

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Current Affairs Headlines:

1. Andhra Pradesh flagged off India's 1st of its kind first 'fruit train'
2. HRD Minister chaired meeting of the INCCU with UNESCO in New Delhi
3. 2019 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report: India's ORF ranks 27th; CEIP, US tops the list
4. Bank of Baroda signed pact with CARE Ratings to assess the credit quality of SMEs
5. NABARD approved loan worth Rs 140 crore at low interest to Punjab Agri Development Bank
6. Govt data: BoM & SBI were only PSBs rated 'good' in digital transactions in Dec 2019
7. Ajay Bisaria Appointed as Next High Commissioner of India to Canada
8. Indian-origin techie Arvind Krishna elected as CEO for IBM
9. Abidali Neemuchwala quits as CEO and MD from Wipro
10. Govt appoints M.Ajit kumar as chairman of CBIC
11. Canara Bank MD & CEO R.A. Sankara Narayanan retires
12. In a first IAF'S AN-32 aircraft landed at Leh with indigenous bio-jet fuel
13. Veteran social activist and feminist writer Vidya Bal dies at 83
14. Padmashri awardee & Eminent Punjabi novelist Dalip Kaur Tiwana passed away at 84
15. YSR Pension Kanuka doorstep pension scheme launched in AP; pensioner age reduced to 60 from 65
16. World's largest solar telescope reveals never-before-seen images of Sun's turbulent surface
17. Indian Navy conducts 5-day coastal security exercise, 'Matla Abhiyaan' in Kolkata, West Bengal.
18. President of India Inaugurated 34th Surajkund International Crafts Mela in Surajkund, Haryana from Feb 1 – 16, 2020.
19. India banned export of all kinds of personal protection equipment
20. Prakash javadekar inaugurates World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2020 in New Delhi
21. 3-day Narmada Mahotsav was celebrated on Madhya Pradesh (MP)
22. Maldives readmitted and becomes 54th member of Commonwealth family
23. Counterpoint data: India surpassed US to become 2nd largest smartphone market globally; China tops
24. India and Maldives inks 5 MoUs to establish Addu tourism Zone
25. Fiscal deficit reached 132.4 % of budget estimate for 2019-2020 till December: CGA
26. NSO revises India's GDP growth rate for 2018-19 to 6.1% from 6.8%
27. Amulya Mica chosen as Most Promising Brand 2019 at 7th MSME Excellence Award in New Delhi
28. MP won 1st place for implementation of PMMVY; Indore topped for better performance
29. Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi appointed as new PM of Iraq

30. BCCI inducted Madan Lal, R.P. Singh & Sulakshana in Cricket Advisory Committee

31. Gopal Baglay appointed as Next High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka

32. Padma Shri awardee Deepa Malik elected as President of Paralympic Committee of India

33. Pramod Agrawal became the Chairman of Coal India Limited

34. ISRO to unveil low-cost satellite launch vehicles

35. NASA decommissioned its Spitzer Space Telescope after 16 years

36. Rubigula state bird of Goa declared as official Mascot for 36th National Games in Goa

37. NADA suspends Weightlifter Ramshad AR for 2 year & Wrestler Ravinder Kumar for 4 years

38. Overview of 108th Australian open 2020 held in Melbourne, Australia

39. Highlights of India Vs Newzealand T20I series 2020

40. Famous Punjabi writer Jaswant Singh passed away at 101

41. Author Mary Higgins Clark, known as 'Queen of Suspense', passed away at 92

42. World Wetlands Day 2020 was observed on February 2

43. Online lottery scheme sales banned by Punjab govt to check illegal sales

Dividend Distribution Tax

It is a tax levied on dividends that a company pays to its shareholders out of its profits.

How is it applied?

The Dividend Distribution Tax, or DDT, is taxable at source, and is deducted at the time of the company distributing dividends.

- The dividend is the part of profits that the company shares with its shareholders.
- The law provides for the Dividend Distribution Tax to be levied at the hands of the company, and not at the hands of the receiving shareholder.
- However, an additional tax is imposed on the shareholder, who receives over Rs. 10 lakh in dividend income in a financial year.

Is Dividend Distribution Tax applicable to private companies?

Under Section 115-O, the Income Tax Act, any domestic firm which is declaring or distributing dividend has to pay DDT at the rate of 15 per cent on the gross amount of dividend.

Is Dividend Distribution Tax fair?

Market participants, especially brokers, have been calling for long to scrap the DDT. The tax makes markets unattractive as it leads to significant taxation of corporate earnings, they argue.

Other than Dividend Distribution Tax (DDT), the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) and Long-Term Capital Gains (LTCG) tax are other major taxes levied on market instruments.

Insurance cover on bank FDs, deposits increased to 5 lakh

- In Budget 2020, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed to increase the limit of insurance cover in case of bank failure on deposits to ₹5 lakh from ₹1 lakh. The proposal come in the wake of crisis at Mumbai-based urban cooperative bank, PMC Bank.

What is deposit insurance? How is it regulated in India?

- Deposit insurance is providing insurance protection to the depositor's money by receiving a premium.
- The government has set up Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) under RBI to protect depositors if a bank fails.
- Every insured bank pays premium amounting to 0.001% of its deposits to DICGC every year.

What happens to depositors' money when a bank fails?

- When a bank is liquidated, depositors are entitled to receive an insurance amount of ₹1 lakh per individual from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (DICGC).
- The ₹1 lakh insurance limit includes both principal and interest dues across your savings bank accounts, current accounts, fixed deposits and recurring deposits held with the bank.

What is the procedure for depositors to claim the money from a failed bank?

The DICGC does not deal directly with depositors.

1. The RBI (or the Registrar), on directing that a bank be liquidated, appoints an official liquidator to oversee the winding up process.
2. Under the DICGC Act, the liquidator is supposed to hand over a list of all the insured depositors (with their dues) to the DICGC within three months of taking charge.
3. The DICGC is supposed to pay these dues within two months of receiving this list.

In FY19, it took an average 1,425 days for the DICGC to receive and settle the first claims on a de-registered bank.

Who are insured by the DICGC?

The corporation covers all commercial and co-operative banks, except in Meghalaya, Chandigarh, Lakshadweep and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Besides, Only primary cooperative societies are not insured by the DICGC.

The DICGC does not include the following types of deposits:

1. Deposits of foreign governments.
2. Deposits of central/state governments.
3. Inter-bank deposits.
4. Deposits of the state land development banks with the state co-operative bank.
5. Any amount due on account of any deposit received outside India.
6. Any amount specifically exempted by the DICGC with previous approval of RBI.

Brexit Deal

- Britain has officially left the European Union (EU) and has become the first country to leave the 28-member bloc.

The UK stopped being a member of the European Union (EU) after 23:00 GMT on 31 January 2020.

What is the European Union?

The EU is an economic and political union involving 28 European countries. It allows free trade, which means goods can move between member countries without any checks or extra charges. The EU also allows free movement of people, to live and work in whichever country they choose.

The UK joined in 1973 (when it was known as the European Economic Community) and it will be the first member state to withdraw.

What happens after Brexit day?

After the UK formally leaves the EU, there is still a lot to talk about and months of negotiation will follow.

While the UK has agreed the terms of its EU departure, both sides still need to decide what their future relationship will look like.

During the 11-month transition period, the UK will continue to follow all of the EU's rules and its trading relationship will remain the same.

What needs to be agreed?

- The transition period is meant to give both sides some breathing space while a new free trade agreement is negotiated.
- This is needed because the UK will leave the single market and customs union at the end of the transition. A free trade agreement allow goods to move around the EU without checks or extra charges.
- If a new one cannot be agreed in time, then the UK faces the prospect of having to trade with no deal in place. That would mean tariffs (taxes) on UK goods travelling to the EU and other trade barriers.

Aside from trade, many other aspects of the future UK-EU relationship will also need to be decided. For example:

1. Law enforcement, data sharing and security.
2. Aviation standards and safety.
3. Access to fishing waters.
4. Supplies of electricity and gas.
5. Licensing and regulation of medicines.

What caused Brexit to happen?

So far, there seem to be three theories for what drove so many people to vote Brexit:

1. Immigrants: Faced with rising immigration locals worried about their jobs and the erosion of the English way of life wanted their government to clamp down on immigration. This was a revolt against unrestricted immigration from poorer Eastern European states, Syrian refugees residing in the EU and millions of Turks about to join the EU.

2. Elites: Faced with decades of economic malaise, stagnant real wages and economic destitution in former industrial heartlands ever since the rise of “Thatcherism” and the embrace of Neoliberal policies by Tony Blair’s New Labour the non-Londoners have decided to revolt against the elite. This isn’t just about being against the EU as it stands, and its free market and free movement of peoples.
3. Bureaucracy: Faced with Brussel’s asphyxiating amount of red tape the English people decide to “take back control” of their country’s bureaucracy.

The three theories are obviously intertwined at times and contradictory at others, that’s why it matters who is going to be negotiating the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU.

What is the Brexit deal?

The transition period and other aspects of the UK’s departure were agreed in a separate deal called the withdrawal agreement.

Most of that was negotiated by Theresa May’s government. But after Mr Johnson replaced her in July 2019, he removed the most controversial part – the backstop.

- The backstop was designed to ensure there would be no border posts or barriers between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland after Brexit. If needed, it would have kept the UK in a close trading relationship with the EU.
- Under Mr Johnson’s deal, a customs border will effectively be created between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Some goods entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain will be subject to checks and will have to pay EU import taxes (known as tariffs).
- These would be refunded if goods remain in Northern Ireland (ie are not moved to the Republic of Ireland).

Yellow Rust

- Yellow Rust was recently detected in wheat crops in parts of Punjab and Haryana.

What is Yellow Rust?

It is a disease that appears as yellow stripes of powder or dust on leaves and leaf sheaths of the wheat crop.

How it occurs?

This occurs when the rust colonies in the leaves drain the carbohydrates from the plant and reduce the green leaf area.

Rain, dew and fog favour the disease's development.

Spread:

The disease can spread rapidly under congenial conditions and affects crop development, and eventually the yield.

Yield due to the disease can be affected by between 5 and 30 per cent.

Where else is it observed in India?

In India, it is a major disease in the Northern Hill Zone and the North-Western Plain Zone and spreads easily during the onset of cool weather and when wind conditions are favourable.

Disease management:

Breeding resistant varieties is the most cost-effective method to control this rust.

These resistance genes, however, have become ineffective due to the acquisition of virulence to that particular resistance gene rendering the variety susceptible.

Anticipatory bail

A constitution bench of the Supreme Court has ruled that an anticipatory bail cannot be limited to a fixed time period and can continue till the end of the trial.

The judgment came in a reference made by a three-judge bench in the case of *Sushila Aggarwal v. State of NCT of Delhi* regarding the scope of Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) which provides for grant of anticipatory bail.

1. If there are any special circumstances necessitating a limit on the tenure of anticipatory bail, it is open for the court to do so. Nothing in Section 438 CrPC compels or obliges courts to impose conditions limiting relief in terms of time.
2. When Parliament has not thought it appropriate to curtail the rights of the citizens, it would be not appropriate for the SC to curtail powers granted to courts with regard to anticipatory bail.
3. Anticipatory bail application could be moved by a person even before filing of FIR.
4. The court, while granting anticipatory bail, should examine seriousness and gravity of the offence to impose any condition on the petitioner, if necessary.

Arbitrary arrests continue to be a pervasive phenomenon in the country and therefore, discretionary power of courts to grant anticipatory bail should not be curtailed and the protection should continue till end of trial.

Besides, the spectre of arbitrary and heavy-handed arrests, too often to harass and humiliate citizens.

What is Anticipatory Bail?

The provision of anticipatory bail under Section 438 was introduced when CrPC was amended in 1973.

Section 438 is a procedural provision concerned with personal liberty of each individual, who is entitled to the benefit of the presumption of innocence.

As opposed to ordinary bail, which is granted to a person who is under arrest, in anticipatory bail, a person is directed to be released on bail even before arrest made.

Who can apply?

1. 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, lays down the law on anticipatory bail.

Sub-section (1) of the provision reads: “When any person has reason to believe that he may be arrested on an accusation of having committed a non-bailable offence, he may apply to the High Court or the Court of Session for a direction under this section; and that Court may, if it thinks fit, direct that in the event of such arrest, he shall be released on bail.”

The provision empowers only the Sessions Court and High Court to grant anticipatory bail.

The reason for enactment of Section 438 in the Code was parliamentary acceptance of the crucial underpinning of personal liberty in a free and democratic country.

Parliament wished to foster respect for personal liberty and accord primacy to a fundamental tenet of criminal jurisprudence, that everyone is presumed to be innocent till he or she is found guilty.

Life and liberty are the cherished attributes of every individual. The urge for freedom is natural to each human being.

In the 1980 *Gurbaksh Singh Sibbia vs State of Punjab* case, a five-judge Supreme Court bench led by then Chief Justice Y V Chandrachud ruled that S. 438 (1) is to be interpreted in the light of Article 21 of the Constitution (protection of life and personal liberty).

A.P. flags off country's first 'fruit train'

- A 'fruit train', said to be the first of its kind in the country, was recently 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.

Bodo Language

Bodo language is one of the key thrust areas in the Bodo Accord which was signed recently.

1. Estimated to have 1.5 million speakers (Census 2011), Bodo is listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
2. It is spoken in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and West Bengal.
3. While Bodo is officially written in the Devanagiri script, the language has a history of having been written in at least three different scripts — until in 1974, the Government recognised Devanagari as its official script. In the first decade of the 20th century, Bodos started writing in the Assamese/Bangla script. Then they also used Roman Script.
4. In the pre-13th century era, it was called Deodhai.

Promises in the accord regarding Bodo language:

1. It was only in 2003, under the then Bodo Accord, that the language was listed in the Eighth Schedule. And it was the first tribal language to be included in the Eight Schedule.
2. In Assam, it has enjoyed the status of official associate language in undivided Goalpara district since 1986.
3. Now the 2020 Accord makes Bodo the associate official language throughout Assam.
4. The new Accord also promises to establish a separate directorate for Bodo medium schools, provincialise schools and colleges in the BTAD

(Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District) and establish a Cultural Complex-cum-Centre of Excellence in Kokrajhar for protection and promotion of the language.

Finance Commission of India

The report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, along with an Action Taken Report, has been tabled in Parliament. The Commission, headed by N K Singh, had submitted its Report to the President in December 2019.

What is the Finance Commission?

The Finance Commission is constituted by the President under article 280 of the Constitution, mainly to give its recommendations on distribution of tax revenues between the Union and the States and amongst the States themselves.

Two distinctive features of the Commission's work involve redressing the vertical imbalances between the taxation powers and expenditure responsibilities of the centre and the States respectively and equalization of all public services across the States.

What are the functions of the Finance Commission?

It is the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to:

1. the distribution between the Union and the States of the net proceeds of taxes which are to be, or may be, divided between them and the allocation between the States of the respective shares of such proceeds;
2. the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India;
3. the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and Municipalities in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;

4. any other matter referred to the Commission by the President in the interests of sound finance.

The Commission determines its procedure and have such powers in the performance of their functions as Parliament may by law confer on them.

Who appoints the Finance Commission and what are the qualifications for Members?

The Finance Commission is appointed by the President under Article 280 of the Constitution.

As per the provisions contained in the Finance Commission [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act, 1951 and The Finance Commission (Salaries & Allowances) Rules, 1951, the Chairman of the Commission is selected from among persons who have had experience in public affairs, and the four other members are selected from among persons who:

1. are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as Judges of a High Court; or
2. have special knowledge of the finances and accounts of Government; or
3. have had wide experience in financial matters and in administration; or
4. have special knowledge of economics.

When was the first Commission Constituted and how many Commissions have been Constituted so far?

The First Finance Commission was constituted vide Presidential Order dated 22.11.1951 under the chairmanship of Shri K.C. Neogy on 6th April, 1952. Fifteenth Finance Commissions have been Constituted so far at intervals of every five years.

Why is there a need for a Finance Commission?

The Indian federal system allows for the division of power and responsibilities between the centre and states. Correspondingly, the taxation powers are also broadly divided between the centre and states. State

legislatures may devolve some of their taxation powers to local bodies.

Finance commissions have over the past several decades adopted different approaches with regard to principles of tax devolution, grants to be given to states and fiscal consolidation issues. In other words, there has to be continuity and change between finance commissions.

There is a need to ensure broad consistency between Finance Commissions so that there is some degree of certainty in the flow of funds, especially to the states. This has become even more critical in the post GST scenario.

If it is given permanent status, the Commission can function as a leaner entity in the intervening period till the next Finance Commission is set up in a full-fledged manner. During the intervening period, it can also address issues arising from implementation of the recommendations of the finance commission.

Commonwealth

The Maldives re-joined the Commonwealth, more than three years after the Indian Ocean island nation quit amid mounting criticism of its human rights. In 2016, the Maldives pulled out of the Commonwealth.

Maldives has been formally reinstated into the Commonwealth as its 54th member state.

1. The Commonwealth of Nations, at one time known as British Commonwealth, is an organisation of fifty three states that were principally below the colonial rule of British Government. They came into existence with the proclamation of sovereignty of the state from the colonial rule of British Empire and were later given self-governance.
2. It proclaims that the Commonwealth nations are “free and equal.” The insignia of this Commonwealth Association is Queen Elizabeth II who

is considered the Supreme of the Commonwealth nations.

3. The member states of the commonwealth are not legally liable or bound to each other. They are rather united by language, history, culture, likeness of the democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
4. Their values are listed down within the Commonwealth Charter and the hands of harmony towards the member states are extended by the Commonwealth Games held every four years.
5. Former British mandates that did not become members of the Commonwealth are Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, British Palestine, Sudan, British Somaliland, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

Former name — British Commonwealth.

Composition: intergovernmental organisation of 53 member states that are mostly former territories of the British Empire. It operates by intergovernmental consensus of the member states. Established in 1949 by the London Declaration.

Structure: Head of the Commonwealth — Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of the Commonwealth. The position is symbolic.

Quantum computing gets funds

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman’s Union Budget for 2020-21, presented on February 1, 2020, proposed Rs 8,000 crore over five years for National Mission on Quantum Technologies and Applications.

What are Quantum Technologies?

Quantum technologies comprise quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum optics, quantum information processing, quantum internet and quantum artificial intelligence.

- The interest and excitement about quantum computer is because of its

power to dabble with complex calculations involved in fields like cyber-security which digital computers now deal with.

- Quantum communications can enhance (cyber) security, provide unique fingerprints and also increase available bandwidth for internet networks.

What is a quantum computer?

- Quantum computers work by harnessing the properties of quantum mechanics.
- Quantum computers use logical units called quantum bits, or qubits for short, that can be put into a quantum state where they can simultaneously represent both 0 and 1.

Difference between classical and quantum computers?

- Classical computers process information in a binary format, called bits, which can represent either a 0 or 1.
- While the bits in a classical computer all operate independently from one another, in a quantum computer, the status of one qubit effects the status of all the other qubits in the system, so they can all work together to achieve a solution.

How the result is obtained?

While a conventional computer outputs the same answer to a problem every time you run a calculation, the outputs of a quantum computer are probabilistic. That means it does not always produce the same answer. So to use a quantum computer, you have to run a calculation through the system thousands or even millions of times, and the array of outputs converge around the answer that is most likely to be correct.

Green India Mission

A sum of Rs 343.08 crore has been released under the Green India Mission (GIM) for undertaking afforestation activities over an

area of 126,916.32 hectare (ha) in 13 states, according to the Economic Survey 2019-20.

GIM is one of the eight missions launched under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).

- GIM, launched in February 2014, is aimed at protecting, restoring and enhancing India's diminishing forest cover and responding to climate change by a combination of adaptation and mitigation measures.

1. To protect, restore and enhance India's falling forest cover.
2. To respond to climate change through a combination of adaptation as well as mitigation measures.
3. To increased forest-based livelihood incomes.
4. To enhance annual Carbon sequestration by 50 to 60 million tonnes in the year 2020.

Goals:

1. Improvement in quality of forest cover and ecosystem services of forests /non-forests, including moderately dense, open forests, degraded grassland and wetlands (5 m ha).
2. Eco-restoration/afforestation of scrub, shifting cultivation areas, cold deserts, mangroves, ravines and abandoned mining areas (1.8 m ha).
3. Improvement in forest and tree cover in urban/peri-urban lands (0.20 m ha)
4. Improvement in forest and tree cover on marginal agricultural lands/fallows and other non-forest lands under agroforestry /social forestry (3 m ha)
5. Management of public forest/ non-forests areas (taken up under the Mission) by the community institutions

6. Adoption of improved fuelwood-use efficiency and alternative energy devices by project-area households.
7. Diversification of forest-based livelihoods of about 3 million households living in and around forests.

Wetlands provide a wide range of important ecosystem services, such as food, water, groundwater recharge, water purification, flood moderation, erosion control, microclimate regulation, landscape aesthetics and, of course, livelihood opportunities. They are in fact a major source of water and the principal place from which India's cities receive their freshwater.

World Wetlands Day 2019

World Wetlands Day is celebrated on February 2 each year to mark the Day the Convention on Wetlands was adopted in the Iranian City of Ramsar in 1971.

India is a party to the Convention since 1982 and committed to the Ramsar approach of wise use of wetlands. The theme for 2020 is 'Wetlands and Biodiversity'.

Status of wetlands in India:

The bad news is that India's cities have lost 25 ha of wetland for every one sq. km's increase of built-up area in the last four decades.

The good news is that 10 more wetland sites around India have been added to the Ramsar Convention, rendering them sites of 'national importance'.

Wetlands in India:

The country has over 757,000 wetlands with a total wetland area of 15.3 million ha, accounting for nearly 4.7% of the total geographical area of the country.

India has 37 Ramsar sites now, covering an area of 1.07 million ha. The latest additions include Maharashtra's first Ramsar site, the Nandur Madhmeshwar bird sanctuary; three more from Punjab (in Keshopur-Miani, Beas Conservation Reserve and Nangal); and six more from Uttar Pradesh (in Nawabganj, Parvati Agra, Saman, Samaspur, Sandi and Sarsai Nawar).

Threats:

- Increasing urbanisation has significantly reduced the amount of area under wetlands.
- According to an assessment undertaken by Wetlands International South Asia (WISA), between 1970 and 2014, cities have rapidly degraded wetlands, to the tune of 25 ha per sq. km of built-up area.
- The biggest offenders were the metropolitans of New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai and Hyderabad, which treat wastelands as their private dumping grounds.

Tyler Prize for the environment:

Context: The Tyler Prize 2020 has been awarded to two pioneers who quantified the economic value of our natural environment. Of two, one is from India- Pavan Sukhdev.

About the Prize:

1. Established in 1973 by the late John and Alice Tyler.
2. This global environmental prize recognizes individuals who have contributed in an outstanding manner to the scientific knowledge and public leadership to preserve and enhance the environment of the world.
3. Recipients encompass the spectrum of environmental concerns, including environmental policy, health, air and water pollution, ecosystem disruption and loss of biodiversity, and energy resources.

New mascot for National Games: flame-throated bulbul:

The flame-throated bulbul, also called the Rubigula, was chosen as the mascot of the 36th National Games to be held in Goa because it is the State bird.

- Endemic to southern peninsular India.
- IUCN status:Least Concern.
- Listed in Schedule – IV of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Gram Nyayalayas

The Supreme Court has directed the states, which are yet to come out with notifications for establishing 'Gram Nyayalayas', to do so within four weeks, and asked the high courts to expedite the process of consultation with state governments on this issue.

What's the issue?

So far only 11 states have taken steps to notify Gram Nyayalayas. Several states have issued notifications for establishing 'Gram Nyayalayas' but all of them were not functioning except in Kerala, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

Only 208 'Gram Nyayalayas' are functioning in the country as against 2,500 estimated to be required by the 12th five-year plan.

Gram Nyayalayas or village courts are established under the Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008 for speedy and easy access to justice system in the rural areas of India. The Act came into force from 2 October 2009.

Composition:

The Gram Nyayalayas are presided over by a Nyayadhikari, who will have the same power, enjoy same salary and benefits of a Judicial Magistrate of First Class. Such Nyayadhikari are to be appointed by the State Government in consultation with the respective High Court.

Jurisdiction:

- A Gram Nyayalaya have jurisdiction over an area specified by a notification by the State Government in consultation with the respective High Court.
- The Court can function as a mobile court at any place within the jurisdiction of such Gram Nyayalaya, after giving wide publicity to that regards.
- They have both civil and criminal jurisdiction over the offences.
- The pecuniary jurisdiction of the Nyayalayas are fixed by the respective High Courts.
- Gram Nyayalayas has been given power to accept certain evidences which would otherwise not be acceptable under Indian Evidence Act.

Procedure

Gram Nyayalayas can follow special procedures in civil matters, in a manner it deem just and reasonable in the interest of justice.

Gram Nyayalayas allow for conciliation of the dispute and settlement of the same in the first instance.

Appeals:

Appeal in criminal cases shall lie to the Court of Session, which shall be heard and disposed of within a period of six months from the date of filing of such appeal.

Appeal in civil cases shall lie to the District Court, which shall be heard and disposed of within a period of six months from the date of filing of the appeal.

The setting up of Gram Nyayalayas is considered as an important measure to reduce arrears and is a part of the judicial reforms. It is estimated that Gram Nyayalayas can reduce around 50% of the pendency of cases in subordinate courts and can take care of the new litigations which will be disposed within six months.

Recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission

The report of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, along with an Action Taken Report, was recently tabled in Parliament.

How revenue has been divided?

- FC has considered the 2011 population along with forest cover, tax effort, area of the state, and “demographic performance” to arrive at the states’ share in the divisible pool of taxes.
- In order to reward population control efforts by states, the Commission developed a criterion for demographic effort — which is essentially the ratio of the state’s population in 1971 to its fertility rate in 2011 — with a weight of 12.5%.
- The total area of states, area under forest cover, and “income distance” were also used by the FC to arrive at the tax-sharing formula.

Recommendations:

- The Commission has reduced the vertical devolution — the share of tax revenues that the Centre shares with the states — from 42% to 41%.
- The Commission has said that it intends to set up an expert group to initiate a non-lapsable fund for defence expenditure.

State- wise distribution:

- Shares of the southern states, except Tamil Nadu, have fallen — with Karnataka losing the most.
- Shares of states like Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, along with Tamil Nadu, all of which have fertility rates below the replacement level, have increased slightly.
- On the other hand, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and West Bengal’s shares have fallen, even though their fertility rates are also low.
- Incidentally, Karnataka, the biggest loser in this exercise, also had the highest tax-GSDP ratio in 2017-18, as per an RBI report on state finances.

Criticisms:

- The population parameter used by the Commission has been criticised by the governments of the southern states.
- The previous FC used both the 1971 and the 2011 populations to calculate the states’ shares, giving greater weight to the 1971 population (17.5%) as compared to the 2011 population (10%).
- The use of 2011 population figures has resulted in states with larger populations like UP and Bihar getting larger shares, while smaller states with lower fertility rates have lost out.
- The combined population of the Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand is 47.8 crore.
- This is over 39.48% of India’s total population, and is spread over 32.4% of the country’s area, as per the 2011 Census.
- On the other hand, the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and undivided Andhra Pradesh are home to only 20.75% of the population living in 19.34% of the area, with a 13.89% share of the taxes.
- This means that the terms decided by the Commission are loaded against the more progressive (and prosperous) southern states.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)

PMMVY, funding and beneficiaries, challenges present and ways to address them.

- States/UTs and districts awarded for best performance under PMMVY.
 1. In the category of best performance since inception of the Scheme to States/UTs having population of more than 1 crore the first position was awarded to the state of Madhya Pradesh, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Haryana in the third position.
 2. In the same category among States/UTs having population of less than 1 crore, Dadra & Nagar Haveli is in the first position. Himachal stood

second and Chandigarh is at the third position.

3. In the District level awards for States/UTs with population of more than 1 crore, the first position went to Indore in Madhya Pradesh. In the same category for States/UTs with population under than 1 crore, the first position went to Serchhip in Mizoram.

PMMVY:

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a maternity benefit rechristened from erstwhile Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY).

The scheme is a conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women.

It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.

1. Promoting appropriate practice, care and institutional service utilization during pregnancy, delivery and lactation.
2. Encouraging the women to follow (optimal) nutrition and feeding practices, including early and Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months.
3. Providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and lactating mothers.

Locust attacks

- During the past few weeks, major locust attacks have been observed in several countries in western and southern Asia and in eastern Africa.

Which countries are affected?

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has currently identified three hotspots of threatening locust activity, where the situation has been called “extremely alarming” — the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea area, and southwest Asia.

