagmites**
> ➢ **Stalactites** hang as icicles of different diameters. Normally they are broad at their bases and taper towards the free ends showing up in a variety of forms.

Note:

> **Stalagmites** rise up from the floor of the caves. In fact, stalagmites form due to dripping water from the surface or through the thin pipe, of the stalactite, immediately below it.

> The stalagmites and stalactites eventually fuse to give rise to columns and pillars of different diameters.

> **Historical Background:** The caves were occupied by **Jain and Buddhist monks** many centuries ago. The presence of 4500 years old vessels from the pre-Buddhism era ensures the same.

Kalaripayattu

> Kalaripayattu is a **martial art** based on the **ancient knowledge of the human** body.

> It originated in **Kerala** during **3nd century BC to the 2nd century AD**. It is now practised in **Kerala** and in some parts of **Tamil Nadu**.

> The place where this martial art is practised is called **'Kalari'**. It is a Malayalam word that signifies a **kind of gymnasium**. Kalari literally means **'threshing floor' or 'battlefield'**. The word Kalari first appears in the Tamil Sangam literature to describe both a battlefield and combat arena.

> It is considered to be one of the **oldest fighting systems** in existence.

> It is also considered as the **father of modern Kung - Fu**.

■■■

Social Issues

Highlights

- *Maternity Scheme Exclusionary: PMMVY*
- *Global Gender Gap Index 2020*

Maternity Scheme Exclusionary: PMMVY

Why in News

The **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** which is a pan-India maternity benefit programme has been criticised for its exclusionary nature. It has led to single women and young brides being left out of its purview.

Issues with the Scheme

➢ Registration for the scheme requires an applicant to **provide her husband's Aadhaar details** along with her own. It **affects single women, including unwed mothers, deserted wives and widows**.

Tedious documentation

HOW PMMVY EXCLUDES

1 Only for the first born

2 Provided after meeting several conditionalities -registration of pregnancy, at least one ante-natal check-up, registration of child birth and vaccinations

3 Proof of address of marital home

4 Husband's Aadhaar card

5 Minimum age of 19 years

6 Father and mother need to give separate undertaking that the child is the first living child for both of them

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

- Total 6 application forms to be filled, with total 30 of 32 pages to be filled by the beneficiary
- As many as 9 IDs to be produced: copy of Aadhaar card (or enrolment slip), copy of Identity proof, copy of Voter ID card (as age proof) for both husband and wife, copy of ration card (as proof of address of marital home), copy of passbook, Mother and Child Protection Card

○ The form also requires **separate undertakings** on **"the first living child"** from the woman and her husband.

➢ A mother seeking benefits needs to **provide address proof of her marital home. It is challenging for a newlywed expecting a child** and often **residing in her natal home** during pregnancy.

➢ The scheme requires an **applicant to be at least 19 years old** which **leaves out younger brides**, who get married at the legal age of 18 years but hesitate in getting their marriages registered.

   ○ **30-35% of first-time mothers are under the age of 18 years.**

➢ The documentation work leaves out many women living on the margins such as **sex workers, women in custody, migrant and those living in post-conflict situations**. They all are unable to claim benefits even though they are most in need of monetary compensation.

➢ Women have to pay a **hefty bribe** during the application process. It goes as high as ₹500/- for each of the three forms so it is **not easy for the women coming from financially weaker** sections.

Suggestions

➢ There is a need for **reviewing the scheme** and **making it universal** by **removing restrictions** on the number of children as well as including all women, whether they are in the formal or informal sector, engaged in paid or unpaid work.

➢ The **sum promised should be at least on par with minimum wages** for women in self-employment, unpaid work, or working for less than minimum wages.

➢ Activists and grassroots workers must make a **formal representation to the government** highlighting their concerns so that corrective actions can be taken.

Global Gender Gap Index 2020

Why in News

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

➢ The WEF published its first gender gap index in 2006.

➢ The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks 153 countries on their progress towards gender parity in **four dimensions**:

  ○ Economic Participation and Opportunity,
  ○ Educational Attainment,
  ○ Health and Survival and
  ○ Political Empowerment

➢ The Index aims to serve as a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics. Through this annual yardstick, the stakeholders within each country are able to set priorities relevant in each specific economic, political and cultural context.

➢ Over the Index, the highest possible score is 1 (equality) and the lowest possible score is 0 (inequality).

