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GS 1 : Heritage and culture ,Geography of the World and Society

1. Indore, Jamshedpur lead Swachh 2020 table (GS-1/2)

Why in News

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has announced the results of the first (April-June) and second (July- September) quarters of Swachh Survekshan 2020.

- Swachh Survekshan 2020 is the 5th edition of the annual urban cleanliness survey conducted by the Ministry.

A clean sweep		Top five ULBs in the >10 lakh population category	
Urban Local Bodies (ULB) from Gujarat and M.P. dominated the top rankings of the Swachh Survekshan 2020 survey. The rankings were based on collection, transportation, processing and disposal of waste		← Quarter 1 →	← Quarter 2 →
		ULB, State	ULB, State
		Indore, M.P.	Indore, M.P.
		Bhopal, M.P.	Rajkot, Gujarat
		Surat, Gujarat	Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra
		Nashik, Maharashtra	Vadodara, Gujarat
Rajkot, Gujarat	Bhopal, M.P.		

Format/ Method of Assessment

- Swachh Survekshan 2020 is evaluated for each quarter on the basis of monthly updation of Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) online Management Information System (MIS) by cities along with citizen's validation on the 12 service level progress indicators.
- Swachh Survekshan 2020 has been conducted in 3 quarters:
 - April - June
 - July - September
 - October - December 2019
- These quarterly assessments will hold 25% weightage in the annual survey which is scheduled to commence from 4th January 2020 across India.
- Ranks for Swachh Survekshan 2020 have been assigned based on the population in two categories of the cities :
 - 1 lakh and above with sub-categories of
 - 1-10 lakh
 - 10 lakhs and above.
 - Less than 1 lakh (under this category, the rankings are given zone and population-wise)

- It includes five zones namely, North, East, Northeast, South and West.

Key Points

- Indore (Madhya Pradesh) and Jamshedpur (Jharkhand) have topped the cleanliness charts for two consecutive quarters among cities with over 10 lakh population and with 1 lakh to 10 lakh population respectively.
- Kolkata ranked at the bottom of the ranking of 49 major cities across both quarters as West Bengal did not participate in the nationwide exercise.
- Among cantonment boards, Tamil Nadu's St.Thomas Mount Cantt was ranked 1st in quarter 1 whereas Delhi Cantt ranked first in the 2nd quarter.
 - Secunderabad Cantonment Board in Hyderabad is the worst performer among other cantonment boards.

2. Inscriptions confirm presence of two medieval monasteries at Moghalmari (GS-1)

Context:

A study of inscriptions on clay tablets recovered from recent excavations at Moghalmari, a Buddhist monastic site of the early medieval period in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district, have confirmed the presence of two monasteries – Mugalayikaviharika and Yajñapindikamahavihara.

Details:

- The presence of two monasteries dating to the same period within a single compound is unique in eastern India. Earlier excavations had indicated the presence of two monasteries on the basis of the structural plan.
- The monasteries at Moghalmari date from 6th century CE and were functional till the 12th century CE.
- Six tiny fragments of inscribed seals were found during excavations. Each of them contained a set of letters accompanied by the deer-dharmachakra symbols.
- The inscriptions are in Sanskrit and the script is a transitional phase between later north Indian Brahmi and early Siddhamatrika.
- The first name Yajñapindikamahavihara, implying etymologically 'a place of sacrificial offering' is of special significance. The second name on the seals, Mugalayikaviharika, bears a phonetic resemblance to the modern name of the site, Moghalmari.

In Xuanzang's travels:

- Archaeologists and historians point out that famous Chinese traveller Xuanzang (more widely identified as Huen Tsang), who visited India in the 7th century CE, referred to the existence of 'ten monasteries' within the limits

of Tamralipta (modern day Tamluk in adjoining Purba Medinipur district). However, he did not refer to any specific name or location.

- With the discovery of the site and the deciphering of the inscriptions, at least two of these monasteries are now identified.
 - It is known from Buddhist texts that Buddhist monasteries have a definite hierarchy – Mahavihara, Vihara and Viharika – which is reflected in the inscriptions found.
 - The study provides the only contextual epigraphical proof for the existence of a viharika (Mugalayikaviharika in this case) as early as the 6th century in this part of the subcontinent.
 - The study of the inscribed seals suggests that the monastery was called Mugalayikaviharika.
-
- It is believed that the name Mugalayika suggests a fair connection to the modern place-name Moghalmari.
 - In his paper, Prof. Sanyal refers to L.S.S. O'Malley's gazetteer of 1911, where the name Moghalmari is said to trace its name to a medieval battle between the Mughals and Pathans, sometime in the 16th or early 17th century.

3. Centre for tougher law against sexual harassment at work (GS-2/1)

Context:

Recommendations to strengthen laws against sexual harassment at workplace.

Background:

Existing laws:

- The Women and Child Development Ministry had steered the Sexual Harassment of Women and Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act in 2013. This act is applicable to government offices, the private sector, NGOs and even the unorganized sector.
- This act was largely based on the Vishaka Guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997.
- The act made the employer responsible to prevent or deter acts of sexual harassment at the workplace. The Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) would be constituted to enquire into complaints regarding sexual harassment at the workplace.
- The Act required the employer to provide requisite assistance to a woman if she chooses to file a complaint under the IPC against the perpetrator, after the conclusion of the enquiry.

Concerns:

- The 2013 Act had entrusted the powers of a civil court to the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) without specifying if the members need to have a legal background. This was a major lacuna given that the ICC formed an important grievance redressal mechanism under the framework of the act.
- The 2013 act only imposed a fine of 50,000 on employers for non-compliance with respect to the constitution of the ICC. This proved to be insufficient in ensuring that the employers constituted the ICC in a time-bound manner.

NCRB data:

- As per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the number of sexual harassment incidents at “work or office premises” registered under Section 509 IPC (words, gesture or act to insult the modesty of a woman) were 479 and 401 in the years 2017 and 2018 respectively.
- The total number of sexual harassment incidents in 2018 including that in public places, shelter homes and others was 20,962. The number of cases continued to be high questioning the effectiveness of the 2013 act.

The Group of Ministers:

- The Group of Ministers (GoM) was constituted in October 2018 in the **aftermath of the #MeToo movement**, which witnessed many women sharing their ordeal of sexual harassment on social media.
- The GoM was constituted to strengthen the legal framework to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace.
- The GoM was reconstituted in July 2019 under the Home Minister. The other members of the GoM include the Finance Minister, Human Resource Development Minister and Women and Child Development Minister.

Details:

- The GoM has finalised its recommendations. It will be now put up for comments from the public.
- Acknowledging the fact that the laws need to change with time, the sexual harassment of women at the workplace needs to be strengthened with suitable amendments.
- The major recommendation includes the addition of new provisions to the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which would strengthen the existing laws on sexual harassment at the workplace.
- The proposed amendments would be largely based on the Vishaka Guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997.
- The amendments would form a part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) project to reboot the IPC. Several retired judges, legal luminaries and State governments are being consulted by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) as a consultative measure before the overhauling of the IPC.

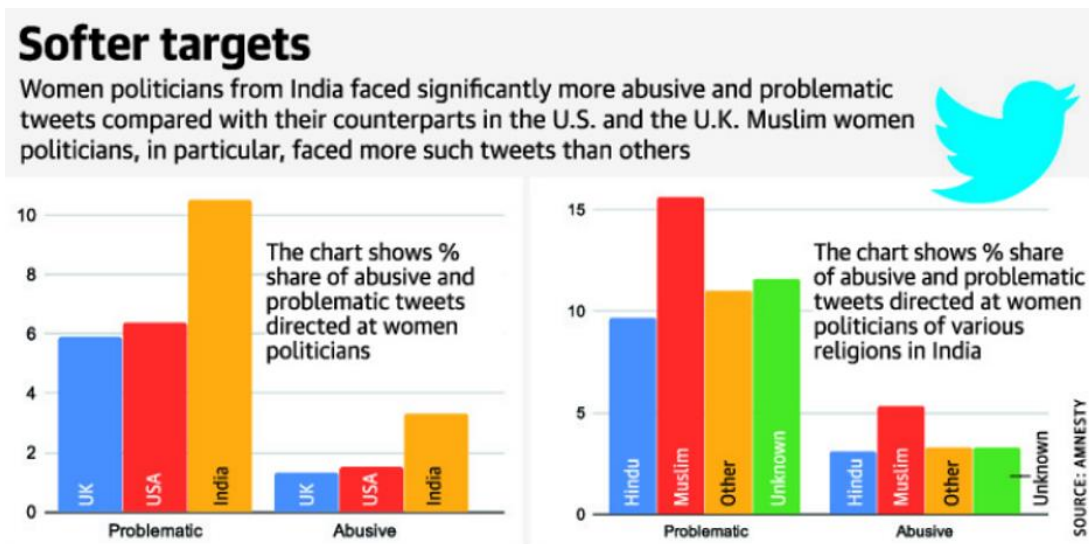
4. Women politicians trolled more: Amnesty India (GS-2/1/3)

What's in News?

Amnesty India had carried out a study of 95 politicians during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India.

Findings:

- Twitter is a toxic space for Indian women politicians, who face substantially higher abuse on the social media platform than their counterparts in the U.S. and the U.K., according to a study. One out of every seven tweets mentioning them is problematic or abusive, with many women targeted by a relentless flow of threats and sexist, religious, racist and casteist slurs.
- While all women are targeted, Muslim women politicians faced 55% more abuse than others.
- The report quotes one of the women leaders, which say: "Women do not enter politics because the price of constant online harassment and trolling was too high."



5. Palestinians threaten to quit Oslo Accords (GS-1)

Context:

Likely announcement of the **West Asia plan** by the U.S. president.

Background:

- The Oslo Accords are a set of agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
- The first Oslo Accord was signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993 and the second Oslo Accord was signed in Taba, Egypt, in 1995.

- **The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement was signed in Washington in 1995, subsequent to the Oslo Accords. The Oslo Accords marked the start of the Oslo process, a peace process aimed at achieving a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine.**
- The Oslo Accords created a **Palestinian Authority** tasked with **limited self-governance of parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip**. The agreement set out the scope of Palestinian **autonomy** in the West Bank and Gaza. It even acknowledged the **PLO as Israel's partner in permanent-status negotiations** and other questions.
 - The most important questions related to the borders of Israel and Palestine, **Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem**, Israel's military presence in and control over remaining territories after **Israel's recognition of Palestinian autonomy**, and the Palestinian right of return. The Oslo Accords, however, **did not create a Palestinian state**.
- The Oslo Accords are **based on the 1978 Camp David Accords**.

Details:

- Palestinian officials have threatened to withdraw from key provisions of the Oslo Accords, in the backdrop of the likely announcement of West Asia peace plan by the U.S. President.
- The Palestine Liberation Organisation has claimed that it reserved the right to withdraw from **the interim agreement**.
- The Palestinians fear that the plan effectively **buries the two-state solution that has been the cornerstone of global West Asia diplomacy**.
- It has expressed concern that the U.S. president's initiative may **turn Israel's temporary occupation of Palestinian territory into a permanent occupation**.

6. Will Trump's peace plan help resolve Israel-Palestine crisis? (GS-1)

Context:

The West Asia peace plan has been unveiled by U.S. President Donald Trump.

Details:

- The Peace plan seeks to give the Israelis what they have long wanted – an expansive state with Jerusalem as its undivided capital and tight security control over a future Palestinian state.
- With his plan, Mr. Trump is actually pushing to revive the stalled two-state talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians, but on his own terms.



What's the plan?

- The Trump plan seeks to address most of the contentious issues in the conflict such as the border of Israel, the status of Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements on the West Bank, Israel's security concerns and the status of the city of Jerusalem.
- However, the solutions Mr. Trump has proposed to almost all of these issues favour the Israeli positions.
 - For example, Israel would be allowed to annex the Jewish settlements on the West Bank as well as the Jordan Valley.
 - The Palestinian refugees, who were forced out from their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed the declaration of the state of Israel in historic Palestine, would not be allowed to return. They could move to the future Palestinian state, be integrated into the host countries or settled in other regional countries.
- Jerusalem, perhaps the most contentious issue, would be the undivided capital of Israel, with Palestine gaining its capital in the east of the city.
- In return, Israel would freeze further settlement activities on the West Bank for four years – the time for negotiations. During this period, the Palestinian Authority should dismiss its current complaints at the International Criminal Court against Israel and refrain itself from taking further actions. It should also crackdown on “terrorist” groups such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.
- Trump has also proposed \$50 billion in investment over 10 years should Palestine accept the proposals.

- In the final settlement, Palestine would get control over more land than what it currently controls.
- The plan also proposes to enlarge Gaza and connect the strip with the West Bank through a tunnel.
- The Arab towns in the southeast of Israel, which are close to Gaza, could become part of a future Palestinian state.

Will the plan work?

- The Palestine position is that an independent, sovereign Palestinian state should be formed based on the 1967 border (meaning the whole of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) with East Jerusalem as its capital (including the Old City that houses Haram esh-Sharif, also known as Temple Mount, a holy site for both Muslims and Jews).
- Issues like the right of return of the Palestinian refugees are to be settled in final negotiations.
- But Mr. Trump has effectively rejected the Palestinian claims and asked them to make more compromises.
 - He seeks to give Jerusalem and about 30% of the West Bank to the Israelis and has denied the right of return of the Palestinian refugees – all for truncated sovereignty for the Palestinians in a state that would practically be surrounded by Israel.
 - And for this, the Palestinians should take action against militant groups, stop supporting Palestinian families of those jailed or killed by Israel and refrain themselves from questioning the occupation in international fora.
- The Fatah party of President Mahmoud Abbas runs the Palestinian Authority on the West Bank, while Hamas is running Gaza. While there's a bitter feud between these two, both sides, as well as the Islamic Jihad, have come together in rejecting the Trump plan.
- It would be difficult for any Palestinian leader to sell Mr. Trump's proposals to the people who are living under occupation for decades.
- The Palestinians say that the Trump administration, which recognised the disputed Jerusalem as Israel's capital and supported the settlements on the West Bank, cannot be an impartial mediator for peace. The Trump plan seems to be underscoring this argument.

7. Month-long Nagoba jatara concludes in Telangana (GS-1)

Why in News

A month-long Nagoba Jatra festival has come to an end in Telangana.

- Nagoba Jatara is a tribal festival held in Keslapur village, Indervelli Mandal Adilabad district, Telangana, thus the festival also known as Keslapur jatara.

- It is a huge religious and cultural event of the Boigutta branch of Mesram clan of the aboriginal Raj Gond and Pardhan tribes.
- During the festival, the maha puja of serpent god Nagoba is held.

Gond Tribe

- Gonds are one of the largest tribal groups in the world.
- They mostly live in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha.
- Gonds are subdivided into four tribes:
 - Raj Gonds
 - Madia Gonds
 - Dhurve Gonds
 - Khatulwar Gonds
- It has been notified as a **Scheduled Tribe**.

Pardhan tribe

Pardhans are considered to be the junior branch of Gond tribe and are traditional bards to Gonds and recite mythologies, folk tales and songs of their gods and goddesses at various festivals, ceremonies and fairs for which service they are paid in cash or kind.

8. A case for including Tulu in the Eighth Schedule (GS-1/2)

Context:

The article argues for the inclusion of Tulu in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and the benefits of such a move.

Background:

- There is considerable linguistic diversity in India.
 - India is one of the unique countries in the world that has the legacy of diversity of languages.
 - According to the 2001 Census, India has 30 languages that are spoken by more than a million people each. There are 122 languages that are spoken by at least 10,000 people each.
 - India is home to 1,599 languages, including the various dialects.
 - Multilingualism is the way of life in India as people in different parts of the country speak more than one language from their birth and learn additional languages during their lifetime.
- There is a threat to the linguistic diversity of India.
 - In recent years, language diversity is under threat as speakers of diverse languages are becoming rare and major languages are adopted after abandoning the mother tongues.

- Most of the languages and dialects are restricted to specific regions and many of them are on the verge of extinction.
- 50 languages have become extinct in the past five decades.
- The constitutional provisions and the language policies have tried to conserve the linguistic diversity of India.
 - Article 29 of the Constitution provides that a section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture has the right to conserve the same.
 - Under the Constitution, provision is made for the appointment of a Special Officer for linguistic minority with the sole responsibility of safeguarding the interest of languages spoken by the minority groups.
 - The language policy of India provides a guarantee to protect the linguistic minorities.
 - The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India lists the official languages of the Republic of India. The Constitution of India has recognised 22 official languages.

Details:

- Despite the many constitutional provisions in place and the language policy of India which provides a guarantee to protect the linguistic minorities, there have always been concerns over the non-inclusion of certain languages in the 8th Schedule.
- The article argues for the inclusion of the Tulu language in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution based on the following facts:
 - Sanskrit and Manipuri, both scheduled languages have much lesser number of speakers than the non-scheduled languages like Tulu, Bhili/Bhilodi, Gondi, Khandeshi and Oraon. The Census reports 18,46,427 native speakers of Tulu in India.
 - Tulu, a Dravidian language has speakers spread across the two coastal districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi in Karnataka and Kasaragod district of Kerala.
 - Robert Caldwell in his book, A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Or South-Indian Family of Languages, has called Tulu as “one of the most highly developed languages of the Dravidian family”.

Significance:

For Tulu language:

- Inclusion of Tulu in the Eighth Schedule would lead to Tulu getting recognition from the Sahitya Akademi which would only help the cause of Tulu language.
- Tulu books would be translated into other recognised Indian languages, thus increasing the reach and influence of Tulu literature.
- Members of Parliament and MLAs will be allowed to speak in Tulu in

Parliament and State Assemblies, respectively.

- Candidates can opt to write all-India competitive examinations like the Civil Services exam in Tulu.

For India:

- The Yuelu Proclamation, made by the UNESCO at Changsha, the People's Republic of China, in 2018, is an important step in recognizing the importance of linguistic diversity and the subsequent benefits arising out of it.
 - The protection and promotion of linguistic diversity help to improve social inclusion and partnerships among the people of different languages.
 - It guarantees the rights for native speakers of endangered, minority, indigenous languages, as well as non-official languages and dialects to receive education in their own languages.
 - It helps to reduce social inequality, if any, between the different native speakers. It will enhance the social inclusion level in society.
 - It will also help encourage the speakers to participate in a series of actions to promote cultural diversity, protect endangered languages and intangible cultural heritages.
- Placing all the deserving languages on an equal footing will promote social inclusion and national solidarity in India. It will reduce the inequalities within the country to a great extent.

Way forward:

- India must accommodate this plethora of languages in its cultural discourse and administrative apparatus.
- Tulu, along with other deserving languages, should be included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in order to substantially materialise the promise of equality of status and opportunity mentioned in the Preamble.
- There is the need to understand the fact that conserving the distinct language, script or culture is not the duty of the state alone. Both the state and the citizens have an equal responsibility to conserve the distinct language, script and culture of a people.
- There is a need for increased efforts at the societal level, in which the communities have to take part in the conservation of language diversity that is part of cultural wealth.

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Kerala becomes first state to pass anti-CAA resolution (GS-2)

Context: Kerala has become the first state in India to pass a resolution demanding rollback of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Why? – Kerala’s arguments:

- The CAA act contradicts the basic values and principles of the Constitution.
- It is against the “secular” outlook and fabric of the country and would lead to religion-based discrimination in granting citizenship.

What’s the issue now?

The Centre has clarified that the CAA act will not impact any Indian citizen including Muslims.

The clarification has failed to have any impact on the protests, with many states announcing that they will not implement the law.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019:

1. It seeks to allow illegal migrants from certain minority communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan eligible for Indian citizenship by amending the Citizenship Act of 1955.
2. It seeks to grant citizenship to people from minority communities – Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians – after 6 years of stay in India even if they do not possess any proper document. The current requirement is 12 years of stay.
3. The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law.

Why is it criticised?

1. It violates the basic tenets of the Constitution. Illegal immigrants are distinguished on the basis of religion.
2. It is perceived to be a demographic threat to indigenous communities.
3. It makes illegal migrants eligible for citizenship on the basis of religion. This may violate Article 14 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to equality.
4. It attempts to naturalise the citizenship of illegal immigrants in the region.
5. It allows cancellation of OCI registration for violation of any law. This is a

wide ground that may cover a range of violations, including minor offences.

2. SC bats against transfer of community resources (GS-2)

Why in News

Recently, the Supreme Court of India held that the Government has no right to transfer “invaluable” community resources like village water ponds to powerful people and industrialists for commercialisation of the property.

- It is necessary to protect village commons for safeguarding the fundamental right guaranteed by Article 21 of our Constitution. These common areas like water ponds and wells are the lifeline of village communities and often sustain various chores and provide resources necessary for life.
 - **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty. No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.
 - It is fundamental, non-derogable and is available to every person. Even the State cannot violate that right.

Key Points

- The judgment came on a plea against the transfer of village ponds’ sites of Saini village in the National Capital Region to some private industrialists by the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority.
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) refused to intervene on the plea but the apex court ordered the authorities and the industrialists to remove all obstructions and restore the water bodies within three months.
- SC said the State can not deprive the villagers of their existing source of water and other community resources even after the promise of providing them with an alternative source. There is no guarantee that the adverse effect of destroying the existing water body would be offset and people would be compelled to travel miles to access the alternative site.
 - Resources which are available for everyone’s use in a community, village or town are called community resources. For example- ponds, playgrounds, public parks etc.

3. Assembly has its rights: Kerala CM (GS-2)

Context:

- A Rajya Sabha member has filed a petition with the Chairman of the House seeking to initiate breach of privileges and contempt proceedings against the Chief Minister of Kerala after the Kerala Assembly passed a resolution against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.
- In response to this petition, Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan has said that the Assembly has its own rights and privileges and they could not be violated.

What is Parliamentary Privilege?

- Parliamentary privilege refers to rights, immunities and exemptions enjoyed by Parliament as an institution and MPs in their individual capacity, without which they cannot discharge their functions as entrusted upon them by the Constitution.
- When any of these rights and immunities are infringed, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is punishable under the law.
- 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.

What are the Rules governing Privilege?

- The Constitution (Article 105) mentions two privileges i.e. freedom of speech in Parliament and right of publication of its proceedings.
- Rule No 222 in Chapter 20 of the Lok Sabha Rule Book and correspondingly Rule 187 in Chapter 16 of the Rajya Sabha rulebook govern privilege.
- 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.
- The rules mandate that any notice should be relating to an incident of recent occurrence and should need the intervention of the House.

What is the Privileges Committee?

- In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker nominates a committee of privileges consisting of 15 members as per respective party strengths.
- A report is then presented to the House for its consideration.
- The Speaker may permit a half-hour debate while considering the report.
- The Speaker may then pass final orders or direct that the report be tabled before the House.
- A resolution may then be moved relating to the breach of privilege that has to be unanimously passed.
- In the Rajya Sabha, the deputy chairperson heads the committee of privileges that consists of 10 members.

What is the Role of the Speaker/Rajya Sabha 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 Rule 222, the member concerned is given an opportunity to make a short statement.

4. No documents need to be produced for NPR: Ministry (GS-2)

Context:

The Union Home Ministry has clarified that no person needs to submit any documents during the house-to-house survey for updating the National Population Register and that information provided by individuals would be accepted and recorded.

Key Details:

- The Ministry spokesperson's official Twitter handle has clarified the confusion surrounding NPR by stating that families need not dig out old documents for verification during the house-to-house survey that will be taken up by the enumerators for updating the National Population Register.
- The MHA has said that information provided by the individual would be just accepted and recorded accordingly.
- The MHA has issued this clarification following a report by 'The Hindu'

which stated the contrary.

- In response to this clarification by the MHA, 'The Hindu' says that its earlier report was based on points given in the NPR manual of the Ministry itself.
- The NPR manual clearly mentions that the existing database would be updated by verifying the details of all respondents through house-to-house enumeration.
- The relevant points in the NPR Training Manual that indicate that the details collected by the enumerators will be verified are:
 - 1.6 The Government has decided to update the NPR database along with House listing and Housing Census phase of Census of India 2021 during April- September 2020.
 - 1.7 Updating the existing NPR database by verifying the details of all residents by conducting a house to house enumeration by the enumerator (designated Government official) and modifying/correcting the demographic data items.
 - 1.8 Collecting Aadhaar number from each resident voluntarily.
 - 1.9 Collecting mobile number, Election Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) or Voter ID Card number, Indian Passport number and Driving License number, if available with the residents.
 - 1.10 Inclusion of all new resident(s)/new household(s) found in the local area (HLB) during the fieldwork.

5. India, Nepal to hold talks on Kalapani (GS-2)

Background

- In November 2019, India released fresh maps of the newly created Union Territories (UTs) of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, along with a map of India depicting these UTs.
- In the maps, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was part of Jammu and Kashmir, while Gilgit-Baltistan was included in Ladakh.
- The map also included the Kalapani area.
- The Nepal government then lodged a protest against the inclusion of the Kalapani area, claiming it as Nepalese territory.

Context

- The Ministry of External Affairs has now said Nepal and India will resolve the Kalapani border issue through dialogue.

Geographical Location



- Kalapani is a 35 square kilometre area, which is claimed by both India and Nepal. River Mahakali, earlier known as river Kali, flows through Kalapani, which is situated on the eastern bank of the river.
- Both India and Nepal claim Kalapani as an integral part of their territories – India as part of Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district and Nepal as part of the Darchula district.
- Kalapani is also a tri-junction point, where the Indian, Nepalese and Tibetan (Chinese) borders meet. The region has been manned by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police since 1962.

What is the dispute?

- The source of river Mahakali is at the heart of the dispute between the countries.
- The 1816 Treaty of Segauli, signed between British India and Nepal, defined river **Mahakali** as the western border of Nepal. River Mahakali has several tributaries, all of which merge at Kalapani.
- India claims that the river begins in Kalapani as this is where all its tributaries merge. But Nepal claims that it begins from Lipu Lekh Pass, the origin of most of its tributaries.
- **Nepal** has laid claim to all areas east of the Lipu Gad – the rivulet that joins the river Kali on its border, a tri-junction with India and China.

Politics of Kalapani

- The origin of the dispute goes back to the early 19th century; politically it emerged as a contentious issue between India and Nepal after the two countries signed the Treaty of Mahakali in 1996.
- The two countries had formed the Joint Technical Boundary Committee in 1981 to resolve the dispute. Though the committee managed to resolve a large part of the dispute, they failed to reach a final settlement.
- Eventually, the issue was referred to the foreign secretaries of the two countries and they have been trying to find a resolution to the dispute.

6. Special provisions likely for J&K residents in jobs, land rights (GS-2)

Context:

Government considering special status for the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Background:

- The Central government had revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution on 6th August 2019.

- The state of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into two Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.
- Article 35A enabled the J&K legislature to decide the “permanent residents” of the State. It ensured job reservation for its residents and allowed the state to prohibit a non-J&K resident from buying a property in the State.
- Post the revoking of Article 35A, several sections and groups from Jammu and Kashmir had expressed concerns about losing their special status and apprehension of losing land and jobs to outsiders.

Details:

- The Centre is considering a proposal to grant special status to J&K through the provision of Article 371.
- The proposed move will provide protection to domiciles of Jammu and Kashmir in government jobs, educational institutions and land rights.
 - The major provision under consideration involves implementing the mandatory requirement of continuous stay in the region for a minimum of 15 years before applying for a job in the government sector. This will ensure that the locals will be more likely to get government jobs in the state.
 - Special provisions are being examined on the lines of those in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand with regard to land rights. The provisions pertain to regulating ownership and transfer of land to conserve the limited resources available for development. This will ensure land ownership remains within the residents of the state.
- The proposed regulations will ensure that the State of Jammu and Kashmir preserves its unique identity.

Additional Information:

- Apart from Jammu and Kashmir, special provisions have been provided to some other states under the Constitution of India, listed in Articles 371 and 371(A-J). While Articles 370 and 371 have been a part of the Constitution since January 26, 1950, Articles 371(A-J) were incorporated through amendments under Article 368, which lays down the power of the Parliament to amend the Constitution and procedure therefor.

7. BJP MP's plea against Kerala CM awaits RS Chairman's nod (GS-2 -Privilege Motion)

Context:

- Move to introduce a Privilege Motion against the Kerala Chief Minister for the Kerala assembly's resolution against CAA.

Background:

- The Kerala Assembly had passed a resolution terming the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, passed by both Houses of the Parliament, illegal and unconstitutional.
- Subsequently, there was a move in the Rajya Sabha to initiate breach of parliament privileges and contempt proceedings against the Kerala Chief Minister for the resolution.
- The request made by one of the members of the privilege committee of the Rajya Sabha, alleges that the Kerala Chief Minister's statement while introducing the resolution, was in complete disregard to parliamentary sovereignty given that the power to make amendments to the constitution and make new laws rests only within the domain of the parliament.
- The petitioner claimed that the move of the Kerala assembly and the statement of the Chief Minister was an action challenging the set constitutional norms and hence liable to face contempt proceedings.

Details:

- A member of the privilege committee had written to the Rajya Sabha Chairperson, seeking to initiate breach of parliament privileges and contempt proceedings.
- The Rajya Sabha privileges committee did not take cognisance of the petition moved as it did not follow due procedure. The petition was not considered primarily on the grounds that it had to be approved and forwarded by Rajya Sabha Chairperson.

Additional Information:

- The privileges committee has a total of ten members with members representing the different political parties in the Rajya Sabha.
- The Chairman of the Committee shall be appointed by the Chairman from amongst the members of the Committee. The privileges committee in the Rajya Sabha is headed by Deputy Chairman.
- The committee can consider any petition only after the Chairman's approval, and whenever the matter is taken up, the member who has moved the petition has to recuse himself from the meeting.
- The Committee shall examine every question referred to it and determine with reference to the facts of each case whether a breach of privilege is involved and, if so, the nature of the breach, the circumstances leading to it and make such recommendations as it may deem fit.

8. Bracing for global impact after Soleimani's assassination (GS-2)

Context:

- The U.S. has killed Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, in an airstrike near Baghdad airport.

Background:

- Tensions between Iran and the U.S. have been steadily escalating with Washington pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal and tightening sanctions and Tehran resuming nuclear activity.
 - There has been an increasing frequency of flashpoints in the gulf like the attacks on the ships and oil tankers, shooting down of drones and attack on Saudi's Oil refineries.
- In April 2019, The U.S. designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist group.
- The U.S. has sought to link the operation to a surge in attacks on its assets and personnel in Iraq.

Details:

- Major General Qassem Soleimani, was the Commander of Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), formed for extra-territorial operations.
- During the past decade, Qassem Soleimani had managed to leverage the disarray in west Asia to enhance Iranian influence in Arab countries with a significant Shia population such as Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. He was successful in creating a network of local sympathisers and proxies and waged effective asymmetric wars.
- Mr. Soleimani was also the main architect of Iran's recent foreign operations, mainly in Syria and Iraq, which were crucial in saving the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and defeating the Islamic State (IS) in both countries.

Concerns:

The situation remains highly unpredictable after the recent escalation. Iran U.S. ties:

- Unlike the other recent targeted assassinations carried out by the U.S. like that of Abu Musaib al-Zarqawi (leader of the al-Qaeda in Iraq), Osama bin Laden (founder of the al-Qaeda) and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, (founder of the Islamic State, or the IS), Gen. Soleimani, was a state actor. Iran might see this as an act of war like any sovereign country would do.
- Iranian authorities have reacted with predictable anger at Gen. Soleimani's

“martyrdom” and vowed vengeance.

- The attack has already taken off even the possibility of renegotiating the nuclear deal, which alone can bring long-lasting peace to the region at large.

Volatile region:

- The killing of Gen. Soleimani, considered the architect of Tehran’s spreading military influence in West Asia, marks a dramatic escalation in the regional shadow war between Iran and the U.S. and its allies, principally Israel and Saudi Arabia. At the outset, it appears as a reckless and unilateral act of provocation by the U.S. that could trigger another full-scale war in West Asia.
- The region is already struggling to cope with multiple conflicts and external interventions.
- Iran has in the past used its foreign proxies, and it might resort to the same in the present scenario. The latest escalation could trigger multiple attacks across the West Asia region, destabilising it further and causing heavy casualties. This could help the jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and the IS regroup and re-emerge.

Worsen the situation in Iraq:

- Gen. Soleimani’s assassination in Baghdad is likely to worsen the already bad situation in Iraq. Iraq has been witnessing nearly three months of youth protests and is undergoing political chaos under a caretaker government. The undue foreign interference by both Iran and the U.S. would only complicate the matters more.
- The event is likely to re-polarise Iraqi society along sectarian lines and intensify the Iran-U.S. competition for influence in Iraq. The situation could turn more volatile providing a fertile ground for the growth of terrorist organizations. The popular Iraqi clamour for political reforms and transparency may be eclipsed by the demand for eviction of the U.S. presence itself.

Oil sector as target:

- There has been a steady increase in skirmishes between Iran and the U.S. and its allies. This latest move by the U.S. will definitely invite a response from Iran given the past precedence. It is widely believed that the latest escalation will have a profound effect on the oil sector.
- An Iranian response may involve resumed attacks on oil tankers and other easy but high value economic targets, particularly in the oil sector.
- The Global oil prices have already seen a 4% rise within hours of the incident due to the fear that a full scale war in West Asia would severely disrupt the global oil supplies given that a large proportion of oil comes from the gulf.
- With very little chances of de-escalation visible, the oil prices might only rise to cause economic stress in any oil importing countries. The oil producers in West Asia will also suffer due to loss of revenue in case of infrastructure damage of

the oil sector.

Potential fallout in India:

- India has already had considerable difficulties in adapting to the U.S.-Iran cold war. Now that the conflict has escalated, its adverse impact on India could only magnify.

Oil imports:

- The U.S. withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and has been steadily increasing the sanctions on Iran. This has involved asking other countries to limit economic transaction with Iran to isolate it economically.
- Iran has traditionally been one of the major sources of oil for India. The price and the payment options that Iran offers India has been the best deal for India in terms of oil purchasing. India has been pressurized into stopping oil imports from Iran post the American sanctions.
- Given India's huge dependence on imported oil, the reduced basket of oil exporters to India and the possibility of the disrupted supply chain will definitely lead to a rise in India's import bill and difficulty in procuring oil.

Geostrategic reasons:

- India's ties with Iran, apart from being "civilisational", have their own geostrategic significance.
- The much touted Chabahar port in Iran is very important for India geostrategically, given the growing strength of the Chinese in the region. The Chabahar port of which India is a major player would suffer from the delays as a result of any escalations.
- Iran has the capacity to influence the U.S.-Taliban peace process in Afghanistan, a neighbouring country. The derailment of the peace process in Afghanistan would have adverse effects on India.

Indian Diaspora:

- Though Iran hosts very few Indians, given the fact that the Iran-US escalation will not be limited to the two nations and would spread out to the entire West Asian region, the safety of an estimated eight million Indian expatriates in the Gulf may be affected.
- India is a large recipient of remittances and a large share of this is accounted by West Asia. Any turbulence in West Asia will adversely affect remittance flow and the Indian foreign reserves.

Domestic factors:

After Iran, India has perhaps the largest number of the world's Shia population. The killing of Soleimani has resulted in widespread anger among the Shia community and the possibility of some of them being radicalized by this event cannot be ruled out. This will pose an additional challenge to the anti-terror apparatus in India.

9. Missing the wood (GS-2)

Context:

- The Kerala Assembly had passed a resolution calling upon the Centre to repeal the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

Details:

Resolution is allowed:

The principal objection that citizenship being a matter concerning the Union, it is not open to State Assemblies to give their opinion on it, is not valid. If a State government believes that a parliamentary law is not constitutional, it is possible for the State legislature to call for its repeal.

- Some states have also come out in support of the resolution holding that such a resolution reflects the popular will of the people.
- A resolution is not legislation, and is not governed by the principle of legislative competence. It is only an expression of a political opinion which the states are free to express.
- The passing of a resolution is considered an internal matter of the state assembly where the House Speaker decides on admitting a resolution and hence due process was followed in the passing of the resolution.
- There have been past precedents where in Tamil Nadu assembly had passed several resolutions concerning India's foreign policy such as asking for a war crimes probe against Sri Lanka and even a referendum on 'Tamil Eelam'.

Resolution not right:

- Union Law Minister and Kerala Governor have denounced the adoption of such a resolution by the Kerala Assembly.
- Subsequently, there was a move in the Rajya Sabha to initiate breach of parliament privileges and contempt proceedings against the Kerala Chief Minister for the resolution.
- There have been questions raised on whether a State Assembly is competent to question the law on a matter under the Union government's domain. The resolution is said to be against the principle of parliamentary sovereignty.

- There have also been arguments that all States have a constitutional duty to implement central laws. Failure of which can be acted against by imposing president's rule in such states.
- There is a technical problem on the resolution's admissibility given that Kerala Assembly Rules states that matters pending before a court or those that do not concern the State should not be admitted in the form of a resolution. Given that several petitions are pending against the CAA in the Supreme Court the resolution goes against the rules framed for Kerala assembly.

Concerns:

- The CAA protests and the subsequent move by Kerala assembly may set the stage for a wider confrontation between the Centre and States that have expressed their disinclination to give effect to the Centre's policy regarding the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.
- There has been growing politicization of the issue with the political parties trying to use the issue electorally.

Way forward:

- The government should consider the major concerns against CAA and address them. The major concerns being raised are that the CAA may be in violation of the equality norm and secular principles enshrined in the Constitution.
- Voicing support for the CAA and also opposing CAA are both valid political opinions, but these should not translate into the politicization of the issue. The concerns and remedy should be sought through legitimate constitutional methods like the judicial review of the CAA in the Supreme Court.