1. The Horn of Africa has been called the worst-affected area, where the FAO has said there is “an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods”.
2. Locust swarms from Ethiopia and Somalia have travelled south to Kenya and 14 other countries in the continent.
3. In the Red Sea area, locusts have struck in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Yemen.
4. In southwest Asia, locusts swarms have caused damage in Iran, India, and Pakistan.
5. Pakistan and Somalia have recently declared locust emergencies.

What are locusts?

Locusts are a group of short-horned grasshoppers that multiply in numbers as they migrate long distances in destructive swarms (up to 150km in one day).

Four species of locusts are found in India: Desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*), Migratory locust (*Locusta migratoria*), Bombay Locust (*Nomadacris succincta*) and Tree locust (*Anacridium sp.*).

How do they inflict damage?

- The swarms devour leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, bark and growing points, and also destroy plants by their sheer weight as they descend on them in massive numbers.
- The desert locust is regarded as the most destructive pest in India as well as internationally, with a small swarm covering one square kilometre being able to consume the same amount of food in one day as 35,000 people.

Global Go To Think Tank Index

- Global Go To Think Tank Index has been released.
- The Index is released by University of Pennsylvania each year since 2008.
- It evaluates public-policy research analysis and engagement organisations

that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues.

- It claims to enable policy makers and the public to make informed decisions on public policy.

Definition of think- tanks:

The report defined "think tanks" as public-policy research analysis and engagement organisations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues, thereby enabling policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy.

How are they ranked?

Nomination and Ranking Criteria included think tank's leadership, staff reputation, quality and reputation of the research and analysis produced, ability to recruit and retain elite scholars, analysts, academic performance, reputation, the impact of a think-tank's research and programs on policymakers and reputation with policymakers.

Top players:

- The list was topped by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace of US, followed by Belgium's Bruegel and French Institute of International Relations (IFRI).
- UK's Chatham House was ranked 6th on the list.

Performance of institutions in India:

1. Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has been placed at No. 16. CSE climbed up two notches in the 14th version of the report.
2. The organisation also moved up three places among 'best independent think tanks' to be at No.123 in the world and sixth among Indian think tanks.
3. Globally, it was ranked 41 of 60 organisations committed to energy and resource policy.
4. India's Observer Research Foundation (ORF) has jumped more than 90

places to 27th position among 176 global think tanks.

5. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation was the highest-ranked Indian think tank with a political party affiliation in the world, getting a rank of 31st, among 38 such institutions.
6. India Foundation and Vivekananda International Foundation were ranked 36th and 37th on that list.

The 2020 report raised some critical threats and opportunities that think tanks across the globe face.

It called upon such organisations to develop national, regional, and global partnerships and create new, innovative platforms to deliver for an ever-expanding audience of citizens, policy makers and businesses.

India has the second-largest number of think tanks at 509. The US has the highest number at 1,871.

Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA)

The government has announced that it was abolishing in "public interest" an anti-dumping duty that was levied on imports of a chemical called *PTA*.

Implications:

Domestic manufacturers of polyester have called the move a huge relief for the industry, claiming they had been fighting to remove the duty for four-and-a-half years.

What is PTA?

- Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA) is a crucial raw material used to make various products, including polyester fabrics.
- PTA makes up for around 70-80% of a polyester product and is, therefore, important to those involved in the manufacture of man-made fabrics or their components.
- This includes products like polyester staple fibre and spun yarn. Some sportswear, swimsuits, dresses, trousers, curtains, sofa covers, jackets,

car seat covers and bed sheets have a certain proportion of polyester in them.

What led to the government decision?

1. There has been persistent demand that they should be allowed to source that particular product at an affordable rate, even if it means importing it.
2. Easy availability of this “critical input” at competitive prices was desirable to unlock “immense” potential in the textile sector, seen as a “significant” employment generator.
3. The duty had meant importers were paying an extra \$27-\$160 for every 1,000 kg of PTA that they wanted to import from countries like China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Korea and Thailand.
4. Removing the duty will allow PTA users to source from international markets and may make it as much as \$30 per 1,000 kg cheaper than now.

Why was it imposed in the first place?

The companies, which submitted that they accounted for over 50% of the domestic PTA industry, had argued that some countries had been exporting the product to India at prices lower than its value in their own domestic markets. This dumping of PTA into the Indian market had a “significant” adverse impact on the domestic industry, they argued.

Why was the move controversial?

1. Companies using PTA to manufacture polyester products claimed that the move went against the government’s vision of making the textiles sector a globally competitive industry. According to them, the move left them with limited domestic suppliers of PTA. The companies had alleged that the product’s cost had become more expensive domestically, which made their own products pricier and less attractive for their domestic and international buyers.
2. This had led to a drop in exports of some of these products during 2014-

16, and an increase in imports of the products they had been producing, as there was no safeguard against imports of cheaper versions of these downstream polyester-based products.

3. On top of this, the domestic industry had argued that domestic PTA producers had not only been unable to ramp up capacity to cater to demand for the product, shutdowns of their manufacturing facilities once a year for maintenance purposes had also led to shortages of the raw material. PTA users claim that they had not been manufacturing as much polyester as they were capable of, operating at 70% of their capacity at any given time.

East Asia Summit

India is set to host an *East Asia Summit* conference this week in Chennai with a focus on *maritime security cooperation and tackling challenges in the maritime domain*.

It will be organised by *the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)*, in partnership with the governments of *Australia and Indonesia*.

The Conference is expected to serve as a platform for free and open dialogue among all the EAS partners on various issues of maritime security cooperation, and to come up with useful suggestions on tackling challenges in the maritime domain in a cooperative manner.

This conference is the fourth in a series of EAS Maritime Security Conferences organised by the Indian government — the first conference was organised in New Delhi in November 2015, the second in Goa in November 2016 and the third in Bhubaneswar in June 2018.

EAS is an initiative of ASEAN and is based on the premise of the centrality of ASEAN.

It is a forum held annually by leaders of 18 countries in the East Asian, Southeast Asian and South Asian regions.

EAS meetings are held after annual ASEAN leaders’ meetings.

The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 December 2005.

There are six priority areas of regional cooperation within the framework of the EAS. These are – Environment and Energy, Education, Finance, Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases, Natural Disaster Management, and ASEAN Connectivity. India endorses regional collaboration in all six priority areas.

1. EAS, representing nearly 50 per cent of the world's population and over 20 per cent of global trade, is a mega gathering and is a testimony to the rise of Asia.
2. EAS is a region of strong and fast growing economies. It is considered the third pole of world economy after the US and Europe. Its four major economic players namely Japan, China, India and Korea are among the twelve largest ranking global economies.
3. Financial and monetary cooperation between ASEAN+6 or EAS countries could be an area of fruitful cooperation in view of the fact that their combined foreign exchange reserves exceed \$ 3 trillion.

1. For India, EAS acts as an alternative to the APEC in which India doesn't enjoy the membership.
2. India's membership to the EAS is a recognition of its fast growing economic and political clout.
3. Act East policy of India: In order to build multi-faceted relations with ASEAN and other multilateral nations and strengthen bilateral relations India has emphasised upon its Act East Policies for which EAS will prove crucial.
4. China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and the nature of its growing investments has led the ASEAN countries to view India as a potential power that could balance a rising China.
5. India's strength lies in service sector and information-technology and Japan has a sound capital base. Thus there

are complementarities in trade and production structures of the EAS members.

6. India's deep cultural and civilizational links with the EAS countries are widely known. India can play a major role in cultural and people to people cooperation with the region, which can reinforce the economic momentum for community building.

East Asia Summit

Leaders' summit in Naypyidaw, Myanmar on November



Vikram Sarabhai

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) are conducting various events at national level in a year long programme to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai.

Vikram Sarabhai and his contributions:

Vikram Sarabhai was born on August 12, 1919. Sarabhai was instrumental in forming India's future in astronomy and setting up the country's space research facilities.

1. Based on his persuasion, the Indian government agreed to set up the Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR) in 1962.
2. Sarabhai was the first chairman of the committee. The INCOSPAR was restructured and renamed as *Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in 1969.*
3. Sarabhai founded *the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad in the year 1947.* The laboratory started its operation from RETREAT, Sarabhai's residence in Ahmedabad. Its first topic of research was cosmic rays.
4. He also set up *India's first rocket launch site in Thumba,* a small village near the Thiruvananthapuram airport in Kerala.
5. Vikram Sarabhai was also responsible for bringing cable television to India. His constant contact with NASA paved a way for the establishment of *Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in 1975.*
6. Sarabhai was the mastermind behind building *India's first satellite, Aryabhata.*
7. He was one of the *founding members of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA).*
8. Vikram Sarabhai received *the Padma Bhushan in 1966* for his contribution to India's progress. He was also awarded *the Padma Vibhushan in 1972, posthumously.*

India develops new vaccine to control classical swine fever

The Indian Institute of Veterinary Research (IVRI) of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has developed a new vaccine to control classical swine fever.

It is a *live attenuated CSF cell culture vaccine (indigenous strain).*

The indigenously developed vaccine will help in saving rabbits as the currently used vaccine (lapinized CSF vaccine) is produced by sacrificing large numbers of rabbits.

Besides, the new vaccine gives immunity for two years as compared to 3 to 6 months protection under the currently used vaccines.

The new vaccine will be a part of the government's *One Health Initiative.*

What is Classical Swine Fever (CSF)?

Hog Cholera or Classical swine fever (CSF) is a contagious viral disease of domestic and wild swine. It happens due to the viruses that bring viral diarrhea in pigs and ailments in sheep.

The disease does not harm humans but all-important precautions are advised to follow.

Concerns for India:

- Classical Swine Fever (CSF) is one of the biggest pigs' diseases in India. It causes a loss of about 400 crores of rupees per year in India. This has led to a decrease in the population of pigs in 2019.
- India currently requires 22 million doses of the CSF (Classical Swine Fever) vaccine every year. However, currently, only 1.2 million doses are being produced. The reason behind its less production is that only 50 doses can be prepared from the spleen of a rabbit.

Reverse osmosis (RO)

The Union Environment Ministry has issued a notification to comply with the NGT order which *prohibited the use of reverse osmosis (RO) purifiers in places where total dissolved solids (TDS) in the supplied water are below 500 mg per litre.*

- The NGT had ordered a ban on RO filters on the grounds that *they wasted water and that, in the process of removing salts, they often deprived drinking water of essential salts,* which could affect the nutritional intake of the people.
- *Background:*

- Current BIS regulations consider 500 mg/litre—1,200 mg/litre of total dissolved solids, which consist of salts and some organic matter, as acceptable.
- *Osmosis and RO:*
- *Osmosis* involves ‘a solvent (such as water) naturally moving from an area of low solute concentration, through a membrane, to an area of high solute concentration.
- A *reverse osmosis* system applies an external pressure to reverse the natural flow of solvent and so seawater or brackish water is pressurised against one surface of the membrane, causing salt-depleted water to move across the membrane, releasing clean water from the low-pressure side’.
- *What are the problems with RO plants?*
- *Deposition of brine (highly concentrated salt water) along the shores.*
- *Affects fauna and flora:* Hyper salinity along the shore affects plankton, which is the main food for several of these fish species. The high pressure motors needed to draw in the seawater end up sucking in small fish and life forms, thereby crushing and killing them — again a loss of marine resource.
- *Construction of the RO plants required troves of groundwater.* Freshwater that was sucked out and is replaced by salt water, rendering it unfit for the residents around the desalination plants.
- *Cost and time:* On an average, it costs about ₹900 crore to build a 100 MLD-plant and, as the Chennai experience has shown, about five years for a plant to be set up.
- *Energy needed:* To remove the salt required, there has to be a source of electricity, either a power plant or a diesel or battery source. Estimates have put this at about 4 units of electricity per 1,000 litres of water. It is estimated that it cost ₹3 to produce 100 litres of potable water.
- *Is RO water healthy?*
- There are concerns that desalinated the RO water may be *short of vital minerals such as calcium, magnesium, zinc, sodium, potassium and carbonates.*
- Most RO plants put the water through a ‘*post-treatment*’ process whereby salts are added to make TDS around 300 mg/l.
- *Are there technological alternatives?*
- *Low-temperature thermal desalination (LTTD) technique* works on the principle that water in the ocean 1,000 or 2,000 feet below is about 4° C to 8° C colder than surface water. So, salty surface water is collected in a tank and subject to high pressure (via an external power source). This pressured water vapourises and this is trapped in tubes or a chamber. Cold water plumbed from the ocean depths is passed over these tubes and the vapour condenses into fresh water and the resulting salt diverted away.
- *Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion:* It will draw power from the vapour generated as a part of the desalination process. This vapour will run a turbine and thereby will be independent of an external power source. While great in theory, there is no guarantee it will work commercially. For one, this ocean-based plant requires a pipe that needs to travel 50 kilometres underground in the sea before it reaches the mainland.

Blue dot network

The first meeting of *the Blue Dot Network’s* embryonic steering committee was held recently in Washington, with Australia and Japan as partners.

What is the Blue dot network?

The U.S., Australia and Japan *announced the network during the November 4, 2019, Indo-Pacific Business Forum in Bangkok.* The initiative aligns with the *G20’s Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment*, particularly on governance, environmental standards and transparency.

- It is a new *S.-led certification plan*.
- A “blue dot” will be awarded to projects the initiative endorses.
- The Network will *not itself directly invest in projects*.
- At present the project is led by the *U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (boasting access to \$60 billion in capital), in partnership with the government-owned Japan Bank for International Cooperation and Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs*.
- Once fully up and running, *the new network will bring together governments, the private sector and other organizations behind a set of high-quality global infrastructure development standards*.

It will act as a *globally recognized seal of approval for major infrastructure projects*, letting people know the projects are sustainable and not exploitative.

Here’s how the network will work:

- Any country or company can participate in the network, as long as it agrees to adhere to the network’s high standards of promoting quality, private sector-led investment. Projects that seek to be certified by the Blue Dot Network will complete an online application.
- Countries, companies and local communities will all benefit from the Blue Dot Network. When projects are certified by the Blue Dot Network, communities and investors can be confident about the high standards and sustainability of the infrastructure.

Maharashtra tops list of States hit by global medical data leak

Greenbone Sustainable Resilience, a German cybersecurity firm, has published a *report on medical data leak*. This is the second report.

1. Medical details of over 120 million Indian patients have been leaked and made freely available on the Internet.

2. Leaks include a massive number of records, including images of CT scans, X-rays, MRIs and even pictures of the patients.
3. The report also places *Maharashtra at the top of the States affected by the leak*. Followed by *Karnataka*.

Ranking of the countries:

This is the second edition of the report and it *classifies countries in the “good”, “bad” and “ugly” categories* based on the action taken by their governments after the first report was made public. *India ranks second in the “ugly” category, after the U.S.*

Concerns:

- The leak is worrying because the affected patients can include anyone from the common working man to politicians and celebrities. In image-driven fields like politics or entertainment, knowledge about certain ailments faced by people from these fields could deal a huge blow to their image.
- The other concern is of fake identities being created using the details, which can be misused in any possible number of ways.

Issues to be addressed:

The report says the leak was facilitated by the fact that *the Picture Archiving and Communications Systems (PACS) servers*, where these details are stored, are not secure and linked to the public Internet without any protection, making them easily accessible to malicious elements.

Why maintain privacy?

Any communication between a doctor and a patient is privileged one. A doctor or a hospital is thus ethically, legally and morally bound to maintain confidentiality.



The Economic Survey is a technocrat's advice to the government. Not only this, it also provides an outline for the year ahead.

The first Economic Survey of India was presented in 1950-51. It was presented along with the Union Budget up to 1964 and from 1964 onwards, it had been separated from the Union Budget.

The Economic Division of the Department of Economic Affairs prepared the Economic Survey in the Finance Ministry under the overall guidance of the Chief Economic Adviser.

When senior officers provide their inputs in the Ministry of Finance, the final version of the Economic Survey is scrutinized by the Finance Secretary and finally approved by the Union Finance Minister.

Finance Minister tabled the Economic Survey 2019-20 in the Parliament after a joint address by President Ram Nath Kovind to both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

Prepared by Chief Economic Advisor, the Economic Survey gives a review of the developments in the economy over the previous 12 months and also gives an outlook for the next financial year.

The Economic Survey for 2019-2020 seems an exercise driven by 20/20 hindsight, combined with an optimistic 20/20 vision for the year to come, as it expects GDP growth to revive from the 5% estimated for this year to a range between 6%-6.5% next year.

The Survey hints at going easy on fiscal deficit targets in a bid to shore up growth and makes a valiant attempt to evangelise wealth creation by entrepreneurs instead of demonising them.

Economic Survey:

Ministry of Finance presents an annual document known as Economic Survey which gives the details of various sectors of the economy and overall economic scenario of the country in the past years.

Aggressive Disinvestment Target:

Economic Survey has recommended an aggressive target for disinvestment of the Central Public Sector Enterprises.

The decision is intended to bring higher profitability and promote efficiency in the operations Public Sector Units.

Furthermore, disinvestment will also bring in higher competition and promote professionalism in the operational culture of the organizations.

Calls for Urgent Reforms in Banking Sector:

Economic Survey said that Indian's Banking Sector needs urgent attention and reforms that can support the growing economy.

The survey calls for a healthy banking sector that is led by Public Sector Banks.

Among the three key recommendation for banking sector, the survey mentions use of Fintech across all banking functions, employee ownership to enhance efficiency and use of emerging technologies such as big-data, artificial intelligence and machine learning to improve operations.

Infra Spend – Roadmap to UDS 5 Trillion Economy:

As part of the roadmap to the ambitious target of achieving USD 5 Trillion Economy, the Economic Survey highlighted that India needs to invest UDS 1.4 Trillion on the development of Infrastructure.

Lack of Infrastructure was cited as a ‘binding constraint’ on the economic growth ranging from power infrastructure, transport and poor connectivity.

Economic Survey said that India’s aspiration of becoming a \$5 trillion economy depends on two things

1) Promoting ‘pro-business’ policy that unleashes the power of competitive markets to generate wealth.

2) Weaning away from ‘pro-crony’ policy that may favour specific private interests, especially powerful incumbents.

Chief Economic Advisor praised his team for “working hard” and having prepared the “second economic survey in the span of six months”.

The government must use its strong mandate to deliver expeditiously on reforms, which will enable the economy to strongly rebound in 2020-21.

It also called for improving governance in public sector banks and the need for more disclosure of information to build trust. It also talks about dwarfism in the banking sector.

Conclusion:

Economic Survey calls for measures to make it easier to start new business, register property, pay taxes, enforce contracts. Government interventions seem to be ineffective in stabilising prices of commodities such as onions: Survey. Economic Survey calls for more reforms for making it easier to do business in country.

Weak global growth impacting India as well as investment slowdown due to financial sector issues had led to growth dropping to a decade low in current fiscal, the survey said, adding 5% growth projected for 2019-20 is the lowest it could fall for now.

The Survey delves into texts from 4th century BC and cites Tamil poet Tiruvalluvar’s Thirukural and Kautilya’s Arthashastra to espouse the virtues of the invisible hand of the market combined with trust in wealth creation.

The higher growth hopes for the coming year are actually based on ‘conservative’ estimates.

By this time next year, there will be some clarity on whether it was wishful thinking or 20/20 vision.

Select Committee recommendations on Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill

15 major changes have been suggested in a report presented by the Select Committee on Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill. The bill prohibits commercial surrogacy and allow only altruistic surrogacy.

The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha in August 2019, but had to be referred for re-assessment to the select committee in November 2019, as several Rajya Sabha members found certain clauses contentious such as allowing only altruistic surrogacy with a near relative as a surrogate.

1. Keep an *option for compensating the surrogate mother beyond medical expenses and insurance coverage* that includes taking care of her nutritional food requirements, maternity wear, etc. that is vital for the wellbeing and upkeep of the surrogate mother.
2. The controversial *clause of “close relative”* has been done away with and instead the committee has recommended the term to be replaced with a “willing woman”.
3. *Who can opt?* Single women, including a widow and divorcee, between the ages of 35 and 45 years, should be able to opt for surrogacy.

4. *Increase insurance cover* for the surrogate mother from the 16 months proposed in the Bill to 36 months.
5. In order to protect the interests of the child born through surrogacy, the order regarding the parentage and custody of the child, issued by a Magistrate, shall be *the birth affidavit for the surrogate child*.

India has emerged as a surrogacy hub for couples from other countries and there have been reports concerning unethical practices, exploitation of surrogate mothers, abandonment of children born out of surrogacy, and rackets involving intermediaries importing human embryos and gametes. *The 228th report of the Law Commission of India* has recommended prohibiting commercial surrogacy and allowing altruistic surrogacy by enacting suitable legislation.

Female Genital Mutilation

Every year, *February 6 is observed as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*.

What is Female Genital Mutilation?

It is the name given to procedures that involve altering or injuring the female genitalia for non-medical or cultural reasons, and is recognised internationally as *a violation of human rights and the health and integrity of girls and women*.

Types:

WHO classifies *four types of FGM*:

1. type 1 (partial or total removal of the clitoral glans).
2. type 2 (partial or total removal of the external and visible parts of the clitoris and the inner folds of the vulva).
3. type 3 (infibulation, or narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal).

4. type 4 (picking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterising the genital area).

Where is it practiced?

Most girls and women who have undergone FGM live in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States, but it is also practiced in some countries in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. Countries where FGM is performed include Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Egypt, Oman, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iraq, Iran, Georgia, Russian Federation, Columbia and Peru, among others.

Why prevent FGM?

As per *the World Health Organization (WHO)*, globally, *over 200 million girls alive today have suffered FGM in over 30 countries*. The economic costs of treating health complications arising out of FGM amount to roughly \$1.4 billion for 2018 for 27 countries where FGM is performed. If the prevalence remains the same, the amount is expected to rise up to \$2.3 billion by 2047.

Kumbhabhishekam

The 'kumbhabhishekam' (consecration) of the 1,010-year-old Brihadeeswarar Temple or the Big Temple is being held at Thanjavur. This enormously significant event was held after 23 years — and after the Madras High Court had settled an old argument over the ritual purification process only five days previously.

The judgment delivered on January 31 by the Madurai Bench of the court addressed the struggle for supremacy between the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions that lies at the heart of several cultural battles in the state — and which also played out in the kumbhabhishekam ceremony.

What was the issue?

There was a *dispute over which language should be used in the slokas at the kumbhabhishekam*. The Thanjai Periya Koil Urimai Meetpu Kuzhu (Thanjavur Big Temple Rights Retrieval Committee), an organisation that aims to restore Tamil traditions in the Sri

Brihadishvara Temple, had demanded that *the kumbhabhishegam should be held only in Tamil*. However, the government had told that *the consecration will be performed in both Tamil and Sanskrit*.

Brihadishvara Temple:

- Built by *emperor Rajaraja Chola I (985 CE -1015 CE)*.
- It has seen *only five kumbhabhishekam ceremonies so far*.
- As per the customs of Hinduism, *'kumbhabhishekam' is done once in 12 years*. According to *the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) department*, the temple had *'kumbhabhishekam'* in 1010, 1729, 1843, 1980 and 1997.
- Located on the banks of *Kaveri river*, it is an exemplary example of a fully realised *Dravidian architecture*.
- It is called as *Dhakshina Meru (Meru of south)*.
- The temple is *a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the "Great Living Chola Temples"*, along with the Chola dynasty era *Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and Airavatesvara temple*.
- There are several shrines added to the temple by most of the following rulers such as *the Pandyas, the Vijayanagara rulers and the Marathas, too*.
- Brihadeshwara Temple is also *the first all-granite temple in the world*.

Ram Temple trust

A 15-member trust to oversee the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya has been constituted. The announcement of a "broad scheme" for developing a Ram Temple and formation of a Trust named '*Shri Ram Janambhoomi Teertha Kshetra*' was made by the prime minister.

There will be a total of 15 members in the trust — 9 permanent and 6 nominated members.

The government has made nine rules which will be the basis of how the trust will work:

1. The *permanent office of the Trust* will be discussed in the first meeting of *Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra*.
2. Trust will be *completely free to take every decision related to the construction of Ram temple*. It will also have to arrange all facilities for devotees such as kitchen, gaushala, museum and sarai.
3. *Trustees can legally accept donations, grants, immovable property and assistance from any person, an institution* for facilities and temple construction. Apart from this, the trust *can also take a loan*.
4. The board of trustees will appoint one trustee as president-managing trustee, who will preside over meetings. At the same time, the general secretary and treasurer will also be appointed.
5. The trust will *decide on investment for existing funds for the construction of Ram temple*. Investment for the temple will be in the name of the trust.
6. The *donations received for the Ram temple will be used only for the work of the trust*. This money will not be used for any other work.
7. Trustees will *not have the right to sell immovable property associated with Ram Mandir trust*.
8. Trust will have to *keep account of donations and expenses received for Ram Temple*. Balance sheets will be created and trust's accounts will be audited.
9. There is *no provision of salary for the members of the Ram Mandir trust*, but the expenses incurred during the journey will be paid by the trust.

This comes in the wake of the Supreme Court, in its judgement on the dispute, asking the Union government to form a trust that can look at the construction and management of the temple.

Why a trust?

One of the five suits before the court in the Babri Masjid case was in the name of the deity itself, *Sri Ram Lalla Virajman*, and of the birthplace, *Asthan Shri Ram Janmabhoomi*.

This suit was founded on the claim that the law recognises both the idol and the birthplace as juridical entities. The court did not accept the Janmasthan as a juridical entity.

It awarded the title of the land to *Ram Lalla*, to be held by the Trust that the Court said should be set up within three months. This Trust is *the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra*.

What did the Supreme Court say about the Trust?

When the Supreme Court delivered its judgment on November 9, 2019, it directed the Centre to formulate within three months a scheme to set up a “Trust with a Board of Trustees or any other appropriate body” under *The Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993*, with powers “including the construction of a temple”.

The court used its powers under Article 142 to direct that “appropriate representation may be given in the Trust to the Nirmohi Akhara”.

The Court also said that the scheme to be framed by the Centre should make “*necessary provisions*” about the functioning of the Trust or the body, including on matters relating to its management, the powers of the trustees “*including the construction of a temple and all necessary, incidental and supplemental matters*”.

Furthermore, this *Trust will get the possession of the inner and outer courtyards along with the rest of the acquired land*, which will be managed and developed by the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra.

What next?

Under the Ayodhya law, the government would transfer the authorized land, which is nearly 67.703 acres and of which the inner and outer courtyard is a part, to the newly constituted Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra.

Bhutan’s new tourism fee:

- Bhutan will now impose a “*sustainable development fee*” (SDF)

on Indian, Bangladeshi and Maldivian tourists.

- The new levy, however, will *not be applicable across Bhutan*. To promote tourism in the less popular Eastern Bhutan, the SDF will not be levied on tourists travelling to 11 districts in the region.
- The decision has been taken *to protect the ecology of the country, amid a spike in visitors from India.*

So far, tourists from the three countries had been exempt from a levy that other nationals had to pay — \$250 per person per day during the peak season, and \$200 per person per day during the low season. The low season is in the winter from December to February, and during the rains from June to August.

Longest Spaceflight by a Woman: Christina Koch:

The *National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)* astronaut *Christina Koch* landed on the Earth on 6th february, 2020 after a record stay of 328 days on the *International Space Station*.

- *The previous longest single spaceflight by any woman was 289 days by Peggy Whitson, also an American, who set that record in 2017.*
- *Valery Polyakov of Russia holds the combine (i.e. for both men and women) record for the longest single spaceflight in history (438 days).*

Lucknow Declaration:

- It is a *joint declaration* adopted as an outcome of the *first India-Africa Defence Ministers’ Conclave* which was held along the side-lines of the DefExpo 2020.
- *Aim:* The Conclave was conducted with the aim of exporting India-made equipment to the African continent in

keeping with long-standing defence partnerships since the 1950s.

The Declaration calls for deeper cooperation in the domain of defence industry including through investment, joint ventures in defence equipment software, digital defence, research & development, provisioning of defence equipment, spares and their maintenance on sustainable and mutually beneficial terms.

NASA's Voyager 2 spacecraft

NASA has managed to fix its *Voyager-2* probe remotely, almost 11.5 billion miles away from its location. The probe has reportedly been acting in an unexpected manner as it failed to carry out a maneuver as planned on January 25. Moreover, the glitch in the probe was detected by the spacecraft's fault detection software which was relayed to NASA.

Voyager 2 is the only probe ever to study Neptune and Uranus during planetary flybys.

It is the second man-made object to leave our planet.

Voyager 2 is the only spacecraft to have visited all four gas giant planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — and discovered 16 moons, as well as phenomena like Neptune's mysteriously transient Great Dark Spot, the cracks in Europa's ice shell, and ring features at every planet.