Key Findings

➢ Globally, the average (population-weighted) distance completed to gender parity is at 68.6%, which is an improvement since the last edition (2018). It will **take 99.5 years** to achieve full parity between men and women at the current rate of change.

➢ The **largest gender disparity is in political**

GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX RANKINGS 2020

Rank	Country	Score
1	Iceland	0.877
2	Norway	0.842
3	Finland	0.832
4	Sweden	0.820
5	Nicaragua	0.804
6	New Zealand	0.799
7	Ireland	0.798
8	Spain	0.795
9	Rwanda	0.791
10	Germany	0.787
21	United Kingdom	0.767
50	Bangladesh	0.726
53	United States	0.724
81	Russian Federation	0.706
92	Brazil	0.691
101	Nepal	0.680
102	Sri Lanka	0.680
106	China	0.676
112	India	0.668
121	Japan	0.652
151	Pakistan	0.564
153	Yemen	0.494

empowerment. Only 25% of the 35,127 seats in parliaments around the world are occupied by women, and only 21% of the 3,343 ministers are women.

➢ **Iceland** has been the **frontrunner** on the Global Gender Gap Index for 11 years in a row. It has closed almost 88% of its gender gap, followed by Nordic neighbours Norway, Finland and Sweden.

➢ **Yemen is ranked the worst** (153rd), while Iraq is 152nd and Pakistan 151st.

India- Specific Findings

➢ India has **slipped to the 112th spot from its 108th position** in 2018. India was ranked relatively higher at 98th place in 2006 Report.

  ○ India has been ranked below countries like China (106th), Sri Lanka (102nd), Nepal (101st), Brazil (92nd), Indonesia (85th) and Bangladesh (50th).

➢ **Performance on Four Indicators:** India has improved to 18th place on political empowerment but it has slipped to 150th on health and survival, to 149th in terms of economic participation and opportunity and to 112th place for educational attainment.

➢ **Economic**

  ○ Among the 153 countries studied, **India is the only country where the economic gender gap (35.4%) is larger than the political gender gap (41.1%)**.

  ○ India is among the countries with very low women representation on company boards (13.8%), while it was even worse in China (9.7%).

➢ **On health and survival,** four large countries – Pakistan, India, Vietnam and China – fare badly with millions of women there not getting the same access to health as men.

World Economic Forum

➢ The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation.

➢ It was established in **1971** as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**. It is independent, impartial and not tied to any special interests.

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

Note:

Security

Highlights

- Destruction of Public Property
- Sashastra Seema Bal
- Chief of Defence Staff
- AFSPA Extended in Nagaland
- Apache Helicopters for Indian Army

Destruction of Public Property

Why in News

Recently, the **Supreme Court of India** has expressed displeasure over rioting and destruction of public property. In India, the **Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984** deals with such issues mainly.

➢ Despite a law against the destruction of property, incidents of rioting, vandalism, and arson have been common during protests across the country.

➢ The SC had *suo motu* laid down **10-point guidelines** for the **assessment of damages and liability** in its judgment in **Destruction of Public and Private Properties Vs State of A.P and others on April 16, 2009**.

Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984

➢ It punishes anyone **"who commits mischief by doing any act in respect of any public property"** with a **jail term of up to five years and a fine or both**. Provisions of this law can be coupled with those under the Indian Penal Code.

➢ Under this Act, **public property includes** "any building, installation or other property used in connection with the production, distribution or supply of water, light, power or energy; any oil installation; any sewage works; any mine or factory; any means of public transportation or of telecommunications, or any building, installation or other property used in connection therewith".

➢ In **2007**, the Supreme Court took **suo motu cognizance** on the issue of public and private properties' destruction and **set up two committees** to suggest changes to the law.

Thomas Committee

➢ It was headed by former apex court judge **Justice K T Thomas**.

➢ It suggested that the **prosecution should be required to prove that public property had been damaged in direct action** called by an organisation and that the accused also participated in such direct action.

  ❍ The court accepted the suggestion and added that the law must be amended to give the court the power to draw a presumption that the accused is guilty of destroying public property and it would then be open to the accused to rebut such presumption.

➢ Such a reversal of the burden of proof is applicable in **cases of sexual violence**, among others. Generally, the law presumes that the accused is innocent until the prosecution proves its case.

Nariman Committee

➢ It was headed by a **senior advocate Fali Nariman**.

➢ The recommendations of this committee **dealt with extracting damages for destruction**.

