

**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**ANALYST**

**— WEEKLY —**

**Week - 2**

**APRIL, 2019**

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However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

**CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST**

WEEK-2 (APRIL, 2019)

**CONTENTS****Section - A: Mains Current Affairs**

Area of GS	Topics in News	Page No.
Defence	• Mission SHAKTI – Growing Stature of India's Space Programme	06
Environment	• Impact of Weak El Nino Conditions	08
Ethics	• Universal Basic Income and Ethical Concerns	10
International Relations	• US-Israel Relations: Changing Geo-Politics	12

**Section - B: Prelims Current Affairs**

Area of GS	Topics in News	Page No.
Economy	• Coffee Blockchain Initiative	15
	• GI tag for five coffee varieties	15
	• IL&FS and financial Issues	16
	• Public Disclosure Norm and IRDAI	17
Environment	• Global Energy and CO2 Status Report	18
	• Menace of Stubble Burning	20
Governance	• Electoral Bonds	21
Science & Tech.	• World Autism Day	22
Security	• Terror Monitoring Group	23
Social Issues	• Vitamin deficiency widespread among healthy looking urban Indians	24
Miscellaneous	• Zika virus: US relaxes travel warnings to India	24

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**SECTION: A**  
**(MAINS)**

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**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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# MISSION SHAKTI – GROWING STATURE OF INDIA'S SPACE PROGRAMME

## CONTEXT

- Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has successfully conducted an Anti-Satellite (A-SAT) missile test 'Mission Shakti' from the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha.

### ◎ ABOUT:

- A DRDO-developed Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) Interceptor Missile successfully engaged an Indian orbiting target satellite in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in a 'Hit to Kill' mode. The interceptor missile was a three-stage missile with two solid rocket boosters.
- The test has demonstrated the Nation's capability to defend its assets in outer space. It is a vindication of the strength and robust nature of DRDO's programmes.
- Anti-satellite technology has so far been in the hands of very few countries: the United States, Russia and China.
- The acquisition and demonstration of this technology make India a member of an elite group of countries.
- Since there are no treaties governing the use of ASAT, India is not in violation of any international conventions.

### Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO)

- It works under Department of Defence Research and Development of Ministry of Defence.
- DRDO is working in various areas of military technology which include aeronautics, armaments, combat vehicles, electronics, instrumentation engineering systems, missiles, materials, naval systems, advanced computing, simulation and life sciences.
- DRDO while striving to meet the cutting edge weapons technology requirements provides ample spinoff benefits to the society at large thereby contributing to the nation building.
  - **Anti-Satellite (A-SAT) missile:** Anti-satellite weapons are space weapons designed to incapacitate or destroy satellites for strategic military purposes.
  - **Interceptor missiles:** Consist of a three-stage booster rocket (meaning three engines are used in succession), and a "kill vehicle," which travels alone after the last booster separates. Using intercept data, the kill vehicle is guided toward an intercept point, where it views the target using its own sensors. From there, using small thrusters to

adjust its direction, the interceptor attempts to track and collide with the incoming warhead. attempts to track and collide with the incoming warhead.

- **Outer Space Treaty of 1967:** prohibits countries from placing into orbit around the Earth "any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction". It also prohibits the stationing of such weapons on celestial bodies, like the moon, or in outer space. India is a signatory of it.

### ◎ ANALYSIS

#### India's stand on outer space:

- India has been participating in all sessions of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.
- India supported UNGA resolution 69/32 on No First Placement of Weapons on Outer Space.
- India supports the substantive consideration of the issue of **Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)** in the Conference on Disarmament where it has been on the agenda since 1982.
- The Outer Space Treaty (of which India is a member) prohibits only weapons of mass destruction in outer space, not ordinary weapons.

#### Why India's 'Mission Shakti' has a lot of ground to cover:

- Space is occupied by multiple satellites of many countries. The ASAT weapon won't give any strategic advantage, no country is dependent on one satellite.
- Most medium and long-range ballistic missiles reach apogees well above 300 kilometers, and it's not that simple to destroy them.

#### Concern for space debris

- The test was done in the lower atmosphere to ensure that there is no space debris.
- Whatever debris that is generated will decay and fall back onto the earth within weeks.