What is Interstellar space?

Scientists use the heliopause to mark where interstellar space begins, although depending on how you define our solar system it can stretch all the way to the Oort Cloud, which begins 1,000 times farther away from the sun than Earth's orbit.

The Heliosphere:

The heliosphere is *a bubble around the sun created by the outward flow of the solar wind from the sun and the opposing inward flow of the interstellar wind.* That heliosphere is the region influenced by the dynamic properties of the sun that are carried in the solar wind—such as magnetic fields, energetic particles and

solar wind plasma. The heliopause marks the end of the heliosphere and the beginning of interstellar space.

About Voyager mission:

- Launched in the 1970's, and the probes sent by NASA were only meant to explore the outer planets – but they just kept on going.
- Voyager 1 departed Earth on 5 September 1977, a few days after Voyager 2 and left our solar system in 2013.
- *The mission objective of the Voyager Interstellar Mission (VIM) is to extend the NASA exploration of the solar system beyond the neighborhood of the outer planets to the outer limits of the Sun's sphere of influence, and possibly beyond.*
- *The Voyager spacecraft are the third and fourth human spacecraft to fly beyond all the planets in our solar system.* Pioneers 10 and 11 preceded Voyager in outstripping the gravitational attraction of the Sun but on February 17, 1998, Voyager 1 passed Pioneer 10 to become the most distant human-made object in space.

Guru Ravidas (Sant Ravidas Jayanti was celebrated on February 9th.)

- Guru Ravidas was a North Indian *mystic poet of the bhakti movement.*
- While the exact year of his birth is not known, it is believed that the saint was born in 1377 C.E.
- Guru Ravidas Jayanti is celebrated on *Magh Purnima*, which is the full moon day in the Hindu calendar month of Magha.
- *The Adi Granth of Sikhs, in addition to the Panchvani are the two of the oldest documented sources of the literary works of Guru Ravidas.*
- *Notably, he belonged to an untouchable caste and suffered a lot of atrocities as a result.* However, the saint chose to focus on spiritual pursuits and also penned several devotional songs which made a huge

impact in the Bhakti movement during the 14th to 16th century CE.

- He is believed to be a *disciple of the bhakti saint-poet Ramananda* and a contemporary of the bhakti saint-poet Kabir.
- One of his famous disciples was the saint, *Mirabai*.
- Among Ravidas's moral and intellectual achievements were the conception of "*Begampura*", a city that knows no sorrow; and a society where caste and class have ceased to matter.



Guru Ravidas Teachings:

Guru Ravidas spoke against the caste divisions and spoke of removing them to promote unity. His teachings resonated with the people, leading to a religion being born called *the Ravidassia religion, or Ravidassia Dharam* based on his teachings.

He taught about *the omnipresence of God and said that a human soul is a particle of God* and hence Ravidas *rejected the idea that people considered lower caste cannot meet God*. He said in his teachings that the only way to meet God was to free the mind from the duality.

FROM YES TO NO TO MAYBE

- Reservation in promotions allowed since 1955 till the SC held it unconstitutional in 1992
- In 1995, law was amended to allow it
- The new law was challenged in SC and in 2006, the court said that before framing any law, the state will have to satisfy the test of:
 1. Backwardness
 2. Inadequate representation
 3. Overall efficiency
- Relying on the 2006 SC judgment, several high courts struck down reservations in promotion
- UPA government introduced a bill that said all SCs and STs shall be deemed backward. The bill awaits passing by Parliament
- On Tuesday, the apex court allowed promotions temporarily till it decides on the legality of the law

Disha law

The Andhra Pradesh state government is preparing to implement *the Disha Bill once it gets the nod of the President*. As per the law, the state has to *equip itself with facilities like forensic laboratories, special courts, and public prosecutors*.

Last year, the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly had passed *the Andhra Pradesh Disha Bill, 2019* (Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2019).

Features of the Bill:

1. It envisages *the completion of investigation in seven days and trial in 14 working days*, where there is adequate conclusive evidence, and reducing *the total judgment time to 21 days* from the existing four months.
2. It prescribes *life imprisonment for other sexual offences against children and includes Section 354 F and 354 G in IPC*.
3. In cases of harassment of women through social or digital media, the Act states *two years imprisonment for the first conviction and four years for second and subsequent convictions*. For this, *a new Section 354 E will be added in IPC, 1860*.
4. As per the Bill, the Andhra Pradesh government will establish, operate and maintain a register in electronic form, to be called *the 'Women & Children Offenders Registry'*. This registry will

- be made public and will be available to law enforcement agencies.
5. The government will establish exclusive *special courts in each district to ensure speedy trial*. These courts will exclusively deal with cases of offences against women and children including rape, acid attacks, stalking, voyeurism, social media harassment of women, sexual harassment and all cases under the POCSO Act.
 6. The government will *constitute special police teams at the district level* to be called *District Special Police Team* to be headed by DSP for investigation of offences related to women and children.
 7. The government will also appoint a *special public prosecutor for each exclusive special court*.

women, followed by Maharashtra with 31,979 cases and West Bengal at 30,002.

'Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty' comprise 21.7 per cent, followed by 'kidnapping and abduction of women' with 20.5 per cent and 'rape' with 7.0 per cent of reported cases.

Special category status

Andhra Pradesh has revived its demand for *Special Category Status (SCS)*. It was the *bifurcation promise and 15th Finance Commission report* that stated that 'grant of SCS lies in the hands of the Centre'. SCS was promised to Andhra Pradesh by the then Congress government at the Centre in 2014, at the time of bifurcation which resulted in the formation of Telangana. The then Opposition party BJP too agreed to it and even stated that SCS would be extended by five more years if it was voted to power.

What is Special Category Status?

There is *no provision of SCS in the Constitution*; the Central government extends financial assistance to states that are at a comparative disadvantage against others. The concept of SCS emerged in 1969 when the *Gadgil formula* (that determined Central assistance to states) was approved.

Some prominent guidelines for getting SCS status:

1. Must be economically backward with poor infrastructure.
2. The states must be located in hilly and challenging terrain.
3. They should have low population density and significant tribal population.
4. Should be strategically situated along the borders of neighboring countries.

Benefits states confer with special category status:

1. The central government bears 90 percent of the state expenditure on all centrally-sponsored schemes and



Need for special law:

Crimes against women constitute murder, rape, dowry death, suicide abetment, acid attack, cruelty against women and kidnapping.

'Cruelty by husband or his relatives' accounts for 27.9 per cent of the crimes against women.

A total of 3,59,849 cases were reported against women in 2017. (2016, 3.38 lakh, 3.2 lakh cases 2015) The number of cases reported has increased.

- Uttar Pradesh has again topped the list with 56,011 cases of crime against

external aid while rest 10 percent is given as loan to state at zero percent rate of interest.

2. Preferential treatment in getting central funds.
3. Concession on excise duty to attract industries to the state.
4. 30 percent of the Centre's gross budget also goes to special category states.
5. These states can avail the benefit of debt-swapping and debt relief schemes.
6. States with special category status are exempted from customs duty, corporate tax, income tax and other taxes to attract investment.
7. Special category states have the facility that if they have unspent money in a financial year; it does not lapse and gets carry forward for the next financial year.

Other benefits:

Besides tax breaks and other benefits, the State with SCS will get 90% of all the expenditure on Centrally sponsored schemes as Central grant. The rest of the 10% will also be given as a loan at zero per cent interest. Usually, the ratio for general category States is 70% loan and 30% grant.

When was the first Special Category status bestowed?

First SCS was accorded in 1969 to Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Nagaland. Over the years, eight more states were added to the list — Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura and, finally, in 2010, Uttarakhand. Until 2014-15, SCS meant these 11 states received a variety of benefits and sops.

Concerns associated:

Considering special status to any new State will *result in demands from other States and dilute the benefits further*. It is also *not economically beneficial for States to seek special status as the benefits under the current dispensation are minimal*. Therefore, *States*

facing special problems will be better off seeking a special package.

National Deworming Day

NDD is observed bi-annually on 10th February and 10th August in all states and UTs followed by mop-up activities.

About the National Deworming Day:

1. The National Deworming Day is a *single fixed-day approach to treating intestinal worm infections in all children aged 1- 19 years*.
2. It will *mobilize health personnel, state governments and other stakeholders to prioritize investment in control of Soil Transmitted Helminth (STH) infections one of the most common infections*.
3. All the children are provided deworming tablet in schools and anganwadis. Besides the deworming tablet, various health promotion activities related to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) are organised in schools and anganwadis.
4. The NDD program is a cost-effective program at scale that continues to reach crores of children and adolescents with deworming benefits through a safe medicine *Albendazole*.

Background:

India carries the highest burden of worm infestation and 64% of Indian population less than 14 years of age are at risk of Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) or worms' infestation (WHO). Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) interfere with nutrients uptake in children; can lead to anaemia, malnourishment and impaired mental and physical development. The situation of undernutrition and anaemia which is linked to STH ranges from 40% to 70% in different population groups across the country (WHO). They also pose a serious threat to children's education and productivity later in life.



About Intestinal parasitic worms:

They are *large multicellular organisms*, which when mature can generally be seen with the naked eye. They are also known as Helminths. They are often referred to as intestinal worms even though not all helminths reside in the intestines.

Why this is a cause for concern?

Parasitic worms in children interfere with nutrient uptake, and can contribute to anaemia, malnourishment, and impaired mental and physical development. Parasitic worms have also debilitating consequences on the health and education of children, and on their long-term earning potential.

Significance of NDD:

- Anganwadi and school-based mass deworming program is safe, cost-effective, and can reach crores of children quickly.
- Deworming has been shown to reduce absenteeism in schools; improve health, nutritional, and learning outcomes; and increase the likelihood of higher-wage jobs later in life.
- Deworming with the safe and beneficial Albendazole tablet is an evidence-based, globally-accepted, and effective solution to controlling worm infections.

Solar Orbiter Mission

Solar Orbiter mission was launched recently.

- The mission is a *collaboration between ESA (the European Space Agency) and NASA*.
- The spacecraft was launched from *Cape Canaveral on a United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket*.

Solar Orbiter:

Solar Orbiter is a mission dedicated to solar and heliospheric physics.

It was selected as *the first medium-class mission of ESA's Cosmic Vision 2015-2025 Programme*.

This is *the first mission that will provide images of the sun's north and south poles* using a suite of six instruments on board that will capture the spacecraft's view. It is a *seven-year mission* and will come within 26 million miles of the sun. It will be able to brave the heat of the sun because it has a *custom titanium heat shield coated in calcium phosphate* so that it can endure temperatures up to 970 degrees Fahrenheit.



Objectives:

- Solar Orbiter will be used to examine how the Sun creates and controls the heliosphere, the vast bubble of charged particles blown by the solar wind into the interstellar medium.
- The spacecraft will combine in situ and remote sensing observations to gain new information about the solar wind, the heliospheric magnetic field, solar energetic particles, transient interplanetary disturbances and the Sun's magnetic field.

Solar Orbiter will set about answering four top-level science questions:

1. What drives the solar wind and where does the coronal magnetic field originate from?
2. How do solar transients drive heliospheric variability?
3. How do solar eruptions produce energetic particle radiation that fills the heliosphere?
4. How does the solar dynamo work and drive connections between the Sun and the heliosphere?

Significance:

Understanding the sun's magnetic field and solar wind are key because they contribute to space weather, which impacts Earth by interfering with networked systems like GPS, communications and even astronauts on the International Space Station. The sun's magnetic field is so massive that it stretches beyond Pluto, providing a pathway for solar wind to travel directly across the solar system.

Journey ahead:

It will take Solar Orbiter about two years to reach its highly elliptical orbit around the sun. Gravity assists from Earth and Venus will help swing the spacecraft out of the ecliptic plane, or the space that aligns with the sun's equator, so it can study the sun's poles from above and below. The mission will work in tandem with NASA's Parker Solar Probe, which is currently orbiting the sun on a seven-year mission and just completed its fourth close approach of the star.

Solar Orbiter follows *the Ulysses spacecraft*, another collaboration between ESA and NASA that launched in 1990 and also flew over the sun's poles. Ulysses completed three passes of the sun before its mission ended in 2009, but its view was limited to what it could see from the sun's equator.

Global conservation list

India will be moving to include the Asian Elephant and the Great Indian Bustard in *global conservation list*- the list of species that merit heightened conservation measures.

- The list will be debated at the 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of *the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)*, an environment treaty under *the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*.
- The COP is *scheduled to be organised from February 17 to 22 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.*
- India has been designated *the President of the COP for the next three years.*

Implications and significance:

Having the elephant and the Great Indian Bustard in the list — more formally known as Appendix 1 — would coax countries neighbouring India, where wild animals such as tigers and elephant foray into, to direct more resources and attention to protecting them. *There are now 173 species in the Appendix 1.*

CMS:

In order to protect the migratory species throughout their range countries, a Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), has been in force, under the aegis of *United Nations Environment Programme.*

Also referred to as *the Bonn Convention*, it provides a *global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats* and brings together the States through which migratory animals pass, the Range States, and lays the legal

foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range.

Classification of species:

Under this convention, migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on Appendix I and Parties strive towards strictly protecting these animals, conserving or restoring the places where they live, mitigating obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them. Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation are listed in Appendix II of the Convention.

CMS is only global and UN-based intergovernmental organization established exclusively for conservation and management of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range.

What are migratory species? Why protect them?

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

Sham Singh Attariwala:

- Sham Singh Attariwala (1790 – 1846) was a general of the Sikh Empire.
- Attariwala participated in many campaigns, including *the Battles of Multan, Kashmir and the Frontier Province*.
- Owing to his courage and influence over the Khalsa army, Sham Singh was nominated to *the Council of Regency* set up by Maharani Jind Kaur for the minor sovereign Maharaja Duleep Singh.

- During *the first Anglo-Sikh war*, he crossed the Sutlej, vowing to lay down his life rather than return in defeat.

174th death anniversary of Sikh General Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala observed on Feb 10th.

Chindu Yakshaganam:

Chindu Yakshaganam, a.k.a Chindu Bhagavatam is a form of theatre practised by members of *the Chindu Madiga community*.

- It is a form of entertainment in villages across Telangana, with the artists skilfully depicting classic tales from the epics and entertaining the masses.
- The art form probably started when people enacted acts of hunting, wars and other acts of valour.
- The *Chindu community* has traditionally been a nomadic community.

Gagarin Research and Test Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC):

Four Indian pilots have begun astronaut training here.

The full programme includes basic or generic astronaut training followed by activities specific to *the first Indian human space mission, Gaganyaan*.

At the end of all training modules in India and Russia, *one or two of the four will be finally named to circle the earth in the first crewed Gaganyaan, which is planned around 2022*.

Integrated Air Defence Weapon System:

- The *Integrated Air Defence Weapon System, also known as the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System (NASAMS)*, provides integrated air missile defence and is currently deployed around Washington, DC.
- *The IADWS system includes radar, launchers, targeting, and guidance*

systems, advanced medium-range air-to-air missile (AMRAAM) and Stinger missiles, and related equipment and support.

Why in News?

The U.S. Department of State has approved the potential sale of a \$1.867 billion Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) to India.

J.R.D. Tata:

It was on February 10, 1929 that India got its first pilot in Jehangir R.D. Tata, who qualified with number 1 on his flying licence, giving birth to Indian aviation.

- R.D's licence, then called an 'aviators certificate', was issued by *The Aero Club of India and Burma*, an associate of the Royal Aero Club of Great Britain, which was authorised to issue licences by *the British Empire's Federation Aeronautique Internationale*.
- *The Aero Club of India and Burma* was recognised by *Federation Aeronautique Internationale* as a sporting authority.
- Though not the first to register, J.R.D was the first Indian to pass out with 'No. 1' endorsed on his flying licence. *Purushottam Meghji Kabali* is by various aviator accounts considered to be the first Indian pilot.

Exercise AJEYA WARRIOR – 2020:

The fifth edition of the *Joint Military Exercise AJEYA WARRIOR – 2020* between India and the United Kingdom will be conducted at Salisbury Plains, United Kingdom in February 2020.

- The aim of this exercise is to conduct company level joint training with emphasis on counter terrorists operation in urban and semi-urban areas.
- The first edition of the exercise was conducted in 2013 at Belgaum,

World Pulses Day:

- Established by the *Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)* to recognize the importance of pulses as a global food.
- It has been designated on February 10 each year since 2019 by the seventy-third session of the *United Nations General Assembly* on December 20, 2018.

Safer Internet Day (February 11 is being observed as Safer Internet Day (SID))

The SID initiative first began in Europe, but is now recognised in around 150 countries worldwide. To increase awareness about emerging online issues, such as cyberbullying, and chooses a topic reflecting current concerns.

- This year, the theme is "Together for a better internet".
- It is organised by the Insafe/INHOPE network of awareness centres, that is spread across 30 countries and is funded by the Connecting Europe Facility program (CEF) of the EU.
- In India, the New Delhi-based NGO *DISC (Developing Internet Safe Community) Foundation* is the SID Committee.

Storm Ciara:

- It is a latest storm to hit Northern Europe.
- It is expected to hit Ireland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Germany.
- In Germany, it is being referred to as 'Sabine'. The storm has two names because there isn't yet a pan-European system in place for labeling weather systems.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science: (February 11 was the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.)

It was established by *the United Nations* to promote equal access to and participation in science for women and girls.

1. According to a 2018 fact sheet prepared by UNESCO on women in science, *just 28.8% of researchers are women.*
2. It defines *researchers as “professionals engaged in the conception or creation of new knowledge”.* In India, this drops to 13.9%.
3. Between 1901 and 2019, 334 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to 616 Laureates in Physics, Chemistry and Medicine, of which *just 20 have been won by 19 women. The double Laureate is Marie Curie.*
4. In 2019, the American mathematician Karen Uhlenbeck became *the first woman to win the Abel Prize*, following 16 male mathematicians.
5. *The Fields Medal* so far has also been awarded to only one woman mathematician, the late Maryam Mirzakhani of Iran, as opposed to 59 men since 1936.

Indian nationals living abroad:

- There are *over 1.36 crore Indian nationals living abroad*, as per the latest data.
- *The highest number of Indians abroad are living in the United Arab Emirates*, where the 34,20,000 Indians comprise about one-fourth of all Indians abroad.
- The UAE is followed by Saudi Arabia (25,94,947), the US (12,80,000), Kuwait (10,29,861), Oman (7,79,351), Qatar (7,56,062), Nepal (5,00,000), UK (3,51,000), Singapore (3,50,000) and Bahrain (3,23,292).

UAE	→	34.2 lakh
Saudi Arabia	→	25.9 lakh
US	→	12.8 lakh
Kuwait	→	10.3 lakh
Oman	→	7.8 lakh
Qatar	→	7.6 lakh
Nepal	→	5 lakh
UK	→	3.5 lakh
Singapore	→	3.5 lakh
Bahrain	→	3.2 lakh

UNHCR launches ‘2 Billion Kilometers to Safety’ campaign:

- *The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR* has announced a new global campaign urging people worldwide to cover the total distance travelled by refugees each year – 2 billion kilometers – by running, jogging or walking.
- *The “2 Billion Kilometers to Safety” campaign* vies to encourage people to support refugees by championing individual acts of solidarity.
- The goal is *to acknowledge the resilience and strength of refugees.*

Debts Recovery Tribunals

The Direct Tax Vivaad se Vishwas Bill, 2020 will now cover pending litigation in debt recovery tribunals (DRTs) as well besides those in various courts and tribunals, the Union cabinet said while approving the change to the bill.

What are DRTs?

Debt Recovery Tribunals were established to facilitate the debt recovery involving banks and other financial institutions with their customers. DRTs were set up after the passing of Recovery of Debts due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act (RDBBFI), 1993. Section 3 of the RDBBFI Act empowers the

Central government to establish DRTs. Appeals against orders passed by DRTs lie before Debts Recovery Appellate Tribunal (DRAT).

lakh to Rs 20 lakh for filing application for recovery of debts in the Debts Recovery Tribunals by such banks and financial institutions.

Powers and functions:

1. The Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) enforces provisions of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions (RDDBFI) Act, 1993 and also Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interests (SARFAESI) Act, 2002.
2. The Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) are fully empowered to pass comprehensive orders and *can travel beyond the Civil procedure Code* to render complete justice. A Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) can hear cross suits, counter claims and allow set offs.
3. However, a Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) *cannot hear claims of damages or deficiency of services or breach of contract or criminal negligence on the part of the lenders*. In addition, a Debts Recovery Tribunal (DRT) *cannot express an opinion beyond its domain, or the list pending before it*.
4. The Debts Recovery Tribunal *can appoint Receivers, Commissioners, pass ex-parte orders, ad-interim orders, interim orders apart from powers to Review its own decisions and hear appeals against orders passed by the Recovery Officers of the Tribunal.*

Other key facts:

- A DRT is *presided over by a presiding officer who is appointed by the central govt.* and who shall be qualified to be a District Judge; with tenure of 5 years or the age of 62, whichever is earlier.
- No court in the country other than the SC and the HCs and that too, only under *articles 226 and 227 of the Constitution have jurisdiction over this matter.*
- The central government, in 2018, raised *the pecuniary limit from Rs 10*

Tribes of Tripura

The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) has passed resolutions to codify the customary laws of three tribal clans- Mizo, Kaipeng and Malsom.

What are Autonomous District Council?

As per the Sixth Schedule, the four states viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram contain the Tribal Areas which are technically different from the Scheduled Areas. Though these areas fall within the executive authority of the state, provision has been made for the creation of the District Councils and regional councils for the exercise of the certain legislative and judicial powers. Each district is an autonomous district and Governor can modify / divide the boundaries of the said Tribal areas by notification.

The Governor may, by public notification:

- (a) Include any area.
- (b) exclude any area.
- (c) create a new autonomous district.
- (d) increase the area of any autonomous district.
- (e) diminish the area of any autonomous district.
- (f) alter the name of any autonomous district.
- (g) define the boundaries of any autonomous district.

Constitution of District Councils and Regional Councils:

- (1) There shall be a District Council for each autonomous district consisting of not more than thirty members, of whom not more than four persons shall be nominated by the Governor and the rest shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage.
- (2) There shall be a separate Regional Council for each area constituted an autonomous region.
- (3) Each District Council and each Regional Council shall be a body corporate by the name respectively of the District Council of (name of district) and the Regional Council of (name of region), shall have perpetual succession and a common seal and shall by the said name sue and be sued.

Related- 125th amendment bill:

1. It seeks to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 Autonomous Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the northeastern region.
2. The amendments provide for *elected village municipal councils*, ensuring democracy at the grassroot level.
3. *Powers*: The village councils will be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry.
4. *The Finance Commission* will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them.
5. *Finance*: The Autonomous Councils now depend on grants from Central ministries and the State government for specific projects.
6. *Reservations*: At least one-third of the seats will be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura after the amendment is approved.

Facts for Prelims- other tribes in Tripura:

1. Bhil
2. Bhutia
3. Chaimal
4. Chakma
5. Garo
6. Halam
7. Jamatia
8. Kahshia
9. Kuki
10. Lepcha
11. Lushai
12. Mog
13. Munda
14. Noatia
15. Orang
16. Reang

Major Port Authority Bill, 2020

The Cabinet has given its nod to *Major Ports Authority Bill* that will replace a 1963 law governing country's 12 major ports.

At present the ports are governed by a *ports law of 1963*. The major port sector has not seen the required level of fixed assets creation to pare the country's high logistic costs owing to legacy issues including *the Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP)*'s archaic regulatory grip.

Overview of the Bill:

1. The proposed law is aimed at enhancing the overall efficiencies of the ports.
2. Now 'major ports' will *get to determine the tariffs* for various port-related services as well as the terms for private developers who team up with them.
3. Every port will now be governed by a *Port Authority* which will have powers to fix reference tariffs for various port services.
4. The Bill also proposes the creation of *an adjudicatory board at the apex level for review of port authority's decisions*. It will have the mandate to resolve the disputes between port authorities and the PPP operators.

Major Ports in India:

India has 12 major ports — Deendayal (erstwhile Kandla), Mumbai, JNPT, Marmugao, New Mangalore, Cochin, Chennai, Kamarajar (earlier Ennore), V O Chidambarnar, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Kolkata (including Haldia).



A plan to restore and preserve the nearly 800-year-old *Konark Sun Temple in Odisha* would be drawn up soon, after a two-day conference of experts at the end of the month, Union Culture Minister Prahlad Singh Patel said.

The temple had been filled with sand and sealed by the British authorities in 1903 in order to stabilise the structure. A scientific study was carried out by the Roorkee-based Central Building Research Institute from 2013 till 2018 to ascertain the temple's structural stability as well as the status of the filled-in sand.

Temple:

1. Built in the 13th century, the Konark temple was conceived as a gigantic chariot of the Sun God, with 12 pairs of exquisitely ornamented wheels pulled by seven horses.
2. It was built by King Narasimhadeva I, the great ruler of Ganga dynasty.
3. The temple is included in UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984 for its

architectural greatness and also for the sophistication and abundance of sculptural work.

4. The temple is perfect blend of Kalinga architecture, heritage, exotic beach and salient natural beauty.
5. It is protected under the National Framework of India by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act (1958) and its Rules (1959).
6. The Konark is the third link of Odisha's Golden Triangle. The first link is Jagannath Puri and the second link is Bhubaneswar (Capital city of Odisha).
7. This temple was also known as 'BLACK PAGODA' due to its dark color and used as a navigational landmark by ancient sailors to Odisha. Similarly, the Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the "White Pagoda".
8. It remains a major pilgrimage site for Hindus, who gather here every year for the Chandrabhaga Mela around the month of February.



Slapping Section 144 during CAA protests 'illegal': Karnataka HC

The Karnataka High Court has declared as "illegal" the order passed by the Bengaluru City Police Commissioner imposing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.PC) from December 19 to 21, 2019, ahead of a series of pro- and anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) rallies.

The court held that *the order did not stand judicial scrutiny in terms of the parameters*

laid down by the Supreme Court in the cases of Anuradha Bhasin Vs Union of India and the Ramlila Maidan Incident Vs Union of India.

1. The police commissioner was expected to form an opinion citing reasons in his order for imposing Section 144. But, *in the present instance*, he has only referred to the recommendations made by eight Deputy Commissioners of Police to invoke Section 144 and *'there was no indication of independent application of mind by the Commissioner.'*

What is Section 144?

It gives power to a District Magistrate, a sub-divisional Magistrate or any other Executive Magistrate on behalf of the State Government to issue an order to an individual or the general public in a particular place or area to *"abstain from a certain act" or "to take certain order with respect to certain property in his possession or under his management"*.

This order can be passed against a particular individual or general public. The order can be passed even *ex-parte*.

As held by the Supreme Court, *mere apprehension of danger is not a sufficient ground to curb citizens' rights by invoking Section 144 CrPC.*

Implications:

1. Section 144 restricts carrying any sort of weapon in that area where it has been imposed and people can be detained for violating it. The maximum punishment for such an act is three years.
2. According to the order under this section, there shall be no movement of public and all educational institutions shall also remain closed and there will be a complete bar on holding any kind of public meetings or rallies during the period of operation of this order.
3. Section 144 also empowers the authorities *to block the internet access.*

Duration of Section 144 order:

No order under Section 144 shall remain in force for more than two months but the state government can extend the validity for two months and maximum up to six months. It can be withdrawn at any point of time if situation becomes normal.

As per the Section, the order can be passed only "if such Magistrate considers", that the direction is likely to prevent:

1. obstruction, annoyance or injury to any person lawfully employed.
2. danger to human life, health or safety.
3. disturbance of the public tranquility, or a riot or affray.

Concerns over its misuse:

Contradictory approach of Article 19 (1) (b) and (c) of the constitution and section 144 of CrPC is a *"reflection of a colonial legacy and the unquestioning adoption of most of the provisions of the 1872 Code of Criminal Procedure by the contemporary Indian State"*.

More often than not, the section has been used *to curb even peaceful dissent.*

What next?

The government should make sure that there is *no blanket imposition.*

Existing *checks and balances and judicial oversight are insufficient.* Therefore, a thorough review is necessary.

Public order and right to peaceful dissent—both should be ensured.

Central Administrative Tribunal:

The Central Administrative Tribunal was established by an Act of Parliament namely

Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 as sequel to the 42nd amendment of the Constitution of India inserting Article 323 A.

Functions: The tribunal adjudicates disputes and complaints with respect to Recruitment and Conditions of Service of the persons appointed to the Public Services and Posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or any State or of any other Local Authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India.

Composition: The Tribunal is headed by the Chairman and 65 Members, 33 from Judicial (including Chairman) and 33 from the Administrative stream. The Chairman is normally a retired Chief Justice of a High Court.