➢ The court accepted them and ruled that the rioters should be made strictly liable and compensation must be collected for the damage done.

➢ Apart from this, the Supreme Court **directed High Courts to order suo motu action** and to set up a machinery to investigate the damage caused and award compensation wherever mass destruction to the property takes place due to protests.

Key Points

➢ The assessment of exemplary damages for property destroyed in incidents of violence should be based on **electronic media/private video evidence**.

Note:

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- The prosecution has to separately prove that the damage occurred during protests was the result of **"direct actions"** of the persons concerned.

Process

- If mass destruction to the property takes place due to protests, the **High Court may issue *suo motu* action** and set up a machinery to investigate the damage caused and award compensation.
  - **Supreme Court** should take over cognisance **if multiple states are involved** and have suffered damage.
- In each case, the court involved should appoint a sitting or retired High Court judge or a sitting or retired district judge as a **Claims Commissioner** to estimate the damages and investigate liability.
  - An **assessor** is appointed to **assist** the Claims Commissioner.
- The Claims Commissioner and the assessor may summon video or other recordings from private and public sources to pinpoint the damage and establish nexus with the perpetrators of the damage.
- The principles of absolute liability shall apply once the nexus with the event that precipitated the damage is established. The liability will be borne by the actual perpetrators of the crime as well as organisers. Their shares would be decided by the court.
- Exemplary damages **should not be greater than twice the amount of the damages liable to be paid**. Damages should be assessed for **destruction to public or private property, injury or death and cost of the actions by the authorities and police to prevent and contain the violence**.
- The Claims Commissioner would finally make a report to the High Court or Supreme Court, which would determine the liability after hearing the parties.

Way Forward

- Even though guidelines have been issued by the Supreme Court, they have a **limited impact** because the **identification of protesters** remains **difficult** especially in protests without leaders.
- Even if a person has been identified, he/she could not be held liable for loss of property unless there is **evidence of him/her calling for violence**.

Sashastra Seema Bal

Why in News

Recently, the **56th Raising Day Parade** of **Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)** was held in **New Delhi**.

Key Points

- SSB comes under the aegis of the **Ministry of Home Affairs** and a part of the **Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF)**, along with **six other central security forces in India** (Assam Rifles, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, Indo Tibetan Border Police and National Security Guard).
- It was established as **Special Service Bureau in May 1963**, in the aftermath of the **Chinese aggression in 1962**.
- It was declared a **lead intelligence agency for Indo Nepal** in June 2001 and assigned the **Indo Nepal border**. In 2004, it was also assigned **Indo Bhutan border**.
- In **2004**, SSB received the **President's Colours** in recognition of the keystone role in national security, since its inception.
- **Responsibilities:**
  - To promote a sense of security among the people living in the border areas.
  - To prevent trans border crimes and unauthorized entry into or exit from Indian territory.
  - To prevent smuggling and other illegal activities on Indian frontiers.
- It is headquartered in **New Delhi** and three frontier headquarters are at **Lucknow (UP), Patna (Bihar)** and **Guwahati (Assam)**.
- It is spread out on **Indo Nepal and Indo Bhutan borders** across the states of **Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam** and **Arunachal Pradesh**.

President's Colours: It is the highest honour bestowed upon a regiment in recognition of their contribution to the security of the nation.

Chief of Defence Staff

Why in News

The government has modified the Service Rules of the Army, Navy and Air Force to enable the appointment

of the **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** and fix the upper age limit at 65 if a service chief is appointed to the post of CDS.

➤ The service (Army, Navy and Indian Air Force) chiefs, when appointed, are usually given a tenure of three years or till they attain the age of 62 years, whichever is earlier.

➤ However, the tenure of the CDS has not been fixed yet.

Chief of Defence Staff

The **Cabinet Committee on Security** approved the creation of the CDS on 24th December 2019.

➤ **Role**

❍ The CDS will act as the **principal military adviser to the defence minister** on all matters relating to tri-services. He will be appointed in a **four-star rank** at par with the three service chiefs.

❍ The CDS will also serve as the **permanent chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC)** which comprises the three service chiefs.

● So far, the chairmanship of the CoSC has not been permanent and is held in rotation by the senior-most service chief, which has caused problems of inadequate attention and short tenures as Chairman, CoSC.

❍ The tri-service agencies, organisations and commands relating to cyber and space will be under the command of the CDS.