10. 171 hospitals de-listed from PM's health scheme after fraud (GS-2)

Context:

Instances of fraud reported in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

Background:

- The Ayushman Bharat Yojana – National Health Protection Scheme, which has now been renamed as Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, plans to make secondary and tertiary healthcare completely cashless. It is a scheme that aims to help economically vulnerable Indians who are in need of healthcare facilities.
- The PM Jan Arogya Yojana beneficiaries get an e-card that can be used to avail services at an empanelled hospital, public or private, anywhere in the country. With it, people can walk into a hospital and obtain cashless treatment.
- The insurance cover provided under the PM-JAY health insurance scheme is 5 lakh per family.

Measures taken:

Given the significance of the scheme and it involving a large amount of money, several measures were introduced to avoid fraud and leakage of benefits:

- A comprehensive set of anti-fraud guidelines has been in place since the launch of the scheme.
- There is the provision of pre-authorisation for most packages.
- All claims require mandatory supporting documents before approval and payment.
- Almost all States have dedicated anti-fraud units.

Details:

- The Centre's ambitious healthcare insurance scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) – under the National Health Authority (NHA) has noted that as per details provided by the States, there has been fraud in the implementation of the scheme.
- Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab were among the States where frauds were detected at different stages of implementation of the PM-JAY.
- The National Anti-Fraud Unit (NAFU) at the NHA has detected the frauds on the basis of algorithms, developed internally.
- More than 390 hospitals of the over 19,000 empanelled across nine States have been either served show-cause notices, suspended, or de-empanelled, for alleged fraud.

Fake beneficiaries:

- Wrongful enrolment of beneficiaries has been observed leading to leakage of the benefits meant to the poor people in need of financial aid in times of health emergencies.
- The Pradhan Mantri Arogya Mitras (positioned at PM-JAY empanelled hospitals) and Village Level Entrepreneurs (positioned at Common Service Centres) have found to be involved in wrongful enrolment.

Abuse-prone packages:

- There are certain packages which are reserved for government hospitals by the State authorities. It was detected that private hospitals were performing these government-reserved procedures and blocking/submitting the same under a different package name or as an unspecified package.

Way forward:

- The responsibility for the closure action lies with the State health agencies.
- Though the scheme has several safeguards in place, the implementational stage is prone to fraud. There is a need for higher surveillance and appropriate punishment for fraud.

11. Is West Asia headed for war? (GS-2)

Context:

The U.S. killing Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, in an airstrike.

Background:

- Tensions between Iran and the U.S. have been steadily escalating with Washington pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal and tightening sanctions and Tehran resuming nuclear activity.
- There has been an increasing frequency of flashpoints in the gulf like the attacks on the ships and oil tankers, shooting down of drones and attack on Saudi's oil refineries.

Reasons behind the Drone attack:

Attack on U.S. embassy:

- The latest escalation came in the backdrop of the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq after a U.S. air raid on a Shia paramilitary group trained and funded by the Iranians, killing at least 25.
- Soleimani, was the commander of the Qods Force, the external intelligence and security unit of the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Gen. Soleimani was practically the commander of the Kataib Hezbollah and other Shia militias operating in Iraq thought to be behind the attack on the U.S. embassy.

Targeting Shia Militias:

- Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) was also killed in the airstrike. The PMF is an umbrella organization of pro-Iran Iraqi militias in which Kataib Hezbollah is a member.
- The PMF was founded in 2014 under Gen. Soleimani's supervision when Iran was trying to put together militias in Iraq and Syria in the wake of civil wars in both countries.
- Iran's main goal was to save the embattled regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and defeat the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, which was threatening the Baghdad government in 2014.
- The PMF played an instrumental role in defeating the IS. The militias fought alongside the Iraqi Army, with the U.S. providing air cover, and

- liberated Iraqi cities in the north and west from the clutches of the IS.
- But once the IS Caliphate was destroyed and tensions were on the rise between Iran and the U.S. after the U.S. pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, the PMF militias started targeting U.S. forces in Iraq.

Increasing attack on Americans in Iraq:

- Ever since Gen. Soleimani took over the Qods Force in 1998, he expanded the operations of the unit, by deepening Iran's links with its proxy groups such as Hezbollah and the Badr Organisation or building new militias such as the Shia Popular Mobilization Units and Houthis.
- In September 2019, the U.S. State Department shut the consulate in the southern Iraqi city of Basra, citing "repeated incidents of fire from Iran-backed militias". The U.S. repeatedly blamed Iran-backed militias for the attacks on American targets.
- U.S. officials also say that Iran proxies under Gen. Soleimani's leadership were planning to carry out more attacks on U.S. interests in West Asia and that the assassination was carried out to deter them.

Iraq's Position:

Significance of U.S. to Iraq:

- Post the toppling of Saddam Hussein from power, the U.S. has been a major security partner of Iraq.
- Presently there are about 5,000 American troops deployed in various parts of Iraq.

Significance of Iran to Iraq:

- Given the fact that Iran is Iraq's neighbour and possesses enormous influence in the region, Iraq cannot totally ignore Iran.
- Most Shia political parties and leaders in Iraq have deep, historical ties with the Iranian regime. This has resulted in the significant influence of Iran in the politics of Iraq.
- Given the intricacy of Iraq's domestic power dynamics and the influence Iran

wields over the Iraqi polity, Iraq is unlikely to abandon Iran altogether.

- The Shia militias are a parallel military force and it is believed that it takes its orders directly from Tehran. They seem to favour Iran than their government at Baghdad.

Consequences in Iraq:

- The U.S.'s unilateral use of airpower within Iraq targeting Iraqi militias

without the permission of the government has upset Baghdad. It claims that the attacks are against the security and sovereignty of Iraq.

- There have been street protests over the U.S. airstrikes.
- The Iraqi government is being pushed to a point where it has to choose between Iran and the U.S.
- The major possibility seems to be that the Iraqi government may ask the U.S. to leave the country as calls are getting louder from the Iraqi political class to expel U.S. troops from the country.

Possibility of War in West Asia:

- Iran has now vowed revenge for the killing, raising the risks of a direct war between the U.S. and Iran to an all-time high.
- After killing Gen. Soleimani, the U.S. has said it is committed to de-escalation and does not want the situation to go out of control indicating it is not in favour of a war.
- Unlike the other recent targeted assassinations carried out by the U.S. like that of Abu Musaib al-Zarqawi (leader of the al-Qaeda in Iraq), Osama bin Laden (founder of the al-Qaeda) and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, (founder of the Islamic State, or the IS), Soleimani, was a state actor. Iran might see this as an act of war like any sovereign country would do.
- Self-preservation or protecting the lives of the top leaders is the primary objective of any regime. No response from Iran would indicate weakness on the part of Iran and might affect its deterrence abilities in the future power plays.
- An Iranian attack could trigger a cycle of violence, with both sides targeting each other in West Asia. There is the possibility of a dramatic escalation in the regional shadow war between Iran and the U.S. and its allies, principally Israel and Saudi Arabia.

12. Why has the U.S. crippled the functioning of the WTO? (GS-2)

Context:

The U.S. decisions making the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body dysfunctional.

Background:

- In December 2019, the U.S. cut short its share of the funding to the WTO. This move has resulted in a shortage of funds for the Appellate Body of WTO to function.
- The U.S. has also stalled the selection process for filling six vacancies at the Appellate Body by virtue of the veto power it enjoys in the appointment process. Consequently, the Appellate Body is left with only one member, who will not be able to deliver any rulings on pending

trade disputes since a quorum of three members is required to adjudicate any dispute.

- The U.S. has paralysed the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body, which acts as the adjudicating body for any disputes in international trade.

Details:

Dispute settlement at WTO:

- Given the increasing global trade and an increasing number of disputes in such trade, a binding, two-stage dispute settlement system was established at the World Trade Organization in the 1990s.
- The Appellate Body consisting of seven standing members forms an important part of the dispute settlement system of the WTO.

Process of appeal:

- In the first stage for adjudicating trade disputes, a panel would decide cases brought before it by the members of the WTO.
- Rulings issued by the panels can be appealed at the Appellate Body. As part of the second-stage of adjudication, the Appellate Body can uphold, modify or reverse the legal findings and conclusions of the panel.
- The Appellate Body's decisions are final and adopted within 30 days by the dispute settlement body.

Significance:

- Since Sanctions can be imposed on a member in case of its failure to comply with the Appellate Body's rulings, the establishment of the Appellate Body has given teeth and credibility to the rules-based multilateral trading system.
- The appellate body has provided security and predictability in the multilateral trading system.
- The panels and the Appellate Body have issued rulings in many disputes. It has addressed major issues in the domain of trade remedies such as countervailing and anti-dumping measures.

Reasons for U.S. actions:

- The U.S. has of late taken an isolationist approach with respect to its trade policy. The U.S. China trade war is an example. It seems to favour more bilateral trade deals which would be more favourable to the U.S. than the multilateral framework approach of the WTO.
- Several U.S. provisions for imposing countervailing and anti-dumping measures were found to be inconsistent with core provisions of the WTO agreements. The functioning of the Appellate Body has posed hurdles to

- the U.S. for adopting unilateral measures in global trading.
- The independent and impartial functioning of the Appellate Body in complex trade disputes had become a problem for Washington over the past many years. The U.S. has raised concerns about adverse decisions that struck down the U.S.'s trade measures.
 - Washington has repeatedly accused the Appellate Body of being partisan in procedures and rulings.
 - The U.S. has repeatedly alleged that the appellate body was crossing the limits of its powers and growing more powerful than the WTO itself of which it is a part. The U.S. has argued that such a role of the Appellate Body is not reflected in the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) framework agreed to by all the members of the WTO.

Efforts to revive the Appellate body:

- Many WTO members do not agree with the U.S.'s criticism of the functioning of the Appellate Body. Despite this, efforts were made to address the specific concerns raised by the U.S. about the Appellate Body.
- After hectic consultations, a draft decision was finalized. The draft decision included a package of reforms to improve the functioning of the Appellate Body.
- Despite an overwhelming acceptance for the package of reforms at the WTO General Council meeting in December 2019, the U.S. decided to reject the draft decision.

Concerns:

- The failure to break the deadlock on the functioning of the Appellate body, an important component of effective WTO dispute settlement mechanism, will act as a blow to the multilateral trading system. At the core of a functioning multilateral trading system is an effective dispute resolution mechanism.
- The dispute settlement system had led to reductions in unfair trade practices and had helped to strengthen the rules-based international trading system. The absence of it will hamper the global trade system.
- Given the fact that the majority of WTO members are developing and poor countries who mostly lack the political and economic power to enforce their rights and protect their interests in a system governed by power, this would severely impede their ability to benefit from global trade.
- The strangulation of the Appellate Body is a reflection of unilateralism and protectionism that are on a sharp rise. The absence of the Appellate Body paves the way for the return of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, 1947 rules which many countries consider as a step back in global trade.

13. UPSC to hold exclusive exam for railways (GS-2)

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the organizational restructuring of the railways through the unification of the existing eight Group A services into one central service – the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).
- The move was required as there was huge “departmentalism” that delayed many projects.

What is the present system like?

- The Indian Railways is governed by a pool of officers, among whom engineers are recruited through the Indian Engineering Services Examination and civil servants through the Civil Services Examination.
- The engineers are in five technical service cadres – Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE), Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME), Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE), Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSSE) and the Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS).
- The Civil Servants are in the Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS), Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS) and Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS).

Why was the reform needed?

The government wants to end inter-departmental rivalries, which it says have been hindering growth for decades.

- Several committees including the Bibek Debroy Committee in 2015 have noted that “departmentalism” is a major problem in the system.
 - Most committees have said the merger of the services in some form would be a solution.
- The Debroy panel had recommended the merging of the eight services into two – the Indian Railway Technical Service (IRTechS) comprising five engineering services (IRSE, IRSSE, IRSEE, IRSME and IRSS), and the Indian Railway Logistics Service (IRLogS), comprising non-technical services (IRAS, IRPS and IRTS). The government has now collapsed all services into one.
- The government has followed the Prakash Tandon Committee’s recommendations of 1994 as it was apprehensive that even if there are two services, there would be infighting.

What will change with the restructure?

- The Chairman along with four members responsible for
 - Infrastructure,
 - Operations and Business development,
 - Rolling stock and
 - Finance respectively will form the Railway Board.
- The Chairman shall be the cadre controlling officer responsible for Human Resources (HR) with assistance from a DG (HR).
- Three apex level posts shall be surrendered from Railway Board and all its remaining posts shall be open to all officers regardless of the service to which they belonged.
- The Board will also have some independent non-executive members, who will be highly distinguished professionals with deep knowledge and 30 years of experience including at the top levels in industry, finance, economics and management fields.

Concerns

- People with a specific skill set might be pushed to perform other work about which there is no clarity.
- The merger is unscientific and against established norms, because it proposes to merge two fundamentally dissimilar entities, with multiple disparities.
- There is growing uncertainty over promotions and career progression of the officers who are currently employed in Railways.
- There could be misunderstanding between civil servants and engineers in Railways.
 - The civil servants come from all walks of life after clearing the Civil Services Examination.
 - The engineers usually sit for the Engineering Services Examination right after getting an engineering degree. Various studies have noted that engineers join the Railways around the age of 22-23, while the civil servants join when they are around 26, barring exceptions.
 - The civil servants are saying that if all present cadres are merged and even higher departmental posts become open to all, engineers, being in larger numbers and of a certain age profile, may end up occupying most posts, if not all.

Future Course

- The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) will be conducting an exclusive examination for recruitment of officers to handle specialised services in the newly created Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).
- Candidates aspiring to get into railways will have to appear for the prelims after which they will indicate their preference for IRMS under five specialities — four of them engineering specialities for ‘technical’

operations comprising of civil, mechanical, telecom and electrical, and one 'non- technical' speciality which will recruit officers for accounts, personnel and traffic.

- This means the Engineering Services Examination, which selects officers for five out of eight railway services, will become redundant.
- Indian Railways will now provide the UPSC with its exact requirement of engineers, e.g. for electrical and mechanical. The UPSC, will, in turn, choose them from candidates having those as optional subjects.
- The first batch will be recruited in 2021, while the new five-member board with merged officers will be in place by mid-2021.
- The government, it's learnt, may also make it mandatory to select non-engineers – e.g. for accounting, traffic and personnel – from a few disciplines such as economics and commerce, restricting the entry of recruits with optional subjects such as history, political science, sociology, among others. However, this will have to wait until the GoM takes a final call.

14. Scoring a foreign policy self-goal (GS-2)

Context:

- The article analyzes the implications of the Citizenship Act (Amendment), 2019 for India's foreign policy.

Details:

- Apart from the domestic opposition to the provisions of the Act from some sections of the society, CAA would have long-term implications for India's foreign policy.
- There are some concerns that the government's expediency over the Citizenship Act has landed India in an unenviable diplomatic spot.

Regional fallout:

- CAA envisages providing citizenship to those facing persecution in the neighbouring countries. The government has been citing human rights violations in the neighbourhood and illegal immigration from the neighbouring countries as the reason for the present amendment. This would appear as anti-neighbour rhetoric to the neighbouring countries.
- This move risks damaging India's relation with two of India's closest allies in the region – Bangladesh and Afghanistan at a time when India does not have many friends in the neighbourhood.
- This would lead to serious loss of diplomatic capital with these countries and decrease India's leverage over the affairs of the region and adversely affect India's regional influence and standing.
- India is being challenged by growing Chinese influence in the region.

India is losing its traditional influence in the region given the Chinese state's engulfment of the Indian neighbourhood. China has increased its interactions with Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Reputational costs:

- The recent moves of the central government like the abrogation of Article 370 and the subsequent clampdown in Kashmir and the CAA have been questioned in international forums. India has lost some goodwill of the international community.
- In December 2019, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called the CAA "fundamentally discriminatory". The UN had also voiced concern over violence in India against CAA and urged respect for freedom of expression.
- In December 2019, in the backdrop of the CAA, the United States, considered India's ally, urged India to "protect the rights of its religious minorities in keeping with India's Constitution and democratic values".
- The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) has referred to CAA as being not only "highly discriminatory and arbitrary" but also contrary to New Delhi's "obligations under international human rights laws".
- The recent incidents have brought damage to the country's reputation. India's attempts to reach out to the international community, have not met with much success.

Break from the traditional path:

- India has traditionally shied away from internationalizing domestic issues, but the recent actions of the government have brought international attention to India's domestic matters. This will only complicate India's ability to deal with domestic decisions given increased international attention.
- India's traditional foreign policy pursuit has been a careful mix of soft power and material capability with the balance often tilting in favour of soft power. India has been looked at as a leading light of inclusiveness, democracy, and a major pole of stability in the comity of nations. The concerns against CAA are against the above principles.

Hurdles to India's dreams:

- Reputation, among other things, is critical in aiding India's quest for a place at the high table of international politics, such as acquiring a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat.
- India has been the region's typical status quo power that the countries loved to engage and promote to higher positions in the global associations. This characteristic of India may be undergoing a dramatic change, with many viewing India as an irresponsible power.

Great power equations:

- There are concerns that the CAA is based purely on domestic calculations.
- India is a major power with great power ambitions and may even be an indispensable power in some respects. But if India decides to shape its foreign policy based purely on domestic calculations, its indispensability and system-shaping abilities will take a serious hit.
- Great powers have traditionally been supportive of India's rise in the global order and have more or less stood by India in its pursuit of power and reputation. This is bound to change thanks to the government's domestic preoccupations.
- Moscow's unequivocal support for New Delhi is now a thing of the past given the increasing India-U.S. ties and this is playing out to the advantage of China.

Diverted Focus:

- Much of India's diplomatic capital is being spent on clarifying India's moves and convincing allies.
- The focus on crucial regional and global issues has been decreasing in India's diplomatic pursuits. Important issues like renegotiating of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the Afghan peace process, increasing complexity in the Indian Ocean's geopolitics have not received the requisite attention.

15. Spotting an opportunity in changing fundamentals (GS-2)

Context:

The growing rivalry between the United States and China and the requisite Indian response.

Background:

- The U.S.-China relation has been described by academics as the world's most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century given the economic and military strength of the two countries.
- It has been a relationship of economic cooperation with China being the second-largest foreign creditor of the United States after Japan, hegemonic rivalry in the Pacific, and mutual suspicion over the other's intentions.
- There has been a deterioration of the relations between the two countries of late.

Trade war:

- In the backdrop of a growing trade deficit with China, the U.S. in 2018 began setting tariffs and other trade barriers on China with the goal of forcing it to make changes to what the U.S. considers China's "unfair trade practices".
- The U.S. claims that the trade practices of China have led to the theft of intellectual property, and the forced transfer of American technology to China.
- In response to the U.S. move, China too raised the tariffs on American goods. The Chinese claim that the U.S. move is in violation of the World Trade Organization's principles.
- There have been increasing tariffs on the goods being traded between the two countries. Repeated attempts to end the trade war have not yielded any tangible results.
- The U.S. has been accusing China of unfairly controlling its currency value in the forex market to aid its export policy. The U.S. has designated China as a "currency manipulator" further straining the relationship between the two countries.

The U.S.-China rivalry is not limited to the economic sphere and the differences between the two countries have been witnessed in many other domains as well.

Next-generation Technologies:

- A technology war has erupted in the areas of artificial intelligence, digital space and 5G. Washington has blacklisted the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei and urged governments not to work with it in developing 5G networks. It accuses China of using Huawei to gather intelligence from other countries. The U.S. has cautioned its allies that using Huawei equipment will lead to less intelligence sharing from it.
- China has blamed the U.S. for targeting the Chinese company just to provide an opportunity for the American companies to expand in the lucrative and high potential technology domain. The Chinese view this development as a
- U.S. move to counter the Chinese progress which threatens U.S. leadership in next-generation technologies.
- The superpower showdown will likely soon extend into the space economy, another technology area of global importance given that China is making remarkable progress in the domain of space technology challenging the current U.S. hegemony in space technology.

Human Rights:

- Tensions between the two countries have risen following the U.S.'s passing of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of

2019 and the proposed Uighur Act. The U.S. accuses China of cracking down on domestic dissent and human rights violations.

- China claims that the U.S. is behind the disturbances in Hong Kong. There is no sign of the protests abating.
- The present U.S. administration's challenge to the "one China policy" given the growing diplomatic exchange between the U.S. and Taiwan is viewed with suspicion by China.
- The Chinese have accused the U.S. of interfering in its internal affairs and thus challenging Chinese sovereignty.

Power Play in the Pacific region:

- China has asserted its military control over the South China Sea by deploying more military assets to the region and occupying several man-made islands. This is viewed as an arm twisting tactic of the Chinese to resolve the dispute over territorial issues in the South China Sea. The U.S. and its allies have called for freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.
- The U.S. has worked towards a military build-up in Asia by its move to arm its allies like South Korea and Japan with American missile defence systems. The Chinese view this as a provocation to China.

Defence field:

- Despite the military advances made by China, U.S. defence spending is much larger than that of China's budget. With the creation of a U.S. Space Force as a separate arm under the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. is seeking to increase its superiority in network-centric warfare.
- The Chinese have been increasing their defence budget year on year citing the increased military buildup in the Pacific region.

Concerns:

- In the United States and China, the trade war has brought struggles for farmers and manufacturers and higher prices for consumers.
- The slowdown in the global economy is compounded by the U.S.-China trade war. As more sectors get drawn in, costs are rising and disrupting global supply chains.
- China's economic rise has led to some geopolitical friction between the US and China in the East Asian region. There has been the formation of groups in the region with alignment to China and the U.S.
- Any impact on clean energy targets in China due to U.S. technology restrictions in the nuclear field could be a setback to efforts to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change in the entire region.
- For other countries, being squeezed between Washington and Beijing

presents avoidable challenges. Acceding to U.S. pressure by banning Huawei hurts competition, delays network rollouts and disrupts commerce. In practice, Huawei is already too entrenched in many countries for bans to be feasible.

- If the U.S.-China trade war develops into a broader cold war, as some observers fear, it will have a devastating effect on the world at large.

Indian Concerns:

Energy concerns:

- Given the slowdown in the global economy, there has been a slack demand for oil globally. The surplus production of oil and shale gas output mainly by the U.S. has further lowered oil prices.
- Given the high dependence of India on imported oil, the present slump in oil prices is a good development for India as it will help reduce its import bills and subsequently its current account deficit. Lower energy prices will also make India's export sector more competitive in the global markets.
- The oil prices have increased more than 4% following the U.S. airstrike killing Iranian General Qassem Soleimani. The present escalation may lead to an outbreak of hostilities in the region between Iran and its regional proxies on one side and the U.S. and its allies on the other side. This would send oil prices soaring.
- India has stopped its oil imports from Iran following the tightening of U.S. sanctions on Iran. Unlike India, China continues to buy Iranian crude oil and is its largest buyer. Reports also suggest that China will invest \$280-billion in developing Iran's oil, gas and petrochemicals sectors. The Chinese have also enhanced their defence cooperation with Iran by the stationing of Chinese security personnel in Iran. There has been the strengthening of China-Iran relations while the India-Iran relation has been on the downswing.
- India, to meet its oil demand has ramped up energy imports from the U.S. which are likely to amount to \$10-billion in 2019-2020. China has been forging closer ties with oil producers in the west Asian region. This will help facilitate Chinese naval presence in the western Indian Ocean, including the Strait of Hormuz.

Trade:

- According to a State Bank of India "Ecowrap" report of July 2019, unlike the countries of Taiwan, Mexico, Vietnam and the European Union, India has not benefited much from U.S.-China trade war.
- Of the \$35-billion dip in China's exports to the U.S. market in the first half of 2019, about \$21-billion (or 62%) was diverted to other countries. The rest, \$14-billion, was made good largely by the U.S. producers.

- Going by a UN Conference on Trade and Development report of November 2019, additional exports from India to the U.S. market in the first half of the year due to trade diversion amounted to only \$755-million.
- The U.S.-China high-tech war threatens India's strategic autonomy.

Military:

- Given the "Pivot to Asia policy" of the U.S., the Chinese anxieties in the Asia-Pacific theatre have only grown over time. This may lead to a condition where India may have to contend with a greater Chinese military presence on its periphery.
- The Western Theater Command created in 2016 is responsible for the border with India. It is the largest of China's military regions, and the Tibet Military Command under it has been accorded a higher status than other provincial commands to widen its scope for combat preparedness. This may lead to increased militarization on the Indo-China border.

Lack of participation in multilateral forums:

- India's domestic concerns and the principle of maintaining equidistance from all powers have resulted in India not being part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the Indo-Pacific Business Forum created by the U.S., Japan and Australia, as also from the Blue Dot Network.
- This stand of India might affect India's influence in the long run in the Indo-Pacific region.

Way forward for India:

- Given that the U.S.-China tensions have driven supply chains out of China, India should come out with the right policies and incentives to attract industries to invest in India. This will not only help India come out of the current slowdown in growth rates but will also, in the long run, make India an important player in the global supply chains.
- The big three Chinese high-tech companies, Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, together have poured in \$5-billion in Indian startups in 2018. India could use this opportunity to try and force China to open its market to India's IT and other technology exports.
- Though India has no role in negotiating the "Code of Conduct" for the South China Sea, India's participation in the "Quad" dialogue on broader issues in the Indo-Pacific should be used as a leverage to protect India's interest in the region. India reserves the right to sail and fly unhindered through the South China Sea in accordance with the principles of freedom of navigation and overflight.
- The U.S. criticism of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is in India's favour given that it traverses Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The U.S.'s position is helpful to India. India would have to reconcile its own regional connectivity initiatives with the BRI projects that have

mushroomed in the neighbourhood.

- U.S.-China rivalry coincides with an upward trajectory in India-U.S. relations. This could help India have some leverage over negotiations with the Chinese even as India and China try and build the much-needed trust and cooperation which will ensure equilibrium and multipolarity in Asia.

16. Stressed urban cooperative banks to face PCA-like curbs (Prelims - PCA)

Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to impose restrictions on urban cooperative banks (UCBs) for deterioration of financial position, in line with the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework that is imposed on commercial banks.
- The move comes in the wake of the recent crisis at the PMC Bank.
- PCA is intended to intervene early and take corrective measures in a timely manner, so as to restore the financial health of banks that are at risk by limiting deterioration in their health and preserving their capital levels.

Details:

- Under the revised Supervisory Action Framework (SAF), UCBs will face restrictions for worsening of three parameters:
 1. When net non-performing assets exceed 6% of net advances.
 2. When they incur losses for two consecutive financial years or have accumulated losses on their balance sheets.
 3. If the capital adequacy ratio (CAR) falls below 9%.
- The RBI has said that action would be taken in case of serious governance issues.
 - UCBs will be asked to submit a board-approved action plan to correct the situation like reducing net NPAs below 6%, for restoring the profitability and wiping out the accumulated losses, and increasing capital adequacy ratio to 9% or above within 12 months.
 - The board of the UCB will be asked to review the progress under the action plan on a quarterly/monthly basis and submit the post-review progress report to the RBI.
 - The RBI may also seek a board-approved proposal for merging the UCB with another bank or converting itself into a credit society if CAR falls below 9%.
 - It can impose restrictions on declaration or payment of dividend or donation without prior approval if any one of the risk thresholds is breached.
 - Some of the other curbs include restricting fresh loans and advances carrying risk-weights more than 100% on incurring capital

expenditure beyond a specified limit and on the expansion of the balance sheet.

- The RBI said actions such as the imposition of all-inclusive directions under Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, and issue of show-cause notice for cancellation of banking licence may be considered when continued normal functioning of the UCB is no longer considered to be in the interest of its depositors/public.

17.The U.S. is weakened by Soleimani's killing (GS-2)

Context:

The U.S. killing Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani, in an airstrike.

Background:

- Tensions between the U.S. and Iran have been increasing ever since the U.S. withdrew from the Iranian Nuclear deal and initiated its 'maximum pressure' campaign on Iran through increased sanctions.
- Iran had adopted the 'strategic patience' approach in reaching out to other world powers while trying to resist the U.S. sanctions.
- The assassination of General Qassem Soleimani is the latest escalation which threatens to draw not just the two countries but the entire region to war.

Consequences:

Further escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran:

- General Qassem Soleimani was a top Iranian military commander, with a diplomatic passport. His assassination is being viewed in Iran as a declaration of war.
- There have been large scale street protests in Iran condemning the assassination and calling for revenge.
- In the holy city of Qom, a red flag was flown on the dome of Jamkaran Mosque signifying that Iran is prepared for a long war.
- In the current circumstances, there is very little possibility of renegotiating the Iranian nuclear deal which alone can bring lasting peace to the region.

Iraq's reaction:

- There was growing uneasiness between the U.S. and Iraq in the backdrop of
- U.S. airstrikes against Iraqi militias in recent weeks and the following attack on U.S. embassy in Baghdad.
- The U.S.'s unilateral use of airpower within Iraq targeting Iraqi militias

without the permission of the government has upset Iraq's government. It claims that the attacks are against the security and sovereignty of Iraq.

- Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis was also killed in the U.S. airstrike. He was then the deputy commander of the Popular Mobilisation Forces, an umbrella organisation of several Iraqi Shia militias. He was an Iraqi political leader who commanded a militia which is understood to be part of the Iraqi army.
- Iraq has claimed that the killing of Soleimani and al-Muhandis was an act of aggression against Iraq.
- The lawmakers, under pressure from both the public and militias to act against the U.S. after the killing, has passed a resolution to expel the thousands of U.S. troops stationed in Iraq and deny them access to its airspace, land or water. The U.S. troops had been in Iraq on an invitation from the Iraqi government to fight the Islamic State.
- Though the Parliament itself doesn't have the authority to expel foreign troops, a resolution passed in Parliament is a call to the executive branch to act. The Iraqi Prime Minister has stated the intent to ask U.S. troops to leave.
- The Iraqi Parliament also called upon the Prime Minister to make a formal complaint to the UN against the U.S. for "serious violations and breaches of Iraqi sovereignty".

Pro-Iranian groups in the region:

- Ever since Gen. Soleimani took over the Quds Force in 1998, he expanded the operations of the unit, by deepening Iran's links with its proxy groups such as Hezbollah and the Badr Organisation or building new militias such as the Shia Popular Mobilization Units and Houthis. Soleimani was viewed as the unifying force that held the Resistance Axis together. The Resistance Axis is a concept that refers to the pro-Iranian groups in the region.
- Though the primary objective of the airstrike was to target Iran, the U.S. act is being viewed as an attack on Iraq and on the pro-Iranian movements like Hezbollah from Lebanon and Liwa Fatemiyoun from Afghanistan.
- There are concerns regarding attacks by pro-Iranian groups across the West Asian region where thousands of U.S. troops and official personnel are stationed.

Allies concerns:

- U.S. allies in the region and major world powers like France, Germany and the U.K. have either expressed concerns over U.S. actions or have stayed neutral with no one backing U.S. actions.
- The Arab League which has generally accused Iran of sowing chaos in the region, too has expressed concern over the situation and asked for calm.

Moves on the international stage:

- Iran's ambassador to the UN has written to the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, and the UN Security Council President to condemn the assassination.
- Though UN Secretary-General has expressed deep concerns over the circumstances, he stopped short of criticizing the U.S.
- China and Russia may table a resolution at the UN that calls for calm as well as criticize the U.S. which could be vetoed by the U.S.

Concerns:

U.S. statements after the assassination:

- Given the isolation being faced by the U.S. on the international stage, the U.S. has tried to justify its actions by its information war. The U.S. has been trying to link Soleimani to terrorist attacks around the world. None of this has won the U.S. any support on the international stage.
- It is not helping the U.S.'s cause that its political leaders have been making dangerous and provocative statements after the assassination.
- The U.S. President has claimed that the U.S. would target and strike "52 Iranian sites", including cultural ones if Iran tries to attack American assets or personnel in the West Asian region. Attacks on cultural sites are considered a flagrant war crime.

Straining of ties between Iraq and the U.S.:

- Iraq is a crucial ally for the U.S. in the war against terrorism in West Asia, and the deterioration in the ties has only hastened after the U.S. act.
- Iraq, forced to choose between the U.S. and Iran, has chosen to stand with Iran given the fact that Iran is Iraq's neighbour and possesses enormous influence in the region and within Iraq as well.
- The U.S. has threatened Iraq with sanctions and a bill for billions of dollars if the U.S. troops are forced to pull back. This approach has only escalated the situation to a three-cornered crisis involving the U.S., Iraq and Iran.

Desperate and irrational policy:

- The U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003 gave rise to the worst kind of violence in Iraq and Syria and provided a massive advantage to Iran not only in Iraq but also across the region weakening the strategic position of its allies (Israel and Saudi Arabia).
- The U.S. attempts to regain its authority in the region has not worked, neither the attempt to overthrow the government in Syria nor the sanctions against Iran.

- The U.S. approach towards Iran has been termed as irrational given that the U.S. decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal was the trigger for the escalation and the present crisis.
- The recent escalation has isolated the U.S. further and deepened anxieties amongst its increasingly isolated regional allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Way forward:

- Given the bad consequences of the past wars in the region and the fact that a full-fledged war would be in no country's interest, there is an urgent need for de-escalation.
- Europe, which has good ties with both the U.S. and Iran, should use its diplomatic channels to bring together the U.S. and Iran for talks and prevent an all-out war.

18. Amidst a tragedy, an opportunity

Context:

The destruction caused by bushfires in Australia and the opportunity to strengthen the bilateral relationship between India and Australia.

Background:

- Wildfires have affected more than 12 million hectares of land in Australia and the tragedy of the bushfires is still unfolding.
- The wildfires have caused large scale loss to life and property leading to the displacement of many residents.
- The wildfires have destroyed the native flora, killing thousands of wild animals. Australia is home to many endangered and rare species.
- Tourism which constitutes a major source of revenue for Australia has been affected by the raging bushfires.

Details:

- India and Australia have many converging interests. There is an opportunity to translate these converging interests and coalescing of values into a formidable partnership. There is the scope for partnership in diverse areas, including the most relevant challenge of climate change facing our planet.
- Post the tragedy of the bushfires, the debate on global warming, climate change and fossil fuels and the need for climate action is only going to intensify.
- Australia's celebrated novelist Richard Flanagan has lamented the fact that Australia has become the ground zero for the climate catastrophe. He notes with concern the ominous signs:

- The deterioration of the Great Barrier Reef.
- Wildfires burning the world-heritage rain forests of Australia.
- The reduction in area and quality of the kelp forests off Australia's **coasts.**
- Water scarcity in the towns of Australia.
- The Indian Ocean Dipole may have triggered the drought that is related to the fires.
- Given that environmental activism has gained ground throughout the country, the campaign against fossil fuels and the export of coal is sure to intensify in the days to come.

Dialogue on energy:

- India and Australia are two economies with large stakeholding in fossil fuels.
- India given its large population and despite its Intended nationally determined contributions for the Paris climate deal is still heavily reliant on fossil fuels to meet its energy requirements. Australia has huge reserves of fossil fuels, especially coal. The export of coal contributes a substantive amount to Australia's revenues.
- Given the complementarity of India and Australia's needs, it is critical for India and Australia to ensure that their dialogue on energy acquires momentum. The envisaged co-operation could take the form of:
 - A joint scientific task force to investigate the latest evidence linking climate change and extreme climatic events. The role of fossil fuels in fuelling climate change needs further understanding.
 - To collaborate on "clean" coal technology
 - R&D on alternative green fuels.
 - Both countries must simultaneously strengthen the International Solar Alliance

Factoring China:

- The growth of China has led to a lot of disruption in inter-country relations in the Indo-Pacific region.
- China's increasingly unilateralist, interventionist and mercantilist approach in dealing with other countries is a big challenge to India and Australia who share the same region of Indo-Pacific with the Chinese.
- India and Australia both have a strategic interest in ensuring a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region in which the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are ensured.
- There is a near consensus within the political leadership and the strategic community that the Australia-India relationship should be strengthened given the benefits it would lead to. "The Quad" grouping is one such platform where the two countries have come together with Japan and the U.S. to counter China.

Scope for cooperation:

- There are many sectors where India and Australia could work in coordination. This would benefit both countries. Potential areas of cooperation include:
 - Water management technologies, given the problem of water stress being faced by both countries.
 - Skills and higher education
 - Maritime technology and maritime security
 - Cybersecurity
 - Counterterrorism

Economic co-operation:

- Indians are today the largest source of skilled migrants in Australia and the economic relationship between the two is already robust.
- There is still scope for enhanced economic co-operation between the two countries and efforts in this direction are afoot.
- Government of India will be officially releasing the Australia Economic Strategy (AES), authored by Ambassador Anil Wadhwa. This will complement Australia's India Economic Strategy 2035 which was authored by Former High Commissioner of Australia to India Peter Varghese.
- Post India's decision to exit from RCEP trade deal, India aims to strengthen economic ties with Australia. In Canberra, there is considerable sensitivity to India's concerns over the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Efforts are on for an early conclusion of a bilateral Free Trade Agreement between India and Australia.

Increasing Bonhomie and people to people contacts:

- The Australia-India Institute at the University of Melbourne, in partnership with the Sydney-based Lowy Institute, commissioned one of the most comprehensive surveys of Indian public opinion on key foreign policy issues. Indians ranked Australia in the top four nations towards which they feel most warmly.
- Australia is home to an increasing number of the Indian diaspora.

Shared Values:

- India and Australia have large English-speaking populations. Language is not a major barrier for the two nations.
- India and Australia are both multicultural, federal democracies that believe in and respect the rule of law.

Heralding a new front for the Indo-Pacific:

- India-Australia relationship for more than six decades had been

characterized by misperception, lack of trust, neglect, missed opportunities and even hostility.

- In 1955, Australia did not take part in the Bandung Afro-Asian conference. India and Australia should bring this chequered past to a closure, and herald a new united front for the Indo-Pacific.