Assam is proposing a census of indigenous Muslim groups:

Assam's Welfare of Minorities and Development Department has announced plans to hold a census of four communities broadly known as "Assamese Muslims" —Goriya, Moriya, Deshi, and Julha.

Why? The government plans to set up a corporation to look after the welfare of these communities who number an estimated 16 lakh in Assam's 3.3-crore population.

What is the National Security Act?

Context: The NSA has repeatedly come under criticism for the way it is used by the police.

As per a Law Commission report from 2001, more than 14 lakh people (14,57,779) were held under preventive laws in India.

About National Security Act:

It is a stringent law that allows preventive detention for months, if authorities are satisfied that a person is a threat to national security or law and order. The person *does not need to be charged during this period of detention*. The goal is to prevent the individual from committing a crime. It was promulgated on September 23, 1980, during the Indira Gandhi government.

As per the National Security Act, the grounds for preventive detention of a person include:

1. acting in any manner prejudicial to the defence of India, the relations of India with foreign powers, or the security of India.
2. regulating the continued presence of any foreigner in India or with a view to making arrangements for his expulsion from India.
3. preventing them from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of the State or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order or from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community it is necessary so to do.

Duration:

Under the National Security Act, an individual can be detained without a charge for up to *12 months*; the state government needs to be intimated that a person has been detained under the NSA. A person detained under the National Security Act *can be held for 10 days without being told the charges against them*.

Appeal: The detained person can appeal before a high court advisory board but they are not allowed a lawyer during the trial.

Very Large Telescope

Using the European Space Organisation's (ESO) Very Large Telescope (VLT), astronomers have noticed the unprecedented dimming of *Betelgeuse*, a red supergiant star (over 20 times bigger than the Sun) in the constellation *Orion*. *Along with the dimming, the star's shape has been changing as well*, as per recent photographs of the star taken using the VISIR instrument on the VLT.



What is happening to Betelgeuse and why is it significant?

Betelgeuse was born as a supermassive star millions of years ago and has been “dramatically” and “mysteriously” dimming for the last six months. According to a report in *Sky and Telescope*, among the brightest night time stars, Betelgeuse ranks 10th, but by the last week of December 2019, its brightness had dimmed so low, that the star was ranked as the 21st brightest, “a remarkable decline — and a historic low.”

- Astronomers do not think that Betelgeuse is dimming because it is going to explode. They have other hypotheses that may explain the reasons for Betelgeuse’s change in shape and dimming. The two scenarios they are working on are *a cooling of the surface due to exceptional stellar activity or dust ejection towards earth.*

About VLT:

It is *the world’s most advanced optical instrument*, consisting of four Unit Telescopes with main mirrors of 8.2m diameter and four movable 1.8m diameter Auxiliary Telescopes.

- The telescopes can work together, to form a giant ‘interferometer’, the *ESO Very Large Telescope Interferometer*, allowing astronomers to see details up to 25 times finer than with the individual telescopes.
- *Location:* Atacama Desert, Northern Chile.

- The VLT *consists of four individual telescopes*. They are generally used separately but can be used together to achieve very high angular resolution.
- The four separate optical telescopes are known as *Antu, Kueyen, Melipal, and Yepun*, which are all words for astronomical objects in *the Mapuche language*.

How it works? Significance:

The light beams are combined in the VLTI using a complex system of mirrors in underground tunnels where the light paths must be kept equal to distances less than 1/1000 mm over a hundred metres.

- With this kind of precision the VLTI can reconstruct images with an angular resolution of milliarcseconds, equivalent to distinguishing the two headlights of a car at the distance of the Moon.
- Individual telescope help see objects that are four billion (four thousand million) times fainter than what can be seen with the unaided eye.

GISAT-1 — Geo Imaging Satellite

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is preparing to launch *GISAT-1, a new earth observation satellite*, in the first week of March.

- It will be *the first of two planned Indian EO spacecraft to be placed in a geostationary orbit* of around 36,000 km.
- It will apparently be in a *fixed spot looking over the Indian continent at all times*.
- It will have *high-resolution cameras* which will help to monitor any changes in borders and the overall geographical condition of the country, etc.

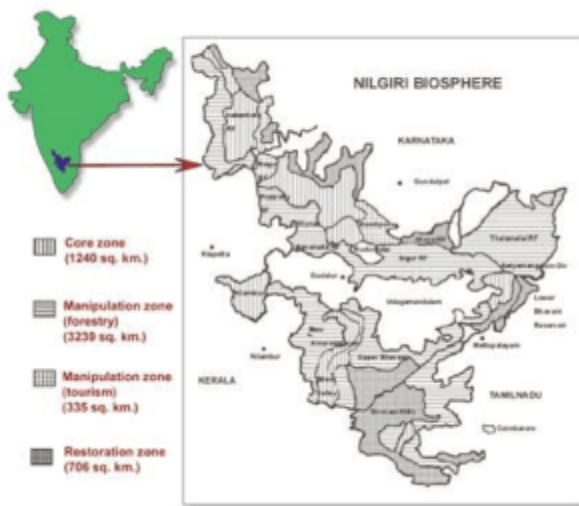
Earth Observation Satellites of ISRO has been successfully able to establish *many operational applications in the country*. Both at Central and State level, there are large number of users who utilise space based inputs

for various purposes. Some of the important missions of ISRO, in terms of IRS series of satellites, that has enabled unique applications of space based imaging are, Cartosat-1 & 2, Resourcesat-1 & 2, Oceansat-1 & 2, Risat-1, Megha-Tropiques, SARAL, Scatsat, INSAT series, and host of other satellites.



Convention on Migratory Species in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

1. Over 50 per cent of the 867 species studied, exhibit a population decline in the long term while 146 are at great risk in the short term.
2. The populations of raptors (eagles, hawks, kites, etc.), migratory seabirds and birds that live in specialised habitats were the most affected in the past decades.
3. The number of birds in the Western Ghats, which is considered one of the world's foremost biodiversity hotspots, also declined by almost 75 per cent since 2000.
4. *Indian Peafowl*, the national bird, has shown a dramatic increase in both abundance and distribution across the country. The number of house sparrows has also stabilised nationwide, although there is still a marked decline in their population in cities.
5. 126 species, including the peafowl, house sparrow, Asian Koel, rose-ringed parakeet and the common tailorbird, are expected to increase in numbers, primarily due to their ability to survive in human habitats.



The research titled 'State of India's Birds 2020' (SoIB), put together by over ten institutions and numerous citizen scientists, was released recently at the ongoing United Nations 13th Conference of the Parties to the

How was the study carried out?

The data for these birds was collected through the citizen science app 'eBird', which received a record ten million entries by approximately 15,500 citizen scientists.

Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology hosts the app, while its India-specific portal is curated and customised by *Bird Count India*, an informal group of birdwatching enthusiasts, ornithologists, naturalists and conservationists dedicated to documenting Indian birds.

Concerns:

This assessment makes it very clear that our birds are in overall decline, in some cases catastrophically so.

Several spectacular birds, many of them endemic to the sub-continent, face a growing threat from loss of habitat due to:

- Human activity.
- The widespread presence of toxins, including pesticides.
- Hunting and trapping for the pet trade.

Categorisation:

1. It categorises 101 species as 'High Conservation Concern for India'.
2. 319 species are classified under the 'Moderate Conservation Concern' These species must be carefully monitored to rapidly detect and act upon signs of continuing decline.

What next?

This information should also translate into many voices being raised for bird conservation, both among conservation bodies, and the general public.

Many urgent policy measures need to be adopted immediately. Conservation action must be taken immediately to identify causes of decline and implement measures to halt and reverse the trend for these species.

Swachh Iconic Places

The 3rd Annual Review meeting on *Swachh Iconic Places (SIP)* was held recently at Baidyanath Dham Deoghar, Jharkhand.

It is an initiative of *Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission*. Aims to take iconic places and their surroundings to higher standards of Swachhata, so that all visitors benefit and also take away home the message of cleanliness. *Implementation of the project:* It is a collaborative project with three other *central Ministries: Urban Development, Culture, Tourism;* all levels in the concerned States and more importantly, Public Sector and Private companies as partners.



Initiatives taken up under Swachh Iconic Places initiative:

Improved sewage infrastructure, installation of Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), drainage facilities, improved sanitation facilities, water vending machines, solid and liquid waste management (SLWM) set-up, structure restoration, lighting arrangements, beautification of parks, roads maintenance, better transport facilities in approach and access areas besides at the main sites.

Places selected:

Phase I iconic places are: Ajmer Sharif Dargah, CST Mumbai, Golden Temple, Kamakhya Temple, Maikarnika Ghat, Meenakshi Temple, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi, Shree Jagannath Temple, The Taj Mahal and Tirupati Temple.

Phase II included Gangotri, Yamunotri, Mahakaleshwar Temple, Charminar, Convent and Church of St. Francis of Assisi, Kalady, Gommateswara, Baidyanath Dham, Gaya Tirth and Somnath temple.

Phase III includes Raghavendra Swamy Temple (Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh); Hazardwari Palace (Murshidabad, West Bengal); Brahma Sarovar Temple (Kurukshetra, Haryana); Vidur Kuti (Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh); Mana village (Chamoli, Uttarakhand); Pangong Lake (Leh-Ladakh, J&K); Nagvasuki Temple (Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh); Ima Keithal/market (Imphal,

Manipur); Sabarimala Temple (Kerala); and Kanvashram (Uttarakhand).

Kangaroo mother care (KMC)

It is *the intervention where babies are placed in skin-to-skin contact with their mothers* and exclusively breast fed. It has been *recommended worldwide for stable low-birthweight newborns*. WHO recommends that it be continued till baby attains a weight of 2.5 kg or till babies wriggle out.

KMC has 3 parts:

(1) Skin-to-skin contact

The more skin-to-skin contact between the baby's front and the mother's chest, the better. For comfort a small nappy is fine, and for warmth a cap may be used. Skin-to-skin contact should ideally start at birth, but is helpful at any time. It should ideally be continuous day and night, but even shorter periods are still helpful.

(2) Exclusive breastfeeding

Direct suckling by the baby from the breasts is all that is needed for most mothers and babies. For very premature babies, expressing milk and addition of some essential nutrients may be needed.

(3) Support to the dyad

Whatever is needed for the medical, emotional, psychological and physical well being of mother and baby is provided to them, without separating them. This might mean adding ultramodern equipment if available, or purely intense psychological support in contexts with no resources. It can even mean going home very early.

Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC)

Sanjay Kothari, Secretary to the President of India, will be the next Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC).

CVC: It is the apex vigilance institution *created via executive resolution*

(based on the recommendations of Santhanam committee) in 1964 but was conferred with statutory status in 2003.

It submits its report to the President of India.

The Commission was set up on the recommendation of *the K.Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption.*

Composition:

Consists of central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners.

They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).

Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.

Removal:

The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.

Aditya- L1 mission

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is preparing to send its first scientific expedition to study the Sun. Named Aditya-L1, the mission, expected to be launched early next year, will observe the Sun from a close distance, and try to obtain information about its atmosphere and magnetic field.

Aditya- L1 mission:

What is Aditya- L1 mission?

It is India's first solar mission. It will be launched using the *Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) in XL configuration*. The space-based observatory will have *seven payloads (instruments)* on board to study the Sun's corona, solar emissions, solar winds and flares, and Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs), and will carry out round-the-clock imaging of the Sun.

Objectives:

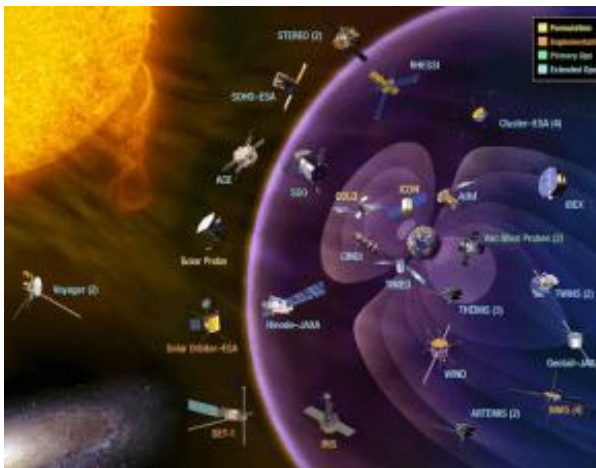
1. Study the sun's outer most layers, the corona and the chromospheres.
2. Collect data about coronal mass ejection, which will also yield information for space weather prediction.

The data from Aditya mission will be immensely helpful in discriminating between different *models for the origin of solar storms and also for constraining how the storms evolve* and what path they take through the interplanetary space from the Sun to the Earth.

Position of the satellite:

In order to get the best science from the sun, continuous viewing of the sun is preferred without any occultation/ eclipses and hence, Aditya- L1 satellite will be placed in the *halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1) of the sun-earth system*.

What are Lagrangian points and halo orbit?



Lagrangian points are the locations in space where the combined gravitational pull of two

large masses roughly balance each other. Any small mass placed at that location will remain at constant distances relative to the large masses. *There are five such points in Sun-Earth system* and they are denoted as L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5. A *halo orbit* is a periodic three-dimensional orbit near the L1, L2 or L3.

Why do we study the sun and the solar wind?

The sun is *the only star we can study up close*. By studying this star we live with, we learn more about stars throughout the universe. The sun is *a source of light and heat for life on Earth*. The more we know about it, the more we can understand how life on Earth developed. It is *the source of the solar wind*; a flow of ionized gases from the sun that streams past Earth at speeds of more than 500 km per second (a million miles per hour).

Disturbances in the solar wind shake Earth's magnetic field and pump energy into the radiation belts, part of a set of changes in near-Earth space known as space weather.

Effects On satellites: Space weather can change the orbits of satellites, shorten their lifetimes, or interfere with onboard electronics. The more we learn about what causes space weather – and how to predict it – the more we can protect the satellites we depend on. *Safety and preparedness:* The solar wind dominates the space environment. As we send spacecraft and astronauts further and further from home, we must understand this space environment just as early seafarers needed to understand the ocean.

Northern European Enclosure Dam (NEED)

A mammoth Northern European Enclosure Dam (NEED) has been proposed to protect millions of people and important economic regions of 15 Northern European Countries from rising seas as a result of climate change.

Two dams of a combined length of 637 km will be constructed.

- First dam will be built between northern Scotland and western Norway, measuring 476 km and with an average depth of 121 m and maximum depth of 321 m.

- The second dam will be built between France and southwestern England, of length 161 km, and average depth of 85 m and maximum depth of 102 m.

Costs involved:

Researchers have estimated the total costs associated with NEED at between €250 billion and €550 billion. If construction is spread over a 20-year period, this will work out to an annual expense of around 0.07%-0.16% of the GDP of the 15 Northern European countries that will be involved.

Implications:

The construction will “heavily impact” marine and terrestrial ecosystems inside and outside the enclosure, will have social and cultural implications, and affect tourism and fisheries.

Need for such measures:

- Such protection efforts are required if mitigation efforts fail to limit sea level rise.
- And, *separating the North and Baltic Seas from the Atlantic Ocean* may be the “most viable option” to protect Northern Europe against unstoppable sea level rise (SLR).
- While NEED may appear to be “overwhelming” and “unrealistic”, it could be “potentially favourable” financially and in scale when compared with alternative solutions to fight SLR.

Way ahead:

Such mega-enclosures could potentially be considered in other regions of the world, including the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Irish Sea, and the Red Sea.

Ra’ad-II missile:

Pakistan conducted a successful flight test of the air launched nuclear-capable cruise missile Ra’ad-II.

- It has a *range of 600 km*.
- The system is equipped with state-of-the-art guidance and navigation systems ensuring engagement of targets with high precision.

Pakistan’s development of the Ra’ad could be seen as an attempt to match India’s BrahMos cruise missile.

Kala Kumbh:

- With an objective *to promote Geographical Indication (GI) crafts and heritage of India*, the Ministry of Textiles is organizing Kala Kumbh – *Handicrafts Thematic Exhibition* in various parts of the country through the Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts).
- The exhibitions are sponsored by *the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)*. EPCH was established under Companies Act in the year 1986-87 and is a *non-profit organisation*, with an object to promote, support, protect, maintain and increase the export of handicrafts.

Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses:

Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses has been renamed as *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses*.

- IDSA is an *autonomous body under the Ministry of Defense*.
- Dedicated to *objective research and policy-relevant studies on all aspects of defense and security*.

Swachh Bharat Mission

The Centre has approved the second phase of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural) with an estimated central and state budget of Rs 52,497 crore.

- The second phase will be implemented on a mission mode between 2020-21 and 2024-25.

- The second phase will focus on Open Defecation Free Plus (ODF Plus), which includes ODF sustainability and solid and liquid waste management (SLWM).
- The ODF Plus programme will converge with MGNREGA, especially for grey water management, and will complement the newly launched Jal Jeevan Mission.
- The programme will also work towards ensuring that no one is left behind and everyone uses a toilet.
- The fund sharing pattern between the Centre and States will be 90:10 for North-Eastern States and Himalayan States and UT of J&K; 60:40 for other States; and 100:0 for other Union Territories, for all the components.
- The Incentive amount provided under SBM(G) to Below Poverty Line (BPL) /identified APLs households shall be up to Rs.12,000 for construction of one unit of IHHL and provide for water availability, including for storing for hand-washing and cleaning of the toilet.
- Central Share of this Incentive for IHHLs shall be Rs.9,000/- (75%) from Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin). The State share will be Rs.3,000/-(25%).
- For North Eastern State, and Special category States, the Central share will be Rs. 10,800/- and the State share Rs.1,200/- (90% : 10%).

SBM- Rural:

Launched on 2nd October, 2014 to accelerate the efforts to achieve universal sanitation coverage and to focus on sanitation.

- The aim is to achieve a clean and open defecation free (ODF) India.
- Implemented by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

Objectives:

It seeks to improve the levels of cleanliness in rural areas through Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities and making Gram Panchayats Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitised.

Incentive:

Eligibility: Incentive as provided under the Mission for the construction of Individual Household Latrines (IHHL) shall be available for all Below Poverty Line (BPL) Households and Above Poverty Line (APL) households restricted to SCs/STs, small and marginal farmers, landless labourers with homestead, physically handicapped and women headed households.

Performance and significance of the mission:

The rural sanitation programme was started on October 2, 2014, when the sanitation coverage in the country was reported at 38.7 per cent.

More than 10 crore individual toilets have been constructed since the launch of the mission and as a result rural area in all the States have declared themselves ODF as on 2nd October, 2019.

Law commission of India

The Union Cabinet has approved the creation of the 22nd Law Commission, which advises the government on complex legal issues.

- The term of the previous law panel had ended in August last year.
- With the cabinet approval, the law ministry will now notify the new panel, which will have a term of three years.

Composition:

1. Apart from having a full-time chairperson, the commission will have four full-time members, including a member-secretary.
2. Law and Legislative Secretaries in the Law Ministry will be the ex-officio members of the commission.
3. It will also have not more than five part-time members.

4. A retired Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court will head the Commission.

Roles and functions:

1. The Law Commission shall, on a reference made to it by the Central Government or suo motu, undertake research in law and review of existing laws in India for making reforms and enacting new legislation.
2. It shall also undertake studies and research for bringing reforms in the justice delivery systems for elimination of delay in procedures, speedy disposal of cases, reduction in cost of litigation, etc.

The law commission of India:

It is an executive body established by an order of the Government of India.

- Originally formed in 1955, the commission is reconstituted every three years and so far, 277 reports have been submitted to the government.
- The last Law Commission, under Justice B.S. Chauhan (retd.), had submitted reports and working papers on key issues such as simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies and a uniform civil code.

Prior to independence, the First Law Commission was established in 1834 by the British Government under the Chairmanship of Lord Macaulay.

Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill

Cabinet clears Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill, aims to regulate IVF clinics.

Overview and key features of the Bill:

- It would lead to the creation of a national board to lay down and implement a code of conduct for people working at IVF clinics.
- Determines the minimum standards of physical infrastructure, laboratory, diagnostic equipment and expert manpower to be employed by ART clinics and banks.
- The bill intends to make genetic testing of the embryo mandatory before implantation for the benefit of the child born through ART.
- It also seeks to streamline the cryo-preservation processes for sperm, oocytes and embryo.
- It also proposes to constitute a national registry and registration authority to maintain a central database and assist the national board in its functioning.
- The bill proposes stringent punishment for those “practising sex selection, sale of human embryos or gametes and running agencies/rackets/organisations for such unlawful practices.

According to a registry maintained by the Indian Council of Medical Research, there are 1,269 ART clinics in India (as on November, 2019). The number swells up to 1,846 when ART clinics and ART banks are taken together. Maharashtra has the maximum number of ART clinics (266) followed by Tamil Nadu (164), Delhi (113), Karnataka (102), Uttar Pradesh (92) and Gujarat (80).

Need for a legislation in this regard:

The need to regulate the ART services is to protect the affected women and children from exploitation. Registration with the ICMR is a voluntary exercise at the moment because of which many clinics don't take the trouble and prefer opacity while offering infertility treatment.

Significance:

The major benefit of the act would be regulation of the assisted reproductive technology services in the country. Consequently, infertile couples will be more ensured and confident of the ethical practices in ART clinics.

What is ART? Why it is in demand?

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), as commonly understood, comprises procedures such as in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), intra-uterine insemination (IUI), oocyte and sperm donation, cryopreservation and includes surrogacy as well.

Social stigma of being childless and lengthy adoption processes have increased the demand for ART in India. It is thus not surprising that the ART industry is expected to grow by a compounded annual growth rate of 10%.

Changes in Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana To Make It Optional For Farmers

Cabinet Approves Changes in Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana to address the existing challenges in implementation.

Changes approved:

1. Allocation of business to Insurance Companies to be done for three years.
2. Central Subsidy under PMFBY/RWBCIS to be limited for premium rates upto 30% for unirrigated areas/crops and 25% for irrigated areas/crops.
3. Districts having 50% or more irrigated area will be considered as irrigated area/district.
4. Flexibility to States/UTs to implement the Scheme with option to select any or many of additional risk covers/features like prevented sowing, localised calamity, mid-season adversity, and post-harvest losses.
5. For estimation of crop losses/admissible claims, two-Step Process to be adopted based on defined Deviation matrix" using specific triggers like weather indicators, satellite indicators, etc. for each area along with normal ranges and deviation ranges.
6. Enrolment under the Scheme to be made voluntary for all farmers.
7. Central Share in Premium Subsidy to be increased to 90% for North Eastern States from the existing sharing pattern of 50:50.

Benefits:

- With these changes it is expected that farmers would be able to manage risk in agriculture production in a better way and will succeed in Stabilizing the farm income.
- Further, it will increase coverage in north eastern region enabling farmers of NER to manage their agricultural risk in a better way.
- These changes will also enable quick and accurate yield estimation leading to faster claims settlement.

Under the PMFBY, which was launched in February 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is mandatory for loanee farmers to take insurance cover under this scheme. Currently, 58 percent of the total farmers are loanee. Various farmers' body and states were raising some concerns on this.

PMFBY: (Launched in 2016)

Merged schemes include National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS). It aims to reduce the premium burden on farmers and ensure early settlement of crop assurance claim for the full insured sum.

Coverage: The Scheme covers all Food & Oilseeds crops and Annual Commercial/Horticultural Crops for which past yield data is available and for which requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) are being conducted under General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).

Premium:

- 2% for Kharif crops.
- 1.5% for Rabi crops.
- 5% for commercial and horticultural crops.

UK's points-based visa policy

UK has launched the new points-based immigration system, which intends to change the way migrants will come to the UK to work, study, visit or join their family.

- Effective from January 1, 2021, the new immigration system affects the EU citizens, who will now be treated at par with non-EU citizens.
- Non-EU citizens already follow a points-based system to migrate to the UK.

What's a points-based policy?

The implementation of the points-based system does not change the status of those EU citizens already in the UK as per the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and those whose status under EUSS is settled. The points-based immigration system will take effect from January 1, 2021 and will end free movement between the UK and EU, treating both EU and non-EU citizens equally. Under this system, points will be assigned for specific skills, qualifications, salaries or professions and visas will be awarded to those who will have enough points.

How it works?

1. Under this system, both EU and non-EU citizens will need to demonstrate that they have a job offer from an approved sponsor, that the job offer is at the required level and that they speak English.
2. Further, as per the Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) recommendations, salary thresholds have been established.
3. Further, a total of 70 points are required to be eligible to apply, with some tradeable characteristics of the system.

The points will be allotted in the following manner:

Offer of job by approved sponsor (20), job at appropriate skill level (20), speaks English at required level (10), salary of £20,480 (minimum) – £23,039 (0), salary of £23,040 – £25,599 (10), salary of £25,600 or above (20),

job in a shortage occupation (as designated by the MAC) (20), education qualification: PhD in subject relevant to the job (10) and education qualification: PhD in a STEM subject relevant to the job (20). Out of these characteristics, the first three are not tradeable, which means they are absolutely required to be eligible for visa under the points-based system.

What are the advantages of points systems?

The ability to qualify without an employer sponsor- workers entering under the Australian points system are less dependent on their employers and do not need permission to switch between jobs as they do in the UK; as a result, they are expected to have more bargaining power and to operate in a more competitive labour market.

Criticisms:

The most common criticism of points systems is that they often do not require a job offer and if workers do not have employment lined up, it is difficult to know whether they are actually employable. The system relies on the government's perception of what skills are valuable, rather than on the views of the employers who are to recruit them. Other criticisms include the fact that eligibility criteria can be unpredictable if candidate are ranked against each other and a specific number admitted. This is because the bar for admission will be higher in periods when more other people are applying.

India to host AFC Women's Asian Cup in 2022:

This was announced by the Women's Committee of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- The AFC Women's Asian Cup is a quadrennial competition in women's football for national teams which belong to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

- The competition also serves as a qualifying tournament for the FIFA Women's World Cup.

Lockheed Martin helicopters:

Context: Cabinet Committee on Security clears procurement of 24 US multi-role helicopters for Indian Navy.

The 24 Lockheed Martin helicopters will be procured through the foreign military sales (FMS) route from the US government.

- The multi-role helicopters will be equipped with Hellfire missiles and torpedoes, and are meant to help the Indian Navy track submarines in the Indian Ocean, where China is expanding its presence.

Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission

4th anniversary of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission observed. It was Launched from Kurubhat in Rajnandgaon District of Chhattisgarh on *21st February 2016*.

Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission:

Launched in 2016, the programme is designed to deliver catalytic interventions to rural areas on the threshold of growth. It is now a Centrally Sponsored Scheme. Funding: Shared between the Centre and the State in a ratio of 60:40 for Plain area States and 90:10 for Himalayan and NE States. The Mission aims at development of 300 Rurban clusters, in five years. The objective is to give a boost to economic activities, skill development and infrastructure amenities in the regions. Development: Under the mission, the Central government in coordination with the district administration has taken measures to bring about multi-layered phased development of the rural gram panchayats and villages on the lines of urban cities with proper civic amenities keeping the soul of villages intact.

What are Rurban areas? Why develop them?

A 'Rurban cluster', would be a cluster of geographically contiguous villages with a

population of about 25000 to 50000 in plain and coastal areas and with a population of 5000 to 15000 in desert, hilly or tribal areas. These clusters typically illustrate potential for growth, have economic drivers and derive locational and competitive advantages.

The larger outcomes envisaged under this Mission are:

1. Bridging the rural-urban divide-viz: economic, technological and those related to facilities and services.
2. Stimulating local economic development with emphasis on reduction of poverty and unemployment in rural areas.
3. Spreading development in the region.
4. Attracting investment in rural areas.

Interim order on Mahadayi tribunal's award

The Supreme Court has passed an interim order allowing an application by the State of Karnataka to notify the Mahadayi Water Dispute Tribunal's award.

What has the Court said?

The implementation of the award would be subject to the final judgment of the Supreme Court in the civil appeals filed by Karnataka, Goa, and Maharashtra, challenging the allocation of water from the Mahadayi river among them.

What was the tribunal award?

1. August 2018 tribunal award had allocated 13.42 TMC water from the Mahadayi river basin to Karnataka.
2. Maharashtra was allotted 1.33 TMC water while Goa was given 24 TMC in the final decision of the tribunal.

The Karnataka government had petitioned the tribunal seeking the release of 7.56 TMC of water for the Kalasa-Banduri Nala project.

What is Kalasa-Banduri Nala project?

Undertaken by the Government of Karnataka to improve drinking water supply to the Districts of Belagavi, Dharwad, and Gadag. It involves building across Kalasa and Banduri, two tributaries of the Mahadayi river to divert 7.56 TMC of water to the Malaprabha river.



Mahadayi river?

- It is a west flowing river.
- Origin: Degaon village, Belgaum district.
- Called Mandovi in Goa.
- Travels 35 km in Karnataka; 82 km in Goa before joining the Arabian Sea.