❍ The CDS will also function as the **Military Adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority**.

➤ **Major Responsibilities**

❍ The key mandate of the CDS will be to facilitate the restructuring of military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through the establishment of joint/theatre commands.

● To achieve jointness in operation, logistics, transport, training, support services, commu-nications, repairs and maintenance of the three services within three years of assuming office.

❍ The CDS will not be eligible to hold any government post after demitting office. The CDS will also not be allowed to take up any private employment, without prior approval, for a period of five years after demitting (resigning) the office.

AFSPA Extended in Nagaland

Why in News

The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has declared the **entire State of Nagaland as a "disturbed area"** for six more months, under the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA)**.

➤ According to the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, the area comprising the whole of State of Nagaland is in a **disturbed and dangerous condition** and the use of armed forces in aid of civilian power is necessary.

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA)

➤ The Act came into force in the context of **increasing violence in the North-eastern States** decades ago, which the State governments found difficult to control.

➤ AFSPA gives armed forces the **power to maintain public order in "disturbed areas"**. They have the authority to **prohibit a gathering of five or more persons** in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law.

➤ If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also **arrest a person without a warrant**; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.

Disturbed Areas

➤ A disturbed area is the one which is declared by notification under **Section 3 of the AFSPA**. It can be invoked in places where the use of armed forces in aid of civil power is necessary.

➤ An area can be considered to be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.

➤ The **Central Government or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory** can declare the **whole or part of the State or Union Territory** as a **disturbed area**.

➤ Once declared 'disturbed', the region is maintained as disturbed for a **period of three months** straight, according to **The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976**. The government of the state can suggest whether the Act is required in the state or not.

Note:

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States under AFSPA, Act

➢ It is effective in the whole of Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur (excluding seven assembly constituencies of Imphal) and parts of Arunachal Pradesh.

➢ In Arunachal Pradesh, the impact of AFSPA has been reduced to eight police stations.

Apache Helicopters for Indian Army

Why in News

The deal for six **AH-64E Apache attack helicopters** for the **Indian Army** is likely to be signed.

➢ Currently, the Army Aviation Corps operates only smaller **Cheetah and ALH (Advanced Light Helicopters)** that weigh **less than five tonnes**.

➢ These are in addition to 22 Apaches being inducted by the **Indian Air Force (IAF)**, which will **replace** the **Russian Mi-35** attack helicopters in service.

AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopter

➢ Better known as an attack helicopter are received from the **Boeing production** facility in **Mesa, Arizona, USA**.

➢ These are all-weather capable, easily maintainable and have high agility and survivability against battle damage.

➢ The **capabilities** of the AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopter includes:

○ It can shoot **fire and forget** anti-tank guided missiles, air to air missiles, rockets while providing versatility to helicopter in network-centric aerial warfare.

○ It also carries **fire control radar**, which has a 360° coverage and nose-mounted sensor suited for target acquisition and night vision systems.

➢ The addition of the Apache Attack Helicopter is a significant step towards modernisation of Indian Air Force helicopter fleet and the Indian Army.

Cheetah Helicopters

➢ The Cheetah Helicopter is a **high-performance** helicopter designed by **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)**.

➢ It is **identical to LAMA SA 315B** Helicopter of Eurocopter, **France**.

➢ It holds the **world record in high altitude flying** among all categories of Helicopters.

➢ The helicopter is suitable for commuting, observation, surveillance, logistics support, rescue operations and high altitude missions.

Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH-DHRUV)

➢ The **indigenously designed and developed** Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH-DHRUV) is a **twin-engine**, multi-role, multi-mission new generation helicopter in the **5.5-ton weight class**.

➢ The major variants of Dhruv are classified as Dhruv Mk-I, Mk-II, Mk-III & Mk-IV.

■■■

Note:

Miscellaneous

Highlights

- Government Instant Messaging System
- Vijay Diwas
- Rare Earth Metal Mining in DR of Congo
- Indian Peacekeepers in South Sudan
- Tripura Gets Its First SEZ
- Onion Varieties
- Macau to Celebrate 20th Anniversary
- Goa Liberation Day
- Spandana: An Andhra Pradesh Initiative

- Konda Reddy Tribe
- Chillai-Kalan
- National Consumer Day
- Typhoon Phanfone
- Second Edition of Eat Right Mela
- SnowEx
- National Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports
- Cyclone Sarai

Government Instant Messaging System

Why in News

Government Instant Messaging System (GIMS) is a prototype of an **Indian equivalent** of popular messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram for secure internal use.