Way forward:

There is the need to elevate the 'two plus two' format talks between India and Australia, from the secretary level to the level of foreign and defence ministers. That would signal that New Delhi recognises Canberra as important a partner as Washington and Tokyo. This will help take the bilateral relations to the next stage.

19. Army gets working on GOCO model to improve efficiency (Prelims)

Context:

The Army has initiated the process of identifying potential industry partners to implement the Government Owned Contractor Operated (GOCO) model for its base workshops and ordnance depots intended to improve operational efficiency.

Details:

- The GOCO model was one of the recommendations of the Lt. Gen. DB Shekatkar (Retd.) Committee to "enhance combat capability and re-balancing defence expenditure."
- Based on the recommendations, the government has "decided to disband two Advance Base Workshops (ABW), one static workshop and four ordnance depots" and eight ABWs are recommended to be corporatized on GOCO model.
 - On the whole, the Indian Army operates eight workshops all over the country. They are located in Jabalpur, Allahabad, Meerut, Kirkee, New Delhi, Agra, Bengaluru and Kakinara.
 - The tasks undertaken by these workshops include depot-level (D level) repairs and overhaul of T-72 and T-90, guns, mortars and small arms, vehicles, communication systems, radars, air defence systems, armoured personnel carriers and manufacture of spares (indigenisation) and overhaul of aviation rotables.
- In GOCO model, the assets owned by the government will be operated by the private industries.
- Under the GOCO model, the private companies need not make investments on land, machinery and other support systems. The missions are set by government and the private sectors are given full independence in implementing the missions using their best practices.
- The main advantage of the model is that the targets are achieved in a lesser time frame. Also, it will boost competitiveness among the private entities paving the way for newer technologies.
- The GOCO model is being evaluated to drive "higher operational

efficiencies”.

20. Trump avoids escalating crisis, says Iran is 'standing down' (GS-2)

Context:

- U.S. President Donald Trump has backed away from days of angry rhetoric against Iran as the two countries tried to defuse a crisis over the American killing of Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani.
- In an address from the White House, Mr. Trump said the United States did not necessarily have to respond militarily to Iranian missile attacks on military bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq overnight.
- Trump's address was in contrast to his harsh rhetoric on Iran in recent days.
- The Republican President had vowed to strike back disproportionately if Iran retaliated strongly against Soleimani's killing.

Iran's Revenge:

Iran's revenge

The killing of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad by the U.S. on January 3 has escalated tensions between Tehran and Washington, leading to Iran launching missile attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq. Here is a quick recap:



U.S. KILLS SOLEIMANI

January 3: A drone strike on Baghdad's international airport kills Soleimani, head of the Revolutionary Guard Corps' foreign operations arm, the Qods Force

▪ Also among the dead is Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy

chief of the Tehran-backed Iraqi paramilitary network Hashed al-Shaabi

IRAN CALLS FOR REVENGE

▪ Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei promises "severe revenge" for Soleimani's death



A satellite image provided by Middlebury Institute of International Studies and Planet Labs Inc. shows the damage caused at the Ain al-Asad air base in Iraq. • AP

▪ Iraq PM Adel Abdel Mahdi warns the U.S. strike will "spark devastating war in Iraq"

January 4: Trump warns that the U.S. is targeting 52 sites in Iran, including its cultural monuments, and will hit them if American personnel or assets are harmed

January 5: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo insists that U.S. action against Iran will conform to international law

DEAL UNRAVELS

January 5: Iran announces its fifth step back from the nuclear deal agreed with world powers in 2015, saying it will forgo a "limit on the number of centrifuges"

FUNERAL TURNS DEADLY

January 7: Over 50 killed in stampede during the funeral procession of Soleimani

▪ In Baghdad, PM Mahdi confirms he has received what the U.S. called a draft letter on steps toward troops withdrawal from Iraq

IRAN STRIKES BACK

January 8: Iran strikes Iraqi bases housing U.S. and foreign troops

▪ Ayatollah Ali Khamenei says the strikes are a "slap in the face" for the U.S.



- Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has said that the attacks on the Erbil and Al-Asad bases were a retaliation for the killing of the General.

What is next in Iran-U.S. conflict?

- If there are no American casualties, a red line drawn by President Trump – the latest spell of crisis was triggered by the death of an American civilian contractor in a rocket attack by a pro-Iran militia in Iraq – he could shrug the Iranian response off and choose not to retaliate, which could be a de-escalating step.
- But there are several scenarios that could lead the conflict to an all-out war.
- First, if Mr. Trump orders air strikes inside Iran, it would trigger further military response from Iran and the conflict will immediately spiral out of control.
- Second, even if Mr. Trump steps back from further retaliation, Iran could target U.S. troops inside Iraq through its proxies such as the Badr Brigade and Kataib Hezbollah. That will drag the U.S. into a deeper conflict.

- Third, the Shia militias operate with relative autonomy. Tehran may not be micromanaging them. Infuriated by the loss of their commander, they could act without authorisation from Tehran against U.S. troops in Iraq, which could trigger a harsher response from the U.S. against Iran, dragging both countries into war.
- In the event of a war, the U.S. can carry out devastating air strikes inside Iran, while Iran could trigger multiple conflicts in the region through its proxies such as Hezbollah, the PMF and al-Houthis, besides launching ballistic missile attacks at the U.S. interests and allies.
- West Asia remains on the brink.

21. The Indian Constitution's unitary tilt (GS-2)

Context

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) has revealed some of the most significant gaps of Indian federalism.

- State governments occupied by opposition parties have declared that they would not implement the law.
- The Legislative Assembly of Kerala went to the extent of passing a resolution, stating that the law “contradicts the basic values and principles of the Constitution”.
- In this backdrop, let us have a look at the federal relationship between the Centre and the States.

Constitutional Perspective

- **Article 256**
 - The executive power of every State shall be so exercised as to ensure compliance with the laws made by Parliament and any existing laws which apply in that State, and the executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of such directions to a State as may appear to the Government of India to be necessary for that purpose.
 - It compels the State government to ensure implementation of the laws made by Parliament.
 - If the State government fails to do so, the Government of India is empowered to give “such directions to a State as may appear... to be necessary”.
- **Article 365**
 - Effect of failure to comply with, or to give effect to, directions given by the Union, where any State has failed to comply with or to give effect to any directions given in the exercise of the executive power of the Union under any directions given in the exercise of the executive power of the Union under any of the provisions of this Constitution, it shall be lawful for the President to hold that a situation has arisen in which the

government of the State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.

- The refusal to enforce the law even after the Centre issues directions would empower the President to impose President's Rule in those States under Articles 356 and 365.

The Supreme Court of India has also confirmed this reading of the law in S.R. Bommai v. Union of India – arguably the most significant case on Indian federalism.

Anti-CAA ads in West Bengal

- Another controversy arose in West Bengal, where the State government put anti-CAA advertisements on its websites.
- In an interim order, the Calcutta High Court directed the State government to remove those advertisements.
- The question – whether State governments are empowered to use public funds to campaign against a law made by Parliament – is open for final determination.
- In its final judgment, the High Court could bar the State government from campaigning against a parliamentary law.

Therefore, neither the refusal to implement nor the official protests registered by State governments carry much legal force.

Concerns raised about single party dominance for electoral politics

- Parliament, the “temple of democracy”, has been reduced to a site for procedural formalities. The Lok Sabha appears to be an extension of the executive, rather than a mechanism for its accountability.
- The Opposition's right to question the government and keep them accountable is seen as meddling in Governance.
 - This is based on the assumption that losers should step aside, respect the democratic mandate, and let the government do its job.
- The brute dominance has dwarfed any semblance of opposition politics at the Centre.
 - This is manifested through the absence of the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha for six years in a row (a consequence of an archaic and arguably unlawful practice requiring a party to secure at least 10% of the total seats to occupy the position of Leader of Opposition).
 - It has also led to the denial of an opposition vote in the appointments to various anti-corruption bodies.

Time and again, our experiences with single-party dominance have shown that in the face of comfortable majorities, our constitutional structure reveals its tendencies to concentrate power.

What was the need of a strong Centre?

- In the backdrop of a bloody partition and threats of “fissiparous tendencies”, it was probably justified for the founders of the Indian Republic to be hesitant in instituting a stronger federalism.
- If we wanted to be together, the argument went, we should only have so much federalism.

Electoral federalism

Over the last seven decades, there have been changes in ground realities.

- We have seen repeated examples of huge vote swings between national and State elections, separated by only a few months, in the same constituencies.
- People have identified the Central and State issues, and are now nuanced in their voting choices, leading to the “losers” of national politics still winning State elections and form legitimately elected governments.
- The State governments are thus filling the opposition deficit at the Centre. With this shift of opposition politics from New Delhi to State capitals, the politics of opposition is likely to become the politics over federalism.

Conclusion

The conflict that the CAA has triggered might become a template for future contestations over the federal question. While the politics seems to be ripe for advancing federalism, the law is likely to constrain such a development.

22. Nirbhaya case: two convicts file curative pleas (Prelims - Curative Petition)

Context

Curative petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court by two convicts in the Nirbhaya case.

Curative Petition:

Curative Petition is the last judicial resort available for redressal of grievances in court which is normally decided by judges in-chamber. It is only in rare cases that such petitions are given an open-court hearing.

- The concept of the curative petition was evolved by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra and Anr. (2002) where the question was whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, after the dismissal

of a review petition.

- The Supreme Court, in the case, held that in order to prevent abuse of its process and to cure gross miscarriage of justice, it may reconsider its judgements in the exercise of its inherent powers.
- For this purpose, the Court has devised what has been termed as a “curative” petition.

Certain specific conditions are laid down by the Supreme Court to entertain the curative petitions. They are:

- The petitioner will have to establish that there was a genuine violation of principles of natural justice and fear of the bias of the judge and that the judgement adversely affected him.
- The petition shall state specifically that the grounds mentioned had been taken in the review petition and that it was dismissed by circulation.
- The petition is to be sent to the three senior-most judges and judges of the bench who passed the judgement affecting the petition, if available.
- If the majority of the judges on the above bench agree that the matter needs hearing, then it would be sent to the same bench (as far as possible).
- The court could impose “exemplary costs” to the petitioner if his plea lacks merit.

Article- 137: Review of judgments or orders by the Supreme Court subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament or any rules made under Article 145, the Supreme Court shall have power to review any judgment pronounced or order made by it.

Note:

- In the current context, if the Curative Petition is rejected, the convicts can file an appeal for Mercy Petition with the President of India.
- As per the Constitution, whenever a crime has been committed and the person concerned has also been punished by the court of law, he may present a mercy petition to the President of India under Article 72 of the Constitution of India, where the matter falls within the ambit of Article 72.

23. SC tells govt. to review orders curbing basic rights in J&K (GS-2)

Why in News

The Supreme Court has recently given its ruling on the Kashmir lockdown and communications shutdown cases.

- The cases were also related to the impact of the prohibitory orders issued under Section 144 of the **Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)** on press freedom.
- Internet access was snapped after **Jammu and Kashmir's special status was revoked** and the state bifurcated into two union territories, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

Key Points

- **Ruling on Suspension of Internet**
 - Suspending Internet services indefinitely is impermissible under the **Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services [Public Emergency or Public Service] Rules, 2017**.
 - The court held that suspension could be done for temporary duration only and the same is subject to judicial review.
 - A "complete and broad" suspension of telecom and Internet services should be resorted to only as a drastic measure in an "unavoidable" situation.
 - The Court has thus asked the government to **review within seven days** all orders directing suspension of internet services.
- **Upheld Fundamental Rights**
 - The **freedom of free speech and expression on the Internet is a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution**. The State cannot cite the extensive reach and impact of the Internet as a medium in order to restrict this right.
 - **Trade, occupation or commerce dependent on the Internet is a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(g)**.
 - Restriction upon such fundamental rights should be in consonance with the mandate under Article 19 (2) and (6) of the Constitution, inclusive of the test of proportionality.

Note: The **Doctrine of Proportionality** postulates that the nature and extent of the State's interference with the exercise of a right must be proportionate to the goal it seeks to achieve.

- **Ruling on Section 144**
 - The Court held that the **repetitive orders** under Section 144 CrPC as an **abuse of power**.
 - The Court said that power under the Section 144 is exercisable not **only where there exists present danger, but also when there is an apprehension of danger**. However, the danger contemplated should be in the nature of an **'emergency'** and for the purpose of preventing obstruction and annoyance or injury to any person lawfully employed".
 - The government **cannot recourse to blanket use of the power under Section 144 CrPC (for issuing restrictions)** as a tool to prevent the legitimate expression of opinion or grievance or exercise of any fundamental rights. There is a need to find a balance regarding security and liberty of people.

- The Court has thus asked the authorities to review forthwith the need for continuance of any such order.

Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services [Public Emergency or Public Service] Rules, 2017

- These are the rules to be followed if the government intends to temporarily suspend telecom services in any part of the country.
- According to these rules, only the Home Secretary of the country and a secretary of a state's home department can pass such an order.
- These also state that any such order should be taken up by a review committee within five days.
- These rules have been framed by the government on the basis of the powers conferred by section 7 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885.

Relevant Provisions of Article 19

- **Article 19(1)(a)** states that all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression.
- **Article 19(1)(g)** states that all citizens shall have the right to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.
- **Article 19 (2)** states that the State can impose reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right to freedom of speech and expression in the interests of the :
 - Sovereignty and integrity of India,
 - Security of the State,
 - Friendly relations with foreign States,
 - Public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.
- Under **Article 19(6)**, the State can impose reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right provided under Article 19(1)(g) in the interest of the general public.

Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure

- Section 144 CrPC, 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.
- **Powers**
 - The magistrate can direct any person to abstain from a certain act or to take a certain order with respect to certain property in his possession or under his management.
 - This usually includes restrictions on movement, carrying arms and form assembling unlawfully. It is generally believed that assembly of three or more people is prohibited under Section 144.
- Section 144 CrPC has often been used to clamp down on telecommunication services and order Internet shutdowns.

24. Taking a holistic approach to dengue (GS-2)

Context:

The advent of a new vaccine against the dengue virus.

Background:

- Dengue is **essentially a tropical disease** that occurs in the countries around the Equator.
- **Hot weather and high humidity** aided by intermittent rainfalls favour the sustenance of **Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus** (a minor contributor), **the vectors transmitting the dengue virus**.
- Dengue is mostly **an asymptomatic infection**, and only a very few develop severe disease. Those very young or very old and those who have chronic ailment are at a greater risk of developing severe disease. **The worldwide Dengue case fatality rate is as low as 0.3%.**

Details:

- The advent of a new tetravalent vaccine against the dengue virus has thrown new light into **the evidence-based management of dengue**.
- The studies and trials have indicated that this vaccine confers about 80% protection to children vaccinated between 4 and 16 years of age without any major side effects.

Concerns:

Challenges associated with Dengue:

- **Urbanisation, poor town planning, and improper sanitation are the major risk factors for the multiplication of the vector mosquitoes.** The rapid and **unplanned urbanization in India** has only amplified the challenges for the public health system
- Aedes eggs can remain dormant for more than a year and will hatch once they come in contact with water.

Shortage of skilled manpower:

- Source reduction activities like **preventing water stagnation and using chemical larvicides and adulticides are often recommended.** These chemicals need to be applied in periodic cycles to kill the larvae that remain even after the first spray.
- However given the scale of operations required and the **shortage of skilled workers** available for such measures, the above options are rarely used.

- Many posts in government departments remain vacant despite there being a dire public health need. The National Vector Borne Disease Control Program notes that the **deficiency of manpower has led to a lack of active surveillance in India which has severely impeded India's actions against Dengue.**

Under-Reporting:

- Dengue cases are often **under-reported due to political reasons**, fearing political backlash by the voters in subsequent elections.
- The state also considers under-reporting of cases to **avoid spreading panic among the common people.**

Lack of Co-ordination:

- There is a **lack of coordination between the local bodies and health departments in the delivery of public health measures.** This has resulted in piecemeal efforts from the stakeholders thus depriving the community the benefit that would arise from synergy.
- The lack of proportionate targets and resources to the different levels of the public health system has resulted in **overburdening of the grass root levels.**

Alternative medicine drugs:

- Despite the guidelines for the management of dengue cases by the WHO and the Indian government, the **usage of complementary medicines** like Nilavembu kudineer (a Siddha medicine) and papaya leaf extract are rampant among the people.
- **For any medicine, safety is more important than efficacy.** Every modern medicine drug has come out after rigorous safety and efficacy studies for around 10 years, with an informed declaration of the side effects. There has been **a lack of such studies with respect to the above alternative drugs.**
- The studies on which alternative drugs are being promoted are based on very primitive forms of research like case reports, in-vitro studies, and animal studies.
- A meta-analysis of various studies has shown that there is no credible evidence for the use of papaya extract in dengue fever. However, some pharmaceutical companies are still marketing papaya extract pills. **There are case reports which point out to many side effects due to the usage of these medicines.**

Way forward:

More comprehensive approach:

- A comprehensive mechanism is required in the efforts against Dengue. Apart from **promoting the use of the vaccine, gaining control over dengue will**

require a more holistic approach. An integrated approach against Dengue should also **include within its ambit vector control and proper case management.**

Vector control:

- Aedes mosquitoes have a limited range as it cannot fly beyond a hundred meters. **Keeping the surroundings clean and hygienic can help prevent the breeding of the vector mosquitoes.**
- Considering that the vector mosquitoes bite during the daytime, keeping the windows shut in the day hours is a simple yet effective measure to reduce dengue incidence.

Epidemiological Measures:

- Epidemiological measures are essential in the management of communicable diseases like Dengue.
- **Epidemiology is the study and analysis of the distribution, patterns and determinants of health and disease conditions in defined populations.** It is a cornerstone of public health and shapes policy decisions and evidence-based practice by identifying risk factors for disease and targets for preventive healthcare.
- Singapore uses one successful model of mapping and analysing data on dengue, using Geographical Information System (GIS). This involves mapping the streets with dengue cases for vector densities. It helps the state to focus attention on such areas for more effective interventions.

Proper Case Management:

- **Fluid management** is the cornerstone in the management of severe diseases like dengue hemorrhagic fever and dengue shock syndrome. There is the need to adhere to the **guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO)** given it is based on elaborate studies and trials.

Need for studies on alternative medicines:

- Alternative medicines need to undergo rigorous testing before its wide-scale usage.

25. A health emergency (GS-2)

Context:

The World Health Organization's announcement on risks regarding polio.

Details:

- **The World Health Organization** has announced that **polio will continue to remain a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)** for the next three months.
- Polio was declared as PHEIC in 2014 and has continued to remain one since then.
- The decision was taken based on the recommendation of the emergency committee. The committee arrived at the unanimous decision based on the **“rising risk” of international spread of wild poliovirus type-1.**

Concerns:

- Polio remains a concern despite concerted efforts across the world. There has been an **increase in the number of cases of wild polio type-1 cases** in 2019 compared to 2018.
- Apart from the increase in the number of cases, there were **instances of the wild type-1 virus getting exported from Pakistan to Iran and Afghanistan.** The **increase in the area currently under threat** possess challenges to the countries given the lack of resources in these countries.
- Other parts of the region that have been free of the virus in the past are at risk of outbreaks.
- **The virus causing polio has been found in the environment** in Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, in Afghanistan. This is a concern considering the fact that the **number of children not vaccinated in Afghanistan has been increasing.** These children would be vulnerable to the Poliovirus present in the environment.
- A major cause of concern has been the outbreak of **vaccine-derived poliovirus cases in 16 countries.**

Additional information:

- A country is said to have eradicated polio when no new case of wild poliovirus is reported for three successive years. Nigeria is all set to be declared as having eradicated polio in 2020, and in turn, the entire African region will become free of wild poliovirus.

26. Transgender Persons Act comes into effect

Context:

The Social Justice Ministry notified the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.**

Details:

- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 was passed by Parliament in November 2019 and subsequently received Presidential assent.

Significance:

- The Act aims to **end discrimination against transgender persons in accessing education, employment and healthcare.**

Provisions:

- The act also recognizes the right to self-perceived gender identity and provides for certification from a district magistrate which could be used for availing welfare schemes of the government. This would be the gender certificate.
- In cases of a transgender person having undergone gender-change surgery, the law says they can obtain a certificate from the medical facility. This can be used for applying for changes in the certificates.

Concerns:

- Many in the transgender community have raised concerns about the requirement of a certificate from the district magistrate.
- There is lack of knowledge about the transgender identity certificate under the Act. Given the lack of awareness and sensitization among the government officials, some of the transgender are finding it difficult to get the certification.

Counter Argument:

- **Certification is needed to prevent misuse of welfare measures meant exclusively for the transgender.** Given the fact that Transgender people are deeply deprived, any leakage of benefits meant for them would render the scheme ineffective for the community.

Way forward:

- There is the need for **greater sensitization among the common people and the government officials** regarding the transgender community.

27. India's under-5 girls face high mortality (GS-2)

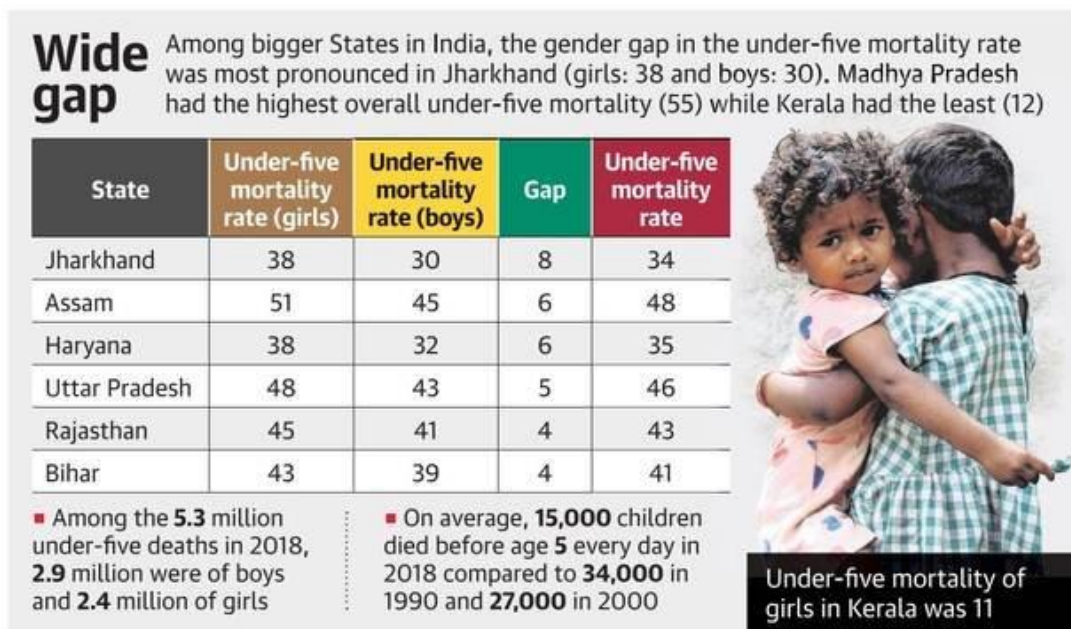
Context:

The **'Levels and Trends in Child Mortality'** report by the United Nations (UN) inter-agency group for child mortality.

Background:

- The child mortality rate, also called 'under-five mortality rate', refers to the probability of dying between birth and exactly five years of age expressed per 1,000 live births. It encompasses neonatal mortality and infant mortality. 47% of deaths among children under five were newborns in 2018.

- Rapid progress has resulted in a significant decline in preventable child deaths since 1990, with the global under-5 mortality rate declining by over half between 1990 and 2016. However, despite these advances, there are still 15000 under-five deaths per day from largely preventable causes.
- Most of the causes leading to under-five mortality are preventable with suitable interventions. The leading causes of death of children under five include:
 - Preterm birth complications
 - Pneumonia
 - Intrapartum-related events
 - Diarrhoea
 - Neonatal infection
 - Malaria
 - Malnutrition and Undernutrition
- Reduction of child mortality is reflected in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Target 3.2 aims to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births by 2030.



Details:

Variation among the regions and countries:

- Huge disparities in under-5 mortality rates exist. Countries that are in the second or third stage of the Demographic Transition Model (DTM) have higher rates of child mortality than countries in the fourth or fifth stage of the DTM.
- Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest under-5 mortality rates in the world.

- Approximately 80% of under-5 deaths occur in only two regions: sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Half of all under-5 deaths in 2018 occurred in five countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia. India and Nigeria alone account for about a third.
- Likewise, there are disparities between wealthy and poor households in developing countries. According to a Save the Children paper, children from the poorest households in India are three times more likely to die before 5 years than those from richer households.

Gender disparity in Child mortality:

- Globally the under 5 mortality risk is higher among boys, meaning that boys are expected to have a higher probability of dying before reaching age 5 than girls. But this trend was not reflected in India.
- India is among the few countries in the world where, in 2018, the mortality for girls under 5 years of age exceeded that of boys.
- The report though notes that in 2018, fewer countries showed gender disparities in child mortality, yet in some countries primarily located in Southern Asia and Western Asia, the risk of dying before age 5 for girls is significantly higher compared to global patterns.

Indian scenario:

- India's neonatal mortality rate is 23 per 1,000 live births.
- Neonatal death is defined as a death during the first 28 days of life (0-27 days). The major causes of neonatal mortality are pre-term birth, intrapartum related events, and neonatal infection.
- According to India's 2017 Sample Registration System, the States with the highest burden of neonatal mortality are Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh, with 32, 33 and 30 neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively.
- Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttarakhand showed the largest gender gaps in under-5 mortality.
- Uttar Pradesh owing to the large population base and also the high neonatal mortality rate has the highest number of estimated newborn deaths in India.

Concerns:

- The report notes that according to the current trends, **close to 52 million children under 5 years of age, will die between 2019 and 2030.**

Way forward:

Reducing the impact of preventable causes:

- Most of the deaths are caused by preventable causes.

- Early neonatal deaths are more closely associated with pregnancy-related factors and maternal health, whereas late neonatal deaths are associated more with factors in the newborn's environment.
- Pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria together are the cause of 1 out of every 3 child deaths before the age of 5 and nearly half of under-five deaths globally are attributable to undernutrition. In less developed countries, malnutrition is the main source of child mortality.
- Appropriate and timely interventions can go a long way in addressing the problem of child mortality.

Appropriate Interventions:

- Given the variation among regions and households, there is a need for specific interventions appropriate for the major risk factor at play in each situation.
- Undernutrition is a major contributing factor in the case of India. Interventions like the POSHAN Abhiyan aiming to improve nutritional outcomes for children, pregnant women and lactating mothers is a welcome initiative.
- The contribution of diarrhoea and malaria to under 5 mortality rate is high in rural hinterlands. Improving sanitation conditions and the provision of PHCs in these areas can be an effective intervention.

Additional details:

- **Infant mortality is the death of young children under the age of 1.** This death toll is measured by the infant mortality rate (IMR), which is the number of deaths of children under one year of age per 1000 live births.
- **Perinatal mortality (PNM)** refers to the death of a foetus or neonate and is the basis to calculate the perinatal mortality rate.

28. Private property is a fundamental right, says SC (GS-2)

Context:

Supreme Court Judgment.

Background:

- Right to private property was a fundamental right under Article 31 of the Indian Constitution.
- Right to property ceased to be a fundamental right with the 44th Constitution Amendment in 1978. But it continued to remain a legal right.

- Article 300A requires the State to follow due procedure and authority of law to deprive a person of his or her private property.

Details:

- The court has come out with its judgment after hearing a plea filed by Vidya Devi, a widow, whose four acres of land was taken over by the Himachal Pradesh government in 1967.
- The court in its judgment has noted that the State cannot trespass into the private property of a citizen and claim ownership of the land in the name of 'adverse possession'. Grabbing private land and then claiming it as its own makes the State an encroacher.
- In a significant observation the apex court has stated that in a welfare state like India, right to property is a human right which translates to being a fundamental right. The State must follow due procedure and authority of law while taking possession of private land.

Additional information:

- Adverse possession is a legal principle under which a person who does not have legal title to a piece of property, acquires legal ownership based on continuous possession or occupation of the land without the permission of its legal owner.
- Under the Limitation Act (a law which deals with the maintainability of the lawsuit on the basis of a time limit) the time limitation for the adverse possession doctrine is 12 years.
- A person in possession cannot be ousted by another person except by due procedure of law and once 12 years' period of adverse possession is over, even owner's right to eject him is lost and the possessory owner acquires right and title.

29. SC not to review Sabarimala case, to examine 'larger issues' (GS-2)

Context:

A nine-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde have said that its objective was not to review the Sabarimala women entry case but examine "larger issues" of law arising from practices.

Background:

- In November 2019, the five-judge Bench led by then Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, instead of deciding the Sabarimala review entrusted to it, sought an "authoritative pronouncement" on the Court's power to decide the essentiality of religious practices.

- Framing seven questions, the Bench referred them to a seven-judge Bench.
 - These referral questions included whether “essential religious practices” be afforded constitutional protection under Article 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs).
- Chief Justice Bobde, who succeeded Justice Gogoi, formed a Bench of nine, rather than seven judges, to examine these questions which concern multiple faiths.

Points to ponder

Seven issues were framed by the five-judge Review Bench for the larger Bench. They form the crux but may be re-framed for future hearing before the nine-judge Bench. The 'broad' issues are:



Not restricting itself to the Sabarimala case, the Bench will examine larger issues of law.

- What should be the interplay between freedom of religion under Articles 25 and 26 and the right to equality under Article 14?
- Right to practice religion is subject to 'public order, morality and health' under Article 25(1). What do these terms actually mean?
- Is constitutional morality the over-arching morality in reference to the Preamble or limited to religious beliefs or faith?
- Should and, if so, how far can a court enquire into whether a

religious practice is essential to a particular faith?

- What is the meaning of the expression 'sections of Hindus' appearing in Article 25(2)(b) of the Constitution?

- Whether 'essential religious practices' deserve constitutional protection under Article 26?

- What is the extent to which courts should entertain PILs questioning religious practices filed by a third person who is not a member of that faith?

Details:

- The nine judge bench has set an objective of examining “larger issues” of law arising from practices such as:
 - The prohibition of women from entering mosques and temples
 - Female genital mutilation among Dawoodi Bohras
 - The ban on Parsi women who married inter-faith from entering the fire temple.
- CJI has said that the nine-judge Bench was only examining propositions of law raised about religious practices believed to be essential to various religions. The Bench would not go into the individual facts of the various petitions before it.
- The Bench, clarified that it would not go into the legality of issues such as the practice of polygamy and 'nikah-halala' in Islam.

30. Kerala govt. challenges CAA in Supreme Court (GS-2)

Why in News

Kerala has become the first state to move the Supreme Court challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 - CAA, 2019.

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 seeks to provide citizenship to illegal migrants from Buddhist, Hindu, Sikhs, Jain, Parsi and Christian faiths, who have come to India from the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, on or before 31st December, 2014.

Key Points

- The suit has been filed under **Article 131 of the Constitution**.
 - Under Article 131, the **Supreme Court has “original” jurisdiction** in disputes between States or the Centre and State(s). The Article allows the court to directly take cognisance of such a dispute.
 - Kerala has said in its suit that it would be compelled under **Article 256** to comply with the CAA, which it considers manifestly arbitrary, unreasonable, irrational and violative of fundamental rights.
 - **Article 256** of the Constitution states that the executive power of every State shall be so exercised as to ensure **compliance with the laws made by Parliament**.
 - Thus, there **exists a dispute, involving questions of law and fact**, between the State of Kerala and the Union of India, regarding the enforcement of legal rights as a State and as well for the enforcement of the fundamental, constitutional and other legal rights of the inhabitants of the State of Kerala.
- The Kerala Government has asked for the law to be declared unconstitutional and in violation of:
 - **Article 14** (equality before law),
 - **Article 21** (protection of life and personal liberty) and
 - **Article 25** (freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion).
- It has also sought directions to declare the **Passport (Entry into India) Amendment Rules, 2015, and Foreigners (Amendment) Order, 2015**, to be **“ultra vires the Constitution of India and to be void”**.
- As per the petition, the amendments also **violate India’s international obligations under**:
 - **Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (which provides that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution).
 - **Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (which provides that everyone has the right to a nationality and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality) and
 - **Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (which provides that all persons are equal before the law, that all persons are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law and that the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any

ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status).

Article 131 of the Constitution (Original Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court)

- The Supreme Court has **original jurisdiction** in any dispute:
 - between the Government of India and one or more States; or
 - between the Government of India and any State or States on one side and one or more other States on the other; or
 - between two or more States.
- **Notable Points**
 - The dispute must involve a question (whether of law or fact) on which the existence or extent of a legal right depends.
 - Any suit brought before the Supreme Court by a private citizen against the Centre or a state cannot be entertained under this.
- The original jurisdiction of a court means the power to hear a case for the first time, as opposed to appellate jurisdiction, in which the court reviews the decision of a lower court.
- **Different from Article 32**
 - Unlike the original jurisdiction under Article 32 (which gives the Supreme Court the power to issue writs, etc.), the jurisdiction in Article 131 is exclusive, meaning it is **only the Supreme Court which has this authority**. Under Article 226, the High Courts too have the power to issue writs, directions etc.
- **Supreme Court's Stand on Article 131**
 - There have been **two conflicting judgments** from the Supreme Court on whether a State can file an original suit under Article 131 to challenge the constitutionality of a central law.
 - The **first judgment reported in 2012** - State of Madhya Pradesh vs Union of India - held that States cannot challenge a central law under Article 131.
 - The **second judgment - State of Jharkhand Vs State of Bihar** - took the **opposite view in 2015** and referred the question of law to a larger Bench of the Supreme Court for final determination. Kerala's plaint relies on the 2015 verdict.

31. SC rejects curative pleas of 2 Nirbhaya death row convicts (Prelims -Curative Petition)

Context:

The curative petitions of 2 convicts who were sentenced to death in the 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case, were rejected by a five-judge Supreme Court Bench, led by Justice N.V. Ramana.

Curative Petition:

Curative Petition is the last judicial resort available for redressal of grievances in court which is normally decided by judges in-chamber. It is only in rare cases that such petitions are given an open-court hearing.

- The concept of the curative petition was evolved by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra and Anr. (2002) where the question was whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, after the dismissal of a review petition.
- The Supreme Court, in the case, held that in order to prevent abuse of its process and to cure gross miscarriage of justice, it may reconsider its judgements in the exercise of its inherent powers.
- For this purpose, the Court has devised what has been termed as a “curative” petition.

Certain specific conditions are laid down by the Supreme Court to entertain the curative petitions. They are:

1. The petitioner will have to establish that there was a genuine violation of principles of natural justice and fear of the bias of the judge and that the judgement adversely affected him.
2. The petition shall state specifically that the grounds mentioned had been taken in the review petition and that it was dismissed by circulation.
3. The petition is to be sent to the three senior-most judges and judges of the bench who passed the judgement affecting the petition, if available.
4. If the majority of the judges on the above bench agree that the matter needs hearing, then it would be sent to the same bench (as far as possible).
5. The court could impose “exemplary costs” to the petitioner if his plea lacks merit.

Article- 137: Review of judgments or orders by the Supreme Court subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament or any rules made under Article 145, the Supreme Court shall have power to review any judgment pronounced or order made by it.


32. ASER flags poor learning outcomes in rural schools (GS-2)

- NGO Pratham’s Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in the past has spoken about deficiencies in India’s Education system and how children fall short on basic learning skills
- In the latest edition of ASER, it directs attention to children between four and eight years of age, and suggests that India’s learning crisis could be linked to the weakness of the country’s pre-primary system

Key stats

Learning levels
Five-year-old children in private schools fared better in learning tasks than those in govt. schools and anganwadis

% of students who completed the tasks	Govt. pre-school	Private kindergarten
COGNITIVE TASKS		
Sorting	77.5	87.2
Pattern recognition	43.4	49.9
BASIC LANGUAGE		
Picture description	63.7	76.6
Listening comprehension	23.5	40.4
BASIC MATHS		
Counting objects	36.8	57.6



- The Right to Education and national policy mandates that children enter grade one at age six.
- More than 20 per cent of students in Standard I are less than six, ASER 2019 reveals they should ideally be in pre-school.
- At the same time, 36 per cent students in Standard 1 are older than the RTE-mandated age of six.
- A comparison of Govt and private school shows 26.1% children in grade one of government schools are four or five years old compared to 15.7% in private schools. At the other end of the spectrum, 30.4% children in grade one of government schools are seven-eight years old compared to 45.4% in private schools.

According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019, 21% children in grade one of government schools could read words compared to 46.7% in private schools an advantage of 122%. How is this possible?

- It is well known that children who go to **private schools come from relatively affluent backgrounds**. They also tend to have more **educated parents**. This affords them certain advantages which are not available to children who are from less advantaged families and are more likely to attend government schools.
- Early childhood education is supposed to prepare children for school. Children are supposed to be **exposed to activities that build their cognitive abilities and early literacy and numeracy skills**.
 - For instance, the **National Early Childhood Care and Education curriculum framework** talks about developing skills related to sequential thinking, predicting patterns, observing, reasoning and problem solving in the pre-school stage. These cognitive and early

language skills are highly correlated with the child's ability to acquire further language skills.

- Therefore, children who enter grade one better prepared with these skills are likely to perform better.
- For instance, among the cognitive tasks administered in ASER 2019 (seriation, pattern recognition and puzzle) only 23.8% children of grade one in **government** schools could do all three tasks compared to 43.1% in **private**

Recommendation

- According to the report within Standard I, children's performance on cognitive, early language, early numeracy, and social and emotional learning tasks is strongly related to their age. Older children do better on all tasks
- Therefore ASER suggests children between four and eight should be taught cognitive skills through play-based activities. It emphasizes on developing problem-solving faculties and building memory of children, and not content knowledge

Leveraging the existing network of anganwadi centres to implement school readiness.