What's the dispute?

Goa raised objection to Kalasa-Banduri project planned in 1989. Goa filed a complaint seeking setting up of a tribunal in July 2002. Goa moved the Supreme Court in 2006 seeking the constitution of a tribunal. The Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal was set up in November 2010.

Worldwide Educating for the Future Index (WEFFI) 2019

Worldwide Educating for the Future Index (WEFFI) 2019 report was published by The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Commissioned by the Yidan Prize Foundation. Developed to assess the effectiveness of education systems in preparing students for the demands of work and life in a rapidly changing landscape. Significance: It is the first comprehensive global index to evaluate inputs to education

systems rather than outputs such as test scores and concentrates on the 15-24 age band in 35 economies.

How are countries ranked?

Countries are ranked based on their abilities to equip students with skill-based education. The rankings are based on three categories:

1. Policy environment.
2. Teaching environment.
3. Overall socio-economic environment.

India's performance:

1. Ranked 35th. Jumped five ranks from the 40th rank.
2. Scored 53.
3. India's growth is attributed to the new national education policy introduced and published in 2019.
4. The policy mentions future-oriented skills such as critical thinking, communication and entrepreneurship.

Global performance:

- Finland topped the index followed by Sweden.
- Among the world's largest economies, the US, UK, France and Russia fell back in the index while China, India and Indonesia took steps forward.

Challenges ahead:

1. Inability of the Indian education system to utilise the opportunity of internationalising the higher education system.
2. A decentralised education system.

Species included in Appendix I of UN Convention on Migratory Species:

The Great Indian Bustard, Asian Elephant and Bengal Florican have been included in Appendix I of UN Convention on Migratory Species. This was done at the ongoing 13th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in Gandhinagar (Gujarat).

Asian Elephant:

Found in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. IUCN status: Endangered. It is also listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Great Indian Bustard:

It is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world. Its largest populations are found in the Indian state of Rajasthan. State bird of Rajasthan. It is listed as 'Critically Endangered' on the IUCN Red List. It is also listed in Appendix I of CITES and Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Bengal Floridian:

In India it is found in Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It has been listed as 'Critically Endangered' on the IUCN Red List. The bird is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act of India, 1972 and Appendix I of CITES.

National Rail Transportation Institute (NRTI)

Railway Board of India and the University of Birmingham have announced the launch of a joint masters programme in Railway Systems Engineering and Integration in the academic year 2020-2021 by the National Rail Transportation Institute (NRTI).

- This initiative will benefit NRTI students by providing them access to world-class expertise and facilities in railway systems at the Birmingham

Centre for Railway Research and Education (BCRRE).

- BCRRE will also gain valuable insights into India's transport sector and get involved in related research and development issues in India.

The initiative has been taken under the Centre of Excellence for Next-Generation Transportation Systems which was set up by an MoU between the NRTI and the University of Birmingham in 2019.

National Rail Transport Institute:

It was set up as a deemed to be university and has been operational since 2018 and is India's first to focus on transport-related education, multidisciplinary research and training.

It is situated in Vadodara, Gujarat.

Functions:

1. It is specifically established to create a resource pool of best-in-class professionals for the railway and transportation sector through institutional partnerships for collaborating on developing curriculum, research projects and executive education programs.
2. It aims to develop interdisciplinary Centres of Excellence, bringing together academicians, scientists and engineers from various backgrounds and plans to leverage its academic and industry partnerships and collaborations.

First-ever Khelo India University Games

The first-ever Khelo India University Games will take off in Odisha.

What is it?

- It is an aspirational competition for India's youngsters with the objective of helping them find the balance between sport and education.
- It is the largest ever competition held at the university level in India and will

have about 3500 athletes from over 150 universities across the country taking part in it.

- There will be a total of 17 sports namely archery, athletics, boxing, fencing, judo, swimming, weightlifting, wrestling, badminton, basketball, football, hockey, table tennis, tennis, volleyball, rugby and kabaddi.

Khelo India programme:

Introduced to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level by building a strong framework for all sports played in the country and establish India as a great sporting nation.

- It is implemented by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- Under the scheme, the talented players identified in priority sports disciplines at various levels will be provided annual financial assistance of INR 5 lakh per annum for 8 years.

It will be a Central Sector Scheme (Scheme implemented by the Central Government machinery and 100% funding by the union government).

Kiliki language

On International Mother Language Day (February 21), an official website of KiLiKi language has been launched.

Kiliki language:

The new speech was invented for the terrifying warrior tribe called Kalakeya in the two-part Baahubali franchise. It now has evolved into a language with script grammar and more than 3000 words for everyday communication. It is considered as the world's easiest language. This fictional language was created by popular lyricist and screenwriter Madhan Karky.

International Mother Language Day:

- Observed every year on 21st February since 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

- The idea to celebrate International Mother Language Day was the initiative of Bangladesh.
- It was approved at the UNESCO General Conference (1999) and has been observed throughout the world since 2000.
- The United Nations General Assembly had proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages.
- The Ministry of Human Resource and Development along with educational institutions and language institutions is celebrating the day as the Matrihasha Diwas in the country.

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before any court to the district magistrate having jurisdiction over the area.

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

Recently, a Group of Ministers (GoM) chaired by the Home Minister met to discuss proposed amendments to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) (JJ) Act, 2015.

JJ Act:

To Comprehensively address children in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection.

- It mandates setting up Juvenile Justice Boards and Child Welfare Committees in every district. Both must have at least one woman member each.
- Also, the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) was granted the status of a statutory body to enable it to perform its function more effectively.
- The Act included several new offences committed against children (like, illegal adoptions, use of child by militant groups, offences against disabled children, etc) which are not adequately covered under any other law.
- All Child Care Institutions, whether run by State Government or by voluntary or non-governmental organisations are to be mandatorily registered under the Act within 6 months from the date of commencement of the Act.

Key changes proposed- the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2018:

- The Bill provides that instead of the court, the district magistrate will issue adoption orders to address the high pendency of adoption cases.
- The Bill also seeks to transfer all pending matters related to adoption

What is happiness curriculum?

On her upcoming visit to India next week along with US President Donald Trump, First Lady Melania Trump will visit a Delhi government school, where she will attend a happiness curriculum class.

What is it?

The curriculum is one of the flagship schemes of the Delhi government in the education sector launched in July 2018 in all MCD schools.

- The curriculum calls for schools in India to promote development in cognition, language, literacy, numeracy and the arts along with addressing the wellbeing and happiness of students.
- It further says that future citizens need to be “mindful, aware, awakened, empathetic, firmly rooted in their identity...” based on the premise that education has a larger purpose, which cannot be in isolation from the “dire needs” of today’s society.

Objectives:

The objectives of this curriculum include developing self-awareness and mindfulness, inculcating skills of critical thinking and inquiry, enabling learners to communicate effectively and helping learners to apply life skills to deal with stressful and conflicting situations around them.

How is the curriculum implemented?

The curriculum is designed for students of classes nursery through the eighth standard.

Group 1 consists of students in nursery and KG, who have bi-weekly classes (45 minutes each for one session, which is supervised by a

teacher) involving mindfulness activities and exercise. Children between classes 1-2 attend classes on weekdays, which involves mindfulness activities and exercises along with taking up reflective questions.

The second group comprises students from classes 3-5 and the third group is comprised of students from classes 6-8 who apart from the aforementioned activities, take part in self-expression and reflect on their behavioural changes.

The learning outcomes of this curriculum are spread across four categories:

- Becoming mindful and attentive (developing increased levels of self-awareness, developing active listening, remaining in the present).
- developing critical thinking and reflection (developing strong abilities to reflect on one's own thoughts and behaviours, thinking beyond stereotypes and assumptions).
- developing social-emotional skills (demonstrating empathy, coping with anxiety and stress).
- developing better communication skills) and developing a confident and pleasant personality (developing a balanced outlook on daily life reflecting self-confidence, becoming responsible and reflecting awareness towards cleanliness, health and hygiene).

How assessment is carried out?

For the evaluation, no examinations are conducted, neither will marks be awarded. The assessment under this curriculum is qualitative, focusing on the “process rather than the outcome” and noting that each student's journey is unique and different.

Pakistan retained on ‘Grey List’ of FATF

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has given an extension of four months to Pakistan to act against organisations involved in terror financing.

- Pakistan will remain in the Grey List.

Key observations:

- All deadlines given to Pakistan to check terror funding have ended and it has failed to complete its action plan in line with an agreed timeline and failed to check terror funding risks emanating from its jurisdiction.
- If Pakistan fails to prosecute, it will be penalised on terror funding acts by June.

Implications:

1. With Pakistan's continuation in the ‘Grey List’, it will be difficult for the country to get financial aid from the IMF, the World Bank, the ADB and the European Union.
2. This will further enhance problems for the nation which is in a precarious economic situation.
3. Also, there is every possibility that the global body may put the country in the ‘Black List’ along with North Korea and Iran.

Pakistan has been under the FATF's scanner since 2018, when it was put on the greylist for terror financing and money laundering risks, after an assessment of its financial system and law enforcement mechanisms. Pakistan has largely addressed 14 of 27 action items.

What next?

It is theoretically possible that Pakistan is moved out of the greylist. But that would require the votes of at least 15 of the FATF's 36 voting members. But, Pakistan needs to continue to work on eight specific areas, including demonstrating it is “identifying and investigating” all terror financing activity in the country, freezing the funds of all designated terrorists and that its prosecutions result in “effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions” against all terror entities in Pakistan.

FATF:

It is an inter- governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7.

Its Secretariat is located at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) headquarters in Paris. Member Countries: There are 39 member of FATF, representing most financial centres around the world. This includes 2 regional organisations- GCC and EC. The FATF Plenary is the decision making body of the FATF. It meets three times per year.

The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

FATF lists:

Grey List: Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.

Black List: Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.

Chatbot ASKDISHA

The Indian Railways Catering & Tourism Corporation Limited (IRCTC) has powered voice-enabled ASKDISHA Chatbot to converse with customers in the Hindi language. The customers can now ask queries to ASKDISHA in Hindi by voice as well as text.

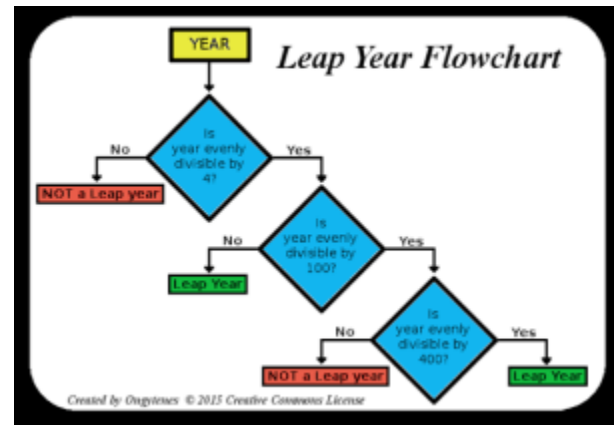
What is ASKDISHA Chatbot?

It is an Artificial Intelligence-based chatbot. It is a special computer programme designed to simulate conversation with users, especially over the internet. Initially launched in the English language in October 2018. Developed by Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC). The aim is to resolve

queries of railway passengers over the internet pertaining to various services offered.

Services provided:

Since its initial launch, passengers seeking help on the reservation of tickets, cancellation, enquiry of refund status, fare, PNR search, train running status, enquiry about retiring rooms and tourism products have been benefited.



Biodiversity management committees (BMC)

The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) is set to tell the National Green Tribunal that it created 243,499 biodiversity management committees (BMC) and 95,525 people's biodiversity registers (PBR) as of January 2020. NGT is hearing a case on the full implementation of the Biodiversity Act, 2002.

What are Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC)?

As per the Biological Diversity Act 2002, BMCs are created for "promoting conservation, sustainable use and documentation of biological diversity" by local bodies across the country.

It shall consist of a chair person and not more than six persons nominated by the local body, of whom not less than one third should be women and not less than 18% should belong to the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes.

- The Chairperson of the Biodiversity Management Committee shall be elected from amongst the members of the committee in a meeting to be chaired by the Chairperson of the local body.
- The chairperson of the local body shall have the casting votes in case of a tie.

Functions:

The main function of the BMC is to prepare People's Biodiversity Register in consultation with the local people. The Register shall contain comprehensive information on availability and knowledge of local biological resources, their medicinal or any other use or any other.

Hunar Haat

WHAT IS IT?

Organised by ministry of minority affairs under "USTTAD" scheme at different parts of the country. It is an exhibition of handicrafts and traditional products made by artisans from the minority communities. These Haat aim to provide market exposure and employment opportunities to artisans, craftsmen and traditional culinary experts.

"Hunar Haat" have become a successful mission to provide employment and employment opportunities and national as well international markets for thousands of master artisans, craftsmen and culinary experts.

What is USTTAD SCHEME?

USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development) scheme aims to preserve heritage of traditional arts and crafts of minority communities and build capacity of traditional craftspersons and

artisans and establish linkages of traditional skills with the global market.

PM KISAN

PM-KISAN Scheme completes one year on February 24, 2020.

So far, over 8 crore 46 lakh farmers covered under Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi. Central Government transfers Rs.6,000 in three tranches every year to beneficiaries.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi:

The scheme was started with a view to augment the income of the farmers by providing income support to all landholding farmers' families across the country, to enable them to take care of expenses related to agriculture and allied activities as well as domestic needs. Under the Scheme an amount of Rs.6000/- per year is transferred in three 4-monthly installments of Rs.2000/- directly into the bank accounts of the farmers, subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income status.

The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiaries rests with the State / UT Governments.

Ambit:

The Scheme initially provided income support to all Small and Marginal Farmers' families across the country, holding cultivable land upto 2 hectares. Its ambit was later expanded w.e.f. 01.06.2019 to cover all farmer families in the country irrespective of the size of their land holdings.

Exceptions:

Affluent farmers have been excluded from the scheme such as Income Tax payers in last assessment year, professionals like Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Chartered Accountants etc and pensioners drawing at least Rs.10,000/- per month (excluding MTS/Class IV/Group D employees).

Similar programmes by states:

1. Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana- MP.
2. The Rythu Bandhu scheme-
Telangana.
3. Krushak Assistance for Livelihood
and Income augmentation (KALIA)-
Odisha.

Jalyukta shivar

Maharashtra government has scrapped the Jalyukta Shivar- the flagship water conservation project.

What is Jalyukta Shivar?

Launched in December 2014 after Maharashtra experienced consecutive droughts. Aimed at rolling out measures that could potentially mitigate water scarcity in the most drought-prone villages in a systematic manner.

Features:

- The project targeted strengthening and streamlining existing water resources like canals, bunds and ponds by arresting maximum run-off rainwater during monsoon.
- Tasks to widen and deepen natural water streams and connect them to nearby water storage facilities like earthen or concrete check-dams was proposed.

What necessitated this?

Nearly 52 per cent of the state's geographical area is prone to drought, either naturally or due to poor rainfall. This includes Marathwada and adjoining areas of Madhya Maharashtra and large parts of Vidarbha.

Was Jalyukta Shivar beneficial?

The scheme had transformed 16,000 drought-prone villages of Maharashtra. The irrigation cover had been increased by 34 lakh hectares. In the process, thereby, increasing the crop yield each year, particularly the kharif crops. Until mid-2019, interventions resulted in

stocking of water measuring 24 lakh trillion cubic metre.

What are joint commands?

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) office is working on a tentative timeline for the establishment of joint commands among the three defence services — Army, Navy and Air Force — beginning with an Air Defence Command.

What are joint commands?

- It is a unified command in which the resources of all the services are unified under a single commander looking at a geographical theatre.
- Meaning, a single military commander, as per the requirements, will have the resources of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force to manage a security threat.

Functions of joint command:

- The commander of a joint command will have the freedom to train and equip his command.
- He will have logistics of all the services at his beckoning.

However, the three services will retain their independent identities as well.

There are two tri-services commands at the moment.

1. The joint command at the moment, the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), is a theatre command, which is headed by the chiefs of the three services in rotation. It was created in 2001 after a Group of Ministers had given a report on national security following the Kargil War.

- The Strategic Forces Command was established in 2006 and is a functional tri-services command.

What is the structure right now?

There are 17 commands, divided among the three services.

- The Army and the Air Force have seven commands each, while the Navy has three commands.
- These commands report to their respective services, and are headed by three-star officers.
- Though these commands are in the same regions, but they are not located together.

The leader of a unified command has control over more varied resources, compared to the heads of the commands under the services now. And the officer commanding will have access to the Air Force's fighter jets and can use them if needed. Through such integration and jointness the three forces will be able to avoid duplication of resources. The resources available under each service will be available to other services too. The services will get to know one another better, strengthening cohesion in the defence establishment.

Do militaries of other countries have such commands?

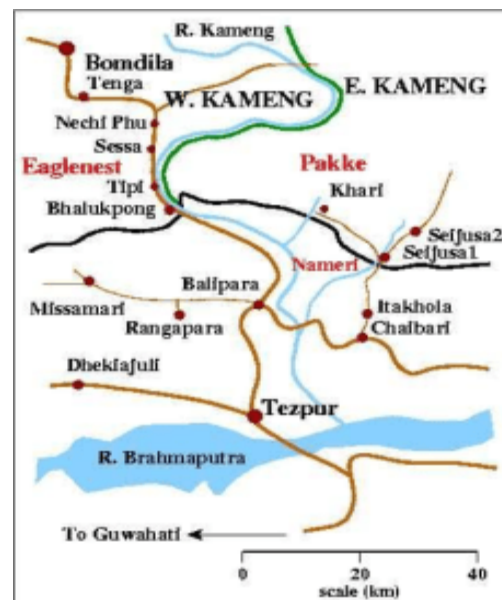
Several major militaries are divided into integrated theatre commands. China's People's Liberation Army has five theatre commands: Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern and Central. Its Western Theatre Command is responsible for India. The US Armed Forces has 11 unified commands, of which seven are geographic and four functional commands. Its geographic commands are Africa, Central, European, Indo-Pacific, Northern, Southern and Space. Cyber, Special Operations, Transportation and Strategic are its functional commands.

Pakke tiger reserve:

Why in News?

Arunachal Pradesh State government is planning to build a 692.7 km highway through the Pakke Tiger Reserve (PTR) in East Kameng district. Named the East-West Industrial Corridor, the highway aims to connect Bhairabhunda in West Kameng district and Manmao in Changlang district along Arunachal Pradesh's border with Assam.

- Pakke Tiger Reserve is also known as Pakhui Tiger Reserve.
- This Tiger Reserve has won India Biodiversity Award 2016 in the category of 'Conservation of threatened species' for its Hornbill Nest Adoption Programme.
- It is bounded by Bhareli or Kameng River in the west and north, and by Pakke River in the east.
- Neighbours: Papum Reserve Forest in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam's Nameri National Park, Doimara Reserve Forest and Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The main perennial streams in the area are the Nameri, Khari and Upper Dikorai. West of Kameng River is Sessa Orchid Sanctuary.



Olive Ridley turtles:

Why in News?

Preparations are almost done at the Rushikulya rookery on the Odisha coast to welcome and protect olive ridley turtles during mass nesting.

Security: To provide security to mother turtles as well as the eggs from human and predator intervention, the forest department is erecting an over 5-km-long fence of metal net from Gokharkuda to Bateswar. This stretch is the most preferred location for mass nesting in the Rushikulya rookery.

- The Olive Ridleys are the second smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- They inhabit warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.
- It is well known for its arribadas or annual mass nestings.
- IUCN Status: Vulnerable.
- Protection under CITES Appendix 1 and the Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.
- Operation Kachhapa: Launched by the Wildlife Protection Society of India in collaboration with the Orissa State Forest Department and the Wildlife Society of Odisha and other local NGOs.



Rohtang pass:

Located on the eastern Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas.

- It connects the Kullu Valley with the Lahaul and Spiti Valleys of Himachal Pradesh.
- The pass lies on the watershed between the Chenab and Beas basins.



Surajkund International Crafts Mela:

What is it?

It is unique as it showcases the richness and diversity of the handicrafts, handlooms and cultural fabric of India, & is the largest crafts fair in the world.

- This is 34th time the Surajkund Mela will be held at Faridabad.
- The Mela is organized by the Surajkund Mela Authority & Haryana Tourism in collaboration with Union Ministries of Tourism, Textiles, Culture and External Affairs.
- Theme state: For the 34th Surajkund International Crafts Mela-2020, the state of Himachal Pradesh has been chosen to be the Theme State.
- The main motto behind this festival is to promote handicrafts, handlooms with the aid of craftsmen invited from all over the country. So basically this

craft festival is a platform for artists across the globe to showcase their culture and talent.



- The snails were found during a field course conducted by Taxon Expeditions at Kuala Belalong Field Studies Centre in Brunei.
- Features: The two-millimetre-long snails have dark grey tentacles, a pale body and a concave shell, whose outer part is greenish-brown.

Places in News- Idlib:

Why in News?

The nine-year-old war in Syria is currently raging in the northwestern province of Idlib, with rapidly escalating tensions between government forces of President Bashar al-Assad and the Turkish military.

Where is it located?

Idlib is a city in northwestern Syria, 59 kilometers southwest of Aleppo, which is the capital of the Idlib Governorate.

Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary:

The decks have been cleared to notify the Malai Mahadeshwara Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka's Chamarajanagar district as a tiger reserve. The approval from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is expected any time now.

- The sanctuary presently has about 20 tigers.
- Once notified, Chamarajanagar district will have the rare distinction in the country of having three tiger reserves. It already has Bandipur and Biligiri Ranganatha Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve within its territorial limits.
- Also, with this, Karnataka will have six tiger reserves, the others being Nagarahole, Bhadra, and Anshi-Dandeli, apart from Bandipur and BRT Tiger Reserves.

Craspedotropis gretathunbergae:

It is a new species of land snail discovered recently.

It is named in honour of Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg.

- The new species comes from tropical rainforests and is sensitive to drought and extreme temperatures.

Idlib province



SERB Women Excellence Award-2020:

- Dr Niti Kumar, Senior Scientist from Division of Molecular Parasitology and Immunology, CSIR-CDRI, Lucknow has received SERB Women Excellence Award-2020.

- This award is given to women scientist below 40 years of age who have received recognition from national academies.
 - The women researchers will be supported by research grant of 5 lakhs per annum for 3 years by Science and Engineering Research Board, Department of Science & Technology, Government of India (SERB-DST).
3. Global Rating: To aim to be rated internationally for its teaching and research as a top hundred Institution in the world over time.
 4. Quality teaching and Research: To provide for high quality teaching and research and for the advancement of knowledge and its dissemination.

Incentives of the scheme:

1. Institutes with IOE tag will be given greater autonomy and freedom to decide fees, course durations and governance structures.
2. The public institutions under IOE tag will receive a government grant of ₹ 1,000 crore, while the private institutions will not get any funding under the scheme.

International Judicial Conference:

Held recently in New Delhi.

- The Conference discussed the changes being introduced by the Government of India to bring Gender Equality in recruiting women in military services, selection process of fighter pilots.
- It also discussed on freedom of women to work in mines at night.
- The Conference also focused on the need for technology to deliver rapid justice.

A high-level meeting to review progress of Institutions of Eminence (IoE) Scheme was held recently.

Launched in order to empower the Higher Educational Institutions and to help them become world-class teaching and research institutions.

Objectives:

1. Excellence and Innovation: To provide for higher education leading to excellence and innovations in such branches of knowledge as may be deemed fit at post-graduate, graduate and research degree levels.
2. Specialization: To engage in areas of specialization to make distinctive contributions to the objectives of the university education system.

Why is it important?

Academic institutions that can impart highest quality education, generate cutting edge research, and attract the best and the brightest from across the globe can have multiplier beneficial effects for the country. So the idea of elevating the best in a sector to an eminent status by granting autonomy is a good one. But to maintain credibility, the process and the selection of these institutions should be above reproach.

Amendments in Arms Act, 1959 and Arms Rules, 2016 notified

Amendments in Arms Act, 1959 and Arms Rules, 2016 notified.

Overview

1. As per the new rules, now International medallists/renowned shooters are allowed to keep additional weapons up to a total of

- twelve under the exempted category, which earlier was seven.
2. If a shooter is renowned in one event, he/she can keep maximum eight (previously it was four), if a shooter is renowned in two events he/she can keep maximum ten (previously it was seven) and if a shooter is renowned in more than two events, he/she can keep maximum twelve (previously it was seven) firearms under the exempted category.
 3. Junior target shooters/aspiring shooters are now allowed to possess two weapons (previously one) of any category in which the person is engaged.
 4. Apart from the above exemptions, shooters are entitled to possess two firearms as normal citizens under provisions of the Arms Act, 1959.
 5. Similarly, by amending the provision under Rule 40 of the Arms Rules, 2016 the quantity of ammunition that can be purchased by the shooters during the year for the practice has also been increased considerably.
 6. Through these amendments, it has also been clarified that no licence is required for Indian citizens for acquisitions, possession of small arms falling under the category of curio.
 7. However, appropriate licence as prescribed would be required for use or to carry or transport such small arms.
 8. Without the endorsement of such firearms in the prescribed licence of the owner, no ammunition shall be sold for their use.

The Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019:

1. It seeks to enhance the punishment for existing offences like illegal manufacture, sale, transfer, etc.; illegal acquiring, possessing or carrying prohibited arms or prohibited ammunition; and illegal manufacture, sale, transfer, conversion, import, export, etc., of firearms.
2. It also proposes to define new offences and prescribes punishment for them, such as taking away firearms from police or armed forces, involvement in organized crime syndicate, illicit trafficking including smuggled firearms of foreign make or prohibited arms and prohibited ammunition, use of firearms in rash and negligent manner in celebratory gunfire endangering human life, etc.
3. It seeks to enhance the period of arms license from three years to five years and also to issue arms license in its electronic form to prevent forgery.

‘A Future for the World’s Children’ report

‘A Future for the World’s Children’ report was recently released by the WHO, UNICEF and the Lancet medical journal. The report calculates the Flourishing Index and Sustainability Index of 180 countries.

How are the countries ranked?

1. Flourishing Index:

Flourishing is the geometric mean of Surviving and Thriving.

- The parameter of Surviving considers maternal survival, survival in children younger than 5 years old, suicide, access to maternal and child health services, basic hygiene, sanitation, and lack of extreme poverty.
- The parameter of Thriving considers educational achievement, growth and nutrition, reproductive freedom, and protection from violence.

2. Sustainability Index:

The Sustainability Index ranks countries on the basis of excess carbon emissions compared with the 2030 target.

Performance of India:

1. India stands 77th (sustainability index) and is at 131st on a ranking that measures the best chance at survival and well-being for children.

2. India has improved in health and sanitation but has to increase its spending on health.

Global Scenario:

1. Children in Norway, the Republic of Korea and the Netherlands have the best chance at survival and well-being.
2. Children in the Central African Republic, Chad, Somalia, Niger and Mali face the worst odds.
3. World-wide the number of obese children and adolescents has increased from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016 — an 11-fold increase, with dire individual and societal costs.
4. The only countries on track to beat the CO2 emission per capita targets by 2030, while also performing fairly (within the top 70) on child flourishing measures are: Albania, Armenia, Grenada, Jordan, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uruguay and Vietnam.

Concerns expressed:

No single country is adequately protecting children's health, their environment and their futures.

Threats: Health and future of every child and adolescent worldwide is under immediate threat from ecological degradation, climate change and exploitative marketing practices that push heavily processed fast food, sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco at children.

Progress reversing: Despite improvements in child and adolescent health over the past 20 years, progress has stalled, and is set to reverse. It has been estimated that around 250 million children under five years old in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential, based on proxy measures of stunting and poverty.

1. Overhaul approach to child and adolescent health, to ensure that we not only look after our children today but protect the world they will inherit in the future.

2. Stop CO2 emissions with the utmost urgency, to ensure children have a future on this planet.
3. Place children and adolescents at the centre of our efforts to achieve sustainable development.
4. New policies and investment in all sectors to work towards child health and rights.
5. Incorporate children's voices into policy decisions.
6. Tighten national regulation of harmful commercial marketing, supported by a new Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

SPICE+ web form

As part of the Government of India's Ease of Doing Business (EODB) initiatives, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has notified a new Web Form christened 'SPICE+' (pronounced 'SPICE Plus') replacing the existing SPICE form.

What is it?

SPICE+ would be an integrated Web Form.

- It would offer 10 services by 3 Central Government Ministries & Departments (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Ministry of Labour & Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance) and One State Government (Maharashtra).
- It aims to save as many procedures, time and cost for Starting a Business in India and would be applicable for all new company incorporations.
- The new web form would facilitate onscreen filing and real-time data validation for the seamless incorporation of companies.