➤ GIMS seeks to replace existing platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal which are being used by a majority of government departments and organisations.

➤ It will be used by **employees of Central and state government departments and organisations for secure intra and inter organisation communications**.

 ○ It employs **end-to-end encryption for one-to-one messaging**.

 ○ The **server** hosting GIMS is installed **within the country** and the information stored would be in the government-based cloud — NIC-operated data centres that are only meant for use by the government and its departments.

 ○ **GIMS Portal** will **administer and monitor** the working of an app.

 ○ Besides, **one-to-one messaging and group messaging**, it also provides for **documents and media sharing**.

 ○ GIMS is designed and developed by the **Kerala unit of National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.

➤ The launch of the new app comes after the recent controversy over the WhatsApp breach of some Indian users' mobile devices due to Pegasus. Pegasus is a spyware developed by Israeli firm in 2016.

Vijay Diwas

Why in News

Vijay Diwas is observed on **16th December every year** to mark India's victory over Pakistan in 1971 war.

➤ **On 16th Dec 1971,** the chief of the Pakistani forces had surrendered unconditionally to the allied forces consisting of Indian Army and Mukti Bahini in Dhaka.

➤ The **end of the 14-day war** resulted in subsequent **secession of East Pakistan into Bangladesh**.

➤ To mark the event, Indian Air Force has also felicitated a team of 25 Air Warriors to undertake a running expedition from **Kargil to Kohima** – aptly named as **K2K Ultra Marathon-Glory Run**.

Rare Earth Metal Mining in DR of Congo

Why in News

The **International Rights Advocates (IRA)** has filed a lawsuit against US tech giants over the **death of child labourers in cobalt mines** in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**.

Note:

- **DR Congo** produces **60%** of the **world's supply of cobalt** and is the **world's largest producer of the rare metal,** which is crucial for **making batteries** used in **mobile phones and electric vehicles**.
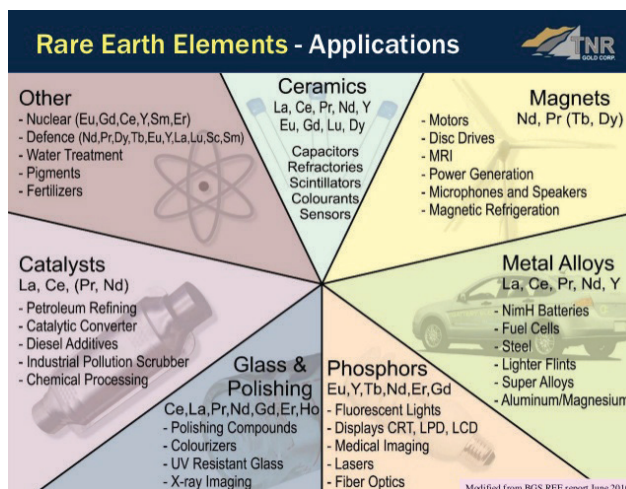
Rare Earth Minerals

- Rare Earths are a series of **chemical elements** found in the **Earth's crust**.

- These minerals have **unique magnetic, luminescent, and electrochemical** properties and are thus used in many modern technologies, including consumer electronics, computers and networks, communications, health care, national defence, etc.

- They are called **'rare earth'** because earlier it was **difficult to extract them from their oxides forms technologically**.

- They occur in **many minerals** but typically in **low concentrations** to be refined in an **economical manner**.

Cobalt

- Cobalt makes up only **0.001% of Earth's crust**.

- It is similar to **iron and nickel** in its **physical properties**.

- It is found in plants and animals, air, water, soil and rocks.

- Cobalt is used in many alloys & superalloys to make parts in aircraft engines, gas turbine, high-speed steels, corrosion-resistant alloys, cemented carbides. It is also used in magnets and magnetic recording media.

- The **radioactive isotope, Cobalt-60,** is used in medical treatment and also to irradiate food.

International Rights Advocates

- It is a non-governmental organisation that promotes human rights and corporate accountability through legal advocacy and capacity building.

Indian Peacekeepers in South Sudan

Why in News

The Indian peacekeepers serving in **South Sudan** have been awarded the **United Nations(UN) medal for their service and contribution to building peace** in the country.

UN Peacekeeping

- UN Peacekeeping helps countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace.