- India has a huge investment in its early childhood programme, administered through 1.2 million anganwadis under the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme.
 - Pre-school education is part of their mandate. But at the best of times, these **centres do no more than implement the government's child nutrition schemes.**
- A number of health crises – including Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) outbreak in Bihar – have **baed the inadequacies of the system.** A growing body of scholarly work has also shown that the **anganwadi worker is poorly-paid, demoralised and lacks the autonomy** to be an effective nurturer.
- The findings of ASER 2019 make a clear case for strengthening these early childhood education centres so that they implement appropriate "school-readiness" activities.
 - There is a need to expand and upgrade anganwadis to ensure that children get adequate and correct educational inputs

Conclusion

- Therefore a reworking of curriculum and activities is urgently needed for the entire age band from four to eight, cutting across all types of preschools and early grades regardless of whether the provision is by government institutions or by private agencies.

33. India to invite Imran Khan for Shanghai Council meet (GS-2)

Context:

The Pakistan Ministry of External Affairs has said that Prime Minister Imran Khan will be invited to participate in the Heads of Government Council meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that will be hosted in India this year (2020).

Issues:

- Prime Minister Khan who assumed office in 2018 has been a tough critic of India's continued lockdown of Kashmir.
- He has also taken up the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 and the National Register of Citizens both domestically and on global platforms.
- Though his predecessor Nawaz Sharif had visited India in May 2014 for the "mini-SAARC summit", Mr. Khan has not been invited to India till now.

Details:

- As per the established practice and procedure within SCO, all eight members of the SCO, four observer states, and other international dialogue partners will be invited to attend the meeting.
- Since becoming a full-time member of the SCO in 2017, both India and Pakistan have participated in multiple meetings of SCO and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) despite hostilities and tension in Kashmir.
- The Heads of Government Council meeting is attended by the Prime Minister-level leaders of the member states that deliberate on the regional body's economic and other pressing issues.
- The meeting also firms up SCO's annual budget.

Regional power play

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's (SCO) annual Heads of Government Council meeting will be hosted by India later this year. Here is a brief look at the organisation

- **Current SCO members:** India, China, Pakistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan
- **Observer states:** Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia
- **SCO dialogue partners:** Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, Sri Lanka
- **SCO permanent bodies:** Secretariat - Beijing; and Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) - Tashkent
- **Founded on June 15, 2001**
- **8-9 June 2017:** India and Pakistan became full SCO members at the Astana summit

Imran Khan has not been invited to India after he assumed office as Pakistan PM in 2018

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a Eurasian Economic, Political and Security organization. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was formed with the primary objective of military cooperation between its member nations. It works towards intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism operations in the Central Asian Region (CAR).

34. 'Taliban proposes brief Afghanistan ceasefire' (GS-2)

Context:

The Taliban have offered a brief ceasefire to the U.S., two insurgent sources have revealed.

Background:

- The Taliban and the U.S. had been negotiating the deal for a year, and were on the brink of an announcement in September 2019 when President Donald Trump abruptly declared the process “dead”, citing Taliban violence.
- Talks were later restarted between the two sides in December 2019 in Qatar, but were paused again following an attack near the Bagram military base in Afghanistan, which is run by the U.S.

Details:

- It is a move which could allow for the resumption of talks seeking a deal for Washington to withdraw troops from
- Washington has for weeks been calling on the militants to reduce violence, posing it as a condition for resuming formal negotiations on an agreement that would see U.S. troops begin to leave the country in return for security guarantees, after a near two-decade fight.
- A second insurgent source, based in Pakistan, confirmed that the offer had been handed to the U.S.

Way forward:

- The insurgents' offer, if accepted by the Americans, could see the negotiations begin again.
- The reports of a temporary ceasefire have been seen as a “positive signal”.
- It is believed that the recent reduction of attacks in urban centres has added weight to the process.

35. '2020 will be an important year for Indo-U.S. relations' (GS-2)

Context:

U.S. President's proposed official visit to India.

Background:

- The partnership between India and the United States has been growing from strength to strength in recent times.
- **Defence Minister and External Affairs Minister** of India met **the US Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State** in Washington DC, in December 2019 for the **second annual India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**.
- The 2+2 Ministerial is the highest-level institutional mechanism between India and the U.S. and provides for a review of the security, defence and **strategic partnership between the two countries**. The 2019 edition was the second 2+2 meeting and the first in the U.S.
- **The inaugural 2+2 dialogue was held in New Delhi in 2018.**

Outcomes:

- One of the major outcomes of the 2+2 talks was both sides reiterating their commitment to **advance towards a free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region**.
- Both countries have committed to **further deepen military-to-military cooperation**, including between the Indian Navy and the US Navy Fleets under US Indo-Pacific Command, Central Command, and Africa Command and intend to expand similar cooperation between their respective Armies and Air Forces.
- The two sides also concluded the **Industrial Security Annex** during the summit.
- Priority initiatives have been identified for execution under **the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) programme**. These measures will provide momentum to collaboration between the private defence industries of both India and the US.
- The two sides also agreed to enhance their engagement in the **area of defence innovation**.
- During the 2+2 talks in Washington, both countries had agreed to promote **practical cooperation in infrastructure development, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and regional connectivity**.

Details:

Setting the agenda for a proposed Official visit by the U.S. President to India, the U.S. officials have stated that the focus of the Indo-U.S. engagements in 2020 would be to implement decisions taken during the 2+2 meeting in December 2019 and on trade.

Blue Dot Network (BDN):

- In line with the spirit of enhancing cooperation in infrastructure development and regional connectivity, **the U.S. has launched “Blue Dot Network” (BDN) to encourage private investment in infrastructure projects.**
- **BDN already has Japan and Australia** on board along with the U.S.
- **The BDN is a “rating mechanism”** that would grade infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region on different **parameters like debt, environmental standards, labour standards, etc.**
- Given that it **involves citizen participation, it will ensure transparency in infrastructure development** and is planned as a direct counter to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, **unlike the BRI, the BDN would not offer public funds or loans for the project.**
- With India refusing to join China’s BRI, there have been efforts to get India to join the U.S.-led BDN.
- Given India’s increasing prominence and stakes in the region, India would have an important role in BDN.

36. U.K. plans govt.-to-govt. framework for future defence deals with India (GS-2)

Context:

In the last few years, India has concluded **high-value defence deals through the Inter-Governmental route**, major examples being that of the **Rafale jets, S-400 air defence systems and stealth frigates.**

Background:

- In the face of **unending delays in defence modernization**, mostly due to long delays in the conclusion of defence deals, India has of late shown increasing interest in Inter-Governmental arrangement for defence deals.
- Despite several efforts, **the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) remains cumbersome and deals invariably get delayed leading to price escalations.**
- **An Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) between two sovereign governments ensures transparency and is a lighter model.** It has become useful to conclude pending critical deals.
- India has used this route previously also, most notably with Russia with which it has a long history of IGAs.

Details:

- Given India’s preference for the Inter-Governmental arrangement for defence deals, the U.K. government is working on a government-to-government framework for defence deals in future, with India.

- The U.K. presently does not have such a mechanism but given the lucrative market that India offers it is keen to adopt it.
- Unlike **the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route of the U.S. government**, where the government levies a small service charge, The U.K. model has no such overheads built into the contract.
- The U.K. has made a pitch to India for **collaboration in the areas of aircraft carriers and development of 6th generation fighter aircraft technologies**.
- The Indian Navy has shown interest in the U.K.'s progress in integrated electric-propulsion.
- The two countries have also exchanged subject matter experts, deepening **defence technology development partnership between the two countries**.

37. Death sentence for rape-murder in 2019 highest in 4 years: NLU report

Context:

The fourth edition of 'The Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics' published by Project 39A of National Law University (NLU)-Delhi.

Details:

- The report notes that a **high number of death sentences awarded in India in recent years relate to cases of sexual offences**.
- The trial courts in India imposed 102 death sentences in 2019, a significant drop from 162 death sentences in 2018. However, the percentage of sexual offences in these cases increased.
- This trend was also seen at the High Courts, where 65.38% (17 out of 26) cases of confirmations of death sentences involved sexual offences along with murder, the highest in four years.
- The Supreme Court in 2019 dealt with 27 capital punishment cases, the highest number since 2001.
- **National debates and legislative trends**, as well as data on administration of death penalty in the report, indicate that the **issue of sexual violence against women and children is now at the heart of the debate on capital punishment in India**.

Causes:

Public outcry:

- **The frequent occurrence and impunity of sexual violence and the deficiencies within the criminal justice system perpetuating the cycle of sexual violence** has led to a public outcry for harsher punishments.
- There was widespread public outcry following a brutal gang-rape and murder in Hyderabad. Following which, **Andhra Pradesh amended the Indian Penal Code to introduce the death penalty for rape**.

POCSO amendment:

- **The amendment to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, introducing stringent mandatory minimum punishments and death penalty** for penetrative sexual assault on children was a major development.

Concerns:

- There was an increase in death warrants issued in 2019, it being six as against one in 2018. **All these warrants were eventually stayed by the courts.**
- All warrants that were issued **lacked compliance with the guidelines issued in the case of Shabnam vs. Union of India.** The guidelines issued by the SC requires that a warrant for execution not be issued until reasonable time for exhausting all remedies under the law has lapsed and also specifies procedures to be followed in issuing such warrant.

38. Can States challenge the validity of central laws? (GS-2)

Context:

Kerala government's move to file a suit in the Supreme Court of India seeking to declare the CAA as unconstitutional.

Background:

- Amid protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, or CAA, 2019, Kerala government has filed a suit in SC seeking to declare CAA as unconstitutional.
- Punjab has also decided to challenge the CAA in the Supreme Court.
- Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh has filed a similar suit in SC, challenging the constitutional validity of the National Investigation Agency Act.
- All these states have invoked Article 131, to challenge the Central government's policies.

Details:

Constitutional provisions:

- Both High Courts and the Supreme Court have the power to adjudicate cases against the State and Central governments. The validity of any executive or legislative action is generally challenged by way of writ petitions under Article 226 of the Constitution in respect of High Courts, and, in respect to fundamental rights violations, under Article 32 in the Supreme Court.
- Unlike individuals, State governments cannot complain of fundamental rights being violated. Therefore, the Constitution provides that whenever a State feels

that its legal rights are under threat or have been violated, it can take the issue to the Supreme Court.

- Article 131 confers exclusive jurisdiction on the Supreme Court to adjudicate disputes involving States, or the Centre on the one hand and one or more States on the other. This means no other court can entertain such a dispute.
- There have been past instances of states having filed cases under Article 131 against neighbouring States in respect of river water sharing and boundary disputes and also against the Centre.

The suit filed by Kerala:

- Kerala's suit asks the SC to declare CAA, 2019, as being violative of the Constitution. Its main argument is that the CAA, 2019 provisions go against the principle of secularism that is a basic feature of the Constitution.
- The suit also challenges the validity of notifications issued under the Passport (Entry into India) Amendment Rules and the Foreigners (Amendment) Order, in 2015-16, as being contrary to the Constitution.
 - The notifications of 2015 had given an exemption to persons belonging to minority communities in Bangladesh and Pakistan – namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians, from the purview of the laws against the illegal entry of foreigners into India.
 - It extends such provisions to minorities who were compelled to seek shelter in India due to religious persecution or the fear of religious persecution and entered India on or before December 31, 2014.
 - The 2016 notification also adds Afghanistan as the source country of such minorities.
- The 2015-16 notifications formed the basis for creating the categories of people who were not to be treated as illegal migrants. The CAA chooses the same groups for conferment of citizenship on a fast-track mode.
- The term "religious persecution" is not found in the CAA, but only mentions that those exempted from the Foreigners' Act under the 2015 and 2016 notifications will not be treated as "illegal migrants". This aspect is also a part of the suit filed by Kerala.

The suit filed by Chhattisgarh:

- Chhattisgarh has sought a declaration that the NIA Act, 2008, is unconstitutional.
- The major argument is that 'Police' is a subject reserved for the States, and having a central police agency, which has overriding powers over the State police, with no provision for consent from the State government for its operations, is against the division of legislative powers between the Centre and the States.
- Chhattisgarh suit argues that NIA act was passed in spite of it being beyond the legislative competence of Parliament and also that such an agency would be against the federal spirit of the Constitution.

Legal precedents:

- There are two conflicting opinions of the Supreme Court on the question of whether the suits challenging central laws are maintainable or not.
- In the State of Madhya Pradesh v. Union of India and Another, case of 2011 the Supreme Court has held that though the Central laws can be challenged in the State High Courts as well and also before the SC under Article 32, no such provision is available to challenge the validity of a Central law under the exclusive original jurisdiction of the SC provided under Article 131.
- In the State of Jharkhand vs. State of Bihar and Another (2014) case, another Bench of the SC stating that it does not accept the view that the constitutionality of a law cannot be raised in a suit under Article 131 referred the matter to a larger Bench for an authoritative pronouncement.

Way forward:

- One of the issues to be decided is whether such a suit involves a question on the violation of a legal right.
 - There have been arguments against the suit filed by Kerala government stating that Kerala has raised a dispute that does not involve any legal right but is only a political question. And that, therefore, it cannot file a suit under Article 131.
 - However, Kerala's suit points out that under Article 256 of the Constitution, the State would be compelled to comply with the CAA and rules and orders passed by the Centre. Since the Kerala government believes that these laws and rules are arbitrary, unreasonable, and violative of fundamental rights, a dispute involving law and fact has indeed arisen between Kerala and the Centre.
- The Supreme Court may have to constitute a larger Bench to decide the question whether the suits challenging central laws are maintainable. If the suits are declared maintainable, then the same Bench may also adjudicate the disputes.

39. Need FTA to spur India, EU trade: Rinkevics (GS-2)

Context:

Latvian Foreign Minister's Statement on **the India-EU Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)**.

Background:

- **The EU-India trade negotiations began in 2007 and were suspended in 2013.** Since then, despite several attempts by Brussels and New Delhi, the two sides have been unable to agree to revive the talks on the proposed BTIA.

- Despite the break in trade talks, trade between India and the group of 28 European nations has been growing. **The EU is India's largest trading partner** with about \$108 billion trade in goods in 2018-2019, and \$42 billion in services. **EU is also the largest source of foreign direct investment in India.**

Details:

- Latvian Foreign Minister has rightly stated that the India-EU trade cannot increase substantially until the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) between the European Union and India are negotiated.
- **Several EU countries are hampered in investing in India without an investment agreement in place.**
- There are many issues with the trade negotiations which needs to be addressed. With a comprehensive trade deal, there is a chance for improvement of trade figures between the EU and India.

India-Latvia ties:

- There is immense scope for **India-Latvia economic co-operation given the potential for IT companies in Latvia to outsource business to India as well as recruit "skilled and talented" Indian professionals.**

Way forward:

- There is hope that there will be movement on the BTIA when the Indian Prime Minister visits Brussels for the **India-EU summit in March 2020.**

40. China reports four new cases caused by coronavirus strain (GS-2)

Context:

China has reported four new cases of pneumonia believed to be caused by a new coronavirus strain.

Background:

- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) had killed nearly 800 people globally during a 2002/03 outbreak. SARS had its origin in China.
- SARS is a respiratory infection affecting mainly the lungs.

Details:

- The new virus was discovered in the central Chinese city of Wuhan and it belongs to the same large family of coronaviruses that includes SARS.

- Thailand and Japan have confirmed new cases of the virus, stoking worries globally as many Chinese people will travel abroad during the Lunar New Year holidays.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has also warned that a wider outbreak is possible, though it has advised against any travel restrictions for China.
- Though there are reports that say the new virus does not appear to be as lethal as SARS, there is little knowledge about its origins and its transmissibility. This lack of knowledge can severely undermine efforts to curb and contain its spread.
- Countries like the United States, Thailand and South Korea have stepped up monitoring of travellers from Wuhan as part of their efforts to prevent the disease from spreading.

41. India-Pak. trade freeze hits thousands: report (GS-2)

Context:

A report highlighting the effect of India-Pakistan ties on the lives of the people in the bordering regions.

Background:

- Following the Pulwama attack, India imposed economic sanctions on Pakistan which curbed the bilateral trade between the two neighbouring countries.
- There has been the shutdown of trade between India and Pakistan across the Wagah-Attari border and the Line of Control (LoC) Salamabad-Chakhan da Bagh routes.
- The cancellation of the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to Pakistan and the trade routes' closure, was followed by Pakistan's counter-measures, including an airspace ban and suspension of trade relations.

Details:

- According to the report titled "Unilateral decisions, bilateral losses" authored by researchers at the Bureau of Research on Industry and Economic Fundamentals (BRIEF), the measures and countermeasures have led to a decline in the relatively meagre bilateral trade of \$2.56 billion in 2018-19 dropping to \$547.22 million (April-August 2019).
- It has resulted in losses in billions of dollars and hundreds of job days affecting the livelihood opportunities of the locals.
- Many families and roughly 50,000 people, in Punjab and nearly 900 families in Kashmir have been directly affected by the shutdown of trade between India and Pakistan.
- The affected groups comprise of traders, custom house agents, truck drivers and helpers, those working at tyre and mechanic stores, local dhabas and motels, who are **more vulnerable to economic hardships and poverty.**

Government's arguments:

- Government officials justify the decisions on trade as being meant to be a tough message for Pakistan and to show India's frustration over Pakistan's continued support to terrorism.
- The economic sanctions would affect Pakistan's economy even more than India's.
- The Union Home Ministry has argued that trade needs to be stopped until a stricter regulatory regime is in place to block the misuse of the route for smuggling weapons, narcotics and fake currency. The ministry has stated in the suspension order that trade would be resumed at a later date considering any change in prevailing circumstances.

Way forward:

- The governments at the Centre and in Punjab and Jammu Kashmir should **consider compensating the affected people for the losses as a short term measure.**
- In the longer run, there is the **need to find alternative trading markets internally** so that those affected are not put out of business permanently.

42. Regulator flags 49 drug samples as 'not of standard quality' (GS-2)

Context:

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization's (CDSCO), December 2019 list of drugs declared not of standard quality.

Details:

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO), in its December 2019 list of **drugs/medical devices and cosmetics** declared not of standard quality/spurious/adulterated/misbranded, has flagged 49 samples, as "not of standard quality".
- Of the 1,336 samples tested, 1,286 were declared of standard quality, 49 "not of standard quality" and one
- The drugs "failed" the quality test because of the presence of foreign matter, description, particulate matter, extractable volume, sterility, disintegration, dissolution and other parameters.
- Such defects may arise because of **inadequate pre-formulation development studies, lack of in-process controls** exercised by the manufacturer or **unsuitable conditions under which drugs are stored or transported.**
- **Spurious or imitation drug products are formulations manufactured concealing the true identity of the product** and made to resemble another

popular brand drug, to deceive the buyer. The product **may or may not contain active ingredients.**

Concerns:

- **Health risks** associated with the consumption of these 'not of standard quality' drugs.
- **Impacts the Indian brand of pharma products in other countries.**

43. Pak. urges U.S. to get it off FATF grey list (GS-2)

Context:

The upcoming **meeting of the FATF in Beijing.**

Background:

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is the **international terror financing watchdog based in Paris.**
- FATF in October 2019 decided to keep **Pakistan on its 'Grey' list for failure to curb terror financing.**
- Pakistan was blamed of funnelling of funds to terror groups like LeT, and JeM among others.
- Pakistan had earlier submitted a review report to the FATF outlining the steps taken by Pakistan to **implement the group's recommendations.**
- If Pakistan is not removed off the grey list by April 2020, Pakistan may be moved to **the 'black' list** of countries. These countries are **subjected to severe economic sanctions.**

Details:

- The current session will involve the **Financial Action Task Force Working Group** scrutinizing Islamabad's efforts to adopt **stricter laws against terror financing and money laundering.**
- It will also involve reviewing if Pakistan has complied with an earlier agenda presented to it by the Paris-based financial task force.
- This meeting is very important for Pakistan as it leads to a **plenary meeting in Paris in April 2019**, where FATF will decide whether Pakistan remains on the grey list or is taken off.
- Pakistan has urged the U.S. to support its bid to exit from the grey list of the FATF.

44. 'Needn't tell Governor when suing Centre' (GS-2)

Context:

- The Governor of Kerala has sought an explanation from the state government of Kerala for its failure to apprise him of the state government's decision to file an appeal in the SC, against the CAA, 2019.

Details:

- Legal luminaries have stated that normally the State government may as a form of "courtesy" apprise the Governor before challenging an important legislation in court but is not mandated to do so.
- Jurists say there is **no constitutional requirement or conventions** for a State government to inform the Governor about its executive decision to file a case.

Shamsher Singh case:

- **The Supreme Court judgment in the Shamsher Singh** case helps throw light on the relationship between the elected government and the Governor.
- The judgment holds that **the Governor is not a rival centre of power** but would only facilitate the smooth functioning of the administration.
- The judgment notes that the Governor is **only a formal head and the real executive powers are vested in the Council of Ministers** who are collectively responsible to the legislature.
- The Judgment also takes into account the observations made by **the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations** which notes that even **though Article 167, allows for the Governor to seek information from the Chief Minister**, it does not imply that the Governor will have dictatorial overtones.

45. SC studying code of conduct for Ministers (GS-2)

Context:

A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has said that, if a new code of conduct is framed for Ministers at the Centre and in the States, the possibility of enforceability ought to be explored.

Details:

- The submissions about such a code were made before the five-judge Bench which is examining if "greater restrictions" should be imposed on the right of

free speech and expression of high public functionaries to protect the citizen's fundamental right to lead a dignified life.

- The issue, which was referred to a Constitution Bench in April 2017, was based on a petition filed by the family members of the Bulandshahr rape case victim, who were enraged by the then Uttar Pradesh Minister Azam Khan's statement that the case was part of a conspiracy against the government.
- It is argued that the code of conduct should reflect constitutional morality and values of good governance. The acts of the persons holding public offices can be thus subjected to better and meaningful public scrutiny, which in turn would ensure democratic accountability.
- The Bench is hearing arguments whether Cabinet Ministers at both the Central & State levels should have a "voluntary model code of conduct" which addresses their private & public activities.

46. SC for curbs on powers of Speaker (GS-2)

Context:

The Supreme Court has asked the Parliament to amend the Constitution to strip Legislative Assembly Speakers of their exclusive power to decide whether legislators should be disqualified or not under the anti-defection law.

- Disqualification powers are granted to the Speakers under the Tenth Schedule.

Details:

- The SC has suggested that an independent tribunal ought to be appointed instead to determine the fate of an MP or an MLA who has switched sides for money and power.
- In a judgment by a three-judge Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana in the Karnataka MLAs' disqualification case, the court had held that a Speaker who cannot stay aloof from the pressures and wishes of his political party does not deserve to occupy his chair. This also urged Parliament to "reconsider strengthening certain aspects of the Tenth Schedule, so that such undemocratic practices are discouraged".
- Disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should be adjudicated by a mechanism outside Parliament or the Legislative Assemblies, it suggested.
- The court also suggested a permanent tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or a former High Court Chief Justice.

47. The right to protest in a free society (GS-2)

Context:

The article argues for the **right to protest** for the citizens.

Background:

- Recently, there have been public protests in India against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and the proposed National Register of Citizens.
- The government's handling of the protests has invited criticism from certain sections. The administrations have been blamed of **arbitrary imposition of section 144**.
 - **Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of 1973** authorises the Executive Magistrate of any state or territory to issue an order to prohibit the assembly of four or more people in an area.
 - Section 144 of CrPC generally **prohibits public gathering**.
 - Section 144 has been used in the past to **impose restrictions as a means to prevent protests that can lead to unrest or riots**.
- The administration has defended its actions, as being **preventive in nature** and to avoid violence and damage to public property.

Details:

India as a functioning democracy:

- The Preamble of the Constitution states that **India is a democratic republic**.
- Democracies are founded on **two core political rights**.
 - The right of every citizen to **freely elect their government** and when dissatisfied with its performance, to vote it out of power in a legitimately held election (**Article 326**).
 - The people have the **right to question and challenge the government's proposals or decisions**. This allows the citizens to politically participate not only during but between elections. This involves a broader conception of democracy that **embodies active and not passive citizenship**.
- Democracy requires that the voice of the people be heard by those in power and decisions be reached after **proper discussion and consultation**.
- Public protests for legitimate causes and concerns are the hallmark of a free, democratic society. They constitute our **political freedoms**.
- **The right to protest is a fundamental political right basic to a democratic society**.

Holding the government accountable:

- The protests perform an important function of **holding the government in power accountable to its actions and decisions**.

- The cluster of inter-related political rights of expression, association, assembly, petition and protest is meant to ensure that the government **works in the interests of the citizenry**.
- The citizens can act as **watchdogs and constantly monitor the government's acts**.
 - They play an important role of helping to recognize and rectify mistakes.
 - An elected government may stray from the constitutional course, go against the interests of the people, become unresponsive and refuse to listen. In such conditions, **pressure against the government can be built through public protests**.
- This is similar to the multiparty system provided for in the Constitution, where Opposition parties are viewed as valuable adversaries and not enemies.

Fundamental rights:

- The right to protest peacefully is enshrined in the Indian Constitution via **Article 19(1)(a) which guarantees the freedom of speech and expression and Article 19(1)(b) which assures citizens the right to assemble peaceably and without arms**. More on Right to Freedom.
 - The right to free speech and expression can be also interpreted as the right to freely express an opinion on the conduct of the government.
 - The right to association can also be the right to associate for political purposes, which might involve challenging government decisions.
 - The right to peaceably assemble allows political parties and citizenship bodies to question and object to acts of the government by demonstrations, agitations and public meetings.
- The Supreme Court has reiterated that the right to protest is a fundamental right through its verdicts in many cases.
 - In the case of **Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary, Union of India & Ors.**, the Supreme Court has held that citizens have a fundamental right to assembly and peaceful protest which cannot be taken away by an arbitrary executive or legislative action.
 - In the **Maneka Gandhi vs. Union of India** case, the SC held similar views on right to protest.

Historical experience:

Independence struggle:

- The background of the Indian Constitution is formed by its **anti-colonial struggle**.
- The Indian freedom struggle involved public expression of views against colonial policies and laws, demonstrations expressing dissent and shaping of public opinion against them.
- The methods involved staging **dharnas, holding large public meetings and demonstrations and even civil disobedience**.

Post-Independence:

- **Potti Sreeramulu undertook a satyagraha** demanding for the creation of a new Telugu-speaking state of Andhra.
- **The Chipko Movement led by Gaura Devi, Chandi Prasad Bhatt**, was a people's movement to save the trees in Uttarakhand. It was meant to prevent the then U.P. government from awarding contracts to commercial loggers.

Inclusive approach:

- Street protests and demonstration movements are particularly important for those outside the mainstream, or those not educated formally.
- They provide **an opportunity for even the most illiterate and powerless person** to show dissent. Street protests help involve many people in the movement.
- Abraham Lincoln had once noted that **"the right of the people to peaceably assemble is a constitutional substitute for revolution"**.

Concerns:

Restraints on Right to protest:

- The right to protest, to publicly question and force the government to answer, is a fundamental political right of the people that flows directly from a democratic reading of Article 19. For this, the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are necessary.
- **The arbitrary restraint on the exercise of such rights by the imposition of Section 144 is a concern.**
- Section 144 is to be imposed in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger of events that has the potential to cause trouble or damage to human life or property thus limiting it to only emergency situations.

Intolerance towards dissent:

- The arbitrary imposition of Sec 144 highlights the inability of the government to **tolerate dissent**.
- It also reflects the **incapacity of the government to discuss, deliberate or listen**.

Way forward:

- The people opposing the CAA have the **right to protest and express their opinions**. The **government needs to acknowledge the right to dissent and protest for all Indians**.
- Notably, **Article 19(1)(3) states that the rights are subject to "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of public order**. There is the need to ensure there is no violence or damage to public property in the protests.

48. India drops 10 ranks in Democracy Index (GS-2/ Prelims)

Context:

- India – the world’s biggest democracy **has slipped 10 places in the 2019 Democracy Index to 51st place.**
- The report, “A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest”, was done by **the Economist Intelligence Unit** – the research and analysis division of **the Economist Group**, which is the sister company to ‘**The Economist**’ newspaper.
- The report records how global democracy fared, **analysing 165 independent states and two territories.**

Democracy Index:

- Democracy Index is an index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a UK-based company. It intends to measure the state of democracy.
- The index is based on **60 indicators** grouped in **five different categories**, measuring **pluralism, civil liberties and political culture.**
- In addition to a numeric score and a ranking, the index categorises each country in one of four regime types: **full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.**
- **Full democracies:** are nations where civil liberties and fundamental political freedoms are not only respected but also reinforced by a political culture conducive to the thriving of democratic principles. These nations have a valid system of governmental checks and balances, an independent judiciary whose decisions are enforced, governments that function adequately, and diverse and independent media.
- **Flawed democracies:** are nations where elections are fair and free and basic civil liberties are honoured but may have issues (e.g. media freedom infringement). These nations have significant faults in other democratic aspects, including underdeveloped political culture, low levels of participation in politics, and issues in the functioning of governance.
- **Hybrid regimes:** are nations with regular electoral frauds, preventing them from being fair and free democracies. These nations commonly have governments that apply pressure on political opponents, non-independent judiciaries, widespread corruption, harassment and pressure placed on the media, anaemic rule of law, and more pronounced faults than flawed democracies in the realms of underdeveloped political culture, low levels of participation in politics, and issues in the functioning of governance.
- **Authoritarian regimes:** are nations where political pluralism has vanished or is extremely limited. These nations are often absolute monarchies or dictatorships, may have some conventional institutions of democracy but with meagre significance, infringements and abuses of civil liberties are commonplace, elections (if they take place) are not fair and free, the media is often state-owned or controlled by groups associated with the ruling regime,

the judiciary is not independent, and there are omnipresent censorship and suppression of governmental criticism.

49. Myanmar's growing dependence on China (GS-2)

Context

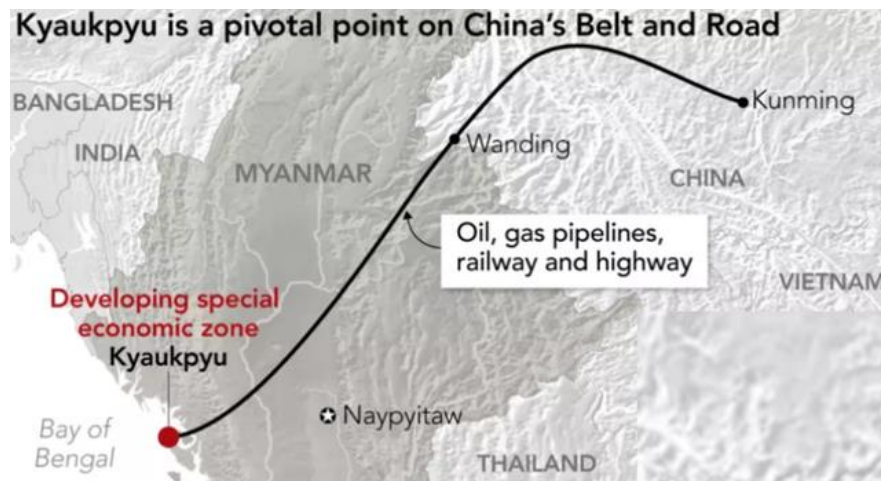
- Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded a two-day visit to Myanmar.

Background

- The last visit by a Chinese President took place in 2001.
- The 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations was judged to be the ideal occasion to launch a major renewal and strengthen the process of the bilateral relationship.
- With the Myanmar visit, Xi has effectively completed his key neighbourhood trips, having travelled through the Maldives and Sri Lanka in 2014, Pakistan in 2015, Bangladesh in 2016, and Nepal in 2019.

Key Agreements signed during the visit

- During Xi's visit, China and Myanmar have **signed a total of 33 agreements**, Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), protocols, and exchanges of letters on areas including major infrastructure projects, railways, industrial and power projects, trade and investment.
- The two countries agreed on MoUs to undertake a feasibility study on the **Myanmar-China Power Interconnection Project** in addition to conducting feasibility studies for the **Yangon River Estuary West Bank Protection, Mandalay-Bagan Railway Line, and Watalone Tunnel projects**.
- Giving a big boost to China's efforts at seeking a greater presence in the Indian Ocean, the two countries signed a concession agreement and shareholders' agreement for the **Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) deep seaport project**.
 - The Kyaukpyu deep seaport is particularly critical for China as it would **provide it with an alternative to the Straits of Malacca**, which is currently their lifeline for energy transportation as well as a trade corridor.
 - Making progress on the Kyaukpyu port is important also because it is linked to the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and therefore the China-Myanmar agreement on the port is touted as a big success for the BRI.



Why Myanmar needs China?

Analysts are sceptical about these projects as there are no significant benefits for Myanmar.

- But the prime reason why they are supporting China is because the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is all set to deliver its judgment on the issue of violence against the Rohingya minority. Myanmar seeks support from China on this issue.
 - The joint statement issued during the visit stated that “The Chinese side supports the efforts of Myanmar to address the humanitarian situation and to promote peace, stability and development for all communities in Rakhine State.”
 - For Beijing’s support on the Rohingya issue, Naypyidaw has reconsidered some of the earlier tough positions it had taken on stalled projects.
- Because of the internal situation in Myanmar, most western countries are reluctant to fund projects in the country. Xi’s visit enhances **investments** in the country.
 - In the first 11 months of 2019, investment from China reached \$20.9 billion, accounting for 25.21% of all foreign direct investment, second only to Singapore.
- Beijing is also **supporting Myanmar via tourism**: Chinese tourist arrivals increased 150% in 2019 when compared with 2018.

India’s Concern

- A Chinese-developed deep **seaport in the Bay of Bengal will complete the encirclement of India** – with **Sri Lanka** already having given its Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to China, which has also developed the **Gwadar port on Pakistan’s coast** on the Arabian Sea.
- China has already been given a **mediator’s status by Dhaka and Naypyitaw in their Rohingya crisis dispute** – adding to New Delhi’s isolation in South Asia.

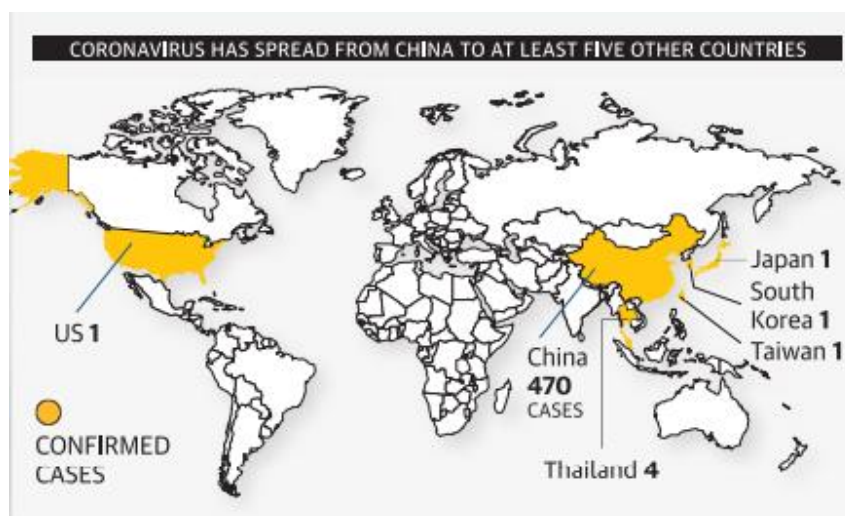
- Even **Nepal**, which will have a high-speed rail link built by China, and **Sri Lanka**, which has a known pro-China Sri Lankan government, headed by brothers Gotabaya Rajapaksa as president and Mahinda Rajapaksa as PM, are heavily leaning on Beijing.
- From New Delhi's perspective, these are problematic. India has taken a strong position against Belt and Road and it worries about the strategic implications of any Chinese bases in the Bay of Bengal under guise of infrastructural projects.

Conclusion

- China keeps reiterating that it conducts its diplomacy with mutual respect and reciprocity as the guiding principle; smaller countries in Asia have found that China's projects have significant downsides.
- India, lacking China's economic muscle or infrastructure-building capacity, can only hope that Myanmar's caution will limit China's influence.

50. WHO's unexplained hesitancy (GS-2)

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses with some causing **less severe** common cold to **more severe diseases** such as **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)** and **Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)**.
 - It causes respiratory and intestinal diseases.
- A coronavirus has many "regularly arranged" protrusions on its surface, because of which the entire virus particle looks like an emperor's crown, hence the name "coronavirus".
- Apart from human beings, coronaviruses can affect mammals including pigs, cattle, cats, dogs, martens, camels, hedgehogs and some birds.
- Detailed investigations found that **SARS-CoV** was transmitted from civet cats to humans and **MERS-CoV** from dromedary camels to humans.



Initial Symptoms

- Coronaviruses are transmitted between animals and people, according to the WHO.
- The agency said **common signs of the new coronavirus infection include** respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.
- In more severe cases, the infection can cause pneumonia, SARS, kidney failure and even death.

How to prevent the spread?

- WHO's standard recommendations to prevent the virus' spread include washing hands regularly, covering mouth and nose while sneezing, and thoroughly cooking meat and eggs.

Global economic and financial market impact

- A paper by Jong-Wha Lee and Warwick McKibbin estimates the global **economic loss due at SARS at \$40 billion in 2003.**
- A **2016 study by the Commission on a Global Health Risk Framework for the Future** estimated that pandemic disease events would cost the global economy over \$6 trillion in the 21st century – over \$60 billion per year.
- A **2017 paper by economists Victoria Fan, Dean Jamison and Lawrence Summers** estimated the expected **annual losses from pandemic risk** to be about \$500 billion – or 0.6% of global income – per year, accounting for both lost income and the intrinsic cost of elevated mortality.