Saudi hosts G20 financial leaders

G20 meeting was held recently in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia).

- Saudi Arabia is the first Arab nation to hold the G20 presidency.
- Theme: "Realizing Opportunities of the 21st Century for All".

Focus areas:

1. Action plan to shield the world economy from the impact of Coronavirus Epidemic.
2. Discuss ways to achieve a fairer global taxation system for the digital era.
3. Discuss global economic outlook and possible policy responses to support growth and safeguard against downside risks.

What is G20?

An informal group of 19 countries and the European Union along with representatives of the IMF and the World Bank.

Represents about two-thirds of the world's population, 85% of global gross domestic product, 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade.

Genesis: Amid 2008 Financial Crisis the world saw the need for a new consensus-building at the highest political level. It was decided that the G20 leaders would begin meeting once annually.

Members:

The members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.

Artemis Program

United States space agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) announced that it will begin to accept applications for astronauts under its Artemis programme from March 2 to March 31, 2020.

Eligibility:

- The space agency has listed several requirements in order to qualify for training under the Artemis programme: one must be a US citizen and have a master's degree in a STEM (Science, technology, engineering and mathematics) field from an accredited institution.
- Candidates must also have completed at least 1,000 hours of pilot-in-command time in jet aircrafts or have two years of related experience.
- Another mandatory requirement is to pass NASA's long-duration spaceflight physical test.

What is Artemis?

Artemis– Acceleration, Reconnection, Turbulence and Electrodynamics of Moon's Interaction with the Sun.

It is NASA's next mission to the Moon.

Objective: To measure what happens when the Sun's radiation hits our rocky moon, where there is no magnetic field to protect it.

Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo and goddess of the Moon in Greek mythology.

Significance of the mission:

With the Artemis program, NASA will land the first woman and next man on the Moon by 2024.

Mission details:

NASA's powerful new rocket, the Space Launch System (SLS), will send astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft nearly a quarter million miles from Earth to lunar orbit.

- Astronauts will dock Orion at the Gateway and transfer to a human landing system for expeditions to the surface of the Moon.
- They will return to the orbital outpost to board Orion again before returning safely to Earth.

Artemis 1, 2 and 3:

The agency will fly two missions around the Moon to test its deep space exploration systems.

NASA is working toward launching Artemis I, an uncrewed flight to test the SLS and Orion spacecraft together, followed by the Artemis II mission, the first SLS and Orion test flight with crew. NASA will land astronauts on the Moon by 2024 on the Artemis III mission and about once a year thereafter.

Scientific objectives:

1. Find and use water and other critical resources needed for long-term exploration.
2. Investigate the Moon's mysteries and learn more about our home planet and the universe.
3. Learn how to live and operate on the surface of another celestial body where astronauts are just three days from home.
4. Prove the technologies we need before sending astronauts on missions to Mars, which can take up to three years roundtrip.

- World's largest species of cave fish has been discovered in Meghalaya's Jaintia Hills.
- The cave fish is around one and a half feet in length and has no eyes and is white due to a lack of melanin pigmentation.

Yongle Blue Hole (YBH):

Why in News?

Carbon more than 8,000 years old lies deep inside a yawning sinkhole in the South China Sea.

YBH:

- It is the deepest known marine cavern.
- Located in the Xisha Islands of the South China Sea (SCS).
- It measures roughly 300 metres from top to bottom.
- Its waters are mostly isolated from the surrounding ocean and receive little fresh water from rainfall, making it a rare spot to study the chemistry of oxygen-deprived marine ecosystems.



World's largest cave fish discovered in Meghalaya:

Elections to Rajya Sabha

The biennial elections for 55 Rajya Sabha seats will take place on March 26, 2020. The announcement was made by the Election Commission recently.

Rajya Sabha:

The Constitution provides that the Rajya Sabha shall consist of 250 members, of which 12 members shall be nominated by the President from amongst persons having special knowledge or practical experience in respect of such matters as literature, science, art and social service; and not more than 238 representatives of the States and of the Union Territories.

How are the members elected?

Elections to the Rajya Sabha are indirect.

1. Members representing States are elected by elected members of legislative assemblies of the States in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote.
2. Members representing Union Territories are chosen in such manner as Parliament may by law prescribe.

Related facts:

- The Rajya Sabha is not subject to dissolution; one-third of its members retire every second year.
- According to Section 154 of the Representation of the People Act 1951, a member chosen to fill a casual vacancy will serve for the remainder of his predecessor's term of office.
- Members of a state's Legislative Assembly vote in the Rajya Sabha elections in what is called proportional representation with the single transferable vote (STV) system. Each MLA's vote is counted only once.

Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)

Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have strongly objected to Karnataka's bid to seek approval for the Mekedatu dam project at the fifth Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) meeting in New Delhi. Following the objections, the CWMA dropped the discussion on Karnataka's application.

What is Mekedatu Project?

A multi-purpose balancing reservoir project over Mekedatu, built at a cost of Rs 5,912, was aimed at solving the drinking water problems of Bengaluru and Ramnagar district. This project was also touted as one that could generate hydroelectricity to meet the power demand in the state.



Why does Tamil Nadu object?

1. The state contended that “the proposed reservoir would affect the natural flows of the river Cauvery.
2. It argued that Cauvery was already a deficit basin and the construction of the project, or any other project “would drastically affect the lower riparian State in getting their due share of waters.

CWMA:

It has been created as per the Cauvery Management Scheme earlier framed by Centre and approved by Supreme Court.

Composition and Powers of CMA:

1. The authority will comprise a chairman, a secretary and eight members.
2. Out of the eight members, two will be full time, while two will be part time members from centre's side.

- Rest four will be part time members from states.

Functions:

- The main mandate of the CMA will be to secure implementation and compliance of the Supreme Court's order in relation to "storage, apportionment, regulation and control of Cauvery waters".
- CMA will also advise the states to take suitable measures to improve water use efficiency.
- It will do so by promoting use of micro-irrigation, change in cropping patterns, improved farm practices and development of command areas.
- The CMA will also prepare an annual report covering its activities during the preceding year.

Role of Central Government:

The central government will provide help in implementation of the modified award in case of any of the state /UT parties (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Puducherry) do not cooperate in implementing the decision or direction of the tribunal. Initially, centre will contribute Rs. 2 crore for the functioning of the authority.

H1N1 infection

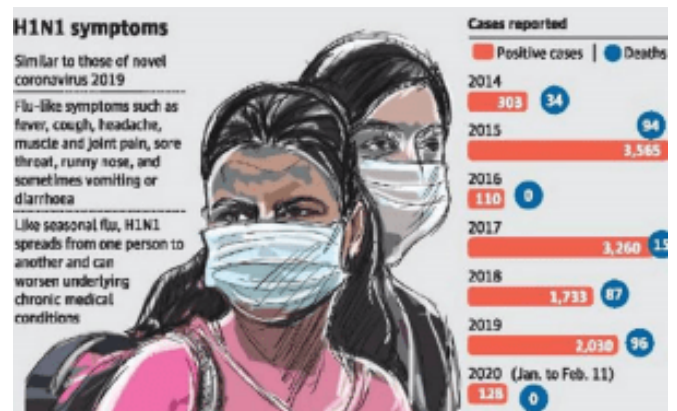
Five judges of the Supreme Court of India have been affected by Swine Flu which is caused by the H1N1 virus.

What is Swine flu (H1N1)?

Also called as pig influenza, swine flu, hog flu and pig flu. It is an infection caused by any one of several types of swine influenza viruses. Swine influenza virus is any strain of the influenza family of viruses that is endemic in pigs. Influenza A (H1N1) virus is the subtype of influenza A virus that is the most common cause of human influenza. It is an

orthomyxovirus that contains the glycoproteins haemagglutinin and neuraminidase.

- Haemagglutinin causes red blood cells to clump together and binds the virus to the infected cell.
- Neuraminidase is a type of glycoside hydrolase enzyme which helps to move the virus particles through the infected cell and assist in budding from the host cells.



Spread and Effects:

- H1N1 influenza (or swine flu) is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs.
- Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine flu have occurred.
- Most commonly, these cases occur in people with direct exposure to pigs (e.g., children near pigs at a fair or workers in the swine industry).
- However, there have been cases of human-to-human spread of swine flu.

Treatment consists of antivirals:

Typical treatment includes rest, pain relievers and fluids. In some cases antiviral medication and IV fluids may be required.

What are Masala Bonds?

Asian Development Bank (ADB) has listed its 10-year masala bonds worth Rs 850 crore on the global debt listing platform of India INX. The proceeds would be used to support local currency lending and investment in India.

India INX is the country's first international exchange, located at International Financial Services Centre, GIFT City in Gujarat. ADB's masala bonds are listed on both Luxembourg exchange and India INX.

What are Masala Bonds?

They are bonds issued outside India by an Indian entity or corporate. These bonds are issued in Indian currency than local currency. Indian corporates usually issue Masala Bonds to raise funds from foreign investors. As it is pegged into Indian currency, if the rupee rates fall, investors bear the risk. The first Masala bond was issued in 2014 by IFC for the infrastructure projects in India.

How does Masala Bonds help bond issuer?

As Masala bonds are issued directly in Indian rupees, the investor needs to bear the exchange rate risks. Rupee rate falls will not affect the issuer of Masala Bonds. In simpler words, as Masala Bonds are rupee-denominated bonds, the risk goes directly to the investor.

Who is eligible to invest in Masala bonds?

Investors from outside of India who would like to invest in Indian assets can invest in Masala bonds. Indian entities like HDFC, NTPC and Indiabulls Housing have raised funds via Masala Bonds.

World Air Quality Report 2019

World Air Quality Report 2019 was released by the pollution tracker IQAir and Greenpeace. The ranking is based on a comparison of PM 2.5 levels. Bangladesh emerged as the most polluted country for PM 2.5. Pakistan, Mongolia, Afghanistan and India followed behind respectively.

PM 2.5 includes pollutants such as sulfate, nitrates and black carbon. Exposure to such particles has been linked to lung and heart

disorders and can impair cognitive and immune functions.

Performance of India:

1. Twenty-one of the world's 30 cities with the worst air pollution are in India.
2. Six cities from India are in the top ten.
3. Ghaziabad, an area close to New Delhi in northern Uttar Pradesh state, is ranked as the world's most polluted city, with an average PM 2.5 concentration measurement of 110.2 in 2019.
4. National air pollution in India decreased by 20% from 2018 to 2019, with 98% of cities experiencing of varying levels of improvement.
5. The report points to economic slowdown, favorable weather conditions, and efforts towards cleaning the air as reasons behind the decrease.
6. The report also points India's launch of the country's first National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) which aims to reduce PM 2.5 and the bigger particulate PM 10 air pollution in 102 cities by 20-30% by 2024 compared to 2017 levels.

MOST POLLUTED CITIES IN 2019

Rank	City	PM2.5 (micrograms/cu. m)
1	Ghaziabad (India)	110.2
2	Hotan (China)	110.1
3	Gujranwala (Pak)	105.3
4	Faisalabad (Pak)	104.6
5	Delhi (India)	98.6
6	Noida (India)	97.7
7	Gurgaon (India)	93.1
8	Raiwind (Pak)	92.2
9	Greater Noida (India)	91.3
10	Bandhwari (India)	90.5

South Asia:

1. South Asia continues to be of particular concern, with 27 of the 30 most polluted cities in India, Pakistan or Bangladesh.
2. However, South Asia has seen improvements from the previous year.
3. Chinese cities have overall seen marked improvements in recent years, with average concentrations of pollutants falling 9% from 2018 to 2019, according to the report.

Climate crisis and urbanization:

There are clear indications that climate change can directly increase the risk of exposure to air pollution.

- It impacts air quality in many cities through desertification and increased frequency of forest fires and sandstorms.
- Greenhouse gas emissions, with the burning of fossil fuel a key driver of the climate crisis, is also a major cause of dirty air.
- Many countries are still dependent on coal for their energy production, the biggest contributor to PM 2.5 emissions.
- Exacerbating the problem is rapid urbanization in industrializing Southeast Asian cities, which is also a major cause of air pollution and poses severe challenges to managing PM 2.5 levels.

Effects of air pollution:

- According to the World Health Organization, air pollution causes an estimated 7 million premature deaths a year globally, mainly as a result of increased mortality from cardiovascular diseases, cancers and respiratory infections.
- It is estimated that more than 80% living in urban areas which monitor air pollution are exposed to air quality levels that exceed WHO guideline limits, with low- and middle-income countries most at risk.

Rank	Country	PM2.5 (micrograms/cu. m)	Population
1	Bangladesh	83.30	166 mn
2	Pakistan	65.81	201 mn
3	Mongolia	62.00	3 mn
4	Afghanistan	58.80	36 mn
5	India	58.08	1,354 mn

Rakhigarhi

Centre is moving ahead with its plan to develop Rakhigarhi as a tourist hub and set up a museum.

As part of encroachment removal at the Rakhigarhi heritage site, 152 households are being shifted to flats.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the government's plan to fund five on-site museums, including the under-construction museum initiated by the Haryana government at Rakhigarhi, in her Budget speech on February 1.

Other sites mentioned in the Budget — Hastinapur in Uttar Pradesh, Shivsagar in Assam, Dholavira in Gujarat and Adichanallur in Tamil Nadu.

What's the issue now?

Rakhigarhi's rise as a site of ancient curiosity has disrupted the villager's life to an extent. The ASI has been able to get under its control just 83.5 acres of the 350-hectare site that spans 11 mounds, after first taking over the site in 1996, due to encroachments and pending court cases.

About Rakhigarhi:

Rakhigarhi, in Haryana, became an archaeological hotspot when Amarendra Nath, former director of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), undertook excavations at the site in 1997.

- The ASI team unearthed a fire altar, parts of a city wall, drainage structures as well as a hoard of semi-precious beads.
- Villagers subsequently began to see the significance of the terracotta shards that littered Rakhigarhi.
- It is a 5,000-year-old site that showcases continuity from the Harappan age to the present times. The village also has havelis that are a couple of hundred years old.
- The site is located in the Sarasvati river plain,

some 27 km from the seasonal Ghaggar river.

- In May 2012, the Global Heritage Fund, declared Rakhigarhi one of the 10 most endangered heritage sites in Asia.



Police and public order in Delhi

The Delhi High Court has issued a series of directions to the Delhi police, the State government and other agencies for providing all necessary assistance to those affected by the violence in northeast Delhi.

- The directions were given on a petition seeking police protection for the safe passage of the injured persons from Al Hind Hospital to other nearest hospitals.

More than 20 people have been killed in Delhi's worst-ever communal violence since 1984 which resulted in clashes that began over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on Sunday evening.

What's the issue?

A key question now being raised is whether or not the government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi can take any action to bring law and order under control. The answer is not a straightforward one, with many factors coming into play.

What the elected legislature in Delhi cannot do?

The NCT of Delhi, under Article 239 AA, has been given a special status.

It gives powers of law-making and administration to an elected legislature and the council of ministers. But, puts two subjects — public order and police — directly under the Union government, however, with exceptions— Two sections of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) —129 & 130 — give the Executive Magistrate certain powers relating to “unlawful assembly”.

Under these two limited powers, the Executive Magistrate, who reports to the Chief Minister, can issue orders relating to public security.

What is CrPC 129?

If a group is found in unlawful assembly under Section 129 CrPC, the Executive Magistrate can issue orders to these persons to disperse. If this fails, the magistrate can use the civil force — which is the police.

What is CrPC section 130?

If efforts under CrPC section 129 fail, the Executive Magistrate, under Section 130 CrPC, can call an officer of the armed forces of the Union to disperse the assembly. This section states that it can be invoked for “public security”.

However, this Section empowers the officer to decide, on his own, the manner in which the unlawful assembly has to be dispersed by forces under his command.

How are these powers different from the powers of a full fledged state?

While public order and police are under the state list, the state government may request the Union government to make available armed forces to help restore public order.

Even in circumstances where public disorder is not so serious as to fall in the category of an “internal disturbance” as defined in Article 355 of the Constitution, the Union Government may accede to the request.

But, as per CrPC 130, except for the limited purpose of dispersing an “unlawful assembly” and arresting its members, neither the state government nor any authority under it has been conferred by the Constitution any legal right to call the armed forces while dealing with a public disorder or “internal

disturbance”.

Also, the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution states that use of the armed forces in the maintenance of public order is outside the purview of the states.

Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2020

Union Cabinet has approved the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2020.

The amended bill is reformed version of the draft legislation which was passed by Lok Sabha in August 2019 but its provisions, including that only a close relative of a couple can be a surrogate mother, had invited criticism.

What is Surrogacy?

- ❖ It is an effective method to treat infertility.
- ❖ In this method another woman carries the child in her womb for nine months and gives birth to it.
- ❖ It can be called as an arrangement between the intended parents and the surrogate mother.



The bill incorporates all recommendations made by a Rajya Sabha select committee, which studied an earlier version of the draft legislation, and is aimed at banning commercial surrogacy and allowing altruistic surrogacy.

Features of the Bill:

1. It allows any “willing” woman to be a surrogate mother and proposes that widows and divorced women can also benefit from its provisions, besides infertile Indian couples.
2. The bill also proposes to regulate surrogacy by establishing National Surrogacy Board at the central level and, State Surrogacy Board and appropriate authorities in states and Union Territories respectively.
3. The proposed insurance cover for surrogate mother has now been increased to 36 months from 16 months provided in the earlier version.
4. Commercial surrogacy will be prohibited

including sale and purchase of human embryo and gametes.

5. Ethical surrogacy to Indian married couples, Indian-origin married couples and Indian single woman (only widow or divorcee between the age of 35 and 45 years) will be allowed on fulfilment of certain conditions.

Ease 3.0 for tech-enabled banking

FM Nirmala Sitharaman launches Ease 3.0 for tech-enabled banking.

This move is expected to change the customer’s experience at the Public Sector Banks (PSBs).

What is it?

Ease (Enhanced Access and Service Excellence) 3.0 reform agenda aims at providing smart, tech-enabled public sector banking for aspiring India.

New features that customers of public sector banks may experience under EASE 3.0 reforms agenda include facilities like:

1. Palm Banking for “End-to-end digital delivery of financial service”.
2. “Banking on Go” via EASE banking outlets at frequently visited spots like malls, stations, complexes, and campuses.

The idea behind EASE 3.0 agenda:

The Ministry has the idea of establishing paperless and digitally-enabled banking at places where people visit the most.

The government aims to focus on digitalization in the Public Sector Banks (PSBs) among themes that include responsible banking, PSBs as Udyami Mitra, customer responsiveness, credit take-off, and deep financial inclusions.

Background:

PSB Reforms EASE Agenda is a common reform agenda for PSBs aimed at institutionalizing clean and smart banking. It was launched in January 2018, and the subsequent edition of the program — EASE 2.0 built on the foundation laid in EASE 1.0 and furthered the progress on reforms. In EASE 2.0, the government had proposed pushing liquidity in the public sector banks, reconstituting the management committee and possible mergers among the ideal partners in the Indian banking sector.

National Technical Textiles Mission

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the setting up of a National Technical Textiles Mission at an total outlay of ₹1,480 Crore.

To position the country as a global leader in technical textiles and increase the use of technical textiles in the domestic market.

Facts:

The Mission will be implemented for four years from 2020-2021 and will have four components:

1. The first component will focus on research and development and innovation and will have an outlay of ₹1,000 crore. The research will be at both, fibre level and application-based in geo, agro, medical, sports and mobile textiles and development of bio-degradable technical textiles.
2. The second component will be for promotion and development of market for technical textiles. The Mission will aim at taking domestic market size to \$40 billion to \$50 billion by 2024.
3. The third component will focus on export promotion so that technical textile exports from the country reach from the ₹14,000 crore now to ₹20,000 crore by 2021-2022 and ensure 10% average growth every year till the Mission ends.
4. The last component will be on education, training and skill development.

What are technical textiles?

Technical textiles are defined as textile materials and products manufactured primarily for their technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic and decorative characteristics.

Technical textiles include textiles for automotive applications, medical textiles, geotextiles, agrotextiles, and protective clothing.

Clause 6 in Assam Accord

Three major communities, perceived to be migrants in Assam, have expressed concern over the recommendations of the high-powered committee on the implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord of 1985. These communities are the Bengal-origin or Bengali-

speaking Muslims (referred to as Miyas), the Bengali Hindus and the Gurkhas.

What are the concerns being expressed?

Implementation of this clause would lead to exclusion of these communities from the list of indigenous communities. More than 80% of these have been living in Assam for centuries.

A 13-member panel set up to study the implementation of the Assam Accord's Clause 6, which relates to the protection of the Assamese identity, recently submitted its report.

What is Clause 6?

Clause 6 states: "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."

However, no government has passed any legislation since 1985 to provide constitutional protection to the Assamese people as envisaged under Clause 6.

Assam Accord:

Signed between the Union government and leaders of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) in 1985, the Assam Accord came at the end of a six-year-long agitation demanding the expulsion of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

German court scraps ban on assisted suicide:

Germany's highest court has ruled that a 2015 law banning professional assisted suicide was unconstitutional, saying in a landmark decision that people have "the right to a self-determined death".

Significance: The ruling is a major victory for the terminally ill patients, doctors and assisted suicide organisations who brought the case, complaining that the existing law went too far. The court said the right to a self-determined death included "the freedom to take one's life and seek help doing so".

What is Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR)?

The Mizoram government has sought the revision of the boundary with Assam, based on the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR), 1873 and the Inner Line of the Lushai Hills Notification of 1993.

What is BEFR?

The BEFR allows Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland not to let non-resident Indians in without an inner-line permit for a temporary stay.

Facts:

- Mizoram used to be the Lushai Hills district of Assam before being made a Union Territory in 1972 and a State in 1987.
- Mizoram shares a 123-km border with southern Assam and has been claiming a 509-square mile stretch “occupied” by the neighbouring State.

ICoSDiTAUS-2020:

It is an international conference on standardisation of Diagnosis and Terminologies in AYUSH held recently in Delhi.

The Conference adopted the “New Delhi Declaration on Collection and Classification of Traditional Medicine (TM) Diagnostic Data”.

• The declaration emphasised the commitment of the countries to Traditional Medicine as a significant area of health care. It further sought the opportunity for including traditional systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha in the International Classification of Diseases of WHO, which is the standard diagnostic tool for health management across the world.

ICoSDiTAUS-2020 is the biggest ever international event dedicated to standardisation of Diagnosis and Terminologies of Traditional Medicine in terms of the broad level of participation covering virtually all the continents.

The conference succeeded in taking forward the objective of expanding the International

Classification of Diseases (ICD) into the realm of traditional medicine systems at a conceptual level with all the countries endorsing.

Indradhanush:

Indradhanush is a joint military exercise between the air forces of India and the United Kingdom.

The focus of this edition of the exercise, being held in India, is ‘Base Defence and Force Protection’.

RAISE 2020:

It is a maiden summit on Artificial Intelligence to spearhead social empowerment, inclusion and transformation.

• The event named RAISE 2020 ‘Responsible AI for Social Empowerment 2020’ will be held in April in New Delhi.

• This is India’s first Artificial Intelligence summit to be organized by the Government in partnership with the industry and the academia.

• The summit will be a global meeting of minds to exchange ideas and charter a course to use AI for social empowerment, inclusion and transformation in key areas like healthcare, agriculture, education and smart mobility amongst other sectors.

Market Intelligence and Early Warning System (MIEWS) Web Portal:

The MIEWS Dashboard and Portal is a ‘first-of-its-kind’ platform for ‘real time monitoring’ of the prices of tomato, onion and potato (TOP).

It also generates alerts for intervention under the terms of Operation Greens (OG) scheme.

• The portal would disseminate all relevant information related to TOP crops such as prices and arrivals, area, yield and production, imports and exports, crop calendars, crop agronomy, etc. in an easy to use visual format.

• The MIEWS system is designed to provide advisories to farmers to avoid cyclical production as well as an early warning in situations of gluts.

CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQ

1. Who among the following has recently won men's singles title in Australian Open 2020?
 - a. Rafael Nadal
 - b. Novak Djokovic
 - c. Roger Federer
 - d. Daniil Medvedev

2. Who is the winner of the Australian Open 2020 women's single title?
 - a. Ashleigh Barty
 - b. Simona Halep
 - c. Belinda Bencic
 - d. Sofia Kenin

3. Which South Asian country has recently declared National Emergency due to massive locusts attack?
 - a. Pakistan
 - b. Nepal
 - c. India
 - d. Sri Lanka

4. Which Indian state has recently found a third Coronavirus infected person in the country?
 - a. Bihar
 - b. Rajasthan
 - c. Odisha
 - d. Kerala

5. Who has been recently appointed the Prime Minister of Iraq?
 - a. Amzad Khatoon
 - b. Al-Hamza Pashtoon
 - c. Mohammed Allawi
 - d. Mehtarim Saleh

6. Which country has officially rejoined in the Commonwealth recently?
 - a. Maldives
 - b. Bangladesh
 - c. Bhutan
 - d. Nepal

7. Who has among the following recently appointed as Indian High Commissioner to Canada?
 - a. Sudesh Burman
 - b. Kamal Kishore
 - c. Ajay Bisaria
 - d. Sanjay Sinha

8. When was World Wetland Day 2020 recently observed?
 - a. 02 Feb
 - b. 02 Jan
 - c. 02 December
 - d. 15 January

9. What is the new Income Tax Rate for those falling in the salary bracket of Rs 5-10 lakh?
 - a) 10 percent
 - b) 5 percent
 - c) 8 percent
 - d) 20 percent

10. Under the Union Budget 2020, the government has allocated how much amount for the education sector?
 - a) Rs 99300 crore
 - b) Rs 83500 crore
 - c) Rs 77900 crore
 - d) Rs 85300 crore

11. Which among the following sites will not be transformed into an iconic site under the Government's proposal in Union Budget 2020?
 - a) Panipat
 - b) Rakhigarhi
 - c) Hastinapur
 - d) Shivsagar

12. When is World Cancer Day observed every year?
 - a) 5th February
 - b) 4th February
 - c) 3rd February
 - d) 2nd February

13. What is the name of the annual joint military exercise that began recently in Meghalaya between India and Bangladesh?
 - a) GATI-IX
 - b) DRISHTI-IX
 - c) AROHAN-IX
 - d) SAMPRITI-IX

14. Which Indian state has declared coronavirus outbreak as 'state disaster' after three confirmed cases?

- a) Kerala
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) West Bengal
- d) Odisha

15. Who among the following was recently appointed as India's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka?

- a) Ravi Pujari
- b) Ashwani Ranjan
- c) Gopal Baglay
- d) Devendra Awasthi

16. Which nation has discovered a massive new natural gas reserve?

- a) Qatar
- b) UAE
- c) Saudi Arabia
- d) Kuwait

17. The Union Government has ruled out disinvestment in which among the following public sector enterprises?

- a) BHEL
- b) Air India
- c) LIC
- d) BPCL

18. A DNA Analysis Centre has been set up under the Nirbhaya Fund scheme in this city.

- a) Pune
- b) New Delhi
- c) Bengaluru
- d) Chandigarh

19. What is the name of the trust that will be set up for the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya?

- a) Shri Ram Mandir Seva Trust
- b) Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra
- c) Shri Ram Sewa Samiti
- d) Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Kalyan Kshetra

20. Which international magazine has named RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das as the 'Central Banker of the Year-2020'?

- a) Time
- b) The Economist
- c) The Banker
- d) The Fortune

21. Which among the following South-Asian countries recently developed a new classic swine fever vaccine?

- a) Sri Lanka
- b) India
- c) Bangladesh
- d) Afghanistan

22. Which state has launched the Janasevaka scheme?

- a) Telangana
- b) Maharashtra
- c) Madhya Pradesh
- d) Karnataka

23. Who has become the first Indian no.4 cricketer to hit a century outside India in four years?

- a) Mayank Aggarwal
- b) Shardul Thakur
- c) Rishab Pant
- d) Shreyas Iyer

24. Which country recently introduced 'Sustainable Development Tax' for regional tourism?

- a) Bhutan
- b) Myanmar
- c) Nepal
- d) Tibet

25. Daniel Arap Moi passed away on February 4, 2020. He was the longest-serving president of which nation?

- a) Zambia
- b) Egypt
- c) Kenya
- d) The Gambia

26. According to the World Health Organisation, the cases of which disease can rise to 81 percent by 2040?

- a) Tuberculosis
- b) Cancer
- c) H1N1
- d) HIV

27. Which Indian city recently received UNESCO World Heritage City Certificate?

- a) Jaipur
- b) Hyderabad
- c) Agra
- d) Gwalior

28. Where will India's 13th major port be constructed?

- a) Gujarat
- b) Maharashtra
- c) Rameshwaram
- d) Rajasthan

29. Who among the following will head the recently constituted Ram Mandir Trust by the central government?

- a) Kameshwar Chauhal
- b) Mahant Narendra Das
- c) K Prasaran
- d) Dr. Anil Mishra

30. Who among the following was recently awarded 'Kishore Kumar Samman' by Madhya Pradesh Government?

- a) Waheeda Rehman
- b) Hema Malini
- c) Asha Parekh
- d) Jaya Prada

31. Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas passed away at the age of 103 years on February 5, 2020. Which among the following is not one of his movies?