- It deploys troops and police from around the world, integrating them with civilian peacekeepers to address a range of mandates set by the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly.

UN Peacekeeping and India

- Currently, there are more than **6,700 troops** and police from India who have been deployed to UN peacekeeping missions, the **fourth highest** amongst troop-contributing countries.

Note:

➤ More than 200,000 Indians have served in 49 of the 71 UN peacekeeping missions established around the world since 1948. Indian peacekeepers have served in UN peacekeeping missions **around the world**.

➤ India has a long tradition of sending **women on UN peacekeeping missions**.

➤ In 2007, **India** became the **first country** to deploy an **all-women contingent** to a **UN peacekeeping mission**.

Tripura Gets Its First SEZ

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has notified setting up of Tripura's first ever Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

➤ It will be developed by **Tripura Industrial Development Corporation (TIDC) Ltd.** for the industries based on rubber, textile and apparel, bamboo and agri-food processing.

Significance

➤ The setting up of a SEZ will open up **new avenues to attract private investment** because of its **close proximity to the Chittagong Port (Bangladesh)**.

Special Economic Zone
➤ A Special Economic Zone is an area in a country that is subject to unique economic regulations that differ from the other regions.

➤ With a view to overcome the shortcomings experienced on account of the multiplicity of controls and clearances; absence of world-class infrastructure, and with a view to attract larger foreign investments in India, the **Special Economic Zones (SEZs) Act was passed in 2005**.

➤ SEZs work as an engine for economic growth supported by quality infrastructure complemented by an attractive fiscal package, both at the Centre and the State level, with the minimum possible regulations.

Onion Varieties

Why in News

The Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) has developed a **'Processing-grade White Onion (PWO-2)**

variety for commercial cultivation by farmers from the 2020-21 rabi cropping season.

➤ Punjab's farmers now mainly grow red coloured varieties of onion, that is, PRO-6 and Punjab Naroya.

➤ The average yield of PWO-2 is 165 quintals per acre and it matures in roughly 140 days. Its **biggest advantage is that the bulbs are processable** and can be used to make dehydrated products such as flakes, powder, rings and granules.

➤ The University in 1994 also released a **processing-grade white onion variety called Punjab White**. However, its average yield was only 135 quintals per acre and did not interest farmers.

➤ Punjab produces 2-2.1 lakh tonnes of onions, which meets hardly a third of the state's requirement. And given rising onion prices, there is probably need for varieties such as PWO - 2 whose bulbs can be converted and stored in processed form.

Macau to Celebrate 20th Anniversary

Why in News

Macau celebrated the **20th anniversary** since the **former Portuguese colony was returned to China**.

➤ The Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) is an **integral part of China** and example of China's **"one country, two systems" model**.

○ "One country, two systems" is a Constitutional principle describing the governance of Hong Kong and Macau since they became regions of China in 1997 and 1999, respectively.

➤ **Administration:** It **does not practice** China's socialist economic system. Also, it enjoys a **high degree of autonomy** in all matters **except foreign and defence affairs**.

➤ **Location:** It is situated on the south-east coast of China near the mouth of **Pearl River**. It is 60 kilometres from Hong Kong.

○ Macau consists of the **Macau peninsula** and the two **islands of Taipa and Coloane**.

Note:

- ➢ **Population:** It is one of the most densely populated areas in the world.
- ➢ Macau is heavily dependent on the gambling industry with its casinos contributing about 80% of the government's income.

Goa Liberation Day

Why in News

Goa Liberation Day is observed on 19th December every year in India. The occasion marks the day when Indian armed forces freed Goa in 1961 from 450 years of Portuguese rule.

- ➢ The Portuguese colonised several parts of India in 1510 but by the end of the 19th century Portuguese colonies in India were limited to Goa, Daman, Diu, Dadra, Nagar Haveli and Anjediva Island.
- ➢ The Goa liberation movement, which sought to end Portuguese colonial rule in Goa, started off with small scale revolts, but reached its peak between 1940 to 1960, ending when India invaded Goa in 1961.
  - ❍ After the failure of diplomatic efforts with Portuguese, military operation code-named **'Operation Vijay'** was conducted by the Indian Navy, Airforce and Army and Goa was liberated on 19th December, 1961.