### **If not, Why space debris is such a big problem**

- Anything launched into the space remains in space, almost forever, unless it is specifically brought down or slowly disintegrate over decades or centuries.
- Satellites that are past their life and are no longer required remain in space, orbiting aimlessly in some orbit.
- According to the September 2018 issue of Orbital Debris Quarterly News, published by NASA, there were 19,137 man-made objects in space that were large enough to be tracked.
- The threat from the space debris is that it could collide with the operational satellites and render them dysfunctional.
  - ▶ When China carried out its first anti-satellite missile test in 2007, destroying its Fengyun-1C weather satellite, it created more than 2,300 large pieces of space debris. Each of them could render a satellite useless on collision.
  - ▶ The satellite hit during the Indian test, as stated, was orbiting at 300 km from Earth's surface.
  - ▶ Analysis of the Chinese test of 2007, which had targeted the satellite placed at more than 800 km from Earth's surface, had created debris that would remain in space for several decades, possibly centuries.

### **Does the ASAT carry warhead?**

- The launch missile doesn't carry any explosive, but just puts itself in the path of the satellite.
- The kinetic energy of the impact is much more than any high explosive it should otherwise carry, so there is no point putting a bomb on it.

### **What signal does the Mission Shakti test send to the world?**

- Mission Shakti has shown that India is capable of bringing down a satellite, and disrupting communication.
- Targeting satellites in the higher orbits, however, is only a matter of scale — of powering the rockets enough to go deeper in the space.
- Many of the most strategic satellites are placed in orbits that 30,000 km from earth's surface or even higher.

- DRDO scientists have claimed that India has the technology to target these as well.

### **Chronology of anti-satellite tests:**

- The first anti-satellite test (ASAT) was carried out by the US military way back in 1959.
- The then Soviet Union followed a year later.
- Thereafter, the two countries carried out a series of such tests up till early 1980s
- After that there was a lull, broken only by the Chinese test in 2007.

### **What are the other ways to make enemy satellite useless?**

- In the last few years, countries have explored alternative options of making enemy satellites dysfunctional
- Technologies have been developed to jam the communication from the satellites by interfering with its radio signals
- Possibility of sending satellites that could just approach a target close enough to deviate it from its selected orbit, without destroying it
- Several countries and organisations including China, Japan, Russia and the European Space Agency are said to be working on developing these 'close proximity' anti-satellite technologies.
- The third option is the possible use of ground-based lasers to 'dazzle' the sensors of the satellites
- This makes them at least "partially blind" so that they are unable to work efficiently.

### **Utilization and challenges of satellite age:**

- Satellites are extremely critical infrastructure.
- These include navigation systems, communication networks, broadcasting, banking systems, stock markets, weather forecasting, disaster management, land and ocean mapping and monitoring tools, and military applications.
- Destroying a satellite would render these applications useless.
- It can cripple enemy infrastructure, and bring it down on knees, without causing any threat to human lives.



### **Practice Question**

- India's space capabilities neither threaten any country nor directed against anyone. Discuss with reference to Mission Shakti and its implications on space weaponisation.

# IMPACT OF WEAK EL NINO CONDITIONS

## CONTEXT

- The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) from Ministry of Earth Sciences has declared that weak El Nino conditions are prevalent in equatorial Pacific Ocean.
- These conditions are likely to persist in early part of summer season and weaken thereafter.
- The preliminary impact of a weak El Nino can already be seen with the rising temperatures and heat waves across the country. In early March, the heat wave season began in many areas of Tamil Nadu, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema.

## ◎ ABOUT:

### El Nino

- El Nino (Spanish for Christ Child) is the occasional development of warm ocean surface waters along the coast of Ecuador and Peru. Recently this development has been used for forecasting of climatic conditions in different parts of the world.
- The El Nino normally occurs around Christmas, roughly every 2 to 7 years and lasts usually for a few weeks to a few months.
- El Nino event is related to two important atmospheric circulation systems:
  - ▶ **Hadley Circulation:** It features air rising near the Equator, flowing pole ward at a height of 10 to 15 kilometres above the earth's surface, descending in the subtropics, and then returning equator ward near the surface.
  - ▶ **Walker Circulation:** There is a stable low-pressure system above the western Pacific near South East Asia and a high-pressure system in the central Pacific. This results in a constant westward flow of the air masses from the area of high pressure to the area of low pressure. At higher altitudes this air then flows directly eastward, oblique to the Hadley Circulation.
- Due to the combined components of Walker Circulation and Hadley Circulation, there is a strong prevailing wind toward the west in the lower layers of the atmosphere, which maintains the stable coastal upwelling system off the coast in western South America.
- La Nina is the condition opposite of an El Nino. In a La Nina, the tropical Pacific trade winds become very strong and an abnormal accumulation of cold water occurs in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean.

and fish, providing rich pickings for the Peruvian fishing industry. During El Nino, the warm water sloshes back towards South America, which hides the nutrient-rich cold waters and ensures fish are in short supply.