- a) Spartacus
- b) The Vikings
- c) The American President
- d) The Bad and the Beautiful

32. The Union Government has set which year as the target for installing 100 GigaWatt solar power?

- a) March 2023
- b) December 2022
- c) December 2021
- d) October 2021

33. WHO has called for how much donation to fight novel coronavirus?

- a) USD 675m
- b) USD 785m
- c) USD 950m
- d) USD 730m

34. How many MoUs were signed between Indian and Russian companies at DefExpo 2020?

- a) 12
- b) 10
- c) 9
- d) 11

35. Who among the following won the International Gandhi Award for Leprosy in the individual category?

- a) Dr. N S Dharamshaktu
- b) Yohei Sasakawa
- c) Damodar Ganesh Bapat
- d) Satya Nadella

36. Who won the International Gandhi Award for Leprosy in the institution category?

- a) World Health Organization
- b) Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation
- c) National Leprosy Eradication Trust
- d) Leprosy Mission Trust India

37. Which country has reported the highest number of novel coronavirus cases outside mainland China?

- a) US
- b) Philippines
- c) India
- d) Japan

38. The military forces of which country have allegedly killed Al-Qaeda's Yemen leader Qasim al-Rimi?

- a) Russia
- b) US
- c) Germany
- d) Japan

39. As per the 6th RBI bi-monthly Monetary Policy 2019-20, the retail inflation hiked to how much in December 2019?

- a) 6.2 percent
- b) 7.4 percent
- c) 8.6 percent
- d) 5.9 percent

40. Which state government will deploy drones to map villages?

- a) Kerala
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) Karnataka
- d) Tamil Nadu

41. Which nation's government collapsed on February 5 after a no-confidence vote?

- a) Georgia
- b) Armenia
- c) Tanzania
- d) Romania

- 42.** US astronaut Christina Koch returned to Earth on February 6 after the record space station mission. Koch spent how many days aboard the International Space Station?
a) 355
b) 268
c) 328
d) 273
- 43.** What is the name of winner who recently won the International Gandhi Award for Leprosy (IGAL) in the individual category?
a) Dr. N S Dharamshaktu
b) Yohei Sasakawa
c) Damodar Ganesh Bapat
d) Satya Nadella
- 44.** Who among the following recently won the IGAL in the institution category?
a) World Health Organization
b) Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation
c) National Leprosy Eradication Trust
d) Leprosy Mission Trust India
- 45.** Which country witnessed most number of Coronavirus cases outside China?
a) US
b) Philippines
c) India
d) Japan
- 46.** Military forces of which country recently killed Al-Qaeda's Yemen leader Qasim al-Rimi?
a) Russia
b) US
c) Germany
d) Japan
- 47.** According to the sixth Reserve Bank bi-monthly Monetary Policy 2019-20, how much retail inflation hiked in December 2019?
a) 6.2 percent
b) 7.4 percent
c) 8.6 percent
d) 5.9 percent
- 48.** What is the name of winner of 'Kishore Kumar Samman' recently conferred by Madhya Pradesh Government?
a) Waheeda Rehman
b) Hema Malini
c) Asha Parekh
d) Jaya Prada
- 49.** Kindly choose the correct movie name of recently died hollywood legend Kirk Douglas.
a) Spartacus
b) The Vikings
c) The American President
d) The Bad and the Beautiful
- 50.** Which year has been set as the target for installing 100 GigaWatt solar power by Government of India?
a) March 2023
b) December 2022
c) December 2021
d) October 2021
- 51.** How much donation World Health Organisation called to fight novel coronavirus?
a) USD 675m
b) USD 785m
c) USD 950m
d) USD 730m
- 52.** Indian and Russian companies signed how many MoUs at DefExpo 2020?
a) 12
b) 10
c) 9
d) 11
- 53.** Which film has become the first non-English film to win the Oscar 2020 award for 'Best Picture'?
a) Parasite
b) The Irishman
c) 1917
d) Jojo Rabbit
- 54.** Who among the following won the Best Actor award in Oscars 2020?
a) Brad Pitt
b) Joaquin Phoenix
c) Will Smith
d) Tom Cruise
- 55.** What is the name of the Indian-origin scientist who is leading the research team to develop the Coronavirus vaccine?
a) RM Kapoor
b) AK Pillai
c) KL Kaletkar
d) SS Vasani
- 56.** Which state government has decided to declare Cauvery Delta Region as a protected

special agricultural zone?

- a) Karnataka
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Andhra Pradesh
- d) Kerala

57. Which state has announced that it will launch an internship scheme for college students?

- a) Gujarat
- b) Madhya Pradesh
- c) Uttar Pradesh
- d) Telangana

58. Which state recently organized a National conference on e-governance 2020?

- a) Delhi
- b) Mumbai
- c) Chandigarh
- d) Patna

59. When National Deworming Day is observed across the country every year?

- a) Feb 10th
- b) Feb 9th
- c) Feb 8th
- d) Feb 7th

60. Who became the first Indian to receive IOC's 'honourable mention'?

- a) Rahul Dravid
- b) Anil Kumble
- c) Pallela Gopichand
- d) Ravi Shastri

61. Under the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry's 'sister cities' initiative, top-performing Varanasi will be paired with which among the following cities?

- a) Amritsar
- b) Aizwal
- c) Diu
- d) Karnal

62. India will host its first-ever cultural festival in collaboration with this nation on February 15-16, 2020?

- a) Russia
- b) France
- c) Israel
- d) Germany

63. How many seats are there in Delhi Assembly?

- a) 60
- b) 67
- c) 70
- d) 80

64. Who is the Delhi BJP President?

- a) Subash Chopra
- b) Gautam Gambhir
- c) JP Nadda
- d) Manoj Tiwari

65. When is World Unani Day celebrated?

- a) February 11th
- b) February 10th
- c) February 8th
- d) February 12th

66. Which state government recently launched Mukhyamantri Pariwar Smridhi Scheme?

- a) Punjab
- b) Bihar
- c) Haryana
- d) Uttar Pradesh

67. Which state government has announced to ban CFL and filament bulbs from November 2020?

- a) Madhya Pradesh
- b) Rajasthan
- c) West Bengal
- d) Kerala

68. When is world pulses day observed every year across the globe?

- a) 8th February
- b) 9th February
- c) 10th February
- d) 11th February

69. Who among the following was recently selected as the best emerging female player of 2019 by FIH?

- a) Julieta Jankunas
- b) Lalremsiami
- c) Frederique Matla
- d) Anita Mandal

70. Which country revealed that it has 'neutralised' 101 Syrian troops?

- a) Turkey
- b) US
- c) Israel
- d) Iran

71. When will Arvind Kejriwal take oath as Delhi Chief Minister?

- a) February 14th
- b) February 16th
- c) February 15th
- d) February 17th

72. What is the new name of coronavirus?

- a) CORONAVIRUS-19
- b) AVID-18
- c) COVID-19
- d) CHID-19

73. Which company was named as the highest profitable PSU in Public Enterprises Survey 2018-19?

- a) Air India
- b) NTPC
- c) BSNL
- d) ONGC

74. According to the RBI notification, who will sign the new one Rupee currency note?

- a) RBI Governor
- b) Finance Minister
- c) Finance Secretary
- d) President of India

75. Which former Jharkhand Chief Minister announced to merge its Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Democratic) Party with BJP?

- a) Arjun Munda
- b) Babulal Marandi
- c) Shibu Soren
- d) Raghubar Das

76. Who recently launched the 'Step with Refugee' campaign?

- a) UNICEF
- b) WWF
- c) OPEC
- d) UNHCR

77. Which Union Territory's Lieutenant Governor recently launched a Financial Inclusion Outreach Campaign?

- a) Ladakh
- b) Jammu and Kashmir
- c) Andaman & Nicobar Islands
- d) Pondicherry

78. Which state has approved Ground Water Act-2020 to improve ground water levels?

- a) Madhya Pradesh

- b) Rajasthan
- c) Gujarat
- d) Uttar Pradesh

79. The UNSC conducted a vote on resolution supporting ceasefire in which nation?

- a) Libya
- b) Turkey
- c) Syria
- d) Yemen

80. Which Indian hill station will host the National Winter Games from March 7, 2020?

- a) Kalimpong
- b) Kufri
- c) Gulmarg
- d) Solang Valley

81. Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra has been renamed after which late Union Minister?

- a) Sushma Swaraj
- b) Atal Bihari Vajpayee
- c) Arun Jaitley
- d) Manohar Parrikar

82. President Ram Nath Kovind presented the President's Colour to which military unit?

- a) INS Vikrant
- b) INS Satlej
- c) INS Shivaji
- d) INS Shivalik

83. Which state government has approved a five day week for government employees?

- a) Uttar Pradesh
- b) Rajasthan
- c) Maharashtra
- d) Madhya Pradesh

84. Which state's Chief Minister has launched 'Anganphou Hunba' programme?

- a) Meghalaya
- b) Manipur
- c) Assam
- d) Nagaland

85. When is World Radio Day celebrated every year?

- a) 11th February
- b) 12th February
- c) 13th February
- d) 14th February

- 86.** When National Women's Day of India is celebrated in the country?
a) 10th February
b) 11th February
c) 12th February
d) 13th February
- 87.** What is the name of world's oldest person who was officially confirmed as the oldest living man by the Guinness World Records on February 12, 2020?
a) Chitetsu Watanabe
b) Chi Hun Saan
c) John Barracks
d) Dai Nippon Meiji
- 88.** Where is the world's biggest cricket stadium being constructed that will be inaugurated by the US President Donald Trump in February 2020?
a) New York
b) Gujarat
c) Sydney
d) Barcelona
- 89.** Who has become the first Indian to win FIH Men's Player of the Year 2019 award?
a) Vivek Sagar Prasad
b) Lalremsiami
c) Manpreet Singh
d) Jagmeet Singh
- 90.** Who has been named as UK's new Finance Minister?
a) Narayana Murthy
b) Priti Patel
c) Rishi Sunak
d) Alok Sharma
- 91.** Who has been made the in-charge of 'COP26', which will be hosted by Britain in November 2020?
a) Priti Patel
b) Rishi Sunak
c) Navdeep Bains
d) Alok Sharma
- 92.** India and Portugal exchanged how many agreements during the state visit by Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa on February 14, 2020?
a) Seven
b) Eight
c) Nine
d) Six
- 93.** Which Indian boxer was ranked no. 1 by IOC's Boxing Task Force rankings for Olympic Qualifiers?
a) Gaurav Bidhuri
b) Shiva Thapa
c) Amit Panghal
d) Vikas Krishnan
- 94.** As per World Meteorological Organization, Antarctica recorded its hottest-ever temperature recently. What was the temperature reading?
a) 18.3 Degrees Celsius
b) 20.75 Degree Celsius
c) 21.25 Degree Celsius
d) 19.4 Degrees Celsius
- 95.** Which country will host the UN Climate Summit 'COP26'?
a) USA
b) UK
c) France
d) India
- 96.** Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's Pancha Loha Statue will be inaugurated by PM Modi on February 16, 2020 in which city?
a) Ahmedabad
b) Lucknow
c) Varanasi
d) Gurugram
- 97.** Who has been appointed as Air India's new Chairman and Managing Director (CMD)?
a) Rajiv Bansal
b) Arun Negi
c) Sanjay Jain
d) Manish Kumar
- 98.** Which city will host National Organic Food Festival in New Delhi?
a) Pune
b) Indore
c) Ahmadabad
d) New Delhi
- 99.** What is the new official name of coronavirus?
a) CORONAVID-19
b) AVID-18

- c) COVID-19
- d) CHID-19

100. Which film became the first non-English film to win the Oscar 2020 award for 'Best Picture'?

- a) Parasite
- b) The Irishman
- c) 1917
- d) Jojo Rabbit

101. Which military unit won the President's Colour this year?

- a) INS Vikrant
- b) INS Satlej
- c) INS Shivaji
- d) INS Shivalik

102. Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra has been renamed after which late Union Minister?

- a) Sushma Swaraj
- b) Atal Bihari Vajpayee
- c) Arun Jaitley
- d) Manohar Parrikar

103. What is the name of the Indian-origin scientist who is leading the research team to develop the Coronavirus vaccine?

- a) RM Kapoor
- b) AK Pillai
- c) KL Kaletkar
- d) SS Vasani

104. Who became the first Indian to receive IOC's 'honourable mention'?

- a) Rahul Dravid
- b) Anil Kumble
- c) Pallela Gopichand
- d) Ravi Shastri

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- c) Manpreet Singh
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- c) Frederique Matla
- d) Anita Mandal

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- a) RBI Governor
- b) Finance Minister
- c) Finance Secretary
- d) President of India

108. Who recently launched the 'Step with Refugee' campaign?

- a) UNICEF
- b) WWF
- c) OPEC
- d) UNHCR

109. Which country will host the UN Climate Summit 'COP26'?

- a) USA
- b) UK
- c) France
- d) India

110. Who has been appointed as Air India's new Chairman and Managing Director (CMD)?

- a) Rajiv Bansal
- b) Arun Negi
- c) Sanjay Jain
- d) Manish Kumar

111. Which state government has recently announced to give Rs. 6 crore prize money to Olympics Gold Medal winners?

- a. Madhya Pradesh
- b. Haryana
- c. Uttar Pradesh
- d. Bihar

112. What is the name of a train connecting Varanasi to Ujjain inaugurated by PM Modi recently?

- a. Kashi-Mahakal Express
- b. Varanasi-Ujjain Express
- c. Adhyatam Express
- d. Kashi Vishvnath Express

113. What is the name of CREDAI's new app to help connect home buyers and developers?

- a. CREDAI Makaan app
- b. CREDAI Niwas app
- c. CREDAI Awaas app
- d. CREDAI Yojana app

114. Which film has recently won the best film award in Filmfare Awards 2020?

- a. Article-15
- b. Uri
- c. Student of the Year 2
- d. Gully Boy

115. Which Indian state has recently started India's first intercity electric bus service?

- a. Maharashtra
- b. Karnataka
- c. Gujarat
- d. Rajasthan

116. Which of the following countries will host the 13th COP (Conference of Parties) on conservation of migratory species of wildlife?

- a. Nepal
- b. Sri Lanka
- c. Pakistan
- d. India

117. Which among the following athlete has recently set a new world record in a 5 km road race?

- a. Joshua Cheptegei
- b. Valencia Ibercaja
- c. Jimmy Gressier
- d. Marshal Rodrigo

118. Which state is hosting 'Bio Asia 2020 Today Tomorrow' conference?

- a. Goa
- b. Punjab
- c. Himachal Pradesh
- d. Telangana

119. Which Indian javelin thrower banned for four years by NADA?

- a. Rahul Chhabra
- b. Arvind Tripathi
- c. Lalit Prakash
- d. Amit Dahiya

120. Which international agency signed a loan agreement of USD 450 million with the Government of India to improve groundwater in the country?

- a. United Nations
- b. World Bank
- c. UNICEF
- d. WWF

121. Which Indian Union Territory will come under the jurisdiction of Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)?

- a. Daman and Diu
- b. Chandigarh
- c. Jammu and Kashmir
- d. Pondicherry

122. In which of the following places a national conference based on the Pradhanmantri Fasal Beema Yojana was organized?

- a. Udaipur
- b. Bhopal
- c. Kanpur
- d. Ambala

123. How much Moody's reduced India's GDP growth forecast for 2020 on February 17, 2020?

- a. 6.2 percent
- b. 5.4 percent
- c. 5.8 percent
- d. 6.9 percent

124. How many mediators have been appointed by the Supreme Court to hold talks with the protesters of Shaheen Bagh?

- a. Five
- b. Four
- c. Three
- d. Two

125. Which former Bengali actor and Trinmool Congress MP passed away on February 18, 2020?

- a. Tapas Pal
- b. Somesh Ghosh
- c. Raghav Desai
- d. Arjun Berman

126. Which country's wrestlers will not take part in Asian Championship to be held in Delhi?

- a. China
- b. Iran
- c. South Korea
- d. Japan

127. Which of the Indian sports personality recently won Laureus World Sports Awards 2020 in best sporting moment category?

- a. MS Dhoni
- b. Sania Mirza
- c. Rahul Dravid
- d. Sachin Tendulkar

128. When Soil Health Card Day is observed in India every year?

- a. February 20
- b. February 19
- c. February 18
- d. February 17

129. What is the status of House Sparrow in India as per the State of India's Birds 2020 Report?

- a. Stable
- b. Uncertain
- c. Strong Decline
- d. Data not Available

130. Which country has recently successfully test-fired Ra'ad-II Cruise Missile?

- a. India
- b. Ukraine
- c. Pakistan
- d. Iran

131. Which Indian Institute has been recently named after Manohar Parrikar?

- a. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)
- b. Indian Institute of Advance Technology (IIAT)
- c. Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM)
- d. Institute for Agricultural Studies (IAS)

132. Ashraf Ghani won a second term as the President of which country?

- a. Iraq
- b. Iran
- c. Saudi Arabia
- d. Afghanistan

133. Which country is hosting the FIFA U-17 Women's Football World Cup 2020?

- a. Bangladesh
- b. India
- c. China
- d. Afghanistan

134. Which Indian player has recently won gold medal in 87-kg Greco Roman category in Asian Wrestling Championships?

- a. Sunil Kumar
- b. Ajeet Pawar
- c. Somesh Yadav
- d. Arun Bhatia

135. Which Ministry recently announced to set up the Central Consumer Protection Authority?

- a. Ministry of Finance
- b. Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution
- c. Ministry of Food Processing Industries
- d. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare

136. When is the World Day of Social Justice observed globally?

- a. 18th February
- b. 19th February
- c. 20th February
- d. 21st February

137. Who among the following won Laureus World Sports Awards 2020 under best sporting moment category?

- a. MS Dhoni
- b. Sania Mirza
- c. Rahul Dravid
- d. Sachin Tendulkar

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- c. Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM)
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142. Pradhanmantri Fasal Beema Yojana national conference held in which place in India?

- a. Udaipur
- b. Bhopal
- c. Kanpur
- d. Ambala

143. What is the new GDP estimation growth rate for India by Moody's?

- a. 6.2 percent
- b. 5.4 percent
- c. 5.8 percent
- d. 6.9 percent

144. How many interlocutors have been named by the Supreme Court of India to bring some solution of Shaheen Bagh?

- a. Five
- b. Four
- c. Three
- d. Two

145. What is the name of former Bengali actor and TMC MP died recently?

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- b. Somesh Ghosh
- c. Raghav Desai
- d. Arjun Berman

146. Wrestlers of which country will not be able to participate in Asian Wrestling Championship?

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- a. China
- b. Iran
- c. South Korea
- d. Japan

147. When is the Central Excise Day observed in India?

- a) 22nd February
- b) 23rd February
- c) 24th February
- d) 25th February

148. Which country's President visited India for the first time on 24th February?

- a) China
- b) USA
- c) Russia
- d) South Korea

149. Which of the following schemes completed its one year of implementation on February 24, 2020?

- a) PM-SYM
- b) PM-KISAN
- c) PMSBY
- d) PMJJBY

150. Which city hosted the International Judicial Conference recently?

- a) Pune
- b) New Delhi
- c) Mumbai
- d) Lucknow

151. Which country has reported highest death toll from coronavirus outside China?

- a) Italy

- b) Japan
- c) Iran
- d) South Korea

152. Which country will host Commonwealth Shooting and Archery Championships in 2022?

- a) Malaysia
- b) India
- c) China
- d) Japan

153. Mahathir Mohamad has resigned as the Prime Minister of which nation?

- a) Malaysia
- b) Maldives
- c) Nepal
- d) Sri Lanka

154. The Home Ministry has amended Arms Act, 1959 to allow renowned shooters to keep a maximum of how many firearms?

- a) 8
- b) 12
- c) 16
- d) 10

155. Riek Machar has taken oath as the first vice president of which nation?

- a) Turkey
- b) Syria
- c) Libya
- d) South Sudan

156. Who won the 34th Cannes Open in France on February 23, 2020?

- a) D Gukesh
- b) G Acharyan
- c) L Mukund
- d) Stanley S

157. Veteran political figure, Hosni Mubarak passed away at the age of 91 on February 25. He had served as the President of which among the following nations?

- a) Jordan
- b) Oman

- c) Egypt
- d) Yemen

158. When will the biennial elections for Rajya Sabha be held in 2020?

- a) March 26th
- b) April 2nd
- c) May 30th
- d) April 29th

159. How many seats are going to polls in Rajya Sabha elections 2020?

- a) 55
- b) 51
- c) 50
- d) 45

160. India has signed defence deals worth \$3 billion with which nation?

- a) Russia
- b) Germany
- c) US
- d) Australia

161. This Buddhist monk from Vietnam, who passed away on February 22, was kept under house arrest since 2003 for his vocal advocacy for democracy.

- a) Siang Chang
- b) Che Sang Di
- c) Huan Ki Sun
- d) Thich Quang Do

162. The ICC has banned Yousuf Abdulrahim Al Balushi from all forms of cricket for 7 years. He represented which nation?

- a) Afghanistan
- b) Oman
- c) Bangladesh
- d) Pakistan

163. When did India observe the first anniversary of National War Memorial?

- a) February 23rd
- b) February 25th
- c) February 24th
- d) February 22nd

164. Which year was the Happiness Curriculum launched?

- a) 2017
- b) 2016
- c) 2019
- d) 2018

165. Who among the following has been appointed as India's next ambassador to France?

- a) Vipin Nigam
- b) Sanjeev Chawla
- c) Jawed Ashraf
- d) Vinay Mohan

166. Who among the following has secured first position in the Hurun Global Rich List-2020?

- a) Jeff Bezos
- b) Bill Gates
- c) Mukesh Ambani
- d) Bernard Renault

167. Which five-time Grand Slam champion recently announced her retirement from tennis at the age of 32?

- a) Anna Kournikova
- b) Elena Dementieva
- c) Dinara Safiana
- d) Maria Sharapova

168. Which Indian badminton player has become brand ambassador of Andhra Pradesh anti-corruption helpline?

- a) Srikanth Kidambi
- b) PV Sindhu
- c) Saina Nehwal
- d) Jwala Gutta

169. Which city will host India's first Artificial Intelligence summit-RAISE 2020?

- a) Hyderabad
- b) Mumbai
- c) Pune
- d) New Delhi

170. Which nation's doctors used a robot to perform surgery to treat brain aneurysm?

- a) Sweden
- b) US
- c) Canada
- d) Germany

171. The Union Government has decided to lift the ban imposed on the export of which among the following crops?

- a) Tomato
- b) Onions
- c) Potato
- d) Spinach

172. India signed 10 MoUs with which among the following nations on February 27, 2020?

- a) Myanmar
- b) Malaysia
- c) Nepal
- d) Sri Lanka

173. A special Air India flight brought back 119 Indian stranded aboard which among the following cruise ships?

- a) Viking Star
- b) Crystal Serenity
- c) Diamond Princess
- d) Seabourn Muse

174. Which crop among the following is not a TOP crop?

- a) Peas
- b) Tomato
- c) Potato
- d) Onion

MCQ's ANSWERS:**1. (b) Novak Djokovic**

World No-2 Novak Djokovic defeated the Dominic Thiem of Austria in the final of the Australian Open to clinch the title of the first Grand Slam of the year for the eighth time.

2. (d) Sofia Kenin

Sofia Kenin won the Australian Open women's singles title by defeating two-time Grand Slam champion Garbine Muguruza. Sofia Kenin won a major for the first time.

3. (a) Pakistan

Pakistan has recently declared National Emergency due to a heavy attack of locusts on crops. Millions of hectares of land have been destroyed by these locusts.

4. (d) Kerala

Kerala government has confirmed the third positive case of Coronavirus in India. According to the Kerala health department, an infected patient has been kept in an isolated ward. It was also informed that the patient is stable and under-treatment.

5. (c) Mohammaed Allawi

The President of Iraq Barham Salih designated Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as the new prime minister of the country. Allawi replaced Adel Abdul-Mahdi who resigned last year.

6. (a) Maldives

Maldives separated from the Commonwealth about three years ago on the issue of human rights. The Maldives seceded from the Commonwealth due to its lack of progress on democratic reforms. The Maldives requested the Commonwealth to let them rejoin the group.

7. (c) Ajay Bisaria

India's senior bureaucrat Ajay Bisaria recently appointed as the High Commissioner to Canada. He is a 1987-batch IFS officer who worked as the private secretary to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

8. (a) 02 Feb

This day is organized to raise global awareness about the important role of wetlands for our planet. World Wetland Day was celebrated for the first time on February 02, 1997, on the completion of 16 years of the Ramsar Conference.

9. (a) 10 percent

The new Income Tax Rate for those falling in the salary bracket of Rs 5-10 lakh would be 10 percent, as per Union Budget 2020.

10. (a) Rs 99300 crore

The Government has allocated Rs 99300 crore for the education sector.

11. (a) Panipat

The Union Government has proposed five archaeological sites to be transformed into iconic sites with on-site museums. The five sites include Rakhigarhi in Haryana, Hastinapur in UP, Shivsagar in Assam, Dholavira in Gujarat and Adichanallur in Tamil Nadu.

12. (b) 4th February

World Cancer Day is observed on February 4th every year across the world. It aims to create awareness about cancer. The day emphasizes to identify the disease on early state with focus on the treatment of cancer.

13. (d) SAMPRITI-IX

The SAMPRITI-IX, an annual joint military exercise between India-Bangladesh, recently began in Umroi, Meghalaya. This exercise can play an important role in enhancing bilateral defence cooperation between India and Bangladesh.

14. (a) Kerala

The Kerala government has declared Coronavirus outbreak as a 'state disaster' after confirmation of three cases. The virus infection first broke out in China's Wuhan city and has so far taken the lives of about 425 people.

15. (c) Gopal Baglay

Gopal Baglay has been recently appointed as the India's next high commissioner to the Sri Lanka. He is 1992 batch IFS officer. He succeeded Taranjit Singh Sandhu who was recently appointed as the ambassador to the USA.

16. (b) UAE

The United Arab Emirates has discovered huge shallow natural gas reserves between the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The new gas field contains about 80 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

17. (a) BHEL

The central government on February 4, 2020 ruled out disinvestment of Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL). The Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur stated in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha that the government has not taken any decision for strategic disinvestment and privatization of BHEL.

18. (d) Chandigarh

A new state-of-the-art DNA Analysis Centre has been set up in Central Forensic Science Laboratory, Chandigarh. The centre has been set up under the Nirbhaya Fund scheme with an allocation of Rs 99.76 crores. It holds the annual capacity to examine 2000 forensic cases relating to sexual assault, homicide and paternity check.

19. (b) Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra

The Union Cabinet on February 5, 2020 approved the setting up of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra. The trust will be set up for the construction of the grand Ram temple in Ayodhya. PM Modi had made a statement regarding the same in the Lok Sabha on February 4, 2020.

20. (c) The Banker

'The Banker', a magazine run by the Financial Times of England, selected Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das as Banker of the Year-2020 for the Asia-Pacific region.

21. (b) India

The Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) of the Indian Council of Agricultural

Research (ICAR) has developed a new vaccine to control 'classical swine fever'. Earlier, this vaccine was sourced from England.

22. (d) Karnataka

Karnataka has launched the doorstep delivery scheme- Janasevaka scheme to provide citizens with easy access to important government services such as the issuance of ration card, health card, senior citizen card, driver's licence and marriage registration certificate.

23. (d) Shreyas Iyer

Shreyas Iyer has become the first No. 4 player to hit a century outside India in four years. He scored 103 runs out of 107 balls during India's first ODI against host nation New Zealand on February 5, 2020.

24. (a) Bhutan

The Government of Bhutan recently passed the 'Sustainable Development Tax' Bill. It allows the government of Bhutan to impose a sustainable development tax on tourists arriving in the country.

25. (c) Kenya

Daniel Arap Moi, longest-serving Kenyan President, passed away on February 4, 2020 at the age of 95 years. He had served as Kenya's President from 1978 to 2002 amid political repression, economic stagnation and corruption.

26. (b) Cancer

Cancer cases can rise to 81 percent by 2040, as per a report published by the World Health Organisation on World Cancer Day (February 4, 2020).