Spandana: An Andhra Pradesh Initiative

Why in News

- ➢ **Spandana,** an **Andhra Pradesh** Government initiative to make **police stations more approachable for the public, especially women,** is winning awards.
- ➢ Spandana (means response) centres have been established within the premises of all District Collector offices and police stations.
- ➢ These centres mostly have a female receptionist and other staff members who are trained, briefed and sensitised in handling women victims and complainants.
- ➢ There are two broad reasons why Spandana initiative has succeeded:
  - ❍ One is the **use of technology**. With Spandana centres spread across the district, each having video

conferencing facility, it is **easier and cheaper** for people to lodge complaints. They no longer have to travel to the district headquarters for follow up.
  - ❍ The second reason is the **special attention to women complainants**.

Konda Reddy Tribe

- ➢ It is **one of the most backward tribal groups** in the states of **Andhra Pradesh and Telangana**.
- ➢ They inhabit on both the banks of the Godavari River (East and West Godavari districts), in the hilly-forest region of Khammam (Telangana) and Srikakulam (Andhra Pradesh).
- ➢ They live in the **interior forest areas largely cut-off from the mainstream**. Traditionally, they were **shifting cultivators** and recently, some of them have adopted **settled agriculture** and **horticulture**.
  - ❍ Collection of non timber forest products and basket-making supplement the sources of their livelihood.
- ➢ Their mother tongue is Telugu with a unique accent.
- ➢ Konda Reddis have also been recognized as **Primitive Tribal Group** (now **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups**).
- ➢ The Konda Reddis are known for their **eco-friendly practices** such as use of household articles made of bamboo, bottle gourd, and seed.

Chillai-Kalan

- ➢ Chillai-Kalan, a **traditional 40-day long period of extreme cold in Kashmir,** began on December 21 and will continue till January 31 followed by **Chillai-Khurd** and **Chillai-Bachha**.
  - ❍ **Chillai-Khurd (small cold), a 20-day** long period which starts from January 31 to February 19.
  - ❍ **Chillai-Bachha (baby cold), a 10-day** long period which occurs between February 20 and March 2.
- ➢ As per **India Meteorological Department (IMD),** the period mostly remains wet as the upper part of the Kashmir Valley receives heavy snowfall and the maximum temperature drops considerably.
- ➢ During this period, water bodies like lakes, rivers and streams get frozen with a thick layer of ice.

Note:

India Meteorological Department

➢ It was established in **1875** as an agency of the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.

➢ It is the principal agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology.

National Consumer Day

➢ Every year, **24th of December** is observed as **National Consumer Day** in India. The **theme of 2019** is **"Alternate consumer grievance/dispute redressal"**.

➢ On this day the **Consumer Protection Act, 1986** had received the assent of the President and came into effect.

➢ It is observed to highlight the **importance of the consumer movement** and the need to make every consumer **more aware of their rights and responsibilities**.

➢ The **World Consumer Rights Day** is observed every year on **15th March**.

➢ The **Consumer Protection Act, 2019** was passed by the Parliament in August 2019 to replace the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 1986	PROVISIONS	CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 2019
No separate regulator	Regulator	Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to be formed
Complaint could be filed in a consumer court where the seller's (defendant) office is located	Consumer court	Complaint can be filed in a consumer court where the complainant resides or works
No provision. Consumer could approach a civil court but not consumer court	Product liability	Consumer can seek compensation for harm caused by a product or service
District: up to ₹20 lakh State: ₹20 lakh to ₹1 cr National: above ₹1 cr	Pecuniary jurisdiction	District: up to ₹1 cr State: ₹1 cr to ₹10 cr National: Above ₹10 cr
No provision	E-commerce	All rules of direct selling extended to e-commerce
No legal provision	Mediation cells	Court can refer settlement through mediation

Typhoon Phanfone

Why in News

The Philippines was hit by typhoon Phanfone on 25th December 2019.

➢ Typhoon Phanfone is known as **Ursula** in the **local language in the Philippines**.

➢ It is the second typhoon after typhoon Kammuri which hit the Philippines recently.

➢ Phanfone is following a similar path as **Super Typhoon Haiyan**, which had hit the country in **2013**.

    ❍ Typhoon is a **region-specific** name of the Tropical Cyclone (swirling system of clouds and thunderstorms that originates over tropical or subtropical oceans).

➢ The Philippines is the **first major landmass** facing the **Pacific cyclone belt**. It is hit by about 20 storms and typhoons each year.