Market winners and losers

- **Winners**
 - Despite the disruption to the wider economy, virus outbreaks have tended to **benefit pharmaceutical stocks.**
 - Facemask manufacturers also outperformed.
- **Losers**
 - Tourism and travel-related stocks – hotels, airlines and luxury and consumer goods – tend to get punished.
 - People didn't take public transport, stayed away from work, stayed away from shops, restaurants, cinemas, conferences, etc.

The impact from the disease is massive on the economy, but almost all of it indirect, due to the precautionary behaviour of the population.

How is the information disseminated to the public?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has taken to Twitter to keep the public updated. With Twitter not available in China, WHO has been regularly posting updates on Weibo, a Chinese microblogging site.

- The update on WHO website about the virus is slow. Even on Twitter, there seems to be some unexplained hesitancy on WHO's part to retweet important information about the virus.

Way forward

- Twitter is an excellent medium to quickly disseminate information, particularly for the WHO which has 5.1 million people followers. Therefore, it is crucial for the WHO to retweet important updates.
- It is also important for the WHO to keep its coronavirus 'disease outbreak news' page on its website regularly updated.
- Millions of Chinese are set to travel during the Lunar New Year holiday this week. In these circumstances, it is the WHO's responsibility to ensure that everyone is fully informed.

51. India slips two places on corruption index (GS-4/2/Prelims)

Context:

Transparency International has announced that India's ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI-2019) has slipped from 78 to 80, compared to 2018.

Corruption Perceptions Index:

- The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is an index published annually by Transparency International since 1995 which ranks countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys.
- The CPI generally defines corruption as the misuse of public power for private benefit.
- The 2019 CPI draws on 13 surveys and expert assessments to measure public sector corruption in various countries and territories, giving each a score from zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). It was launched at the World Economic Forum (WEF) 2020.

Findings:

- India's score of 41 out of 100 remains the same. The global average for 2019 is 43.
- China has improved its position from 87 to 80 with a score of 41 out of 100.
- The top-ranked countries are New Zealand and Denmark, with scores of 87 each, followed by Finland (86), Singapore (85), Sweden (85) and Switzerland (85). The countries ranked at the bottom of the list are Somalia, South Sudan and Syria with scores of 9, 12 and 13. These countries are closely followed by Yemen (15), Venezuela (16), Sudan (16), Equatorial Guinea (16) and Afghanistan (16).

In the Asia Pacific region, the average score is 45, after many consecutive years of an average score of 44, which illustrates general stagnation across the region.

Analysis:

- In the last eight years, only 22 countries significantly improved their CPI scores, including Greece, Guyana and Estonia. In the same period, among the 21 countries that saw a significant fall in their scores are Canada, Australia and Nicaragua. In the remaining 137 countries, the levels of corruption show little to no change.
- The report observed that, in democracies like India and Australia, unfair and opaque political financing, undue influence in decision-making and lobbying by powerful corporate interest groups, have resulted in stagnation or decline in the control of corruption.
- The CPI report has revealed that a majority of countries are showing little to no improvement in tackling corruption.
- Transparency International pointed out that their analysis also showed that corruption was more pervasive in countries where big money could flow freely into electoral campaigns and where governments listened only to the voices of wealthy or well-connected individuals.

Conclusion:

The CPI has been widely credited with putting the issue of corruption on the International Policy Agenda. It sends a powerful message and the governments are forced to acknowledge their scores and act on it. The governments must urgently address the corrupting role of big money in political party financing and the undue influence it exerts on the political systems.

52. Fund crunch hits MGNREGA scheme (GS-2)

Context:

Lack of funds for the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme.**

Background:

- 2019's budget allocation was ₹60,000 crore for the MGNREGA scheme.
- The allocated amount for MGNREGA for the present fiscal was lesser than the amount spent under MGNREGA in the previous fiscal.

Details:

- More than 96% of the allocated money for MGNREGA has already been spent or is needed to pay pending dues, with less than ₹2,500 crores left to sustain the scheme for the next two months.
- **January, February, and March are months with little agricultural activity when rural workers desperately need employment.**

Concerns:

- The Centre is on the verge of **running out of funds for the crucial MGNREGA scheme**.
- With the Centre yet to release pending dues to the states, fifteen States are already facing **negative net balances** as per the scheme's financial statements. Worryingly, these states will enter next year with pending liabilities.
- States are **unable to pay to the workers on time**. For example in Rajasthan, workers' wages have not been paid since October-end. This is contrary to the spirit of the Act and **violates the principle of rights-based implementation of the MGNREGA scheme**.
- There is a **high demand for work this fiscal year**, as the rural economy is in distress and informal employment has also collapsed. The lack of funds is a cause of concern.

Significance:

- Given the **backdrop of economic slowdown**, many economists have recommended that **putting money into the hands of rural consumers via MGNREGA is key to kickstarting the economy**.

53. The four phases of constitutional interpretation (GS-2)

Introduction

- The Constitution of India came into force 70 years ago, on January 26, 1950. The enactment of the Constitution was an ambitious political experiment – with universal adult franchise, federalism in a region consisting of over 550 princely States, and social revolution in a deeply unequal society. However, it was equally a unique achievement in terms of constitutional design.
- Republic Day therefore provides us an opportunity to take a step back from political contestations about the Constitution and consider how the **text has been interpreted by the courts over the last seven decades**.

Phase One-Textualist Approach

- In its early years, the Supreme Court focused on the plain meaning of the words used in the Constitution.
- **K. Gopalan v. State of Madras (1950)** was one of the early decisions in which the Court was called upon to interpret the fundamental rights under Part III.
 - The leader of the Communist Party of India claimed that preventive detention legislation under which he was detained was inconsistent with Articles 19 (the right to freedom), 21 (the right to life) and 22 (the protection against arbitrary arrest and detention).

- The Supreme Court decided that each of those articles covered entirely different subject matter, and were to **be read as separate codes rather than being read together.**
- Amongst the most controversial questions in Indian constitutional law has **been whether there are any limitations on Parliament's power to amend the Constitution, especially fundamental rights.** In its early years, the Court read the Constitution literally, **concluding that there were no such limitations.**

Phase Two- The Structure

In the second phase, the Supreme Court began exploring other methods of interpretation.

- Appeals to the **text of the Constitution were gradually overtaken by appeals to the Constitution's overall structure** and coherence.
- In the leading case of **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)**, the Court concluded that Parliament's power to amend the Constitution **did not extend to altering its "basic structure" – an open-ended catalogue** of features that lies within the exclusive control of the Court.
 - When Parliament attempted to overturn this decision by amending the Constitution yet again, the Court, relying on structuralist justifications, decisively rejected that attempt.
- In this phase, the Court also categorically rejected the Gopalan approach in favour of a structuralist one in **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978)**. Through this decision, the Court conceived of the fundamental rights as a **cohesive bill of rights rather than a miscellaneous grouping of constitutional guarantees.**
 - The right to life was incrementally interpreted to **include a wide range of rights such as clean air, speedy trial, and free legal aid.**
 - This paved the way for the Supreme Court to play an unprecedented role in the governance of the nation.
- Impact
 - What was common between the first two phases of the interpretive story was that significant decisions involving the **interpretation of the Constitution were entrusted to Constitution Benches** (comprising five or more judges of court) and were carefully (even if incorrectly) reasoned.
 - There was **limited scope for precedential confusion**, since matters which had been decided by Constitution Benches and which demanded reconsideration were referred to larger Constitution Benches.

Phase Three- Eclecticism

In the third phase, the Supreme Court's interpretive philosophy **turned far more result-oriented** than it had ever been. The Court often **surrendered its responsibility of engaging in a thorough rights reasoning** of the issues before it. Two factors underpinned this institutional failure.

- First, the changing structure of the Court, which at its **inception** began with eight judges, grew to a sanctioned strength of 31; it is currently 34.
 - It began to sit in panels of two or three judges, **effectively transforming it into a “polyvocal” group** of about a dozen sub-Supreme Courts.
- Second, the Court began deciding cases based on a certain **conception of its own role** – whether as sentinel of democracy or protector of the market economy.
 - This unique decision-making process **sidelined reason-giving in preference to arriving at outcomes that match the Court’s perception.**

The failure to give reasons contributed not only to **methodological incoherence but also to serious doctrinal incoherence and inconsistency** across the law.

- This can be best described as **panchayati eclecticism**, with **different Benches adopting inconsistent interpretive approaches** based on their conception of the Court’s role, and arriving at conclusions that were often in tension with one another.
 - The imagery that panchayati eclecticism is meant to invoke is that of a group of wise men and women (applying the analogy, sub-Supreme Courts), taking decisions based on notions of fairness that are **detached from precedent, doctrine and established interpretive methods.**

Phase Four- Purpose

In the fourth phase, the Court has acknowledged as critical to its interpretive exercise the purpose for which the Constitution has been enacted. Many Constitutions attempt the task of **entrenching a political compromise** between the incumbents and challengers of the day. India’s Constitution, at its very inception, was different.

- In enacting the Constitution, the **founders of our Republic expressed a sense of unease with the status quo** and raised expectations of root-and-branch social revolution and transformation.
 - The Court is now beginning to interpret the Constitution in accordance with its revolutionary and transformative potential.
- With about a dozen significant Constitution Bench decisions from the Supreme Court since 2018, there has been a renaissance in decision-making by Constitution Benches. This includes the Court’s decisions **striking down Section 377 and the criminal offence of adultery, and including the office of the Chief Justice of India within the scope of the Right to Information Act.**

Conclusion

However, facets of **phase 3 continue to linger on in the courts.**

- Cases that involve substantial questions of interpretation of the Constitution – such as the cases concerning the **National Register of Citizens and the**

electoral bonds scheme – are still being adjudicated upon by benches of two or three judges.

- There remains a latent risk, therefore, that the gains made in the early days of phase four could be lost, and we could slide back to panchayati adjudication once again.

54. 'Why is a certificate needed to identify a transperson?' (GS-2)

Context:

Supreme Court's notice to the government.

Background:

- **The Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act of 2019** was meant to be a consequence of the directions of the **Supreme Court of India** in the **National Legal Services Authority vs. Union of India case judgment**, mandating the Central and State governments to ensure legal recognition of all transgender persons and proactive measures instituted for their welfare.
- The apex court deemed that **individuals had the right to the self-identification of their sexual orientation**. It recognized that transgender persons **have fundamental rights**, and paved the way for enshrining the rights of transgenders in law.
- In the Act, there is a provision for recognition of the identity of transgender persons. The transgenders will have the **right to self-perceived gender identity**. They can **apply to the district magistrate and get a certificate of identity as a transgender person**. The certificate issued shall confer rights and be a proof of recognition of the identity of a transgender.
- While the Act is progressive in that it allows self-perception of identity, it mandates a certificate from a district magistrate declaring the holder to be transgender. There is an argument from the activists, that this **goes against the principle of self-determination itself**. It is also a source of concern given that there is no room for redress in case an appeal for such a certificate is rejected.

Details:

- Several petitions have been filed in the SC against the provisions of the Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act of 2019.
- One of the petitioners has argued that **the right to self-identification forms part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution** and the above provision violates that right of the transperson.
- The petitioner claims that the Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act of 2019, instead of furthering or protecting the fundamental rights of transpersons, violates and facilitates the violation of their rights to life, privacy and equality.

- The Supreme Court has asked the government to explain why a law meant to protect and empower the transgender community requires a magistrate's certificate as a prior condition for the State to identify a transperson.
- The Bench led by Chief Justice of India has issued **a formal notice to the government on the petition.**

55. 'One nation holding up SAARC' (GS-2)

- India has been playing a lead role in connectivity in the South Asian region through efforts like the SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement initiated in the SAARC Kathmandu session of 2015.
- SAARC has not been able to hold a formal meet in the past four years due to tensions between India and Pakistan.
- With the intra-regional trade being abysmally low, the full potential of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is not being utilized due to Pakistan's preference to use terrorism as a state policy towards India, rather than the peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue. This has obstructed efforts aimed at regional cooperation.
- The use of terror as an instrument of its foreign and security policy has promoted radicalism and terrorism in the region.
- There is a need to ensure that terrorists do not receive state support. Efforts should be directed at cutting the ideological and financial network supplying the terrorists.

56. Bodo Accord

Why in News

Recently, the central government, the Assam government and the Bodo groups, including all factions of the militant National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), signed an agreement to redraw and rename the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) as the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), in Assam.

- BTAD is spread over four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri.
- The BTAD and other areas mentioned under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution have been exempted from the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019.

Key Points

- Bodoland Territorial Region would include the villages which are dominated by Bodos but are outside BTAD presently. Villages with non-Bodo population would be excluded from it.
 - A committee will be formed to decide the exclusion and inclusion of new areas. Subsequently, the total number of Assembly seats will go up to 60, from the existing 40.

- Both the representatives of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) will be present in the committee.
- Bodo-Kachari Welfare Council will be set up for focused development of Bodo villages outside BTAD.
- Bodos living in the hills would be conferred a Scheduled Hill Tribe status.
- Bodo language with Devanagari script would be the associate official language for the entire Assam.
- However, the agreement has not addressed the issue of “citizenship or work permit” for non-domiciles in the BTAD yet.
- Around 1500 cadres of NDFB will be rehabilitated and assimilated by the Central and the state governments.
 - The criminal cases registered against factions of NDFB members for non-heinous crimes shall be withdrawn and the cases of heinous crimes will be reviewed.
- Comprehensive solutions have been made to redress the grievances of the people.
 - Families of the people killed during the Bodo movement would get ₹5 lakh each.
 - A Special Development Package of ₹1500 crore would be given by the Centre to undertake specific projects for the development of Bodo areas.

Benefits

- The accord will successfully bring together leading stakeholders under one framework.
- People previously associated with armed resistance groups will enter the mainstream and contribute to the nation’s progress.
- It will further protect and popularise the unique culture of the Bodo people and will give them access to a wide range of development-oriented initiatives.
- It will bring peace, harmony and togetherness in the people of Assam.

Background

- Bodos are the single largest community among the notified Scheduled Tribes in Assam. Bodos are a part of Bodo-Kachari and constitute about 5-6% of Assam’s population.
- The first organised demand for a Bodo state came in 1967-68.
- The Assam Accord of 1985, gave rise to Bodo aspirations and in 1987, ABSU revived the Bodo statehood demand.
- Bodo Security Force which arose in 1986 as an armed group renamed itself NDFB, and later split into factions.
- The first Bodo accord was signed with the ABSU in 1993. It led to the creation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) with some limited political powers.
- In 2003, the second Bodo Accord was signed by the extremist group Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF), the Centre and the state. This led to the creation

of BTC, which is an autonomous body under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

57. Time limit on advance bail violates personal liberty: SC (GS-2)

Context:

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court ruled that the protection of anticipatory or pre-arrest bail cannot be limited to any time frame or fixed period as the denial of bail amounts to deprivation of the fundamental right to personal liberty in a free and democratic country.

Background:



The back story of advance bail

- The old Cr.PC of 1898 did not contain any specific provision corresponding to the present Section 438. There was a difference of opinion among various HCs whether court had an inherent power to grant pre-arrest bail
- The Law Commission of India on September 24, 1969, highlighted the need for introducing a provision in the Code enabling courts to grant "anticipatory bail" as an antidote to detention in false cases
- Clause 447 of the Draft Bill of 1970 was enacted with some modifications and became Section 438 of the Cr.PC, 1973

A five-judge Supreme Court Bench in the 1980 case of Gurbaksh Singh Sibbia vs. State of Punjab interpreted that the power to grant anticipatory bail is "cast in wide terms and should not be hedged in through narrow judicial interpretation". It held that courts could impose conditions which were appropriate

Issue:

The questions referred to the Constitution Bench were twofold:

1. Whether the protection granted to a person under Section 438 should be limited to a fixed period till the accused surrenders in court.
2. Whether the life of anticipatory bail should end when the accused is summoned by the court.

Details:

- A five-judge Bench, led by Justice Arun Mishra, acknowledged that anticipatory bail helps thwart influential powers from implicating their rivals in false cases.
- Section 438 (anticipatory bail) of the Code of Criminal Procedure protects people from the ignominy of detention in jail for days on end and disgrace to their reputation.
- “The life or duration of an anticipatory bail order does not normally end at the time and stage when the accused is summoned by the court, or when charges are framed, but can continue till the end of the trial,” the court held.
- The court held that a plea for anticipatory bail can be filed even before the registration of FIR as long as there is a reasonable basis for the apprehension of arrest and clarity of facts.
- An application for anticipatory bail should be based on concrete facts and not vague or general allegations. The application should also contain bare essential facts relating to the offence and why the applicant reasonably apprehends arrest.

Can restrictions be imposed on Anticipatory bail?

- Nothing in Section 438 of the CrPC compels or obliges courts to impose conditions limiting the relief in terms of time, or upon filing of FIR or recording of statement of witnesses by the police during investigation or inquiry, etc.
- Courts, depending on the seriousness of the threat of arrest, need not wait to hear the prosecution’s version before granting anticipatory bail. Issuance of notice to the prosecutor can be done simultaneously while granting protection from arrest to the accused.
- The grant of protection should not be blanket but confined to specific offence or incident for which relief from arrest is sought. It is open for the police to move court for arrest of the accused if there is any violation of bail conditions, the Bench said.
- The court held that protection against arrest should adjust in favour of the accused. Restricting the protection would prove unfavourable for the accused.
 - However, it is open for a court to impose appropriate conditions for grant of anticipatory bail if the specific facts or the features of the offence involved demand it.
 - Courts have to consider the nature of the offence, the role of the person, the likelihood of his influencing the course of investigation or tampering of evidence, including intimidating witnesses and fleeing justice.
 - But restrictions/conditions can be imposed only on a case-to-case basis.
 - Special or other restrictive conditions may be imposed if the case or cases warrant, but should not be imposed in a routine manner in all cases, the Bench pointed out.

58. Cabinet nod for raising abortion limit to 24 weeks (GS-2)

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020, to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.

Details:

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 is for expanding access of women to safe and legal abortion services on therapeutic, eugenic, humanitarian or social grounds.
- The proposed amendments include substitution of certain sub-sections, insertion of certain new clauses under some sections in the existing Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, with a view to increase upper gestation limit for termination of pregnancy under certain conditions and to strengthen access to comprehensive abortion care, under strict conditions, without compromising service and quality of safe abortion.

Significance:

- It is a step towards the safety and well-being of women and many women will be benefitted by this.
- Recently several petitions were received by the Courts seeking permission for aborting pregnancies at a gestational age beyond the present permissible limit on grounds of foetal abnormalities or pregnancies due to sexual violence faced by women.
- The proposed increase in gestational age will ensure dignity, autonomy, confidentiality and justice for women who need to terminate a pregnancy.
- In order to increase access of women to safe abortion services and taking into account the advances in medical technology, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has proposed amendments after extensive consultation with various stakeholders and several ministries.

Salient features of proposed amendments:

- The Bill proposes requirement for opinion of one provider for termination of pregnancy, up to 20 weeks of gestation and introducing the requirement of opinion of two providers for termination of pregnancy of 20-24 weeks of gestation.
- Enhances the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women which will be defined in the amendments to the MTP Rules and would

include vulnerable women including survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women (like differently-abled women, minors), etc.

- The upper gestation limit not to apply in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by the Medical Board.
- Name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed except to a person authorised in any law for the time being in force.

59. Should restrictions on free speech be reviewed? (GS-2)

Brandenburg v. Ohio (1969)

- In this case, the ‘**clear and present danger**’ test was expanded, and the ‘imminent lawless action’ test was laid down by the U.S. Supreme Court, which the court has followed since.
- This test states, “The constitutional guarantees of **free speech and free press do not permit the state to forbid or proscribe advocacy** of the use of force or of law violation, except where such advocacy is directed to inciting or producing **imminent lawless action**”.
 - **Imminent** means ‘likely to happen very soon,’ ‘at hand,’ or ‘fast approaching.’

Initially, Indian courts explicitly rejected the “clear and present danger” test, arguing that the **doctrine cannot be imported into the Indian Constitution because of “reasonable restrictions”**, but subsequently we see the courts adopting tests similar to the US ones, and even affirming the Brandenburg test, as in the case of **Arup Bhuyan** [Arup Bhuyan vs State of Assam, (2011)].

- The Supreme Court said, citing the Brandenburg test, “We respectfully agree and are of the opinion that they apply to India too, as our fundamental rights are similar to the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution”.

Shreya Singhal vs Union of India, (2013)

How do we differentiate between advocacy and incitement? The Shreya Singhal judgment offers a very clear exposition of the difference between advocacy and incitement.

- The court held that three concepts are fundamental to understanding the scope of free speech. For them “The first is **discussion**, the second is **advocacy**, and the third is **incitement**.”
- Mere discussion or even advocacy of a particular cause howsoever unpopular is at the heart of Article 19(1)(a).
- It is only when such discussion or **advocacy reaches the level of incitement that Article 19(2) kicks in**”.

They cited Brandenburg's case: "The wide difference between advocacy and incitement, between preparation and attempt, between assembling and conspiracy, must be borne in mind. In order to support a finding of clear and present danger it must be shown **either that immediate serious violence was to be expected or was advocated**, or that the past conduct furnished reason to believe that such advocacy was then contemplated."

60. Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020, to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.

What was the need for a new bill on abortion?

- **Section 3** of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971, capped the abortion limit at 20 weeks.
- Under **Section 5**, a woman **could undergo abortion beyond 20 weeks only if her life was endangered by the pregnancy**.
 - But there **remained no provision for foetuses that were diagnosed with severe life-threatening defects**.
 - Most **birth defects** are diagnosed between 16 to 18 weeks of pregnancy. But some anomalies of the brain and spine can be detected only after 20 weeks.
- The **MTP Act, 1971 was replete with unclear language**, which resulted in doctors refusing to perform abortions even within the stipulated 20-week gestation limit fearing criminal charges.
 - Women had to seek the approval of the judiciary, which, by most accounts, did not always come in time.
 - "As a result", notes a 2015 study in the India Journal of Medical Ethics, "10 to 13 per cent of maternal deaths in India are due to unsafe abortions".
 - Given the delays in the judicial system, the 20-week mark often passed, leaving many, including rape survivors, with unwanted pregnancies.

Features of the bill

- The bill proposes to permit the **termination of pregnancy up to 24 weeks from the existing 20 weeks**.
 - It aims to expand access for women to safe and legal abortion services on therapeutic, eugenic, humanitarian or social grounds.
- The amendments proposed in the bill are the **requirement for the opinion of one doctor for the termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks** of gestation, and

introducing the requirement of the opinion of **two doctors for the termination of pregnancy of 20-24 weeks of gestation.**

- The bill also proposed enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for **special categories of women, which will be defined in the amendments to the MTP Rules** and would include vulnerable women including survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women (like differently-abled women, minors), etc.
- **Upper gestation limit will not apply** in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by **Medical Board.**
 - The composition, functions and other details of the Medical Board are to be prescribed subsequently in Rules under the Act.
- **Name and other particulars of a woman** whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed except to a person authorized in any law for the time being in force.

Significance

- The extension of limit would ease the process for women, allowing the mainstream system itself to take care of them, **delivering quality medical attention.**
- It has a provision to protect the **privacy** of the person seeking abortion.
- The proposed increase in gestational age will ensure dignity, autonomy, confidentiality and justice for women who need to terminate a pregnancy.
- The extension will help victims of rape, girls with disabilities as well as minors, who may not realize they are pregnant until later.

Issue Area

- MTP will be extended till 24 weeks only for certain categories of women, there is also a provision that says that pregnancies with foetal abnormalities can be terminated only **after being approved by medical boards.**
- Medical boards often delay medical interventions required and often do not have the right kind of specialists.

Way forward

- The Government needs to ensure that all norms and standardized protocols in clinical practice to facilitate abortions are followed in health care institutions across the country.
- The government should also learn from the experiences of the 1971 Act: the new piece of legislation should be worded in a manner that removes frequent appeals to the judiciary.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

1. One-fifth of country's forests prone to fires: study (GS-3)

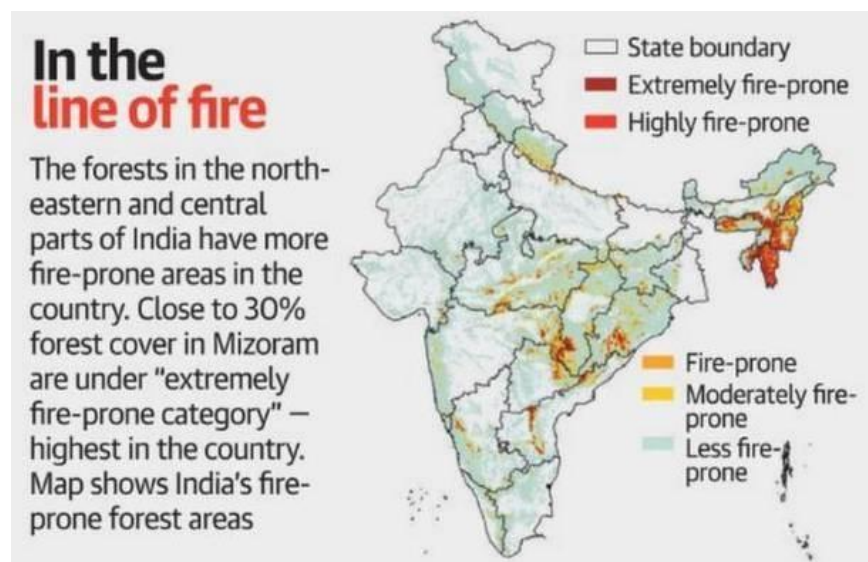
Why in News

Recently, the 2019 report by Forest Survey of India (FSI) was released. It states that about 21.40% of forest cover in India is prone to fires, with forests in the north-eastern region and central India being the most vulnerable.

- FSI carried out a study along forest fire points (FFP) identified across the country from 2004 to 2017.
- There are total 2,77,758 FFP identified during the 13 years.
- FFPs were analysed using a moderate resolution imaging spectroradiometer (MODIS) by overlaying the points coverage over the grid coverage of 5 km x 5 km.

Forest Survey of India

It is a premier national organization under the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests responsible for assessment and monitoring of the forest resources of the country regularly.



Key Points

- Extremely fire-prone areas account for 3.89% of total forest cover, very highly fire-prone areas account for 6.01% and highly fire-prone areas for 11.50%. Together, the three categories come to 21.40 % of forest cover.
- From November 2018 to June 2019, there were total 29,547 alerts based on MODIS. Mizoram recorded the highest number of fire alerts (2,795).
 - The north-eastern region accounted for about one-third of alerts in the country.
 - The Central Indian States also recorded a high number of forest fire alerts.
 - Alerts: Madhya Pradesh > Maharashtra > Odisha > Chhattisgarh
- The overall green cover has increased in the country but the forest cover in the north-east, particularly in Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, has decreased.
- The uncontrolled forest fires can lead to significant loss of forest cover. Climate change influences the frequency and intensity of forest fires and results in forests becoming increasingly inflammable.
- Reasons for Forest Fires
 - Thunderstorms are the most likely natural cause for forest fires.
 - In central India, the reasons are mainly manmade, particularly in cases where people visit forests and leave burning bidis, cigarette stubs or other inflammable materials.
 - A major reason for forest fires in the north-east is slash-and-burn cultivation, commonly called jhoom or jhum cultivation.
- The north-east has tropical evergreen forests which are not likely to catch fire easily on their own like the dry deciduous forests of central India.

2. Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan-3 in mission mode, says ISRO (GS-3)

Context:

Four pilots from the Indian Air Force (IAF) will leave for Russia this month to receive training as astronauts of Gaganyaan, the first Indian crewed flight to space.

Background:

Gaganyaan:

- In 2018, India's first manned space mission was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech.
- Gaganyaan will be the first Indian crewed orbital spacecraft intended to be the basis of Indian Human Space Flight Program.

- With Gaganyaan, India will become only the 4th country after Russia, the USA and China to send humans to space.
- The target is to launch it before the 75-year celebration of India's.

Independence.

- Before the manned mission scheduled for December 2021, two unmanned tests will be carried out in December 2020 and July 2021.
- ISRO is planning to launch the manned mission in December 2021 and if there are any setbacks during development, the launch could be carried out in 2022.
- ISRO's indigenous mission will be assisted by a few other countries in

Selecting and training astronauts.

- According to ISRO, a budget of Rs 10,000 Cr has been set aside for setting up the required infrastructure.

The Spacecraft:

- The spacecraft will carry 3 Indian astronauts and it will circle the earth for around 7 days from a distance of around 300-400 km.
- It will be launched by India's biggest rocket GSLV Mk 3 from Sriharikota.
- The 7-ton spacecraft will orbit the earth at an altitude of around 400km for up to 7 days.
- ISRO has developed most of the critical technologies needed for the mission.
- Its service module will be powered by two liquid-propellant engines.
- It will have life support and environmental control systems.

Crew Module:

- The crew module is a twin-walled sealed structure that recreates earth-like conditions.
- It will be equipped with Emergency Mission Abort and Emergency Escape System.
- The crew escape system is an emergency system to help the crew pull away from the launch vehicle if the mission has to be aborted. It can be done at the 1st and 2nd stage of the rocket.
- Crew escape system ensures that the crew module gets advance warning if anything goes wrong with the rocket.
- It pulls the crew module away to a safe distance and can be landed either on sea or on land with the help of parachutes.

Development of the Project:

- Preliminary studies and technological development started in 2006 itself under the generic name 'orbital vehicle'.
- The plan was to design a simple capsule with an endurance of about a week

in space, a capacity of 2-4 astronauts, and a splashdown landing after re-entry.

- ISRO is developing the Gaganyaan orbital vehicle based on its Space Capsule Recovery Experiment (SRE), which was successfully launched and recovered in January 2007.
- India has already successfully developed and tested several building blocks, including re-entry space capsule, pad abort test, safe crew ejection mechanism in case of rocket failure, flight suit developed by DRDO's Defence Bioengineering and Electromedical Laboratory and the powerful GSLV-Mk III launch vehicle.
- Having met all required technological keystones, the Indian Human Spaceflight Programme was accepted and formally announced by the Prime Minister.
- A full-fledged training facility will be set up at Bengaluru for training the astronauts.

Russian Support for Gaganyaan:

- Russia has offered Semi Cryogenic engine technology and critical components for the human space capsule.
- ISRO Chairman K Sivan revealed that the technology will be transferred
 - under the 'Make in India' programme so that the engines can be made in India.
 - The two countries have already signed a deal for the training program of astronauts.
 - Based on an agreement between ISRO and Glavcosmos, a subsidiary of Russia's state-run space corporation Roscosmos, four selected pilots of the IAF will be trained at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonauts Centre.
 - The Russian agency along with ISRO and IAF will select, test and qualify the trainees in collaboration with the state-run Institute of Medical and Biological Problems, Russia.
 - India is also negotiating with Russia for the supply of space suits, crew seats and windows.
 - Recently, India and Russia discussed matters related to Rocket Aerodynamic Test, Piloted Vehicle and Crew Rescue System for the Indian mission.

On flight path

ISRO has planned 25 missions for the year 2020. Ground work for Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan-3 progressed smoothly in 2019. A status check:

1 Gaganyaan, the country's maiden manned space mission, is progressing well. Four Indian Air Force personnel have been identified for the mission and their astronaut training will start from the third week of this month in Russia

2 Chandrayaan-3, the country's third lunar mission, has been approved. The mission, which will cost around ₹600 crore, will also try to land in the lunar south pole like Chandrayaan-2. The take-off may get postponed to next year

3 Communication satellite GSAT-30 is 2020's first scheduled launch

4 In the first half of 2020, SSLV or small satellite launcher will make its debut

ISRO has sought ₹14,000 crore as budget for 2020-21

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH CHANDRAYAAN-2

We are looking at all navigation guidance and control aspects. We learnt from telemetry data that the design could not take the large difference in velocity. We have learnt our lessons from the failure

K. SIVAN
ISRO CHAIRMAN



Key Details:

- ISRO Chairman K. Sivan has announced that four IAF pilots have been shortlisted after a series of fitness and endurance tests.
- The initial tests were conducted at the IAF's Institute of Aerospace Medicine, Bengaluru, and Russia.

Bengaluru, and Russia.

- The four pilots will leave in the third week of January 2020 to be trained at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Centre in Moscow, as per an agreement signed between the respective space agencies of the two countries.
- The first of the two pre-Gaganyaan test flights with a humanoid will be launched by 2020-end along with some of the six shortlisted microgravity experiments.

Chandrayaan - 3:

- ISRO has also quietly begun work on another soft landing mission to the moon with most of the same features of Chandrayaan-2 and almost on the back of the failure of the latter's lander on the lunar surface.
- The launch of the nearly ₹600 crore Chandrayaan-3 is targeted for the end of 2020 or early 2021.
- It will be almost a repetition of the July 2019 Chandrayaan-2 mission in the configuration of spacecraft, the landing spot on the moon and the experiments to be conducted on the lunar surface.
- The third mission will be ISRO's bid to realise for itself the difficult

Technology of soft-landing on another planetary body.

- The agency is undertaking it as the landing module of the second mission

- crashed barely five minutes before it was to have landed on the lunar surface.
- The lander and rover are estimated to cost ₹250 crore and will go to the moon on a propulsion model. The GSLV Mark III vehicle costs around ₹350 crore.
 - Another lunar mission is being discussed with Japanese space agency JAXA (Japan Aeronautics Exploration Agency) but its elements have not been finalised.
 - Although scores of landers sent by Russia, the U.S. and the Chinese have explored the moon's surface, so far, no other agency has landed in the southern hemisphere. ISRO hopes to be still the first to do so.

ISRO's Second Spaceport

- The Tamil Nadu government has started acquiring 2,300 acres of land in Thoothukudi district for ISRO's second launch port.
- Currently, satellites are launched from the Sriharikota launch centre in Andhra Pradesh.
- According to ISRO, Thoothukudi offers a locational advantage to launch towards India's South.
- When ready, the new spaceport will handle mainly the small satellite launch vehicle (SSLV) that is under development. SSLVs are meant to put a payload of up to 500 kg in space.

Analysis of Vikram's Crash-landing:

- Chandrayaan-2's moon lander Vikram may have most likely crashed on the moon because the navigation control and guidance mechanism in the penultimate phase were not designed to handle the large spike in speed that developed in the last 35 minutes of its descent.
- This problem has been corrected in the new modules of Chandrayaan-3 which is due to be sent around the end of 2020.
- ISRO Chairman K. Sivan has stated that ISRO is looking at all navigation guidance and control aspects. It has learnt from telemetry data that the design could not take the large difference in velocity.
- ISRO's internal failure analysis committee has evaluated the failed landing attempt and it has denied that Chandrayaan-2 was launched without doing thorough tests.

3. Kerala for steps to curb alien plants' growth in NBR (GS-3)

Context:

The Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department is gearing up to adopt comprehensive steps to arrest the rampant growth of invasive alien plants, especially tree species like 'Senna Spectabilis', in the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR), including the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

What are Alien Invasive Species?

- An invasive species is a species that is not native to a specific location (an introduced species), and that has a tendency to spread to a degree believed to cause damage to the environment, human economy or human health.
- According to experts, alien species become 'invasive' when they are introduced deliberately or accidentally outside their natural areas, where they out-compete the native species and upset the ecological balance.
- The most common characteristics of invasive species are rapid reproduction and growth, high dispersal ability, ability to survive on various food types and in a wide range of environmental conditions and the ability to adapt physiologically to new conditions, called phenotypic plasticity.

How Invasive Alien Species (IAS) are introduced?

- The movement of people and goods around the world increases the opportunity for the introduction of IAS.
- The most effective way to stop the negative impacts of IAS is through prevention of spread by regulating the trade or movement of a species.
- Once an IAS has arrived, early detection, monitoring and eradication can stop the species from spreading.

Negative Consequences of Invasive Species:

- Invasive species can have a number of negative impacts on the areas that they invade. Perhaps the most significant of these is the widespread loss of habitat.
- Some invaders can physically alter the habitat in addition to destruction.
- Other invasive species may not destroy habitat but can have an impact by killing large numbers of endemic species.
- Invasive species can also impact human health. Invasive zebra mussels accumulate toxins in their tissues like PCBs and PAHs. When other organisms prey on these mussels, the toxins are passed up the food chain and can also enter animals consumed by humans.
- Ballast water from ships also sometimes contains harmful bacteria like cholera. Invasive animals can also be vectors for diseases.
- In addition to these impacts, invasive species can also have enormous economic costs.

Some commonly found alien species:

- African apple snail (*Achatina Fulica*): The most invasive among all alien fauna in India, this mollusc was first reported in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is now found across the country and is threatening the habitat of

several native species.

- Papaya Mealy Bug (*Paracoccus marginatus*): Native of Mexico and Central America, it is believed to have destroyed huge crops of papaya in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.
- Cotton Mealy Bug (*Phenacoccus solenopsis*): Native to North America, it has severely affected cotton crops in Deccan.
- Amazon sailfin catfish (*Pterygoplichthys pardalis*): This species is responsible for destroying the fish population in the wetlands of Kolkata.

Other prominent cases in India in recent times:

- Chilika Lake became degraded mainly through siltation and the choking of the seawater inlet channel, this resulted in the proliferation of invasive freshwater species, a decrease in fish productivity and an overall loss in biodiversity.
- Invasive growth of the grass *Paspalum distichum* has changed the ecological character of large areas of the Keoladeo National Park, reducing its suitability for certain waterbird species including the Siberian Crane.
- In the Kanjli Wetlands, the water hyacinth which was introduced is now invasive. From time to time it is removed using mechanical means.
- At the Ropar Wetlands, invasive weeds are also a concern and management plans are under development.