27. (a) Jaipur

UNESCO has handed over the formal certificate of World Heritage City to Jaipur. UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay conferred this certificate.

28. (b) Maharashtra

The central government has given in-principle approval for the construction of a new major port at Vadhavan in Maharashtra. This port will help to keep the largest ship. It will cost around Rs.5500 cr.

29. (c) K Parasaran

The central government has constituted 'Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra' trust for the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Senior advocate K Parasaran will head the Ram Mandir Trust.

30. (a) Waheeda Rehman

This award is given by the Madhya Pradesh Government. Actress Waheeda Rehman was awarded two lakh rupees, shawl and memento as a Kishore Kumar Samman.

31. (c) The American President

The legendary Hollywood actor, Kirk Douglas passed away at his family home in Beverly Hills at the age of 103 years on February 5, 2020. He has acted in iconic films including the Spartacus, Paths of Glory, Champion, the Vikings and the Bad and the Beautiful.

32. (b) December 2022

The union government has set the target of installing 100 GigaWatt solar power and 60 GigaWatt wind power capacity across the nation by December 2022. The target would be achieved through the implementation of various schemes.

33. (a) USD 675m

The World Health Organization has requested funds worth USD 675m in donations to fight the novel coronavirus in countries that are being considered particularly "at risk". The donation has been requested to fund WHO's plan for the next three months.

34. (d) 11

Indian and Russian companies exchanged 11 MoUs on Day 2 of DEFEXPO 2020 on February 6, 2020. The major companies that were a part of the agreements include Bharat Dynamics Limited, BHEL and Vista control from India and BEML, INVERSIA and UVZ from Russia. Three agreements were signed in relation to production of different defence equipment such as parts of t-72, T-90, radar systems and 3D modeling.

35. (a) Dr. N S Dharamshaktu

The International Gandhi Award for Leprosy in the individual category went to Dr. NS Dharmashaktu for his exemplary work towards fighting leprosy. The honour was presented by

President Ram Nath Kovind on February 6, 2020.

36. (d) Leprosy Mission Trust India

President Ram Nath Kovind conferred the International Gandhi Awards for Leprosy to the Leprosy Mission Trust under the institutional category for its tireless work with the people afflicted by Leprosy for over a century.

37. (d) Japan

Japan currently has the highest number of novel coronavirus cases outside mainland China. The country reportedly has over 80 confirmed cases with 41 more cases being reported in its isolated cruise ship, Diamond Princess.

38. (b) US

The US forces have claimed to have killed Al-Qaeda's Yemen leader Qasim al-Rimi in a major counter-terrorism operation. Qasim al-Rimi was the founder of the dangerous Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

39. (b) 7.4 percent

According to the 6th RBI Bi-Monthly Monetary Policy 2019-20, the retail inflation hiked to 7.4 percent in December 2019 from 5.5 percent in November 2019. In October, retail inflation was 4.6 percent.

40. (b) Madhya Pradesh

The Madhya Pradesh state government has decided to deploy drones to map villages. This will be the first time that drones are being used to make maps in the state.

41. (d) Romania

Romania's government fell to a no-confidence vote in the Parliament on February 5, 2020 after being in office for only three months. Overall, 261 out of 465 MPs voted against the minority government.

42. (c) 328

US astronaut Christina Koch returned to Earth on February 6, 2020 after a record space station mission. She completed 328 days aboard the International Space Station, the most by any woman, surpassing previous record-holder Peggy Whitson's 289-day

record. Koch, however, fell short of Scott Kelly's all-time US record by 12 days.

43. (a) Dr. N S Dharamshaktu

Dr. NS Dharmashaktu won the International Gandhi Award for Leprosy for his exemplary work towards fighting leprosy. He won this prize in the individual category.

44. (d) Leprosy Mission Trust India

Leprosy Mission Trust was conferred the International Gandhi Awards for Leprosy by President Ram Nath Kovind. Leprosy Mission Trust won this award in institutional category for its untiring efforts to help leprosy patients.

45. (d) Japan

Japan witnessed highest number of Coronavirus patients outside China. About 80 people have been confirmed with Coronavirus and several other people were found infected in an isolated cruise ship.

46. (b) US

Qasim al-Rimi, Al-Qaeda's Yemen leader, recently killed by the US Army in a massive anti-terrorism operation. He was the founder of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

47. (b) 7.4 percent

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) mentioned in its Bi-Monthly Monetary Policy 2019-20 that the retail inflation increased to 7.4% in December 2019. Earlier, it was recorded 5.5% in November 2019.

48. (a) Waheeda Rehman

Veteran Bollywood actress Waheeda Rehman recently awarded Kishore Kumar Samman by the Madhya Pradesh Government.

49. (c) The American President

Kirk Douglas, the legendary Hollywood actor, recently passed away in Beverly Hills, USA. He was 103. Kirk was famous for various movies like Spartacus, Champion and the Vikings etc.

50. (b) December 2022

The Government of India has set a target of installing 60 GigaWatt wind power capacity and 100 GigaWatt solar power across the

country by Dec 2022. Various schemes will be launched to achieve this target.

51. (a) USD 675m

WHO has requested global community to raise funds to fight the Coronavirus. According to the WHO, USD 675 m are required to curb Coronavirus.

52. (d) 11

Eleven MoUs were signed between Indian and Russian companies at DefExpo 2020 on February 6, 2020. There were various famous companies that signed the MoUs like BHEL, INVERSIA, Bharat Dynamics Limited and UVZ.

53. (a) Parasite

Parasite has become the first non-English and South Korean film to win the Oscar 2020 award in the 'Best Picture' category. The film is directed by Bong Joon Ho.

54. (b) Joaquin Phoenix

The 92nd edition of the Oscar Awards, the world's most prestigious film awards, was held on February 10, 2020. Joaquin Phoenix has won the Oscar for Best Actor for the film 'Joker'. Renée Zellweger won the best actress award for the film 'Judy'.

55. (d) SS Vasan

A team of scientists in Australia, led by Indian-origin scientist SS Vasan, is preparing a vaccine for the treatment of Coronavirus. The study is being conducted by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) of Australia.

56. (b) Tamil Nadu

The state government of Tamil Nadu has decided to declare the Cauvery Delta Region as a protected special agricultural zone. This was announced by the state's Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy on February 9, 2020. The CM stated that his legal team will be drafting a special law in regard to the same.

57. (c) Uttar Pradesh

The Uttar Pradesh Government has decided to launch an internship scheme for college students. The state's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath made the announcement during a job fair in Gorakhpur on February 9. The

internship scheme aims to brighten employment prospects for the youth.

58. (b) Mumbai

National conference on E-governance 2020 recently concluded in Mumbai. The conference was focused on promoting the use of digital platforms to provide public services.

59. (a) Feb 10th

The National Deworming Day was observed on February 10, 2020. On the occasion, the Union Government runs a special drive for children and adolescents between the age group of 1 and 19, to give them a single dose of Albendazole.

60. (c) Pullela Gopichand

Indian badminton coach Pullela Gopichand has received IOC Coaches Lifetime Achievement Awards "honourable mention" for his excellent contribution in the field of coaching.

61. (a) Amritsar

Top-performing Varanasi has been paired with Amritsar under the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry's 'sister cities' programme. The programme has paired top-performing cities with poorly performing ones to help guide the cities also to perform well.

62. (c) Israel

The first-ever 'Jerusalem-Mumbai Festival' will be held in Mumbai on February 15, 2020 to promote artistic and cultural ties between India and Israel.

63. (c) 70

The Delhi Assembly has 70 constituencies. In the 2015 Delhi Elections, AAP had won 67 seats, BJP had won three seats and the Congress had drawn a blank.

64. (d) Manoj Tiwari

Manoj Tiwari was appointed as the Delhi BJP president in 2016. He had led the BJP to a record victory in the 2017 MCD elections.

65. (a) February 11th

The World Unani Day is observed every year on February 11. The day commemorates the birth anniversary of great Unani scholar and social reformer Hakim Ajmal Khan.

66. (c) Haryana

Haryana's Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar launched Mukhyamantri Pariwar Smridhi scheme on the completion of 100 days of state government. The government will provide two thousand rupees to poor farmers in three installments in this scheme.

67. (d) Kerala

Kerala's Finance Minister Thomas Isaac announced in the state budget that Kerala will ban the sale of both compact fluorescent lamp (CFL) and incandescent (filament) bulbs from November 2020. All street lights and bulbs in government offices will be replaced with LED lights.

68. (c) 10th February

World Pulses Day is celebrated on February 10 every year around the world. World pulses day is celebrated by the United Nations to recognize the importance of pulses as a healthy food.

69. (b) Frederique Matla

India's forward player Lalremsiami has been selected as the 2019 FIH Women's Rising Star of the Year. She defeated Argentina's Julieta Jankunas and Frederique Matla of the Netherlands.

70. (a) Turkey

Turkey announced on February 11, 2020 that it neutralized 101 Syrian regime soldiers following a bombardment that killed five Turkish soldiers in Syria's Idlib region on February 10. Syria's Idlib region is the last major rebel-held region.

71.(b) February 16th

Arvind Kejriwal will be sworn in as the next Delhi Chief Minister on February 16, 2020. He will be sitting on the CM's chair for the third straight time now.

72.(c) COVID-19

The World Health Organisation has officially named coronavirus as 'COVID-29'. The new name has been given to prevent the use of other names for the disease, which may be inaccurate or stigmatizing.

73. (d) ONGC

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC),

Indian Oil Corporation and NTPC are the top three companies in the PSU survey of 2018-19. Their total profit share was 15.3 percent, 9.68 percent and 6.73 percent respectively.

74. (c) Finance Secretary

The central government has announced to introduce new one rupee note in the market soon with new security features. 'The Government of India' will be written in Hindi on the top of this note. It will be signed in Hindi and English by Finance Secretary Atanu Chakraborty.

75. (b) Babulal Marandi

Babulal Marandi, the first Chief Minister of Jharkhand and President of Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Democratic) Party, recently announced that his party will be officially merged with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on 17 February.

76. (d) UNHCR

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees-UNHCR recently launched 'Step with Refugee' campaign. Individuals participating in this campaign will challenge themselves to cover a distance of two billion kilometers in 12 months.

77.(b) Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir's LG GC Murmu has launched a financial inclusion outreach campaign to extend financial services to all areas that are un-banked.

78.(d) Uttar Pradesh

The Uttar Pradesh Cabinet has approved the Ground Water Act-2020 to improve the falling groundwater level. Under the act, penalty would be imposed on the individuals and institutions who pollute the groundwater.

79.(a) Libya

The United Nations Security Council(UNSC) conducted a vote on a resolution supporting a ceasefire in Libya on February 12, 2020. The resolution was called by Britain.

80.(c) Gulmarg

Gulmarg, a hill station in Jammu and Kashmir will be hosting the National Winter Games from March 7, 2020 under Khelo India. The five-day games will comprise 30 events under

five broad activities- snowboarding, snow skiing, cross country and snow show.

81. (a) Sushma Swaraj

Indian External Affairs Ministry announced on February 13, 2020 that the Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra has been renamed as Sushma Swaraj Bhawan to commemorate the late leader's invaluable service to Indian diplomacy.

82. (c) INS Shivaji

INS Shivaji was presented with the President's Colour by President Ram Nath Kovind on February 13, 2020. The President's colour is the highest honour bestowed upon any Indian military unit.

83. (c) Maharashtra

The Maharashtra cabinet has approved a five-day working week plan for all government employees.

84. (b) Manipur

Manipur's Chief Minister N Biren Singh launched 'Anganphou Hunba' programme on February 13, 2020. The state government has prepared a 260-crore rupee project to provide irrigation water to places having adequate arable land and large number of farmers.

85. (c) 13 February

World Radio Day is observed every year on February 13 across the globe. This day highlights importance and value of radio. It was first celebrated by the UNESCO on February 13, 2012.

86. (d) 13 February

National Women's Day is celebrated every year on February 13 in India. It is celebrated on the occasion of Sarojini Naidu's birthday. This year, India is observing her 141st birth anniversary.

87. (a) Chitetsu Watanabe

The Guinness World Records recently announced Chitetsu Watanabe, a Japanese man, as the oldest living man on the earth. His age is 112 years and 344 days as of February 12. He was born on March 5, 1907, in Niigata, Japan.

88. (b) Gujarat

World's biggest cricket stadium is under

construction at Motera, Gujarat. It will be known as Sardar Patel Cricket Stadium. Till date, Melbourne Cricket Stadium is considered as the largest cricket stadium in the world.

89. (c) Manpreet Singh

Indian Hockey Team captain Manpreet Singh has become the first Indian to win FIH's Men's Player of the Year 2019 award. He beat Belgium's Arthur van Dorren and Argentina's Lucas Villa to win the honour.

90. (c) Rishi Sunak

Indian-origin Rishi Sunak has been named as the new Finance Minister of the United Kingdom by PM Boris Johnson.

91. (d) Alok Sharma

Alok Sharma was named as the new UK Minister in charge of the crucial UN climate summit, 'COP26', which will be hosted by Britain in November 2020. Sharma is also the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy under UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government.

92. (a) Seven

India and Portugal exchanged 7 MoUs on February 14, 2020 to expand cooperation in areas such as industrial and intellectual property rights, maritime transport, port development and audio-visual co-production.

93. (c) Amit Panghal

Amit Panghal was ranked number one by the IOC's Boxing Task Force ahead of next month's Olympic Qualifiers. Amit had won the historic silver medal at the World Championships in the 52-kg weight category.

94. (b) 20.75 Degree Celsius

Antarctica recorded its hottest-ever temperature of 20.75 degrees Celsius recently, according to the World Meteorological Organization. The highest temperature recorded previously in the continent was 18.3 Degrees Celsius, which was recorded in January 1982.

95. (b) UK

The United Kingdom will host the UN Climate Summit 'COP26' in November 2020. The UK Secretary of State, Alok Sharma will lead the UN climate talks.

96. (c) Varanasi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Pancha Loha Statue of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya in Varanasi on February 16, 2020. On the same occasion, PM Modi will dedicate the Pt Deendayal Upadhyaya Memorial Centre to the nation.

97. (a) Rajiv Bansal

Rajiv Bansal was recently appointed as the Chairman and Managing Director of Air India. Bansal is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Officer from Nagaland Cadre of 1988 batch.

98. (d) New Delhi

The central government would be organizing the National Organic Food Festival in New Delhi from February 21-23, 2020. The first-of-its-kind festival will see participation from over 150 women.

99. (c) COVID-19

Coronavirus has officially been named as 'COVID-19' by the World Health Organisation. The new name has been given to avoid the use of other names that may be inaccurate or stigmatizing.

100. (a) Parasite

South Korean film Parasite, directed by Bong Joon Ho, created history by becoming the first non-English film to win the Oscar 2020 award for 'Best Picture'.

101. (c) INS Shivaji

The President's Colour was presented to INS Shivaji by President Ram Nath Kovind on February 13, 2020 for its outstanding contribution in training modern-day Marine Engineers. The President's colour is the highest honour that is awarded to any Indian military unit.

102. (a) Sushma Swaraj

Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra was renamed after late Sushma Swaraj on February 13, 2020. The Kendra will now be known as Sushma Swaraj Bhawan. The move aims to commemorate the late leader's invaluable service to Indian diplomacy.

103. (d) SS Vasan

Indian-origin scientist SS Vasan is leading a

team of scientists in Australia to prepare a vaccine for the treatment of Coronavirus. The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization of Australia is conducting the study.

104. (c) Pullela Gopichand

The coach of Indian national badminton team, Pullela Gopichand has been honoured with the IOC Coaches Lifetime Achievement Awards "honourable mention" for his excellent contribution in the field of coaching.

105. (c) Manpreet Singh

Indian Hockey Team captain Manpreet Singh has become the first Indian to win FIH's Men's Player of the Year 2019 award. He beat Belgium's Arthur van Dorren and Argentina's Lucas Villa to win the honour.

106. (b) Frederique Matla

Indian striker Lalremsiami was named as the FIH Women's Rising Star of the Year 2019. She beat Argentina's Julieta Jankunas and Netherlands' Frederique Matla to win the award.

107. (c) Finance Secretary

The central government will soon be introducing a new one rupee note with new security features. 'The Government of India' will be written in Hindi on the top of this note. The new one rupee note will be signed by Finance Secretary Atanu Chakraborty in both Hindi and English.

108. (d) UNHCR

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees-UNHCR recently launched 'Step with Refugee' campaign. Individuals participating in this campaign will challenge themselves to cover a distance of two billion kilometers in 12 months.

109. (b) UK

The United Kingdom will host the UN Climate Summit 'COP26' in November 2020. Indian-origin Alok Sharma, who is the UK Secretary of State will lead the UN climate talks.

110. (a) Rajiv Bansal

Rajiv Bansal has been appointed as the new Chairman and Managing Director of Air India.

He is an 1988-batch Indian Administrative Service Officer from Nagaland Cadre.

111. (b) Haryana

The Chief Minister of Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar, recently announced that the state government will give Rs. 6 crore to players those winning Gold Medal in Olympic Games.

112. (a) Kashi-Mahakal Express

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated projects worth Rs 1200 crore in Varanasi including Kashi-Mahakal Express that connects Varanasi to Ujjain.

113. (c) CREDAI Awaas app

Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI) has recently launched a mobile application 'CREDAI Awaas app' to help buyers and developers in buying and purchasing properties.

114. (d) Gully Boy

Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt received the Filmfare Awards for Best Actor and Actress for the film 'Gully Boy'. Apart from that, Ayushmann Khurrana bagged the Best Actor (Male) Critics Award for 'Article 15'.

115. (a) Maharashtra

The first intercity electric bus service between Mumbai and Pune was started on February 14, 2020. Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari inaugurated this electric bus service. This electric bus has a seating capacity of 43 people.

116. (d) India

The conference will be held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat from February 17-22, 2020. The Asian elephant and the Great Indian Bustard will be included in the Global Conservation List at this conference.

117. (a) Joshua Cheptegei

Joshua Cheptegei of Uganda has made a new record by completing the five km road race in 12 minutes 51 seconds. He broke Kenya's Rhonex Kipruto (13.18 seconds) record by 27 seconds which he made in Valencia last month.

118. (d) Telangana

The Government of Telangana is organizing

the Bio-Asia Summit 2020 in Hyderabad from 17-19 February 2020. The summit will focus on biology companies and their investment capabilities.

119. (d) Amit Dahiya

NADA - National Anti-Doping Agency banned a national javelin thrower Amit Dahiya for four years due to disciplinary issues. He was found guilty of misleading NADA officials during a dope test.

120. (b) World Bank

The Government of India and the World Bank have signed a loan agreement of USD 450m to improve groundwater level in the country. This agreement will also help to curb the declining groundwater level in India.

121. (c) Jammu and Kashmir

Minister of State in PMO Jitendra Singh announced that Union Territories Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh will be covered by Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) soon.

122. (a) Udaipur

The fourth National Conference on Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana was organized in Udaipur, Rajasthan. The conference was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

123. (b) 5.4 percent

Moody's lowered India's GDP growth forecast for 2020 to 5.4% from 6.6%. Moody's growth projections are depending on present calendar year. According to its estimates, India's GDP growth in 2019 was 5 percent.

124. (d) Two

The Supreme Court-appointed advocate Sanjay Hegde and Sadhana Ramachandran as interlocutors in the Shaheen Bagh case. The apex court has informed that both interlocutors have to submit their report in a week.

125. (a) Tapas Pal

Former Bengali actor and Trinmool Congress (TMC) MP Tapas Pal passed away on February 18, 2020, in Mumbai. He was 61. He made his debut in the Bengali movie industry with Tarun Majumdar's film Dadar Kirti.

126. (a) China

Chinese wrestlers will not participate in the Asian Wrestling Championships in Delhi as the Indian government has not issued visas to them due to the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus infection in their country.

127. (d) Sachin Tendulkar

Sachin Tendulkar recently won the Laureus Sporting Moment Award (2000-2020). Tendulkar won this prize for a picture that shows team India carrying him on shoulders after winning 2011 ICC World Cup.

128. (b) February 19

India observes Soil Health Card Day every year on February 19 because Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched first Soil Health Card same day on February 19, 2015. Farmers get detailed information about the health of their farm soil.

129. (a) Stable

The State of India's Birds 2020 Report highlights that numbers of House Sparrow have declined in urban areas while it is stable almost everywhere in the country. The report also informed that declining of suitable nesting points and lack of insects (food) are major reasons for its decline.

130. (C) Pakistan

Pakistan has successfully test-fired conducted nuclear-capable cruise missile Ra'ad-II. This missile can hit a target in 600 km of range. Pakistan claimed that this missile can boost the military's capability on land and at the sea.

131. (a) Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)

The Government of India has decided to rename Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) as the 'Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses'. Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra in New Delhi has been also renamed as Sushma Swaraj Bhawan and Foreign Service Institute.

132. (d) Afghanistan

Ashraf Ghani has been elected as the President of Afghanistan for the second time. According to the Election Commission of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani has secured 50.64 percent of the votes as a presidential candidate. On the other

hand, Abdullah Abdullah got just 39.52 percent votes against Ashraf Ghani.

133. (b) India

India is hosting FIFA U-17 Women's Football World Cup 2020. The event will kick off on November 02, 2020. The five Indian cities that will host the event are – Navi Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Bhubneshwar and Guwahati.

134. (a) Sunil Kumar

Sunil Kumar is India's Greco Roman wrestler. He recently won the Gold Medal in Asian Wrestling Championships in the 87-kg category. He defeated Kyrgyzstan's Azat Salidinov in the final round.

135. (b) Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Ram Vilas Paswan recently announced that the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) would be set up by first week of April 2020 under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

136. (c) 20th February

The World Day of Social Justice is observed globally on 20th February 2020 with an aim to promote gender equality and rights of the indigenous peoples and migrants.

137. (d) Sachin Tendulkar

The Laureus Sporting Moment Award for 2000-2020 was recently won by Sachin Tendulkar. He was declared winner on the basis of votes. The award was decided over a picture that shows team India carrying Sachin Tendulkar on shoulders after winning 2011 ICC World Cup.

138. (b) February 19

National Soil Health Card Day is celebrated in the country on February 19 every year. PM Narendra Modi launched first Soil Health Card on February 19, 2015 that's why this day is celebrated on November 19 every year.

139. (a) Stable

The report tells about the status of birds in

India. It highlights that the numbers of House Sparrow have declined in urban areas of the country. However, the population of House Sparrow is almost stable in other parts of the country.

140. (C) Pakistan

A cruise missile named Ra'ad-II was recently test-fired by Pakistan. According to the media reports,. It can hit a target in 600 km of range. Now, Pakistan government believes that Ra'ad missile can improve the military capability on land and at the sea.

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The Supreme Court-appointed advocate Sanjay Hegde and Sadhana Ramachandran as interlocutors in the Shaheen Bagh case. The apex court has informed that both interlocutors have to submit their report in a week.

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146. (a) China

Chinese wrestlers will not be able to participate in the Asian Wrestling Championships to be held in Delhi. The decision has been taken as the Indian government has not issued visas to them due to the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus in China.

147. (c) 24th February

The Central Excise Day 2020 was observed in India on February 24, 2020. The Day is celebrated by the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) every year to acknowledge the contribution of CBEC officers.

148. (b) USA

US President Donald Trump arrived in India on February 24, 2020, marking his maiden visit to the country. Upon his arrival, President Trump addressed the 'Namaste Trump' event in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

149. (b) PM-KISAN

Union Ministry for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare on February 24, 2020 marked the first year anniversary of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Scheme, which was launched in 2019 to boost farmers' income.

150. (b) New Delhi

The International Judicial Conference was held in New Delhi to deliberate on issues such as recruitment of women in Indian military services; speedy justice system through e-court and others.

151. (c) Iran

Iran has confirmed 8 deaths due to the deadly coronavirus, which is the highest death toll from the virus outside China. Pakistan has announced closer of its border with the Islamic nation. Neighbouring Afghanistan has also banned all air and ground-based travel between the two nations.

152. (b) India

India will be the host nation for the 2022 Commonwealth Shooting and Archery Championships. The Championship will be held in Chandigarh in January 2022.

153. (a) Malaysia

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad submitted his resignation to the country's king, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah on February 24, 2020.

154. (b) 12

The Home Ministry has amended the Arms Act, 1959 to allow international medalists and renowned shooters to have additional weapons up to a total of twelve under the exempted category, as against earlier seven.

155. (d) South Sudan

Rebel leader Riek Machar has been sworn in as the first Vice President of South Sudan. Machar will be a part of a transition government that will serve for 36 months.

156. (a) D Gukesh

India's D Gukesh won the 34th Cannes Open in France on February 23, 2020, beating his French competitor Harutyun Bargseghyan. The 13-year-old had become the world's second youngest Grandmaster ever in 2019.

157. (c) Egypt

Former President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak passed away at the age of 91 years on February 25, 2020. Mubarak, who had ruled Egypt for almost 30 years was

ousted from power during the 2011 Arab Spring revolution.

158. (a) March 26th

The biennial elections for Rajya Sabha are scheduled to take place on March 26, 2020. The elections will be conducted for 55 seats from 17 states to fill up the seats of members retiring in April. The elections to the Rajya Sabha are indirect.

159. (a) 55

The Rajya Sabha Elections 2020 will take place for 55 seats on March 26, 2020. The term of 55 Rajya MPs is due to end in April 2020.

160. (c) US

India has signed defence deals worth \$3 billion with the United States. India will be purchasing advanced military equipment from the US including MH-60 Romeo and Apache helicopters. India and the US are also working to finalise a comprehensive trade agreement.

161. (d) Thich Quang Do

Vietnam's dissident Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Do, who was placed under house arrest since 2003, passed away on February 22, 2020. He was 93. Thich Quang Do was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize multiple times for being a vocal advocate of democracy in Vietnam.

162. (b) Oman

The International Cricket Council has imposed a seven-year ban on Omani cricketer, Yousuf Abdulrahim Al Balushi. Al Balushi was banned from all forms of cricket after he was found guilty of being involved in match fixing. The Omani cricketer accepted all four charges of breaching ICC's Anti-Corruption Code.

163. (b) February 25th

The first anniversary of the National War Memorial was observed on February 25, 2020. On the occasion, India's first Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat

honoured the fallen soldiers along with veterans from all three wings of the armed forces.

164. (d) 2018

The Happiness Curriculum was launched in 2018 by the AAP-led Delhi Government. The scheme aims to reinvent the school education model in Delhi Government Schools and promote development of cognition, language, literacy, numeracy and arts among children, which will in turn boost their mental growth and well-being.

165. (c) Jawed Ashraf

Jawed Ashraf, 1991 batch IFS officer, has been appointed as the next Indian ambassador to France. He earlier served as the High Commissioner of India to Singapore.

166. (a) Jeff Bezos

According to the Hurun Global Rich List - 2020, Jeff Bezos remains the world's richest person. His net worth is USD 140 billion. The list ranked Mukesh Ambani as the ninth richest person in the world.

167. (d) Maria Sharapova

Five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova bid adieu to tennis at the age of 32 on February 26, 2020. Maria Sharapova is currently ranked 369. She won her first Grand Slam title - Wimbledon in 2004 at the age of 17.

168. (b) PV Sindhu

Andhra Pradesh Government has recently launched Anti-Corruption Toll Free Helpline Number. Badminton world champion PV Sindhu has been appointed as the brand ambassador for this helpline number.

169. (d) New Delhi

The Union Government will be organizing India's maiden Artificial Intelligence summit- "RAISE 2020" from April 11-12, 2020 in New Delhi. The RAISE 2020

stands for “Responsible AI for Social Empowerment 2020”.

170. (c) Canada

Canadian doctors successfully performed a surgery using a robot to treat a 64-year-old female patient with brain aneurysm. Brain aneurysm is ballooning of a blood vessel in the brain. It can leak or rupture and cause bleeding into the brain.

171. (b) Onions

The government has decided to lift the six-month old ban imposed on the export of onions. The move was taken to protect farmer interests as prices of the crop are likely to fall sharply due to bumper rabi crop.

172. (a) Myanmar

India exchanged 10 MoUs with Myanmar on February 27, 2020 in different fields including energy, infrastructure, health, transport and communication and conservation of Tigers and other Wildlife.

173. (c) Diamond Princess

Air India has brought back 119 Indians stranded aboard the luxury cruise ship-Diamond Princess-in the Port of Yokohama in Japan. The cruise liner has been quarantined since February 3, 2020 after a passenger who had disembarked in Hong Kong was tested positive of COVID-19 virus.

174. (a) Peas

TOP crops include three major vegetables-Tomato, Onion and Potato. The centre recently launched a new Market Intelligence and Early Warning System to monitor the prices of TOP crops.