Tropical Cyclone

➢ **Cyclone** is the formation of a very low-pressure system with very high-speed winds revolving around it. Factors like wind speed, wind direction, temperature and humidity contribute to the development of cyclones.

➢ Cyclones are called 'Hurricanes' in the North Atlantic and Eastern Pacific, 'Typhoons' in South-East Asia and China and 'Tropical Cyclones' in the South-West Pacific and Indian Ocean Region.

Second Edition of Eat Right Mela

Why in News

Recently, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare inaugurated the **2nd edition of Eat Right Mela** in New Delhi.

Key Points

➢ **Eat Right Mela** is organised by **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**.

    ❍ It is an outreach activity for citizens to nudge them towards eating right. It is organised to make

citizens aware of the health and nutrition benefits of different types of food.

➢ **The PURPLE Book,** a handbook on diets for diseases was also launched.

○ It provides general guidelines for hospitals on suitable diets for common medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, gut disorders etc. in a simple format and has been developed and vetted by experts in the field of food and nutrition.

➢ **Network for Scientific Co-operation for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (NetSCoFAN)** was also launched.

○ It is a network of research & academic institutions working in the area of food & nutrition along with the NetSCoFAN directory. It covers detailed information of various heads/Directors and scientists of leading and associated partnering institutions.

○ It would comprise of **eight groups of institutions** working in different areas viz. **biological, chemical, nutrition & labelling, food of animal origin, food of plant origin, water & beverages, food testing, and safer & sustainable packaging**.

○ It would **identify research gaps** in respective areas and collect, collate and develop database on food safety issues for risk assessment activities.

➢ The importance of **'Save Food Share Food'** was emphasised.

○ In this context, **Indian Food Sharing Alliance (IFSA)** seeks to reduce food waste and hunger and to feed the needy and hungry with surplus food through structured systems.

SnowEx

Why in News

Recently, **NASA** has launched a **seasonal campaign** to understand how much water is contained in each winter's snowfall and how much will be available when it melts in the spring.

➢ This campaign is **part of a five-year programme called SnowEx** which was initiated in **2016-17**.

Key Points

➢ The geographical focus of SnowEx is North America but NASA's **overall target** is optimal strategies for **mapping global Snow Water Equivalent (SWE)** with remote sensing and models leading to **"Earth System Explorer" mission**.

➢ NASA currently has no global satellite mission to track and study SWE.

➢ Snow is a vital source of water for **drinking, agriculture** and **electrical power** in the western United States and other locations around the world.

Remote sensing: It is the science of obtaining information about objects or areas from a distance, typically from aircraft or satellites.

Cyclone Sarai

Tropical Cyclone Sarai hit Fiji on December 28, 2019, causing widespread damage.

➢ It is a **category two tropical cyclone** and is moving east towards the Tongan waters at nearly 10 kmh speed.

➢ It is expected to have average winds of up to 110km/hr with momentary gusts to 150km/hr close to its centre.

Fiji and Tonga

➢ Fiji is a country and archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean. It surrounds the Koro Sea about 1,300 miles north of Auckland, New Zealand.

➢ Tonga, officially the Kingdom of Tonga (also called Friendly Islands), is located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It lies east of Fiji.

Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale

➢ The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale is a 1 to 5 rating based on a hurricane's sustained wind speed. This scale estimates potential property damage.

Category	Sustained Winds	Types of Damage Due to Hurricane Winds
1	119-153 km/h	Very dangerous winds will produce some damage
2	154-177 km/h	Extremely dangerous winds will cause extensive damage

3 (major)	178-208 km/h	Devastating damage will occur
4 (major)	209-251 km/h	Catastrophic damage will occur
5 (major)	252 km/h or higher	Catastrophic damage will occur

National Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports

Why in News

A cycling expedition consisting of staff from the **National Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports (NIMAS)** reached **Yangon (Myanmar)** on 25th Dec 2019.

It will be cycling through Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia up to the Malaysia-Singapore border.

➢ **Ministry of Defence is funding** the expedition.

National Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports

➢ It is an **advanced sports training institute** located in the **West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh**.

➢ It **operates under** the control and superintendence of the **Ministry of Defence**.

➢ The institute offers training across land, air and water. It is a first of its kind initiative that allows civilians to experience challenges across a variety of outdoor surfaces as well as pursue a career in adventure sports. It provides structured training to defence personnel as well.

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Note:

Key Points

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Summary

Key Points

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Summary