Key Details:

- The spread of invasive plants, especially *Senna Spectabilis*, is posing a major threat to the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, owing to its quick growth and coppicing character.
- The tree species had been found in nearly 10 km sq. area of 344.44 sq. km of the sanctuary around five years ago. But now it has invaded more than 50 sq. km of the sanctuary in a short span of time.
- This showed its high invasive nature. A recent study of the Ferns Nature Conservation Society with the support of the Forest Department recorded the presence of the plant on 78.91 sq. km area of the sanctuary.

Impact on Tiger Reserves located in NBR:

- The plant started to invade adjacent tiger reserves, including Bandipur and Nagarhole in Karnataka and the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu.
- Earlier, it was planted as avenue trees along roadsides in Wayanad. Due to massive flowering and drying of bamboo species in the Wayanad, lots of open spaces were created which were occupied by *Senna Spectabilis*.
- An adult tree grows up to 15 to 20 metres in a short period of time and every year distributes thousands of seeds after the gregarious flowering.

- The thick foliage arrests the growth of other indigenous species of trees and grass, and causes food shortage for the wildlife population, especially herbivores, during summer.
- Moreover, wildlife would not feed on the leaves of the tree as it was not palatable for them.

Chemical measures:

- “The ‘vayal’ ecosystem’ (marshy land) of the forest area now houses this plant in large numbers. The allelo chemicals produced by this plant adversely affect the germination and growth of the native species.
- The KFRI has developed some physical and chemical measures to tackle the threat of the plant. Though the physical method has been followed for the past five years to tackle the issue, it was yet to have any desired effect.
- Hence plans have been made to adopt an integrated method by combining the physical as well as chemical measures to address the issue.
- Inter-State co-ordination needed: As the same threat is being faced by the adjacent tiger reserves, managers of the reserves agreed to follow similar steps to tackle the threat. The issue would be further discussed with them in the Inter-State meetings to be held soon.

4. Modi calls up South Asian leaders (GS-2)

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called up leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka and conveyed India’s commitment to the principle of “Neighbourhood First”.

Key Details:

- During the talks, Mr. Modi conveyed his greetings to the leaders and discussed the upcoming regional interactions.
- The talks hint at India’s pursuit of a regional arrangement without the participation of Pakistan.
- The PM emphasised India’s commitment to the ‘neighbourhood first’ policy and the vision of shared peace, security, prosperity and progress for all of India’s friends and partners in the region.
- India’s ‘neighbourhood first’ policy was adopted soon after Mr. Modi took charge in May 2014 which led to several key regional agreements including the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh.
- During the latest telephonic interaction, Mr. Modi told his Bangladeshi counterpart, Sheikh Hasina, that India’s ties with Dhaka were a “priority” for his government.
- In recent weeks, relations with the eastern neighbour were marred by

negative references to the country by several leaders including Home Minister Amit Shah who justified the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 citing alleged persecution against minority religious communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- Both leaders discussed the upcoming celebrations in Dhaka around the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in March 2020 where the Indian leader is expected to be a leading speaker.
- Modi also spoke to Nepal PM K P Sharma Oli. During 2019 both sides completed several bilateral projects including the operationalization of the Motihari-Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline. Both leaders agreed to inaugurate an integrated check post of Biratnagar through video conference.
- PM Modi discussed the visit of Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk to India in 2020. Mr. Modi visited Bhutan soon after being sworn in for the second stint.
- The phone calls were in keeping with India's recent attempts to create a regional grouping without Pakistan.

5. India records less than 100 tiger deaths for the first time in three years (GS-3)

Why in News

According to the Ministry of Forest Environment and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the number of tiger deaths in 2019 has decreased for the first time in three years.

- The number of tiger deaths recorded in previous years are 122 (2016), 115 (2017), 100 (2018) and 95 (2019).
- Decreasing tiger mortality has emerged parallelly with the increasing numbers of tigers in the country.
 - The tiger census report (2019), reported an increase in the number of tigers compared to 2014.

Key Points

- **Numerics:**
 - For 2019, 84 cases of tiger deaths and 11 cases of seizures (a tiger is presumed dead on the basis of body parts seized by authorities) are reported in the country.
 - Madhya Pradesh, which has the highest number of tigers in the country (526, as per the last census), has recorded the highest number of tiger deaths (31) followed by Maharashtra (18), Karnataka (12) and Uttarakhand (10).
 - Deaths were also recorded from non-tiger bearing states like Gujarat, where a tiger had strayed into the State and died.
- **Reason:**
 - Poaching is the main reason for tiger deaths in the country followed

- by other natural reasons.
- The data on tiger mortality also confirms 22 cases of poaching in the country.
- **Location:**
 - Tigers are most vulnerable when they are outside reserves as they are not under surveillance.
 - Almost over 70% of cases of poaching have been reported outside tiger reserves.
- **Use of Technology:**
 - The reduced tiger mortalities are due to usage of technology for surveillance, good management of tiger reserves and a lot of awareness and education programmes on tiger conservation.
 - M-STriPES (Monitoring System for Tigers-Intensive Protection & Ecological Status) patrolling app is deployed and used in every tiger reserve.

6. Indian Science Congress (ISC)

Context

- Prime Minister inaugurated the 107th edition of the Indian Science Congress in Bengaluru.

Details

- The objective of the ISC is to build a scientifically literate country and mould younger generations empowered with critical thinking and scientific temper.
 - Article 51A (h) mandates that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.
- The theme of ISC 2020 is “Science and Technology: Rural Development”.
- The event brings together science fraternity across the world to discuss scientific innovation and research.

Indian Science Technology and Engineering facilities Map (I-STEM) Portal

- The web portal ‘I-STEM’ has been developed by scientists from the Indian Institute of Science – Bengaluru.
- I-STEM will allow researchers to identify the specific facility they need located closest to them for their R&D work in India.
- Termed as ‘One Nation One Research Web Portal’ for the scientific community, the portal will link researchers and resources, hold a database of all the R&D facilities established in institutions around the country, and enable their sharing in a transparent manner.
- A secure payment gateway and SMS-based booking confirmation would enable them to compare the usage charges, make payments and schedule the

time-slots.

- In the near future, there are also plans to include private laboratories and universities in the database, which could also benefit start-ups.

Need for the Project

- At present, there is no mechanism for young scientists to gain access to facilities needed for experiments, which are not available in their labs. As a result, they have to individually approach institutes to seek permissions to use their facilities, a process that is tedious.
- By the time a researcher gets a time slot to make use of the facility, their samples get degraded. The aim, therefore, is to make the entire process hassle-free.

7. The double burden of malnutrition: need for urgent policy action (GS-3)

Context:

- India facing the double burden of both undernutrition and overnutrition has taken several steps to address the same. The article discusses the need for more evidence-based policymaking.

Background:

- Malnutrition, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), refers to deficiencies, excesses, or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients.
- The term malnutrition covers 2 broad groups of conditions. One is 'undernutrition' – which includes stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height), underweight (low weight for age) and micronutrient deficiencies or insufficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals). The other is overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer).
- The condition where some sections of the population are suffering from undernutrition while other sections are suffering from issues like obesity and overweight condition is often referred to as the double burden of malnutrition.

Details:

Issue of malnutrition in India:

- Reports of National Health & Family Survey, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, and WHO have highlighted that rates of malnutrition among adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and children are alarmingly high in India.
- There is ample evidence to show the ill consequences of poor nutrition practices on individuals, families, society and the country at large. Despite the evidence, there was very little action taken to acknowledge, understand

and act on the challenge of undernutrition in India.

Programmes and policy in India:

- India's efforts in tackling malnutrition have received a new impetus. A range of programmes and policies have been launched.
- POSHAN Abhiyaan is primarily against child undernutrition. But given the interdependence of a child's nutritional status on the maternal health condition, it also strives to work towards improving the nutritional status of adolescent girls and mothers. Read more on Poshan Abhiyaan.
- India's National Nutrition Mission has brought focus onto the issue of malnutrition. Targets have been set and all stakeholders have been involved in the fight against malnutrition.
- National and State governments have mobilized all their resources, district administrators have been involved given the fact that they work at the grassroots level, the private sector has mobilized its own resources, while the civil society has continued to push for accountability and action.
- Anaemia Mukht Bharat focusses on the issue of Anaemia. Given the comparatively poor nutritional status of women and their special health needs, the programme envisages major interventions to reduce anaemia in India.
- Eat Right India movement focusses on improving nutritional literacy in India. It aims to promote healthy eating in India given the importance of food on the health profile of an individual.

Concerns:

- Despite the laudable progress made against malnutrition, there is still scope for further improvements.
- India's National Family Health Survey (NFHS) shows that there has been a decline in child malnutrition numbers in the country, but various studies show that the rate of decline is very slow.

Key Challenges:

Regional imbalance in improvements:

- A report published in The Lancet Global Health Report with respect to a study made by the Indian Council of Medical Research, observes that the progress made in India in maternal and child undernutrition varies tremendously across the States. There have been uneven improvements.

Issue of malnutrition:

- The above report also highlighted how malnutrition was the largest contributor to child deaths in India as well as disability in adults. Malnutrition can thus be said to be a major impediment in the socio-economic development of India.
- Saving the lives of children under five in India will require a steady focus on

nutrition.

Challenge of Over-nutrition in India:

- The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey data reveals the worrying trend of the conditions of overweight, obesity and even early non-communicable disease becoming challenges even to children. About 10% of children under 19 years have pre-diabetes.
- This challenges the notion that overnutrition is a challenge for only adults.

The double burden of malnutrition:

- A recent study of the International Food Policy Research Institute and Emory University has highlighted how economic progress has helped reduce underweight condition among women but has also introduced the challenge of overweight condition among others.
- India's adults bear a tremendous double burden of malnutrition. Some districts in India have levels of 'overweight' that are as high as 40%. Diabetes and increasing incidence of cardiovascular diseases in India point towards the increasing burden of over nutrition.

Effect of social determinants:

- A range of studies published by researchers in India and abroad demonstrate that social determinants related to gender, education, sanitation and poverty are key drivers of stunting and undernutrition.
- Early-life undernutrition is an important risk factor for later-life adult diseases. Poor nutrition in the first 1,000 days of a child's life can also lead to stunted growth, which is associated with impaired cognitive ability and reduced school and work performance.
- Thus a vicious cycle of poverty leading to undernutrition and undernutrition perpetuating poverty leads to an impediment in the social development of the society. This is more of a challenge in a country like India.
- Addressing these underlying factors needs to be considered in the fight against malnutrition.

Way forward:

Differentiated strategies:

- Given the regional imbalances in improvements, there is a need for differentiated strategies to address the problem of child malnutrition in India. The interventions should be relevant to the region's challenges. There is a need to understand the risk factors that contribute the most to malnutrition. This would ensure more effective interventions.
- Given the fact that there now exist both the problems of undernutrition and overnutrition, India will need a more nuanced approach to address

malnutrition.

Addressing the problem of over nutrition:

- Need to incentivize the cultivation and consumption of a range of food commodities and not just cereals.
- Need to ensure supply of nutritive food like pulses in programmes such as the PDS, ICDS and school meals.
- Need to restrict the marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks.
- Should work towards improving nutrition literacy.

Evidence-based policymaking:

- Given the diversity and complexity of the challenge of malnutrition, there is the need for an evidence-based and data-driven approach to diagnosing the challenge of malnutrition in India's states, districts and communities. There is a need to commit to evidence-informed policies and programmes.
- There is a need for increased use of data and science to inform India's efforts, to track progress and to learn from both successes and failures.
- Silos in data systems should be broken and community health-workers and Anganwadi workers should be provided feedback on areas of good performance and where improvement is needed.
- The data from the comprehensive National Nutrition Survey must be made available to the scientific community.
- The World Health Organization's updated Essential Nutrition Actions across the Life Course, offering evidence-informed options, is a critical guide that must be adapted to India's needs.

Integrated approach:

- Given the interlink between malnutrition and social determinants, there is the need for a more integrated approach towards addressing malnutrition in India. Coherence is needed in areas of public policy across multiple ministries.
- It is imperative that policy efforts come together under a common umbrella and an overarching body is needed to ensure convergence.

8. How humans affect genetic connectivity of four mammals

Context:

- A study from the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), on the effect of anthropogenic activities on genetic connectivity.

Background:

- The Anthropocene is a proposed geological epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems, including, but not limited to, anthropogenic climate change.

- Changing landscapes, habitat loss, fragmentation, and global climate change have caused biodiversity decline worldwide.
- Biodiversity decline encompasses more than just species loss. It also includes the loss of genetic diversity within species and loss of ecosystems.
- The current rate of global diversity loss is estimated to be 100 to 1000 times higher than the (naturally occurring) background extinction rate and expected to still grow in the upcoming years.

Details:

- A study from the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bengaluru, has brought to light the fact that anthropogenic activities have impacted genetic connectivity or the genetic flow among habitat patches.
- The genetic exchange happens predominantly during mating between animals of different habitat patches.
- Four wide-ranging mammals including the jungle cats, leopards, sloth bears and tigers were investigated for the genetic differentiation in the forests of central India.

Key findings:

- In several mammalian carnivores, juveniles disperse away from their mother's territory to establish their own territory. Males are known to travel longer distances than females.
- The report analyzes how land-use, human population density, nearby roads and traffic affected the movement of animals and thus their genetic structure.
- The paper notes that tigers were impacted the most by the high human footprint. Tigers in central India do not have equally high genetic exchange throughout the landscape. Some protected areas, like Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, seem to be getting relatively isolated as reported even by the 2014 tiger census.
- Jungle cats were found to be the least impacted. This is because, in central India, they occupy a variety of habitats including forests, scrublands, grasslands and even irrigated agricultural fields close to the forests.

Concerns:

- Isolation of habitat patches due to habitat destruction and fragmentation, restricts animal movement among habitat patches and thus reduces genetic exchange and increases the probability of extinction.

Steps taken:

- India has started paying attention to wildlife corridors and encouraging engineering reforms to promote wildlife movements.
- In 2019, the Ministry of Environment along with the Wildlife Institute of India released a document that lays out the regulatory requirements for

developing roads, railways, and powerlines while recognising the impacts on wildlife and people. National Highways Authority of India and all public works departments have been instructed to follow the guidelines.

Way forward:

- With increasing infrastructure and traffic, there is the need for a systematic study of the impact of roads on smaller species like jungle cat and jackals.
- There is a need to ensure the presence of mitigation structures like underpasses and overpasses to ensure that there is no fragmentation of the habitats with infrastructure development.
- Maintaining connectivity is critical to ensure long term persistence of a species.

9. Need transparent UDAN: air passengers' association

Context

- The Air Passengers Association of India (APAI) wants the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) - Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) – to be fine-tuned and recalibrated with details of money spent by the government in airline subsidies, and the number of routes suspended.
- The air passengers' body said the details must be made public for the sake of transparency.

UDAN Scheme

This scheme is a part of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) and is funded jointly by the GoI and the state governments. The following are its salient features:

- The scheme duration is for 10 years
- Airlines participating in UDAN are selected through a competitive bidding process
- The Central government will provide the following:
 - Subsidy to cover Value Gap funding (VGF) for participating airlines
 - Concessional GST on tickets booked using the scheme
 - Codesharing for flights under the policy
- State Governments will extend the following measures:
 - GST reduction to 1% for 10 years
 - Coordination with oil companies to facilitate refuelling facilities
 - Provide land for airport and ancillary development
 - Trained security personnel
 - Utilities at subsidised rates
 - 20% of VGF
- Airport operators such as AAI will provide the following concessions:
 - No parking, landing and storage charges at participating airports
 - Nil TNLC (Terminal Navigation Landing Charges)

- Allow ground handling by the airline selected through the bidding process
- RNCF (Route Navigation and Facilitation Charges) will be discounted to 42.4% of normal rates by the Airports Authority of India

Value Gap Funding is not provided to cargo airlines. All other terms and conditions remain the same as passenger airlines. The fares are graded based on distance and flight hours for both fixed-wing and rotary-wing services. The RCS subsidy is funded by a levy of Rs 5000 per flight on major routes. Flights regulated under this policy framework can be booked from the UDAN website and major travel portals by passengers.

10. New satellites will help Gaganyaan crew (GS-3)

Context:

India plans to ring in its own era of space-to-space tracking and communication of its space assets in 2020 by putting up a new satellite series called the Indian Data Relay Satellite System (IDRSS).

Details:

- The IDRSS is planned to track and be constantly in touch with Indian satellites, in particular, those in low-earth orbits which have limited coverage of earth.
- In the coming years, it will be vital to ISRO, whose roadmap is dotted with advanced Low Earth Orbit (LEO) missions such as space docking, space station, as well as distant expeditions to the moon, Mars and Venus. It will also be useful in monitoring launches.
- The first beneficiary would be the prospective crew members of the Gaganyaan mission of 2022 who can be fully and continuously in touch with mission control throughout their travel.
- Work on the two IDRSS satellites planned has begun. The first of them will be sent towards the end of 2020. It will precede the pre-Gaganyaan experimental unmanned space flight which will have a humanoid dummy. A second one will follow in 2021. The two will offer near-total tracking, sending and receiving of information from the crew 24/7.

Other countries with relay satellite systems:

- Older space majors such as the U.S. and Russia started their relay satellite systems in the late 1970s-80s and a few already have around 10 satellites each.
- They have used them to monitor their respective space stations Mir and the International Space Station and trips that dock with them, as well as the Hubble Space Telescope.

- While the U.S. is putting up its third-generation advanced fleet of TDRS (Tracking & Data Relay Satellites), Russia has its Satellite Data Relay Network and Europe is building its own European Data Relay System. China is into its second generation Tianlian II series.

11. Genome of Indian cobra sequenced (GS-3)

Context:

A consortium of scientists, including some from India, have mapped the genome of the Indian Cobra, among the most poisonous snakes in the country.

Details:

- India is the snakebite capital of the world.
- The Sind Krait from western India is over 40 times more potent than that of the Spectacled cobra, making it the most toxic Indian snake.
- Though bites from 60 of the 270 species of Indian snakes are known to kill or maim, anti-venom now available is only effective against the 'Big 4.'
- Every year, approximately five million people worldwide are bitten by venomous snakes resulting in about 400,000 amputations and more than 100,000 deaths.
- Each year, about 46,000 people die and 140,000 people are disabled in India from snakebites by the 'Big 4' – the Indian cobra, the common krait, Russell's viper, and the saw-scaled viper.
- Currently, anti-venom is produced by immunising horses with extracted snake venom and is based on a process developed more than 100 years ago. The process is laborious and suffers from a lack of consistency leading to varying efficacy and serious side-effects.

Why is it significant?

- Sequencing a genome is an important step to making anti-venom but wouldn't on its own solve the problem of making and supplying enough of the product to address the huge volume and variety of snakebites in India, according to independent scientists.
- High-quality genomes of venomous snakes would enable the generation of a comprehensive catalogue of venom-gland-specific toxin genes that can be used for the development of synthetic anti-venom of defined composition.
- Knowing the sequence of genes could aid in understanding the chemical constituents of the venom and contribute to the development of new anti-venom therapies, which have remained practically unchanged for over a century.

12. 2019 was 7th warmest year since 1901' (GS-3)

Context:

The rise in average temperatures over India in 2019 was the lowest since 2016, according to a report from the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Nevertheless, the year that went by was the 7th warmest since record-keeping commenced in 1901.

Details:

- During the year, the annual mean surface air temperature, averaged over the country, was +0.36°C above average.
 - The average is defined as the mean temperature from 1980-2010.
- According to the World Meteorological Organisation, the rise in global mean surface temperature during 2019 (January to October) was +1.10°C.

Main contributors:

- The main contributors to the warming were temperatures in the pre-monsoon (March-May) and monsoon seasons (June-September), said the IMD report titled 'Climate Summary'.
- Meteorologists said that the decline over the previous three years was not indicative of any trend and was just "a regular variation". "There is no declining trend. The only pattern is that global warming is raising average temperatures globally, as well as in India," it was pointed.
- 2019 was also characterised by unusually high rainfall, which was 9% over what is normal for a year – this was due to monsoon rains (June-September) being 10% over its normal, and the northeast monsoon rains being 9% over its normal.
- During 2019, eight cyclonic storms formed over the Indian seas, with the Arabian Sea contributing five out of these eight cyclones against the normal of one per year. This was a phenomenon not seen in India since 1902.
 - This was, meteorologists said, due to a strong Indian Ocean Dipole, or an IOD, which cyclically heats the west Indian Ocean that stimulated cyclone formation over the Arabian Sea.
 - An unusually strong IOD has contributed to the ongoing Australian drought.

Casualties:

- Weather also caused severe casualties. Rain and floods killed 850 lives in different parts of the country.

13. A multilateral alternative, by Asia (GS-3)

Context

- This article discusses the transformation of Asian economies in the last few years and how this has led to them being larger than the rest.

Asian Century

- This Phrase is said to have arisen in the 1988 meeting between Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, re-establishing relations after the India-China border conflict in 1962.
- It responds to the re-emergence of the two countries, leveraging size and technological competence to shape a new order that reflects their civilizational values which are distinct from those of the West.

A look at key facts

- Asia is home to more than half the world's population.
- Of the world's 30 largest cities, 21 are in Asia, according to UN data.
- By the end of 2020 it is said, Asia will also become home to half of the world's middle class, defined as those living in households with daily per capita incomes of between \$10 and \$100 at 2005 purchasing power parity (PPP).
- Since 2007, Asians have been buying more cars and trucks than people in any other region – by about 2030 they will be buying as many vehicles as the rest of the world combined, according to LMC Automotive.

The decisive shift responds both to the Asian growth engine and to Asian technology.

India and China's Global outreach

In 2015, emerging India established the International Solar Alliance, laying out a distinct global sustainable development framework, and seeking a triumvirate.

- China, in 2013, after attaining 15% of the global wealth, announced the multilateral Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and in 2014, launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, challenging the global governance paradigm.
- The United States has recognized the 'Asian Century' bypassing multilateralism; its direct dealings with China and India and the Indo-Pacific construct are examples.

USA continues to hold power

- USA has defined human rights solely on the basis of political and procedural terms.
- It has withdrawn from climate change after shifting the burden onto developing countries.
- It has forced inclusion of intellectual property rights into the trade regime.
- U.S.-determined national security standards on the world has led to a handful of countries agreeing to ban Huawei 5G technology.
- It has imposed sanctions on companies building a gas pipeline from Russia.
- Sanctions on Iran have affected India's interests, impacting long-term relations.

This is not just questioned by Asian countries but also by its alliance partners.

How China has capitalized?

- The BRI provides a strategic framework for new global institution building as its scope is as wide as multilateral treaties.
 - For example, state-owned enterprises in infrastructure sectors in the BRI, with backing from national banks, are contributing to internationalisation of the Renminbi, enhancing China's role in global economic governance.
- As the world leader in digital transactions, China is developing block chain-based financial infrastructure in BRI countries and exploring an international block-chain currency for digital settlements without relying on the dollar, thus reducing U.S. leverage.
- With the U.S. military 'pivot to Asia', China is keen to resolve the border dispute with India to avoid constraints.
 - The recent India-China Summit on boundary issues resolved to work out a framework on a roadmap to a final solution on border issues.
 - India has rejected American opposition to Huawei taking part in 5G trials. The Indian government has allowed all applicants, including Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd, to participate.

Therefore, the contours of the new order should not be seen through a western prism.

Conclusion

- In Asia, differences will centre on overlapping priorities –
 - Security (the U.S.'s efforts to maintain hegemony),
 - Economic (China's emphasis on connectivity, markets and growth) and
 - Equitable sustainable development (India-led framework of digital infrastructure designed as a public good).
- By 2030, there is every possibility of a triumvirate.
 - Both the U.S. and China have regular high-level discussions on strategic issues with India, recognising its demographic, technological and resource potential to be part of a future global triumvirate.
- Asia and Africa, former colonies with conditions closer to India than to China, are waiting for late-comer India, a civilisational state like China, to lay out its vision of a digital, cooperative, sustainable multilateral strategic framework to complement the frameworks of the other two powers.
- Early concrete moves for their simultaneous rise are in the global interest.

14. CJI urges government to provide exclusive CISF team to secure courts (GS-3)

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde has asked the government to provide a separate and dedicated cadre of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) for security cover to court complexes across the country.

- The CJI said such a force would thwart sudden spurts of violence like the one recently seen at the Tis Hazari court complex between lawyers and the police.
- The development came while hearing a writ petition filed to improve security in courts and tribunals by installing closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras.
 - In 2017, the apex court directed that CCTV cameras be installed in courts and important locations of court complexes in at least two districts in every State and Union Territory. The monitor of these cameras should be placed in the chamber of the District and Session Judge concerned.
 - The apex court had, in its order, made it clear that footage from the cameras would not be made available to the public under the Right to Information Act or without the permission of the high court concerned.
 - The court had also considered the issue of CCTV cameras in tribunals. It had directed the installation of cameras in subordinate courts in a phased manner.

- Heat waves over the northeastern and central parts the country claimed about 350 lives.
- Lightning and thunderstorm claimed over 380 lives from central, northeastern, northwestern and peninsular parts of the country.
- Snowfall and avalanche-related incidents claimed lives from Jammu & Kashmir, and from Leh.
- A cold wave claimed 28 lives from different parts of Uttar Pradesh during the last week of December, the Climate Summary noted.

15. All set for water bird census in A.P. (GS-3)

Context:

- The Annual Bird Census will commence in the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) and surrounding wetlands in the Godavari mangrove cover on the east coast of India.
 - Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary is Located in Andhra Pradesh.
 - It is part of the Godavari estuary.

Details:

- It will be a two-day census of the avian species which will assess the threats and challenges being faced by the water birds.
- The census aims at documentation of migratory and resident birds to be able to **prepare a better management plan of the complex ecosystem** that supports the waterbird species.
- It will give a picture of its present state and results of the conservation being done in the wildlife sanctuary and outside.

Indian Skimmer



- It is a waterbird.
- IUCN Status: Vulnerable.
- It has started visiting the Godavari mangroves. It can also be sighted at Chambal River in Central India.

16. New facility to tackle cybercrimes (GS-3)

Why in News

The **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** was recently inaugurated by the government. **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** has also been launched pan India.

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre

- The scheme to set up I4C was **approved in October 2018**, to deal with all types of cybercrimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
- It has **seven components**:
 - National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit
 - National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal
 - National Cyber Crime Training Centre
 - Cyber Crime Ecosystem Management Unit
 - National Cyber Crime Research and Innovation Centre
 - National Cyber Crime Forensic Laboratory Ecosystem
 - Platform for Joint Cyber Crime Investigation Team.
- **15 States and Union Territories** have given their consent to set up Regional Cyber Crime Coordination Centres.
- This state-of-the-art Centre is located in **New Delhi**.

National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal

- It is a **citizen-centric initiative** which will enable citizens to **report cybercrimes online** and all the complaints will be accessed by the concerned law enforcement agencies for taking action as per law.

- The portal specifically focuses on crimes against women, children, particularly child pornography, child sex abuse material, online content pertaining to rapes/gang rapes, etc.
- It also focuses on crimes like financial crime and social media related crimes like stalking, cyber bullying, etc.
- The portal was **launched on a pilot basis on 30th August 2019**.
- It will improve the capacity of law enforcement agencies to investigate the cases after successful completion by improving coordination amongst the law enforcement agencies of different States, districts and police stations.

17. RBI chalks out financial inclusion strategy for 2024 (GS-3)

Why in News

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has planned the **National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI)** for the period **2019-2024**.

- It is an ambitious strategy which aims to strengthen the ecosystem for various **modes of digital financial services in all Tier-II to Tier VI centres** to create the necessary infrastructure to move towards a **less-cash society by March 2022**.
- Financial inclusion is a **key driver of economic growth and poverty alleviation** in the whole world.

Classification of Centres (tier-wise) Population (as per 2011 Census)

- **Tier I** - 1, 00,000 and above
- **Tier II** - 50,000 to 99,999
- **Tier III** - 20,000 to 49,999
- **Tier IV** - 10,000 to 19,999
- **Tier V** - 5,000 to 9,999
- **Tier VI** - Less than 5000

Key Points

- **Vision:** 'A financially aware and empowered India'.
- **Objectives:**

- Create awareness and educate consumers on access to financial services, availability of various types of products and their features.
 - A target has been set that every willing and eligible adult, who has been enrolled under the **Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana**, will be enrolled under an insurance scheme and a pension scheme by **March 2020**.
- Change attitudes to translate knowledge into behaviour.
- Make consumers understand their rights and responsibilities as clients of financial services.
- Increase outreach of banking outlets to provide banking access to every village within a 5-km radius or a hamlet of 500 households in hilly areas by March 2020.
- Ensure that every adult had access to a financial service provider through a mobile device by March 2024.
- **Stakeholders:** It recognises an **indicative list** of stakeholders-
 - Financial Consumers.
 - Financial Market players like banks, **non-banking financial companies** (NBFC) etc.
 - Educational Institutions.
 - Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
 - Financial Sector Regulators.
 - Both Central and State governments.
 - Multilateral international players like **OECD**, **G-20**, etc.
- **Significance:**
 - Steps are needed to **strengthen the digital financial services' ecosystem** including increased awareness on usage of digital modes of transactions, increased acceptance infrastructure and a safe environment incorporating the principles of consent and privacy.
 - There is a need to **develop a sector-specific action plan** to monitor targets and review the progress, along with a strong regulatory and legal framework aimed at protecting the interests of the customers, promoting fair practices and curbing market manipulations.
 - Currently, financial inclusion policies are targeted towards specific sectors such as the **small and medium businesses**, agriculture or specific regions such as the **aspirational districts**.

- The strategy also envisions to make the **Public Credit Registry (PCR) fully operational by March 2022** so that authorised financial entities could leverage it for assessing credit proposals from all citizens

18. India should lead in the fight against multidrug-resistant pathogens

Context:

The public health threat posed by Multi-Drug- Resistant (MDR) germs.

Background:

- Penicillin and antibiotics like erythromycin and floxins introduced about 60-70 years ago, have been successful in tackling many diseases. Each such conventional drug effectively kills millions of germs.
- During the treatment a tiny population of the disease causing germs had survived due to changes such as slight change in their genes. This would stop the drug from entering their cells or helped create pathways that pump out the entered drug molecules. This genetic change helped them resist the effect of the drugs. Such escapees have undergone multiplication into millions over years, and thus they constitute the MDR-germs.

Concerns:

Increasing risk of MDR germs:

- Many disease causing bacteria (pseudomonas, E.coli, klebsiella, salmonella and TB) and fungi (Candida auris), no longer respond to the conventionally used antibiotic drugs.
- These emerging Multi-Drug- Resistant (MDR) germs affect almost 3 million people across the world every year. A UNO study states that failure to find new drugs for these MDR-germs could lead to a global death toll of around 10 million people by 2050.

Lack of R&D against MDR germs:

- Scientists and drug firms have to undertake basic, fundamental research into the biology of MDR germs and develop effective drugs to tackle them.
- The process of research and development, clinical trials, market release of these drugs have long cycle times and would require a decade or more. It would also involve billions of dollars of investment.

- Unlike the drugs prescribed for chronic diseases like diabetes, arthritis, blood disorders and cancer which are prescribed for long terms (months and years), antibiotic drugs are prescribed for much shorter durations. This has resulted in companies shying away from investing in R&D in anti MDR germ drugs.

Failure of Major players in the domain of MDR drug development:

- There have been some private firm initiatives in the domain of MDR drug development. They were fortunate in getting R&D funds as grants from private foundations and governmental sources. Many of these initiatives though successful in the initial years in developing effective drugs against MDR germs have **failed to sustain**.

Vulnerability of India:

- A recent paper on the mortality burden of MDR-pathogens in India, shows that 13% is the overall rate of death. This study involved only hospital-based deaths. It fails to consider the millions affected and dying across the towns and villages of India. India is at high risk of MDR germ infections.
- Given the climatic conditions and the sanitation conditions in India, the chances of spread of these MDR germs is more likely in India.
- A developing country like India is more vulnerable to the threat of MDR germs given the state of public health system in place and the per capita expenditure by state in the health sector being low.
- Similar situations would be witnessed in parts of Africa, Southeast Asia and **other low-income, high-population countries**.

Recent Developments:

- A pioneer US based Anti MDR germ drug developer firm Achaogen was bought over by CIPLA-USA, which is the US arm of the Indian public-spirited drug company CIPLA.
- The deal involved buying all the equipment and the rights to acquire the technology and to make and sell their successful drugs.
- CIPLA's move in this area holds out an example for other Indians and firms to enter the field.

Way forward:

R&D initiatives:

- Given that R&D efforts by Indian scientists will be of public health and economic value, there is an urgent need for more such efforts in India.
- There is a need for more research **not only in government-operated R&D institutions and universities, but also in private non-governmental research institutions, and drug companies.** The government has a key role in incentivizing such efforts.
- Indian government and its funding agencies **offering grants in the domain of MDR germ drugs development** should be increased. Private non-profit foundations in India should also consider funding such initiatives.

Indian firms in drug development:

- **The Indian firms in drug development are doing well as compared to firms operating in other parts of the world.** Just a handful of vaccine-makers across India now provide about 35% of childhood vaccines globally, through their R&D efforts. **India has become the major vaccine provider for children across the world.**
- These Indian firms should interact with the other pioneer firms in the US, consider acquiring them, or **working as partners and gain the hard-earned technology of making drugs active against MRD-germs,** and make these available for use by the needy not only in India but across the world.
- There is also scope for **setting up labs in India to aid the R&D work in partnership with the US firms.**
- **India could become a major player in offering good health to the 7 billion people across the world through these efforts.**

19. 'Won't back fiscal tightening currently'

Context:

Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee's views on the economy and the educational sector in India.

Details:

Fiscal Tightening:

- The Union Budget 2019-20 has pegged the fiscal deficit target at 3.3% of GDP.

- Given the major causes fuelling the economic slowdown such as dip in consumption expenditure, the economist has expressed concerns over any fiscal tightening measures from the government.

The education sector:

- Given the fact that the Centre had little role to play in funding education as it was a State subject, Prof. Abhijit Banerjee has stated that the real constraint to the state of education in the country was not lack of money, but the lack of attention paid to the sector.

Reforming the higher institutions:

- More important than higher budgetary allocations to education sector, is the need for reforms of institutions such as the Ministry of Human Resources and Development and the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Greater autonomy to institutes:

- There is a need for urgent institutional reforms which would grant greater autonomy for the institutes in determining their syllabus and also result in lesser interference from outside.

Broad based education:

- There is also the need to shift the excessive focus on technical education and move towards a more broad based education.

20. LCA Navy variant successfully lands on INS Vikramaditya

A prototype of the naval version of the light combat aircraft (LCA) successfully completed the test trial. It landed and took off from India's aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya on 11 January 2020. The test was a significant step towards India developing its own deck-based fighters. This will now pave the way to develop and manufacture the Twin Engine Deck Based Fighter for the Indian Navy.

Developed by:

It was developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA).

Carrier INS Vikramaditya:

- ◆ The indigenously developed niche technologies of the carrier are specific to deck-based fighter operations
- ◆ The carrier INS Vikramaditya is currently deployed in the Arabian Sea.
- ◆ It has the naval version of the MiG 29 on board.
- ◆ INS Vikramaditya has a capacity for 30 aircraft.
- ◆ The carries are the naval version of the Tejas fighter aircraft that the Indian Air Force (IAF) is inducting.
- ◆ In September 2019, the naval version of the LCA successfully executed its first-ever arrested landing at a shore-based test facility in Goa.
- ◆ India currently requires 57 deck-based fighters for its carrier operations.

21. 'Mass planting of exotic trees in Nilgiris harmful' (GS-3)

Context:

- A Coonoor-based trust proposal to plant more than 10,000 trees in the Nilgiris.

Details:

- The trust plans to plant trees in order to restore the degraded forests and to give impetus to the afforestation efforts in the region.
- Most of the trees will be **exotic flora like jacaranda and podocarpus, pine and bottlebrush.**
- Conservationists argue that this mass plantation drive will be **harmful to the environment in the long term.**

Concerns:

Affecting the ecosystem:

- Exotic trees have a **huge impact on soil chemistry** on the ground, preventing native grass, plants and herbs from taking root underneath the canopy. They behave like an **alien species**, sharing the available resources and thus reducing the number of native species.
- The **reduced floral biodiversity will, in turn, affect the wildlife of the region.**

High Water demand:

- After the exotics take root, they **increase the water demand** in that region, impacting not just the Nilgiris but other districts further downstream that rely on rivers emanating from the hills.
- Given the reliance of the region on water supply from these rivers this might lead to a **water stress condition in the region**.

Way forward:

- Afforestation and reforestation initiatives are welcome, but they need to give consideration to the **species selected for the initiatives**.
- There needs to be a better **understanding of the ecological restoration practices** that can be implemented when working in a landscape as crucial and sensitive as the Nilgiris.
- The basic character of the land should not be altered in the name of afforestation. **Only native grasses should be grown in what were previously grasslands, or Shola trees** should be grown where they existed previously.

22. Kaziranga has one of the highest number of wetland birds (GS-3)

Context:

The 2019 wetland bird census.

Details:

- **Kaziranga National park has recorded 96 species of wetland birds**, which is one of the highest for wildlife reserves in India.
- The survey has observed **an increase in** not just the **total number of birds**, but also the **no of different species and the families**. A notable improvement has been observed compared to the first wetland bird survey in Kaziranga (2018).
- The bar-headed goose constitutes the largest share followed by common teal and northern pintail species. The other species with sizeable numbers include gadwall, little cormorant, Eurasian wigeon, Asian openbill, northern lapwing, ruddy shelduck and spot-billed pelican.
- The survey has covered four ranges of the park – Agoratoli, Bagori, Kohora and Burapahar. Agoratoli Range home to **Sohola, the largest of Kaziranga's 92 perennial wetlands** saw the highest number of birds.

Significance:

- The wetlands constitute the major portion and also nourish Kaziranga's ecosystem.
- Data on wetland birds is important given that an increase or decrease in the number of birds **is indicative of the park's health.**

Additional Information:

- Kaziranga National Park is a national park in the state of **Assam, India**. The sanctuary, which hosts two-thirds of the world's **great one-horned rhinoceroses**, is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985**.
- Located on the edge of the **Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspot**, the park combines high species diversity and visibility.
- Kaziranga is a vast expanse of tall elephant grass, marshland, and dense tropical moist broadleaf forests, crisscrossed by **four rivers, including the Brahmaputra, Mora Diphlu, Diphlu and Mora Dhansiri**. The park includes numerous small bodies of water.
- Kaziranga is home to a high density of tigers and was declared a **Tiger Reserve in 2006**. The park is home to large breeding populations of elephants, wild water buffalo, and swamp deer.
- Kaziranga is recognized as **an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for the conservation of avifaunal species.**

23. Retail inflation at 5-year high of 7.3% in December (GS-3)

Context:

Retail inflation has surged to over 5-year high of 7.35% in December 2019.

Details:

- Retail inflation soared to a five-and-a-half year high of 7.35% in December 2019.
- This significantly breaches the upper limit of 6%, set by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- The Centre has mandated the Reserve Bank of India to keep inflation in the range of 2-6%.

- According to information released by the National Statistical Office on Monday, retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index was only 2.11% in December 2018 and 5.54% in November 2019.

What is Retail Inflation?

- Inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) captures retail inflation.
- In India, retail inflation is linked to Consumer Price Index (CPI) which is released by the Central Statistics Office of the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation.
- CPI numbers are widely used as a macroeconomic indicator of inflation, as a tool by governments and central banks.

24. Govt. gets cracking on GST evaders with data analytics (GS-3)

Context:

The Department of Revenue has identified as many as 931 cases of fraudulent GST (Goods and Services Tax) refund claims through data analytics and has now tasked the GST data analytics wing to scrutinise all past and pending refund claims filed all over the country for inverted duty structure.

Issue:

- The highest number of such fraud cases have been booked in the Kolkata zone, followed by Delhi, Jaipur and Panchkula (Haryana).
- Investigators in Delhi had cracked, through data analytics – a significant fraud case wherein fraudsters created a network of over 500 entities comprising fake billing entities, intermediary dealers, distributors and bogus manufacturers of 'hawaii' chappals for availing and encashing fake ITC credits.
- Through meticulous cyber-planning, fraudsters had created over Rs. 600 crore of 'fake credit' which they would have continued to encash had it not been busted.
- It was also through data analytics that recently, GST formations had identified a few exporters with 'star' status who were fraudulently availing IGST refund and were untraceable at their registered addresses.

Way forward:

- Fake claims of input tax credit and tax evasion at the retail level are two major areas of revenue leakage.
- The GST data analytics wing has been able to identify many cases involving fake invoicing and fraudulent tax credits, which have been encashed through the facility of IGST refunds
- The sources said to curb input tax credit (ITC) frauds, data analytics is to be done on all refunds since 2017, keeping an eye on the modus operandi of unscrupulous refund claimants or fly-by-night or shell business entities for availing fake ITC.

25. CRZ rules eased for 'Blue Flag' beaches (GS-3)

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of Environment and Forest has relaxed Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules.

- CRZ rules restrict construction near beaches. Relaxation in the rules will allow States to construct infrastructure and enable the beaches to receive 'Blue Flag' certification.

Key Points

- The Ministry selected 13 beaches in India for the Blue Flag certificate in 2019.
- India's CRZ laws do not allow the construction of infrastructure on beaches and islands.
 - However, the Blue Flag certification requires beaches to create infrastructures like portable toilet blocks, greywater treatment plants, a solar power plant, seating facilities, CCTV surveillance, etc.
- The government notified that construction activities and facilities shall be permitted in the CRZs, including Islands, for the purpose of Blue Flag Certification in beaches.
 - However, these activities are subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from the High Tide Line (HTL).

High Tide Line: HTL means the line on the land up to which the highest water line reaches during the spring tide.

Low Tide Line: Similarly, it means the line on the land up to which the lowest water line reaches during the spring tide.

Spring tides: The position of both the sun and the moon in relation to the earth has direct bearing on tide height. When the sun, the moon and the earth are in a straight line, the height of the tide will be higher. These are called spring tides and they occur twice a month, one on full moon period and another during new moon period.

Blue Flag Certification

- It is an international recognition conferred on beaches that meet certain criteria of cleanliness and environmental propriety.
- The 'Blue Flag' beach is an 'eco-tourism model' and marks out beaches as providing tourists and beachgoers clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities/amenities, a safe and healthy environment and sustainable development of the area.
- The Blue Flag Programme was started in France in 1985 and has been implemented in Europe since 1987 and in areas outside Europe since 2001 when South Africa joined.
 - The Blue Flag Programme is run by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) which is an international, non-governmental, non-profit organisation.
- The certification is accorded by the Denmark-based Foundation for Environment Education, with 33 stringent criteria under four major heads for the beaches, that are-
 - Environmental Education and Information
 - Bathing Water Quality
 - Environment Management and Conservation
 - Safety and Services
- Spain tops the list with 566 such beaches; Greece and France follow with 515 and 395 Blue Flag beaches, respectively.
- Japan and South Korea are the only countries in the south and southeastern Asia to have Blue Flag beaches.

26. Inflation shocker (GS-3)

Context

- The National Statistical Office released data that showed annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation for December 2019 at 7.35%, which was the highest since the 7.39% of July 2014, and also more than the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) upper target limit of 6%.
- But the real shocker was retail food inflation, which soared to a more than six-year high of 14.12%.

Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI)

- It is a measure of change in retail prices of food products consumed by a defined population group in a given area with reference to a base year.
 - The base year presently used is 2012.
- Like Consumer Price Index (CPI), the CFPI is also calculated on a monthly basis and methodology remains the same as CPI.
- The Central Statistics Office (CSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) releases CFPI for three categories -rural, urban and combined, separately on an all India basis
 - Price data are collected from selected towns by the Field Operations Division of NSSO and from selected villages by the Department of Posts.
 - Price data are received through web portals being maintained by the National Informatics Centre.

How serious is the spike in food inflation? Is it more than what was expected?

- The sudden and sharp increase in the Consumer Food Price Index (CPFI) inflation has caught everyone by surprise. For an extended period from September 2016 to August 2019, the year-on-year CPFI inflation consistently remained below the overall CPI inflation.
- But CPFI inflation went up from 2.99% in August to 5.11% in September to 7.88% in October, then to 10.01% in November and 12% in December. This last figure was the highest since the 17.89% for November 2013.

So what accounts for this sudden spike?

- The main reason seems to be the uneven rains. The southwest monsoon season (June-September) in 2019 brought little rain almost until the last week of July. The late onset of the monsoon resulted in lower and delayed sowing of the kharif crop.
- However, September, October, and even the first half of November saw heavy rain, which caused damage to the standing crop that was in the late maturity stage, or due for harvesting.
- The production disruptions during kharif, ironically from more and not less rain, are the main reason for prices rising, especially from September onward.

Is this then temporary and once-for-all?

- The same heavy and unseasonal rain that wreaked havoc on the kharif (monsoon) crop has helped recharge groundwater aquifers, and filled the major irrigation reservoirs to near full capacity. This is proving beneficial to the rabi (winter-spring) crop.
- Government data show farmers have sown 8% more area during the current rabi season. That, together with vastly improved soil moisture conditions and a normal winter, should hopefully translate into a bumper harvest, offsetting any kharif losses.

Concerns

- What could cause unease to the policy makers is that the spike comes alongside a global upswing in food prices. The UN Food and Agricultural Organisation's Food Price Index (base year: 2002-04 = 100) averaged 181.7 points in December 2019, the highest since the 185.8 level of December 2014.
- The simultaneous hardening of international prices poses a challenge to the government and the Reserve Bank of India in containing domestic food inflation at a time when the economy is already going through a deep slowdown.
- Rising global prices can potentially undermine the assumption of food prices cooling off after March, which also complicates RBI's efforts at monetary easing to address the ongoing slowdown.
- The disturbing December print has set off fears over whether India is entering a period of slow growth accompanied by high inflation, in other words, stagflation.

What can the government do?

- Food inflation is not bad news for farmers who have suffered from low crop prices and the end of the global commodity boom after 2014. A price recovery would give a boost to rural incomes, which is beneficial for consumption and overall economic growth in the current circumstances.
- But neither the government nor the RBI can afford to ignore food inflation that will hurt consumers and make further cuts in interest rate impossible.
- There is pressure now to open up or allow more imports of commodities such as pulses, milk powder, and edible oils. The government will ultimately have to take a considered decision that balances the interests of both producers and consumers

27. 34,000 Bru refugees to be settled in Tripura (GS-3)

Bru Tribe:

- Bru (or Reang) tribals inhabit parts of Northeastern states of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.
- In Mizoram, they are largely restricted to Mamit and Kolasib.

Background:

- In 1995, following a clash between Mizos and Brus, the Young Mizo Association and Mizo Students' Association demanded that Brus be removed from the state's electoral rolls, contending that the tribe was not indigenous to Mizoram.
- This led to an armed movement led by the militant outfit Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF), and a political one by the Bru National Union (BNU).
- Many Bru villages were burnt down and scores allegedly raped and killed, which led to the displacement of 40,000 Bru people.
- A large number of Bru families fled to North Tripura.
- The first phase of repatriation started in November 2010, when 1,622 Bru families with 8,573 members were resettled in Mizoram.
- The process was stalled in 2011, 2012 and 2015 amid protests by Mizo NGOs.
- Brus settled in Tripura also expressed fears for their security in Mizoram.

Details:

- Due to ethnic tensions in Mizoram, around 34,000 people were forced to live in sub-human conditions in tents in Tripura.
- No solution could be reached all these years. In 2018, an agreement was signed and a package was sanctioned, but many people did not want to go back to Mizoram.
- Only 328 families moved back.
- Due to the initiative by Prime Minister, negotiations were started afresh. The displaced people will now be settled in Tripura permanently.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs brought the stakeholders to the talks in 2015, and a financial package of Rs. 435 crore was arrived at.
- The package covers 32,876 members of 5,407 Bru families. It included a one-time assistance of Rs. 4 lakh in a fixed deposit within a month of repatriation, monthly assistance of Rs. 5,000 through direct benefit transfer, free rations for two years, and finally, Rs. 1.5 lakh in three instalments for building houses.

28. Unclaimed telco refunds to go into consumer fund (Prelims)

Context:

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has said that the telecom service providers will need to deposit all unclaimed money of consumers, including excess charges and security deposit, in the Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund (TCEPF).

Details:

- The authority observed that there is a need to bring clarity among service providers in depositing money which they are unable to refund to the consumers.
- TRAI added that while some service providers were depositing money only on account of excess billing revealed in the audit, others were depositing unclaimed money such as security deposits and plan charges of failed activations.
- Such unclaimed/nonrefundable amount belonging to consumers would be deposited in the TCEP fund as it will be utilised for the welfare measures of the consumers.

TCEPF:

- The Telecommunication Consumers Education and Protection Fund Regulations of 2007 offers a basic framework for depositing unclaimed money of consumers by service providers, maintenance of the fund and other aspects.
- The income from the fund is utilised for programmes and activities relating to consumer education and protection.

Way ahead:

- It was felt that an amendment in the TCEPF regulation may be carried out to remove any kind of ambiguity and facilitate deposit of any unclaimed money of the consumer such as excess charges, security deposit, plan charges of failed activations, etc.
- The TCEPF Regulations, 2007, which have now been amended, provide the basic framework for depositing unclaimed money of consumers by service providers, maintenance of the TCEPF and other related aspects.

With this amendment, service providers will deposit any unclaimed consumer money of any form such as excess charges, security deposit, plan charges of failed activations, or any amount belonging to a consumer, which service providers are unable to refund to consumers, to the fund after providing time of 12 months or period of limitation specified under law whichever is later.

29. Centre sets higher GST mop-up target (GS-3)

Context:

Measures being taken to increase **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** collections.

Background:

- **Lower-than-expected GST collection and compensation cess collections** have been a matter of concern in the past few months.
- **The GST collection has fallen short of the Budget Estimate** by as much as 40 per cent during the April-November period of 2019-20, according to government data.
- **The shortfall could be Rs. 40,000 crores, all of which may be borne by the central government**, considering that the states have been guaranteed 14% annual revenue growth under GST laws.

- The compensation requirements have increased significantly and are unlikely to be met from the compensation cess being collected.

Details:

- There are 1.2 crore GST registrants across India.
- With only three months to go before the current financial year ends, enforcement actions have increased and pressure has mounted on revenue officers to augment GST collections in the remaining period of the fiscal to meet the revenue targets.
- The **Revenue Department has fixed the GST target** for January and February 2020 at Rs. 1.15 lakh crore each while the March 2020 collection is to be Rs. 1.25 lakh crore.

Use of Data Analytics:

- The field officers have been directed to **go after tax evaders and non-filers using data analytics.**
- Official sources have stated that about 40,000 companies have been **red-flagged for availing excess or fraudulent ITC (Input Tax Credit) and other tax-related wrongful issues like using fake invoices or inflated or fake e – way Bills**, through data analytics.
- GST authorities would look into the mismatch of supply and purchase invoices, mismatch in GSTR-1, GSTR-2A and GSTR-3B, failure to file returns and over-invoicing, to identify the tax evaders.
- Field officers have been directed to **conclude ITC recovery without any overreach** but in a stipulated time frame.

Amnesty:

- Taxpayers, who have taken ITC wrongfully, can **voluntarily repay amounts equal to the inadmissible credit before punitive action is taken.** This would save them the penalties and action under the law.

High-level Monitoring:

- Principal Chief Commissioners and Chief Commissioners would have to update their efforts to curb tax evasion and leakages, checking fake or huge ITC claims, mismatch in returns filed, etc. on a daily basis.
- The Revenue Secretary would be closely monitoring the exercise and holding high-level review meetings with top officials.

30. GSAT-30 gives India a communication boost (GS-3)

Why in News

Recently, the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** has launched telecommunication satellite **GSAT-30** into a **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO)** from **Kourou** launch base, **French Guiana** by **European Ariane-5 VA-251**.

- GSAT-30 satellite will **replace INSAT-4A** which was launched in 2005.
- A **European communication satellite** named **EUTELSAT KONNECT** was also launched with GSAT-30.

Key Points

- **Weight:**
 - GSAT-30 weighs **3,357-kg** and will be gradually adjusted into a **orbit 36,000 km from the earth**.
- **Launched from:**
 - It was launched from the foreign launcher because it is **much heavier than the lifting capacity of its geostationary launch vehicle GSLV-MkII** (It has the capacity to lift 2000kg).
 - The GSLV-Mk III can lift up to 4,000 kg, but ISRO plans to use the upcoming Mk IIIs mainly for its first human space flight **Gaganyaan of 2022**.
- **Use:**
 - It will provide DTH (direct to home) television services, connectivity to VSATs (that support working of banks') ATMs, stock exchange, television uplinking and teleport services, digital satellite news gathering and e-governance applications.
 - The satellite will also be used for bulk data transfer for a host of emerging telecommunication applications.
- **Coverage :**
 - The satellite provides **Indian mainland and islands** coverage in **Ku-band** and extended coverage in **C-band** covering **Gulf countries, a large number of Asian countries and Australia**.

Geosynchronous Orbit

- **Geosynchronous satellites** are launched into orbit in the **same direction the Earth** is spinning and **can have any inclination**. While geostationary orbit lie on the **same plane as the equator**.
- In the case of geostationary satellites, the Earth's force of gravity is exactly enough to provide acceleration required for circular motion.
- Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit(GTO): To attain geostationary or geosynchronous earth orbits, a spacecraft is first launched into a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit.
 - From the GTO the spacecraft uses its engines to shift to geostationary or geosynchronous orbit.

31. Govt. failed in e-mobility mission, says plea in SC

- A petition filed in the Supreme Court alleges **non-implementation of the National e-Mobility Mission Plan, 2020**.
- The plan was **initiated in 2012** and had made several recommendations for the **adoption of electric vehicles, including electric-powered government fleets and public transportation and subsidies** for those who opt for electric and zero-emission vehicles.
- The petition contended that the governmental apathy has **violated the fundamental rights of citizens to health and clean environment guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution**.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice has directed that the Union Ministry of Surface Transport and Highways through its Minister be impleaded in the case.

32. Eastern Ghats: land use policies, climate change hit endemic plant habitats (GS-3)

Context:

A study on the **effect of anthropogenic activities and climate change on the endemic species** of the Eastern Ghats in India.

Background:

- The Eastern Ghats, consisting of a chain of broken hill-ranges is spread across Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- The Eastern Ghats is home to unique ecosystems and consists of over 450 endemic plant species. The region remains one of the most exploited and degraded ecosystems of India.

Details:

Increasing anthropogenic pressure:

- The study notes that with intensifying anthropogenic activities like agricultural practices, urbanization and pressures from mining and deforestation, the Eastern Ghats ecology is under severe strain.
- The highly threatening human activities in the Eastern Ghats area are mining, urbanisation/settlements, dam construction, firewood collection and agricultural expansion. Unsupervised tourism has also been a major source of concern.
- The study estimates that by 2050 the total human population in the Eastern Ghats region would reach 2.6 million, raising pressure from anthropogenic activities.

Habitat Destruction:

- The increased demand for land for food, road and other activities will lead to encroachments and threaten the habitats of endemic and rare, endangered and threatened (RET) species of Eastern Ghats.
- The endemic species of Eastern Ghats were found to be distributed in the core areas of the forests of Kalahandi, Mahendragiri, Nallamalai-Seshachalam, Kolli and Kalrayan hill forests, while the RET species were distributed not only in the core areas but also in the periphery of the forests, thus being at a greater risk from anthropogenic disturbances.
- There are fears that this habitat destruction could have led to species loss also.
- The study notes that unsupervised tourism has also affected the distribution of endemic and RET species.

Climate change effect:

- Observations based on simulations have shown that that the temperature in the region is likely to increase by 1.8 degree Celsius by 2050 to 1.98

degree Celsius by 2070. The rainfall is also projected to increase by 113 millimetres by 2050 and 160 millimetre by 2070.

- Given that the mean temperature and rainfall are crucial for the plant species, the endemic species are at risk.
- The regional or local climate change (warming) has led to frequent prolonged non-rainy days, increased number of days with maximum and minimum temperatures resulting in loss of soil moisture and soil degradation.
- The increased temperatures and reduced moisture have also contributed to the occurrence of frequent forest fires, eliminating regeneration of the less-frequent endemic species in the forest.

Significance of the study:

The study confirms other similar studies from across the globe which have shown that **the tropics are losing more plant biodiversity than other regions**. These observations stress the need for **urgent conservation strategies**.

Way forward:

- The biodiversity conservation initiatives of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Government of India and State forest departments should **focus on the Eastern Ghats to protect declining habitats of endemic and RET species**.
- More scientific studies including the setting up of larger species inventories to identify and record species can help on conservation efforts.
- The administrations should consider redefining the boundaries of national parks and sanctuaries based on the richness of endemic and RET species. This would aid the conservation efforts of these species.
- Ecotourism with regulatory guidelines being a positive way to educate and promote conservation should be encouraged and supported by the state.

33. Is the Indian economy staring at stagflation? (GS-3)

Context:

The retail price inflation has increased to a nearly six-year high of 7.35% in December 2019, raising worries that the Indian economy may be headed towards stagflation.

Philips Curve:

- The **conventional view in economics** is that there is an **inverse relationship between economic growth and inflation**.
- The idea was first proposed by economist William Phillips, based on statistical studies of inflation and unemployment. The **“Phillips Curve”** is the result of this study.
- **The inverse relationship between inflation and unemployment** was seen as a confirmation of the hypothesis that inflation helps the economy function at its full potential.
 - **Inflation, by boosting nominal wages** can encourage workers in an economy to accept lower real wages. The employment and production capacity increases boosting economic growth.
 - **Without inflation, workers would be unwilling to accept lower real wages**, which in turn would lead to higher unemployment and decreased output in the economy.
- However, at **inflation rates beyond a certain level**, at which point labour and other resources in the economy are fully employed, inflation will **have no employment or growth benefits**.
- Accordingly, policymakers are often advised to **maintain a certain inflation rate** to ensure that unemployment is kept to a minimum and the economy is operating at full capacity.

Stagflation:

- **Stagflation is an economic scenario where an economy faces both high inflation and low growth (and high unemployment) at the same time.**
- Stagflation challenges the conventional view that inflation helps an economy operate at full capacity.
- **The stagflation crisis in the United States in the 1970s**, caused by rising oil prices, led many to question the validity of the Phillips Curve.

Background of Indian economic situation:

- The Indian economy has had **six consecutive quarters of slowing growth since 2018**.
- Economic growth in the second quarter of 2019-2020 was just 4.5%. For the 2019-2020 financial year, growth is expected to be around 5%.
- **The slowdown has mainly been attributed to the lack of sufficient consumer demand for goods and services.**
- Ironically, insufficient demand was cited as the primary reason behind the low price inflation that was prevalent in the economy until recently. This had prompted the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to cut interest rates in order to boost demand. **The RBI has cut its benchmark interest rate, the repo rate, five times in 2019.**
- As against the expectation that the interest rate cuts would spur demand and boost the economy, in the second half of 2019, **prices of goods began to rise at a faster pace and the growth rate of the economy continued to fall significantly.**
- This combination of rising prices and falling growth has led many to believe that **India may be sliding into stagflation.**
- The only aspect of comfort is the fact that **core inflation**, which excludes items such as vegetables whose prices are too volatile, **remains within the RBI's targeted range.** This is often used for reasoning that India is not in a full-fledged stagflation condition.

Concern:

Policy dilemma:

- The major reason attributed to the current slowdown in India is the **lack of sufficient consumer demand.** In such a scenario the general measures suggested to revive the Indian economy involves measures like greater spending by the government and the central bank.
- However, **stagflation essentially prohibits the government and the central bank from taking such countercyclical policy steps.**
 - If the central bank decides to inject fresh money into the economy either by **cutting its benchmark interest rate or other unconventional means**, it could lead to a further rise in prices and result in retail inflation rising further above the RBI's targeted range of 2-6%.

- A similar rise in inflation could result if the government engages in **deficit spending** that is funded by the RBI.
- The reluctance to inject more money into the economy would be bad news at a time when the economy, with **significant unemployed resources, is not functioning at its full capacity.**

Affecting the common people:

- Stagflation characterized by high inflation and low growth affects apart from being politically disadvantageous to the ruling government, also affects the common people.
- **The slowdown in growth could affect peoples' incomes.** There could be lesser employment avenues leading to lower incomes.
- Higher inflation could cause a **reduction in people's standard of living** as they can afford fewer things with the disposable income they earn.

Way forward:

There are contrasting views on what needs to be done for an economy to recover from stagflation.

Focus on growth:

- Given the fact that India's nominal GDP growth, a measure of the overall level of spending in the economy, is expected to hit a 42-year low of 7.5% this year, some economists suggest that policymakers should focus exclusively on boosting aggregate demand in the economy.
- They argue that the central bank should further ease its policy stance and the government should spend more on infrastructure and other sectors to boost the economy.
- These economists consider the RBI's target of keeping inflation from rising above 6% as an arbitrary one. They argue that this target can be modified as per the need of the economy in its current state.
- Core inflation in December 2019 was at 3.7%. Hence, Inflation on the broader level, as measured by the core inflation figures, remains within the RBI's target range.

Inflation is a concern:

- Some economists are cautious about advocating a big-spending approach to rescue the economy from stagflation. The fact that monetary easing in

the last one year has only raised prices without leading to higher growth rates points to the futility of such an approach. Injecting further liquidity into the economy may lead to higher inflation.

- India's growth rate was mainly boosted by the availability of easy credit over the last decade. Further credit expansion by the central bank and debt-fuelled government spending, will not lead to genuine and sustainable economic growth. The need is for supply-side reforms to bring about genuine economic growth.

34. 146 endangered Irrawaddy dolphins sighted in Chilika (GS-3)

Context:

Dolphin census

Background:

- The Irrawaddy dolphin is a euryhaline (able to tolerate a wide range of salinity) species of oceanic dolphin found in discontinuous subpopulations near sea coasts and in estuaries and rivers in parts of the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia. It is an aquatic mammal.
- Although sometimes referred to as the Irrawaddy river dolphin, it is not a true river dolphin, but an oceanic dolphin that lives in brackish water near coasts, river mouths and in estuaries.

Range:

- It has established subpopulations in freshwater rivers, including the Mahakam River, the Mekong, the Ganges and the Irrawaddy River from which it takes its name.
- Its range extends from the Bay of Bengal to New Guinea and the Philippines although they do not appear to venture offshore.
- In India, it is mostly present in the brackish-water Chilka Lake. Their Presence has also been recorded from Sunderbans National Park.

Threat:

- Irrawaddy dolphins are **more susceptible to human conflict** than most other dolphins who live farther out in the ocean.

- The Irrawaddy dolphin's proximity to developing communities makes the effort for conservation difficult. Entanglement in fishnets and degradation of habitats are the main threats to Irrawaddy dolphins.
- Some Irrawaddy dolphin sub-populations are classified by the IUCN as critically endangered. Irrawaddy dolphins in general, however, are listed as an endangered species in the IUCN list, which applies throughout their whole range.

Conservation efforts:

- Conservation efforts are being made at international and national levels to alleviate the threats faced by the Irrawaddy Dolphins.
- Protection from international trade is provided by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). In 2004, CITES transferred the Irrawaddy dolphin from Appendix II to Appendix I, which forbids all commercial trade in species that are threatened with extinction.
- The Irrawaddy dolphin is listed on both Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Details:

- The dolphin census was simultaneously taken up in Chilika and off Odisha coast.
- Odisha Forest Department officials, wildlife experts and researchers have sighted 146 Irrawaddy dolphins in Chilika Lake.
- Chilika Lake has the highest single lagoon population of the Irrawaddy dolphin in the world.
- The counting of dolphins was done using hydrophones. A hydrophone is a microphone designed to be used underwater for recording or listening to underwater sound. Most hydrophones are based on a piezoelectric transducer that generates an electric potential when subjected to a pressure change, such as a sound wave.

Significance:

- The good numbers recorded signify the importance of freeing the lake from encroachments by prawn farming gherries.
- Post the eviction of encroachments, Dolphins were colonizing new areas.

35. Why 'Make in India' has failed (GS-3)

Context

Five years after its launch its appropriate time to take the stock of the progress made by 'Make in India'.

Three major objectives of the initiative

- First- Manufacturing growth rate at 12-14 %: The first objective is to increase the manufacturing sector's growth rate to 12-14% per annum in order to increase the sector's share in the economy.
- Second-100 million jobs: The second objective is to create 100 million additional manufacturing jobs in the economy by 2022.
- Third-increase manufacturing's contribution to GDP to 25%: The third objective is to ensure that the manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP is increased to 25% by 2022 (revised to 2025) from the current 16%.

Assessment of the progress made so far

- As the policy changes were intended to usher growth in three key variables of the manufacturing sector – investments, output, and employment growth.
- Progress on the investment front:
 - Slow growth: The last five years witnessed slow growth of investment in the economy.
 - This is more so when we consider capital investments in the manufacturing sector.
 - The decline in gross fixed capital formation: Gross fixed capital formation of the private sector declined to 28.6% of GDP in 2017-18 from 31.3% in 2013-14 (Economic Survey 2018-19).
 - Gross Fixed Capital Formation is the measure of aggregate investment.
 - Increase in private sector's savings decrease in investment: Household savings have declined, while the private corporate sector's savings have increased.
 - This is a scenario where the private sector's savings have increased, but investments have decreased, despite policy measures to provide a good investment climate.
- Progress on the output growth front:

- **Double-digit growth only in two quarters:** The monthly index of industrial production (IIP) pertaining to manufacturing has registered double-digit growth rates only on two occasions during the period April 2012 to November 2019.
- **Below 3% for the most part:** The data show that for a majority of the months, it was 3% or below and even negative for some months.
- The negative growth implies a contraction of the sector.
- **Progress on the employment growth front:**
 - **No progress:** The employment, especially industrial employment, has not grown to keep pace with the rate of new entries into the labour market.

Problems with the policy

- The initiative had two major lacunae.
- **First- Too much reliance on foreign capital:** The bulk of these schemes relied too much on foreign capital for investments and global markets for produce.
 - This created an **inbuilt uncertainty**, as domestic production had to be planned according to the demand and supply conditions elsewhere.
- **Second-Lack of implementation:** The policy implementers need to take into account the implications of implementation deficit in their decisions.
 - The result of such a policy oversight is evident in a large number of stalled projects in India.
 - The spate of policy announcements without having the preparedness to implement them is '**policy casualness**'.
 - 'Make in India' has been plagued by a large number of under-prepared initiatives.

Three reasons why 'Make in India' failed to perform

- **Too-much ambitious goals:** It set out too ambitious growth rates for the manufacturing sector to achieve.
 - **Beyond capacity rate for the sector:** An annual growth rate of **12-14%** is well beyond the capacity of the industrial sector.
 - **Overestimation of implementation capacity:** To expect to build capabilities for such a quantum jump is perhaps an enormous overestimation of the implementation capacity of the government.

- **Dealing with too many sectors:** The initiative brought in too many sectors into its fold.
 - **Lack of policy focus:** Bringing in too many sectors under its fold led to a loss of policy focus.
 - **Lack of understanding of comparative advantages:** Further, it was seen as a policy devoid of any understanding of the comparative advantages of the domestic economy.
- **Ill-timed launch**
 - Given the uncertainties of the global economy and ever-rising trade protectionism, the initiative was spectacularly ill-timed.

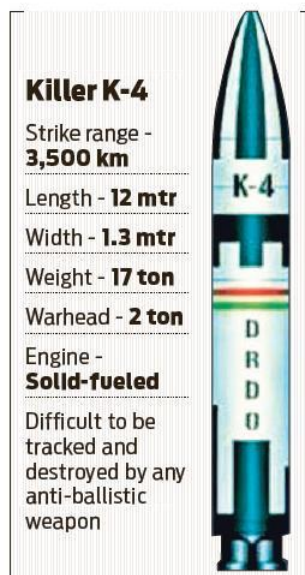
Conclusion

- The economy needs much more than policy formation for increasing manufacturing activity. The government must realise that industrialisation cannot be kick-started by legislations in Parliaments.

36. Submarine-launched ballistic missile tested (GS-3)

Context:

Successful test of the submarine-launched ballistic missile.



Details :

- India successfully test-fired the 3,500-km range submarine-launched ballistic missile, K-4.
- The test was carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) from a submerged pontoon off the Visakhapatnam coast. A pontoon simulates the situation of a launch from a submarine.

Significance:

Technological breakthrough:

- The missile ejecting from a submerged platform to the surface [sea] possess several technical challenges. There are very few countries which have managed to achieve this.
- This technological breakthrough marks an important step towards achieving indigenization of defence technology.

Edge over other missiles of the same class:

- **The Circular Error Probability (CEP)** of the K-4 is much more sophisticated than most countries which possess similar missiles. The CEP determines the accuracy of a missile. The lower the CEP, the more accurate the missile would be in targeting.

Increased range:

- INS Arihant, the first and only operational SSBN, is armed with K-15 Sagarika missiles with a range of 750 km. The K-4 has an enhanced range.
- The K-4 missiles will be the mainstay of the Arihant class of indigenous ballistic missile nuclear submarines and will give India the stand-off capability to launch nuclear weapons submerged in Indian waters.
- Standoff weapons are missiles or bombs which may be launched at a distance sufficient to allow attacking personnel to evade defensive fire from the target area. Typically, they are used against land- and sea-based targets in an offensive operation.

Second strike capability:

- The nuclear triad is a three-pronged military force structure that consists of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles.

- India completed its nuclear triad with the commissioning of INS Arihant in August 2016, which was India's first submarine built indigenously.
- The K-4 being nuclear-capable, it will also enhance the second strike capability of India.
- In nuclear strategy, a second-strike capability is a country's assured ability to respond to a nuclear attack with powerful nuclear retaliation against the attacker.

Additional Information:

- SSBN is the US Navy hull classification symbol for a nuclear-powered, ballistic missile-carrying submarine. The SS denotes "submarine" or "submersible", the B denotes "ballistic missile," and the N denotes "nuclear powered."

37. Drone Census

India's first drone census has seen only 2,500 Ownership Acknowledgment Numbers (OANs) being issued by the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) since five days of beginning.

Drone Census

- The MoCA had issued a notice providing a one-time opportunity for voluntary disclosure of all drones and operators starting from January 14.
- The DGCA issued the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR), Section 3 – Air Transport Series X, Part I, Issue I, dated August 27, 2018 regulates use of drones.
- It provides the process for obtaining Unique Identification Number, Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP) and other operational requirements; there are drones that do not comply with the CAR.
- If a drone is not enlisted by 5 p.m. on January 31, then it will most definitely be confiscated.
- After January 31, only authorised retailers will be allowed to sell them after uploading buyers' Know your Customer (KYC) and sale invoice, similar to the sale of mobile phones and cars.

Why such move?

- The exercise will give the government a picture of who owns what kind of drone in which part of the country.
- It will help in making policy decisions that should ideally become the base for understanding the scale of operations.

38. IMF lowers India's growth forecast to 4.8% (GS-3)

Context:

Update of the **World Economic Outlook report of the International Monetary fund (IMF)**.

Projections for India:

- The IMF has lowered India's economic growth estimate for the current fiscal to 4.8%. This marks a lowering of its own estimate of 6.1% made in October 2019.
- The growth markdown largely reflects a **downward revision to India's projection**.

Reasons:

The WEO lists the following reasons for the slowdown in growth estimates for India:

- Weak rural income growth leading to the decline in rural demand growth
- **The sharp decline in consumer demand**
- Stress in the non-bank financial sector
- **Sluggish credit growth**

Positives:

- **India's growth is projected to improve** to 5.8 per cent in 2020 and 6.5 per cent in 2021 (1.2 and 0.9 percentage point lower than in the October WEO).
- The WEO notes that the growth momentum should improve in the coming fiscal due to:
 - The positive impact of **corporate tax rate reduction**.
 - The positive impact of **monetary stimulus by the RBI** and fiscal stimulus by the government.

- **Subdued oil prices**

Projections for global growth:

- The IMF's new projections estimate that global growth would be 2.9% in 2019, and would increase to 3.3% in 2020 and 3.4% in 2021.
- However compared to the October 2019 WEO forecast, the estimate for 2019 and the projection for 2020 represent 0.1 percentage point **reduction** for each year while that for 2021 is 0.2 percentage point lower.

Reasons:

- The downward revision in growth forecast is mainly **due to weaker growth across emerging economies, including India, Mexico and South Africa.**
- The subdued growth forecast for India accounts for the largest share of the downward revisions in global growth estimates.

Risks:

- The IMF has categorized **rising geo-political tensions**, especially between the United States and Iran, as a notable downside risk for the global economy.
- **Deterioration in economic relations between the US and its trade partners** due to higher trade tariffs could further undermine the growth prospects.

Positives:

The IMF notes that market sentiment has improved due to the following reasons:

- The broad-based shift toward **accommodative monetary policy** in most economies
- Favourable news on **US-China trade negotiations** in the form of the first phase of the trade deal
- **Diminished fears of a no-deal Brexit.**

Way forward:

The WEO suggest the following measures for strengthening economic activity and forestalling downside risks to growth:

- Stronger **multilateral cooperation**
- **Balanced policy mix** at the national level, considering available monetary and fiscal space.

39. Liquidity, credit flow figured at RBI board meet, minutes show (GS-3)

Context:

Placing of the minutes of the board meeting of the RBI in public domain.

Details:

- This is the **first time the RBI has released the minutes of a board meeting in the public domain** in a bid to **enhance transparency** regarding its functioning.
- The minutes were made available **under the Right to Information Act**. There are proposals to place the minutes on the RBI's website voluntarily.
- The board of RBI discussed the following issues:
 - The **prevailing liquidity situation** and flow of credit from banks and non-banking finance companies to the economy
 - The case of **Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank**
- The central board **does not discuss interest rates**, which are set by the monetary policy committee.

40. FMCG growth slows to single digit in 2019: Nielsen (GS-3)

What's in News?

After two years of clocking double-digit growth, the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) segment slowed down to single-digit growth in 2019.

- Nielsen said FMCG grew at 9.7% in 2019, much lower than the previous year's growth of 13.5%.
- Further, the growth trend was dampened by a drop in volume growth – down to 5.8% from 10.5% in 2018 – while price-led growth sustained at 3.4%.

- It is believed that a mix of macroeconomic factors, and channel and zone factors driven by manufacturers, coupled with consolidation of smaller players have been instrumental in the slowdown.
- A lower pace of innovation has further limited consumer demand pick up.

Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG):

Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) are products that are sold quickly and at a relatively low cost. Examples include non-durable household goods such as packaged foods, beverages, toiletries, over-the-counter drugs, and other consumables.

Note:

Nielsen Holdings Plc is an American information, data and measurement firm.

41. India, co-builder of Hawaii telescope, wants it shifted out of proposed site (GS-3)

Context:

India, a partner in the construction of one of the largest telescopes in the world, has said it wants the project to be moved out of the proposed site at Mauna Kea, a dormant volcano in Hawaii.

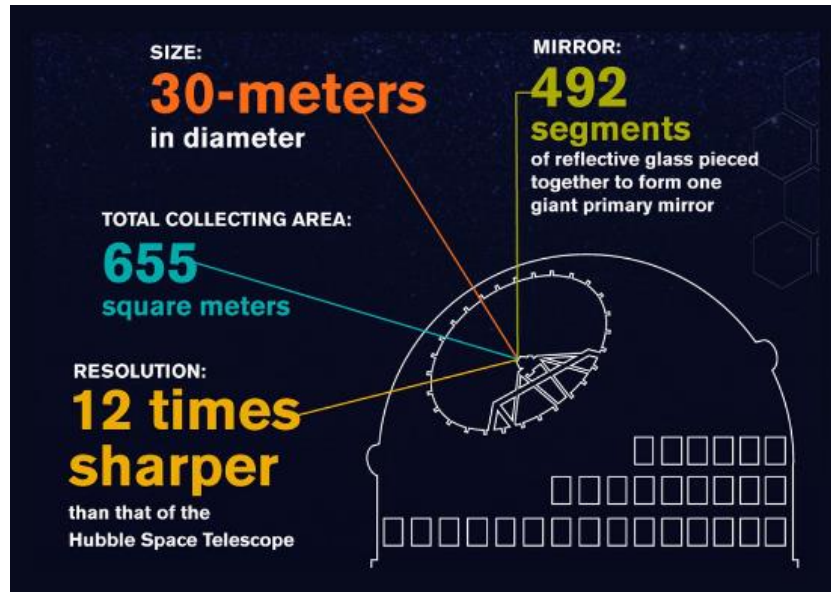
Details:

- The TMT or Thirty Metre Telescope, as it is called, is a joint venture (JV) involving five countries, but the \$2 billion project has been marred by protests for over a decade.
- The TMT will enable scientists to study fainter objects far away in the universe, which would give information about early stages of evolution of the universe.
- Also, it will give out finer details of not-so-far-away objects like undiscovered planets and other objects in the Solar System and planets around other stars.

- Canada, the United States, China and Japan are the other – and more significant – partners in terms of the monetary and infrastructural aspects of the TMT. The level of contribution determines the amount of viewing time, or slots, that the member-countries' scientists get on the machine. Thus India, in a given year, stands to get 10% of the available slots; any downtime could potentially eat into those.
- The proposed site is considered sacred to indigenous Hawaiians, and also has too many observatories for one more such massive establishment to come up, say groups that have contested the site.

Issues:

- The TMT has been a litigious site since 2014. In 2018, the Supreme Court of Hawaii gave permission for construction to proceed but the project's proponents have not made progress because they were obstructed twice, in 2015 and 2019, respectively, from construction.
- Protests at the site in 2019 saw scientists unable to access other telescope facilities in Mauna Kea.
- The project has been delayed by nearly five years and should have begun operations by 2025.
- India has committed \$200 million, which is about a tenth of the proposed cost.
- The telescope needs 492 precisely polished mirrors and India is to contribute 83 of them.
- The project delay has meant that these manufacturing contracts have also been delayed.
- India too has its problems with hosting ambitious science projects. The Indian Neutrino Observatory, proposed to come up in Theni, Tamil Nadu, has also been stalled due to protests against the project in the State.



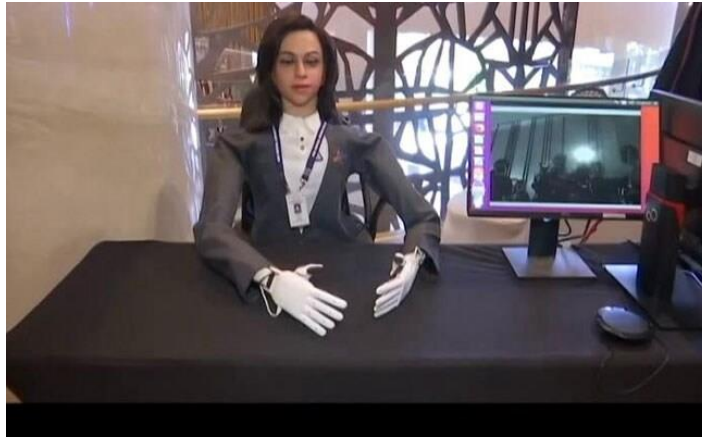
Mauna Kea:

- The Mauna Kea Observatories (MKO) are a number of independent astronomical research facilities and large telescope observatories that are located at the summit of Mauna Kea on the Big Island of Hawaii, United States.
- The location was considered near ideal because of its dark skies from lack of light pollution, good astronomical seeing, low humidity, high elevation, position above most of the water vapour in the atmosphere, clean air, good weather and low latitude location.

Next Best Site:

- The next best site to locate the telescope is the Observatorio del Roque de los Muchachos (ORM) on La Palma in the Canary Islands, Spain (Northern Hemisphere).
- Hanle, in Ladakh, was also in the running to host the TMT, but lost out to Mauna Kea, which is considered a superior site due to the imaging possibilities it offers, its stable weather, and also because it has the necessary infrastructure to manage telescopes, already being host to several telescopes.

42. Meet Vyom Mitra, first Indian 'woman' to ride to space (GS-3)



Vyom Mitra is a **half-humanoid**, set to take the first unmanned flight to space under Gaganyaan. She can **switch panel operations**, ECLSS [environment control and life support systems] functions, be a companion, converse with the astronauts, recognise them and also respond to their queries. **Two trial flights** without crew will take place with a humanoid.

The humanoid will simulate the human functions required for space before real astronauts take off before August 2022

43. Poll panel successfully tests facial recognition technique (GS-3)

The **State Election Commission of Telangana** successfully tested the **facial recognition application for voter verification at polling stations** using real-time authentication capabilities.

The application uses latest technologies like artificial intelligence, big data and machine learning. An analysis of the tendered votes during the previous elections to the local bodies revealed that there was violation in the voting procedure leading to conduct of re-poll in these areas. However, it was made clear that the application is only an additional aid to personnel on election duties and not in lieu of the existing identification systems.

44. SEBI eyes AI, machine learning to fix market manipulation (GS-3)

Issue:

Systemic risks are becoming important objectives for financial regulators; it requires identification and monitoring of important financial institutions,

leverage, inter-connectedness, risk concentrations and market sentiment. Catching malpractices in the market using the standard tools that analyse only structured data of price and volume is increasingly getting difficult.

Details:

- SEBI is acquiring capabilities to monitor and analyse social media posts to keep a tab on possible market manipulation.
- It is said that the capabilities will involve the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), big data analytics and natural language processing tools to spot market manipulation.
 - AI/ML tools are being increasingly deployed in fund management, trading, supervision and surveillance functions in the capital markets.
 - AI (Artificial Intelligence) and ML (Machine Learning) tools have the potential to bring a paradigm shift in the securities market landscape; blockchain can be used in clearing and settlement activities.
- It was revealed that the new plan involves creating a “data lake” project to augment analytical capabilities.
- SEBI has also been keeping a watch on social media and there have been cases where social media posts have helped in acting against manipulative activities.

Conclusion:

There is a need for the technologists to invest time in research in these tools for applications in the capital markets.

45. Researchers discovered a new species of Allosaurus in Utah

The latest study showed there were two species namely the newly described Allosaurus jimmdaseni and Allosaurus fragilis.

Paleontologists have unveiled a remarkable new species of the meat-eating dinosaur at the Natural History Museum of Utah. It is suspected that the species must have evolved at least 5 million years earlier than fragilis.

Allosaurus jimmdaseni:

- ◆ The new meat-eating species has been named dinosaur Allosaurus jimmdaseni.
- ◆ 5 million years ago, it was the most common and the top predator in its ecosystem.
- ◆ The researchers stated that the species inhabited the flood plains of western North America during the Late Jurassic Period, between 157-152 million years

ago.

- ◆ Allosauroids are a group of small to large-bodied, two-legged carnivorous dinosaurs that lived during the Cretaceous periods.
- ◆ These dinosaurs have a short narrow skull with low facial crests extending from the horns in front of the eyes forward to the nose. It has a relatively narrow back of the skull with a flat surface to the bottom of the skull under the eyes.
- ◆ The paleontologists earlier thought that only one species of Allosaurus existed in Jurassic North America. But the latest study showed there were two species namely the newly described Allosaurus jimmadseni and Allosaurus fragilis.

46. Adjusted gross revenue (AGR) Crisis

Context

In Oct 2019, the Supreme Court had directed telecom service providers to pay the pending dues –**aggregating to over Rs 1.47 lakh crore** – to the government by 23rd January 2020

The decision impacts over 15 telecom firms, both current and defunct, but those with the highest liabilities are Vodafone-Idea Ltd (Rs 53,038 crore), Airtel (Rs 35,586 crore) and Tata Teleservices (Rs 13,823 crore)

Brief History of the issue:

1994 – Telecom sector was liberalised under the National Telecom Policy under which licenses were issued to companies in return for a fixed license fee.

1999 – The government gave an option to the licensees to migrate to the **revenue sharing fee model**, so as to provide relief from high licence fees .

- Under this, telcos were required to share a percentage of their **adjusted gross revenue (AGR)** with the government as annual license fee (LF) and spectrum usage charges (SUC).
- The LF and SUC were set at 8 per cent and between 3-5 per cent of AGR respectively, based on the agreement.

Department of Telecom's(DOT) Stand

AGR includes all revenues (before discounts) from both telecom and non-telecom services

Telecos Stand

AGR should comprise just the revenue accrued from core services and not dividend, interest income or profit on sale of any investment or fixed assets.

2005- Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) challenged the government's definition for AGR calculation.

2015 – TDSAT (Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal) ruled in favour of Telecos

Oct 2019 – Supreme Court set aside TDSAT's order and upheld DOT's definition of AGR

Jan 2020 – Supreme Court has accepted petition of Telecos request to extend the deadline fixed at 23rd Jan 2020 to pay up the dues (but not on the definition of AGR)

Why the definition of AGR is important?

Because it has revenue implications for both government & Telecos.

- **For government** – it means increase in its revenue collection which helps maintaining fiscal deficit and undertake welfare measures
- **For Telecom Operators-** Added financial burden especially at a time where their assets are over leveraged and profits are under pressure from severe competition (after Jio's entry)

Implication of the Supreme Court's 2019 Order

- **On Telecom companies:** Increased liability means losses in their operation in short term. It also erodes the telcos' net worth impacting retail investors
- **On Telecom Sector:** It could potentially lead to Vodafone Idea's exit due to its weak financial position & its inability to pay its dues. This leads to the creation of a Airtel-Jio duopoly which may not augur well for the competitiveness in the sector and thus the government's vision of Digital India.

- **On Banking Sector:** AGR issue has triggered panic in the banking industry, given that the telecom sector is highly leveraged. Vodafone Idea alone has a debt of Rs 2.2 lakh crore. mutual fund industry having exposure to telecom sector will also see erosion of value.
- **On Consumers:** Competition in the sector will always lead to better prices and better technology. Possibility of creation of duopoly will impact the competition in negative manner.

Way ahead

- Government should realize the consequences of the failure/weakness of the sector on the broader economy & on its long term vision of Digital India.
- Therefore, instead of being inflexible on AGR for short term revenue gain, it should accommodate the interests of the telecom operators (like extension of deadline, foregoing interest on dues) so that long term vision is not compromised

47. India showcases A-SAT missile prowess (Prelims)

Context:

71st Republic Day parade.

Background:

In 2019 the DRDO shot down a live satellite in **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** of 300 km using a **modified interceptor of the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system** in 'hit to kill' mode with 10-cm accuracy.

Details:

- India showcased its **anti-satellite (A-SAT) missile capability of the weapon, Mission Shakti**, during the parade.
 - It has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).
 - The A-SAT technology enables India to destroy an enemy satellite by directly colliding with it with pinpoint accuracy.
 - A-SAT weapons play a critical role in providing the **necessary strategic deterrence**.

- **The Air Defence Tactical Control Radar (ADTCR)** was also showcased as part of the Republic Day parade.
 - The ADTCR is used for **volumetric surveillance**, detection, tracking and friend/foe identification of aerial targets of different types. It also **transmits data** of prioritized targets to multiple command posts and weapon systems.
- The Indian Air Force's (IAF) newest inductions, **Chinook heavy-lift helicopters and Apache attack helicopters**, made their debut during the Republic Day flypast.

Apache helicopters:

- - India has contracted Apache helicopters from Boeing.
 - The addition of the Apache Attack Helicopter is a significant step towards the modernization of the Indian Air Force helicopter fleet. It will enhance the capability of IAF in providing **integrated combat aviation cover to the army strike corps**.
 - Apache Attack Helicopter has better maneuverability and is lighter than the Mi-35 attack helicopter it is replacing.

Chinook helicopters:

- - **Chinook is a heavy lift, tandem-rotor helicopter.** The helicopter is expected to greatly enhance India's capabilities across a range of military & **HADR missions**.
 - The Chinook will allow the IAF to **transport cargo to high-altitude locations**, can contribute to operations like inter-valley transport of troops, airlifting artillery guns and heavy underslung loads for the Border Roads Organisation, and for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to far-flung crisis-hit areas.
 - The Chinook is a vital addition to the **construction of strategic roads and infrastructure projects on the border**. The Border Roads Organisation has been eager for the Chinook to complete road-building projects in the North East that have been stuck for years for want of a heavy lift chopper that can carry material and equipment through narrow valleys.

- **Supreme Commander of the armed forces, the President of India** reviewed the parade.
- Before the commencement of the parade, Prime Minister paid homage to fallen soldiers by laying a wreath at the flame of the immortal warrior at **the National War Memorial (NWM)**.
 - The NWM was inaugurated in February 2019. It was built in memory of about 22,500 Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in the post-independence period.

48. Dubious decision (GS-3)

Context

- The **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** took over the Bhima Koregaon case in which several activists were booked for making provocative speeches at the Elgaar Parishad event organised at Shaniwar Wada in Pune in 2017, which then allegedly **escalated tensions leading to riots in Pune and Mumbai**.
- The activists were arrested and booked under the **Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)**.
- The transfer of the case to the NIA is now being looked at as a **“misuse” of the powers conferred upon the agency**.

Procedures for NIA to investigate a case

- According to the rules, for the NIA to take over a case from a state, a **formal communication is usually sent to the MHA by the state** requesting for a transfer of the case to the agency, following which a notification is issued and the investigation is formally transferred.
- The state police then formally hands over all the files related to the case to the agency.
- But in this case, **Section 6(5) of the NIA Act** was invoked that permits the central government to direct the agency (NIA), **suo motu, to investigate any offence if it feels that a crime is a scheduled offence fit to be probed by the NIA**.

Background

- The Pune police have filed a charge sheet against activists on the charge of being **part of a Maoist plot against the government**, basing their claim on purported material seized from computers during raids.
- It was believed that a sinister plot was devised to overthrow the government, allegedly at the behest of the Communist Party of India (Maoist).
- Despite its inter-State ramifications, the **State government opposed a petition in the Supreme Court for a court-monitored independent probe.**
- At that time, the **Centre, expressed no inclination to hand over the probe to the NIA**, even though sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) were invoked.

The Union government cannot now turn around and claim that it is a fit case for an NIA probe.

Issue Area

- It is an unwarranted interference in the police powers of the State as policing and law and order are state subjects.
 - The Pune police reports to the state government, the NIA is answerable only to the Union Home Ministry.
- It threatens to undermine the spirit of federalism.
- The Elgar Parishad case has **gone through the investigation process and reached the courts** – bail pleas in the case have been heard by the Supreme Court.
 - For the Union Home Ministry to intervene at this juncture and change the investigating **agency is tantamount to undermining this process.**
 - Even if the state government orders a review of the case, it will have **to pass the test of the courts.**
- The credibility of the **NIA as an independent investigative agency itself is being questioned.**
 - An impression has formed that the agency, set up in 2008 following the Mumbai attacks to probe acts of terrorism, is just another arm of the Centre, another “caged parrot” meant to **serve its political masters.**

Conclusion

- Whatever the merits of the claims and counter-claims, the **probe has been completed and the case is waiting to be heard by the court.**
- Any attempt to unilaterally change the course **now will be seen as motivated and driven by bad faith** and will hurt the Centre and the investigative agency

49. Economic slowdown may impact poverty alleviation, says Banerjee (GS-3)

- Nobel laureate and economist Abhijit Banerjee has stated that the economy is facing a **demand deficit as people are not spending.**
- The slowdown in the urban sector is bound to have **negative consequences for the entire economy**, given the fact that the **urban and rural sectors are dependent on each other** for the creation of jobs and availability of low-skilled workers.
- It might take a long time to get out of the difficult situation, as there was not enough money to improve the economy. **The banking sector and the financial sector, in general, are stressed** and the government is not in a position to intervene and bail it out through recapitalization.
- The slowdown in the economy might **adversely impact poverty alleviation**, given that the funds allocated to poverty eradication schemes will take a cut.
- There is an urgent need to lay emphasis on a **multi-pronged approach for poverty alleviation, given the multidimensional nature of poverty.** Poverty can take the form of people being education-poor, health-poor or asset-poor. There is a need for appropriate actions to deal with specific types of poverty.

50. Centre, Assam govt. sign accord with Bodo groups to redraw, rename territory (GS-3)

Context:

The signing of an accord between the government and the Bodo groups.

Background:

- **The Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD)** is spread over the four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, and Udalguri of Assam.
- Several Bodo groups have been **demanding separate land for the ethnic community since 1972**, a movement that has claimed nearly 4,000 lives.
- Recently, around 1,500 cadres of several militant groups including some from **the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) have surrendered**. They will be rehabilitated by the Centre and Assam Government and will be assimilated into the mainstream.

Details:

- **The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Assam government and Bodo groups have signed an agreement.**

Renaming of BTAD:

- It involves provisions to rename the **Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) as the Bodoland Territorial Region.**

Redrawing of the BTAD:

- As per the agreement, villages dominated by Bodos that are presently outside the BTAD would be included and those with non-Bodo population would be excluded. Hence it will involve a **redrawing of the boundaries.**

The Bodo movement:

- The memorandum of settlement states that the criminal cases registered against members of the NDFB factions for **“non-heinous” crimes shall be withdrawn** by the Assam government and in cases of **heinous crimes it will be reviewed.**
- **The families of those killed during the Bodo movement would get ₹5 lakh each.**

Special Development Package:

- **A Special Development Package of ₹1500 crore** would be given by the Centre to undertake specific projects for the development of Bodo areas.
- Bodos living in the hills would be granted Scheduled Hill Tribe status. This would help them receive the state’s aid.

Significance:

- There is hope that after the agreement, other NDFB factions too will leave the path of violence, surrender their weapons and disband their armed organizations.
- The signing of the agreement is a welcome step forward to **end the 50-year-old Bodo crisis.**

51. Govt. sweetens Air India offer, puts 100% stake on the table (GS-3)

Context:

The Union Government's initiative to disinvest from Air India.

Background:

There have been **previous attempts by the union government to privatize the national carrier.** However, it has **failed to garner interest** from the private players.

Details:

The government's offer:

- The Union government in its latest attempt has come up with **better terms of reference** for the bids.
- The present offer is for a **100% stake sale of Air India (AI)** as against the 76% stake offered in 2018.
- It would involve the **complete transfer of management control** to the private player.
- It would also involve the **transfer of the government's share in the two subsidiaries of Air India:**
 - The low-cost international carrier Air India Express
 - The ground-handling arm AISATS
- The government has offered to **hive off liabilities worth nearly ₹40,000 crores** as an incentive for the bids. But the private player keen to buy Air India will also have to take on a certain proportion of the liabilities.

Eligibility:

- Any private or public limited company, a corporate body and a fund with a net value of ₹3,500 crores will be eligible to bid.

Employees:

- All present employees of Air India totaling as many as 9,617 permanent employees, including pilots and cabin crew, will go to the new buyer.
- **The buyer should retain these employees for a certain lock-in period**, which would be divulged in the share purchasing agreement. The government is exploring different modalities to ensure that the retired staff members have a medical cover.

Significance:

- The current attempt is **qualitatively different from the previous attempt**.

Share in liabilities:

- The debt which has been built up in Air India, due to cumulative losses cannot be passed on because it is not sustainable. The failure to attract private sector interest in the bids in the previous attempt and the present offer to take a higher share of the liabilities is a reflection of this fact.
- The **exclusion of the entire non-aircraft related debt is a bold reform** as it might as well be the single biggest write off by the government.
- The **private player will be left with only a sustainable debt**, leaving ample room for the private player to focus on improving the company.

Complete exit:

- The present offer involves **a clean exit by the government** and complete transfer to the private player. This would ensure the private players enough freedom to run the state of affairs in the company without many regulations.

FDI:

- The bid document also states that the **existing FDI policy, which allows a foreign airline to buy up to 49% in Air India**, will continue to apply.

Disinvestment efforts:

- The present offer marks a bold reform and a very **determined effort to exit the airline** to allow the **taxpayers' funds to be utilized for the government's social agenda**.

52. African cheetahs to prowl Indian forests (GS-3)

Context:

The Supreme Court has lifted its stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs into the Indian habitat.

Background:

- There have been previous proposals to introduce African cheetahs in India, as part of a plan **to revive the Indian cheetah population**. The proposal was to introduce African cheetahs into the **Palpur Kuno Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh on an experimental basis**.
- However, **the Supreme Court had stalled the plan in 2012**.
- The SC had expressed concerns that the proposed introduction of cheetahs in the given sanctuary, may come into conflict with a **parallel project to reintroduce lions into the sanctuary** and delay its implementation.
- The court had also expressed doubts over the choice of the sanctuary for the re-introduction proposal, over **doubts on the abundance of prey**. It had opined that the Kuno Sanctuary was not a natural habitat for the African cheetah.
- The court also took into consideration many **scientific studies** which claimed that the **introduction of an alien species involves considerable risk** of destabilizing the ecological balance and **should be considered only if no suitable native species are available for re-introduction**.

Details:

- Following a **favourable view from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**, the Supreme Court has lifted its seven-year stay on a proposal to introduce African cheetahs from Namibia into the Indian habitat on an experimental basis.
- The hearing came on an application filed by the NTCA.
- The court has asked for the right precautions to be taken during the process and ensure every effort is taken to ensure that the re-introduction is a success.

- The court has called for a **proper survey to be done to identify the best possible habitat for the cheetahs.**
- The SC has set up a **three-member committee, to guide the NTCA** in the implementation of the re-introduction programme. The Committee will have to file a **progress report every four months** on the progress made. The committee would help, advice and monitor the NTCA in the programme.

Significance:

The possible gains from introducing the cheetah in India include:

- The move would **boost wildlife tourism** in the region. This would provide impetus to the development of the surrounding regions.
- The introduction of cheetahs could lead to the **improvement of grasslands.** They could help control the population of the herbivores in the region.
- The success of the initiative would help bring **global recognition for India** for having been able to successfully revive the Cheetah in India.
- The lessons learned in the implementation of the programme could help **guide similar efforts in the re-introduction of other species.**

Concerns:

- Given the fact that **cheetahs do not breed well in captivity and require vast stretches of grassland and access to adequate prey to thrive,** officials at the NTCA feel that the actual process of translocation and its success might be a long-drawn effort.

53. Examining the slowdown (GS-3)

Context

Setting aside the gloomy projections based on short-term economic trends, the long-term and comparative evidence reveal interesting trends about the health of the Indian economy.

Performance of the Indian economy after 1991

- **Higher growth plateau reached after 1991:** After the 1991 economic reforms, the Indian economy reached a higher growth plateau of 7% compared to a prior rate of 3.85%.
 - **The high growth rate during 2003-2011:** India witnessed a high growth momentum during 2003-04 and 2010-11 with a period average of 8.45% (GDP with base 2004-05) or 7% (base 2011-12).
 - **Ups and downs after 2012:** The momentum lost steam in 2011-12 and 2012-13, gradually picked up again gradually to reach the 8% mark in 2015-16, and then started falling consistently to reach 6.63% in 2018-19.
 - **Structural dimension?** This trend suggests that India's current growth challenge has a structural dimension as it began in 2011-12.
- **Comparison with China and the world**
 - **Average at 7.07% after 2011-12:** Despite these fluctuations from 2011-12, on average, India clocked a growth rate of 7.07% from 2011 to 2019, a decent figure compared to China's and the world's economic growth rates.
 - Whereas like India, the growth of the world economy was fluctuating since 2011, **China's growth declined consistently from 10.64% in 2010 to 6.60% in 2018.**

Why couldn't India's growth momentum be sustained after 2010-11?

- **Analysis of five variables:** To answer the above question, an in-depth analysis of trends in five key macroeconomic variables was done for two different periods: 2003-04 to 2010-11 and 2011-12 to 2018-19.
 - Consumption.
 - Investment.
 - Savings.
 - Exports.
 - **Net foreign direct investment (NFDI) inflows.**
- **What emerged from the analysis:** The results reveal that compared to 2003-2011, **investment and savings rates and exports-GDP ratio declined** in the 2011-2019 period.
 - **How much the investment declined?** The investment rate declined from 34.31% of GDP in 2011-12 to 29.30% in 2018-19.
 - **Household vs. corporate sector decline:** The investment decline was caused mainly by the **household sector** and to some extent by the public sector, but not the **corporate sector**.

- **The decline in investment compensated by NFDI:** The slump in the domestic investment rate in the 2011-2019 period was compensated by increased NFDI inflows.
- On average, NFDI inflow was **1.31%** of GDP during 2011-2019 compared to **0.89%** during 2003-2011.

Why tax-cut not help the economy

- **The justified policy of reviving the housing sector:** The decline in household sector investment justifies the package of measures introduced by the Central government to revive the housing sector.
- **Why corporate tax cut won't help much?** The questionable policy, however, is the steep cut in the corporate income tax rate from 30% to 22%, aimed at boosting private investment.
 - Given that **the corporate investment rate has not eroded severely during 2011-2019**, the tax cut would help economic revival.
 - **Lost opportunity to spur rural consumption:** A part of the largesse offered to Corporate India could have been used to spur rural consumption.

What the decline in saving rate mean?

- **Importance of savings:** The savings rate declined almost consistently from **27% of GDP to 30.51%** between 2011 and 2018.
 - This was also caused by a significant fall in the savings of the household sector in financial assets. Corporate savings did not fall.
 - **Why the fall in household financial savings needs to be increased?** The fall in household financial savings is alarming and needs to be arrested.
 - Savings are required to meet the requirements of those who want to borrow for their investment needs.
 - **Saving-investment relation:** Lower household savings imply lesser funds available in the domestic market for investment spending.
- **Economic growth powered by consumption:** The decline in household savings has pushed up private final consumption expenditure consistently
 - Private final consumption rose from 56.21% of GDP in 2011-12 to 59.39% in 2018-19.
 - **Consumption driven economic growth in 2011-19:** The increase in private consumption suggests that economic growth during 2011-2019 was powered by consumption, not investment.

- **Investment driven growth during 2003-2011:** In contrast, during 2003-2011, growth was powered by investments.
- **So, declining saving rate means a slowdown in the economy may not be due to structural issues.**
 - **Re-examination of popular view:** Thus, the popular view that economic slowdown was caused due to a slowdown in consumption demand needs to be re-examined.
 - There is no concrete evidence to suggest that the economy is facing a structural consumption slowdown.

Export-GDP ratio decline and what it means

- **Export-GDP decline from 24.54% to 19.74%:** India's exports-GDP ratio declined from 24.54% to 19.74% **during 2011-2019.**
- A trend similar to the rest of the world: The decline started from 2014-15, coinciding with a similar trend in the world export-GDP ratio.
 - However, the drop in India's exports was significantly larger than the world, a cause for concern.
 - The exports- and NFDI-GDP ratio has deteriorated sharply and consistently in China after 2006.
- **Indian economy doing better than China:** Sharp decline in China's export-GDP and NFDI-GDP, together with the consistent fall in China's GDP growth after 2010, proves that the Indian economy is doing better than China.

Conclusion

The popular view that the slowdown in the Indian economy is due to the structural problems needs a re-examination in the view of the decline in investment in tandem with the world.

54. 10 more wetlands in India declared as Ramsar sites (GS-3)

Context:

Union Environment Minister's announcement on the addition of new wetlands from India to the Ramsar Convention.

Background:

Wetland:

Wetland constitutes a land area **covered by water, either temporarily/seasonally or permanently**. It has the characteristics of a **distinct ecosystem**.

Ramsar Convention:

- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance is an international treaty for the **conservation and sustainable use of wetlands**. The Convention, **signed in 1971**, is one of the oldest inter-governmental accords for preserving the ecological character of wetlands.
- It aims to **develop a global network of wetlands for the conservation of biological diversity and for sustaining human life**.
- The Convention is also known as the **Convention on Wetlands**. It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the Convention was signed.
- Wetlands declared as Ramsar sites are **protected under strict guidelines**. Certain activities are prohibited within wetlands.

Significance of wetlands:

- Wetlands provide a wide range of important resources and ecosystem services such as food, water, fibre, **groundwater recharge, water purification, flood moderation, erosion control, and climate regulation**.
- The wetlands also **support a large number of migratory birds**.
- **The wetlands are, in fact, a major source of water**. The main supply of freshwater comes from an array of wetlands that help soak rainfall and recharge groundwater.

Government efforts:

- Recognizing the importance of wetlands and the increasing risk faced by them due to anthropogenic activities, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has prepared a **four-pronged strategy for the restoration of wetlands**.
- The strategy includes preparing **baseline data, wetland health cards, enlisting wetland Mitras and preparing targeted Integrated Management Plans**.

Details:

- India has added 10 more wetlands to sites protected by the Ramsar Convention.
- Among the 10 new Ramsar sites is **Nandur Madhameshwar, the first Ramsar site in Maharashtra.**
- Punjab, which has three Ramsar sites, added three more including the Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal.
- UP, which had one Ramsar site previously, has added six more including Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and Sarsai Nawar.
- The other Ramsar sites are in the states of Rajasthan, Kerala, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Tripura.
- With the new additions, **a total of 37 sites in the country have been recognized under the international treaty.**
- The new additions are expected to bring renewed focus and commitment to the conservation of wetlands in India.

Additional Information:

- The countries with most sites are the United Kingdom and Mexico. And, the country with the greatest area of listed wetlands is Bolivia.

55. E- Retailers to Collect Plastic Waste

Why in news

The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** has told the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** that e-commerce giants Amazon and Flipkart need to fulfil their **extended producer responsibility** under the **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016.**

- According to the **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016** “Primary responsibility for collection of used multi-layered plastic sachet or pouches or packaging **is of producers, importers and brand owners who introduce the products in the market**”.
 - They need to establish a system for collecting back the plastic waste generated due to the packaging of their products.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

- EPR is a policy approach under which producers are given a significant responsibility – **financial and/or physical** – for the treatment or disposal of post-consumer products.
- Assigning such responsibility could in principle provide incentives to prevent wastes at the source, promote product design for the environment and support the achievement of public recycling and materials management goals.

Plastic Waste Management Rules

- These rules were framed in 2016 which extended the **responsibility to collect waste generated from the products** to their **producers** (i.e persons engaged in the manufacture, or import of carrying bags, multi-layered packaging and sheets or like and the persons using these for packaging or wrapping their products) and **brand owners**.
 - They have to approach local bodies for the formulation of plan/system for the plastic waste management within the prescribed time frame.
- The rules have been extended to villages as well. Earlier, it was limited to municipal districts.
- Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has been mandated to formulate the guidelines for **thermoset plastic** (plastic difficult to recycle).
 - Earlier, there was no specific provision for such type of plastic.
 - Manufacturing and use of non-recyclable multi-layered plastic are to be phased in two years, i.e. by 2018.
- The 2016 rules were amended in 2018, laying emphasis on the phasing out of **Multilayered Plastic (MLP)**, which are "**non-recyclable, or non-energy recoverable, or with no alternate use.**"
 - The amended Rules also prescribe a **central registration system** for the registration of the producer/importer/brand owner.
 - The amendment provided that registration should be automated and take into account ease of doing business for producers, recyclers and manufacturers.
 - While a **national registry** has been prescribed for producers with a presence in more than two states, a **state-level registration** has been prescribed for smaller producers/brand owners operating within one or two states.

Central Pollution Control Board

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) of India is a **statutory organisation** under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It was established in 1974 under the **Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974**.
- The CPCB is also entrusted with the powers and functions under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981**.

Way Forward

- **Plastic packaging constitutes more than 40%** of the total plastic waste generated in India and it is important that a direction is issued to the e-retailers that they should stop using plastic packaging materials and shift to environment-friendly packaging materials and shift to environment-friendly packaging option.

56. 'Email accounts of govt. officials hacked' (GS-3)

Context:

An independent security researcher has alerted the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre, Government of India, that the credentials of the official email accounts of at least 3,000 employees working in sensitive establishments such as the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR), Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) among others have been hacked in various data breaches.

Details:

- The founder of Hackrew did an analysis of data leaks from several services spanning the last six years and compiled a dossier of the leaked credentials from various websites in the "dark web" among other resources.
- The results of Mr. Kothapalli's analysis revealed that 3,202 accounts ending with "gov.in" format were hacked and their login name/passwords made available in plain text over the deep web.
- It is opined that these organisations were specifically targeted, which is why the count of leaked data is so high compared to other organisations.
- The results of the research also show that 85% of the passwords were in plain text. Out of these, the ones belonging to government employees were all in plain text, without exception.

- This implies that if the employees use that same email ID-password combination for any other web-based services, then there is a high probability that all those services will also be compromised.

Concerns:

- Several industry experts believe that this raises a serious concern about the security of digital infrastructure in the country and also highlights the government authorities' carelessness.
- Over the years, India has witnessed massive security breaches across various segments, institutions and government departments.
- According to a new Data Security Council of India (DSCI) report, India has been the second most cyber attacks affected country between 2016 to 2018. The average cost for a data breach in India has risen 7.9% since 2017, with the average cost per breached recorded mounting to \$64.

Recent initiatives by the government:

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY) and Nasscom-affiliated DSCI have recently launched the 'Cyber Security Grand Challenge.'
- The Indian government has allocated a Rs. 3.2 Crore grant for innovative startups in the Indian cyber security space.

57. SAMPRITI - IX

Why in News

- A joint **military** training exercise between **India and Bangladesh** 'SAMPRITI-IX' will be conducted at Umroi, **Meghalaya** from 3rd-16th february, 2020.
- The exercise aims to build, strengthen and promote positive relations between the Armies of India and Bangladesh.
- The exercise is **hosted alternately by both countries**.
- The **eighth edition** of the exercise was conducted at **Tangail, Bangladesh**.

Joint Military Exercises of India with Other Countries	
Name of Exercise	Country
Garuda Shakti	Indonesia
Ekuverin	Maldives
Hand-in-Hand	China
Kurukshetra	Singapore
Mitra Shakti	Sri Lanka
Nomadic Elephant	Mongolia

58. 4 hydro projects violate Ganga flow norms: CWC (GS-3)

Context:

A report by the Central Water Commission (CWC) states that, over a year after the government made it mandatory for hydropower projects on the upper reaches of the river Ganga's tributaries to release minimum quantities of water through the year, 4 of the 11 projects are flouting norms.

Background:

- The Centre's e-flow notification came into effect in October 2018 and gave companies three years to modify their design plans, if required, to ensure that a minimum amount of water flowed during all seasons.
- The government advanced this deadline, from October 2021 to December 2019.
- This was after the CWC undertook field visits to hydropower sites and reported that most of the power projects there could begin implementing the norms right away and didn't need three years.

Details:

- The e-flow notification specifies that the upper stretches of the Ganga – from its origins in the glaciers and until Haridwar – would have to maintain 20% of the monthly average flow of the preceding 10-days between November and March, which is the dry season; 25% of the average during the 'lean season' of October, April and May; and 30% of monthly average during the monsoon months of June-September.

- The CWC is tasked with measuring the flow and ensuring that plants comply with the law.
- It is the designated authority for supervision, monitoring and regulation of flows. Power projects will be assessed by the CWC quarterly for compliance after December 2019.
- The central government through the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) may direct the release of additional water in the river Ganga to meet special demands as and when required.

Non-compliant projects:

- The non-compliant ones are Maneri Bhali Phase 2, Vishnuprayag Hydroelectric project; Srinagar Hydroelectric project and the Pashulok barrage project.
- The Vishnuprayag and Srinagar projects are on the Alaknanda river, the Maneri Bhali on the Bhagirathi and the Pashulok is on the Ganga mainstream.

59. A.P. flags off country's first 'fruit train' (GS-3)



What's in News?

A 'fruit train', said to be the first of its kind in the country, was flagged off from Tadipatri Railway Station in Andhra Pradesh.

- The fruit train was carrying a load of 980 metric tonnes of locally grown bananas to the Jawaharlal Nehru Port in Mumbai, from where the consignment will be exported to Iran.
- This is the first time in India that an entire train is being sent to the gateway port (JNPT) for export.
- This helps save both time and fuel as 150 trucks would have been required to send a consignment of this size by road to JNPT, which is over 900 km away, before the temperature-controlled containers are loaded on ships.
- The bananas are being exported under the brand name 'Happy Bananas'.
- Farmers from the Putlur region in Anantapur and Pulivendula in Kadapa district are exporting 'Green Cavendish' bananas to many international markets.

60. Misery Index

Why in News

Recently, there has been a demand to measure Indian economy on 'Misery Index'.

- The **first misery index was created by Arthur Okun** in 1960's and was equal to the **sum of inflation and unemployment rate figures** to provide a snapshot of the US economy.
- The **higher the index, the more is the misery** felt by average citizens.
- It has broadened in recent times to include other economic indicators, such as **bank lending rates**.
- In recent times, variations of the original misery index have become popular as a means to gauge the overall health of the global economy.
- A variation of the original misery index is the **Bloomberg misery index**, developed by the online publication.