- The lack of fish is the reason that El Nino was first discovered by the Peruvian fishermen. They noticed that every three to seven years, there would be virtually no fish in the seas. The reduction in fish caused by El Nino can be dramatic; an event in 1972-1973 almost brought the complete collapse of the Peruvian fishing industry.
- The severe El Nino had also caused massive coral bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef and droughts in parts of Africa, South East Asia and South America.
- Last year, Australia underwent its worst drought in living memory — in regions like the New South Wales the drought was the worst in 400 years.
- It also brings drought in Indonesia and Australia.

### Impact of El Nino in India:

- **El Nino and the Indian Monsoon rains are inversely related:**
  - Trade winds coming from South America normally blow westward towards Asia during Southwest Monsoon. Warming of the Pacific Ocean results in weakening of these winds.
  - Therefore, moisture and heat content gets limited and results in reduction and uneven distribution of rainfall across the Indian sub-continent.
  - In the 135 years between 1880 and 2014, around 90 per cent of all evolving El Nino years have seen below normal rainfall.
- **It leads to drought conditions:**
  - ▶ The most prominent droughts in India, six of them, since 1871 have been El Nino triggered droughts, including the recent ones that occurred in 2002 and 2009.

## ◎ ANALYSIS:

### Impact of El Nino around the world:

- It causes flooding in Peru and Ecuador. The earlier cool water off the coast was rich in nutrients



- ▶ Drought has negative bearing on crop production leading to very serious consequences on the livelihood of farmers especially the poor and marginal ones.
- ▶ In addition, the drop in agricultural production destabilises the food security framework of our country, leading to increased prices for the food products and push the lower economic class to hunger and starvation.
- **Hotter than usual summers:**
  - ▶ Whenever there is an El Nino during summer, temperatures tend to rise, with increased chances of stronger or more severe heat waves.
  - ▶ The last El Nino event that ended in 2016 had lasted for two years and caused heat waves in India. The heat waves in 2015 and 2016 killed more than 2,500 people in India.

#### **Disease outbreaks by El Nino:**

- Major diseases like chikungunya, dengue, malaria, Hantavirus, rift valley fever, cholera, plague and zika are affected by the weather events induced by El Nino.
- The scientists analysed certain disease outbreaks and tried to correlate them with higher temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns characteristic of the El Nino. They found that in regions like Southeast Asia, Tanzania, western United States and Brazil — which are generally affected by the El Nino — the spread of diseases came after shifts in rainfall, temperature and vegetation.
- There was either excess of droughts or floods which created the environmental conditions that favoured the growth and propagation of disease causing microorganisms and their carriers.
- The study's analysis indicates that the intensity of disease activity increased by 2.5-28 per cent during El Nino events than in other periods in the affected regions. For instance, plague in regions like Colorado and New Mexico and cholera in Tanzania were impacted by above normal rainfall.
- Similarly, excess land surface temperatures in Brazil and Southeast Asia aided the spread of dengue. El Nino, in itself, is a difficult phenomenon to track and study, which makes its consequences even more difficult to understand.

#### **El Nino and Global warming:**

##### ● **El Niño contributes to an increase in global temperatures:**

- ▶ The United Nations has declared 2015 the hottest year since record keeping began. It was also a year marked by the occurrence of a "super" El Niño.
- ▶ Even without El Niño, 2015 would have been a record warm year, but climate scientists believe El Niño was responsible for 8 percent to 10 percent of the warming. Scientists estimated that El Niño accounted for 0.07°C of the above average warming that occurred in 2015.

##### **But does rising temperature, in turn, intensify El Niño:**

- Study suggests that super El Niño events could double in the future due to climate change. Using 20 climate models to examine possible changes in El Niño over the next 100 years, the scientists projected that extreme El Niño events could occur roughly every 10 years instead of every 20.

##### **Way forward:**

- El Niño, the weather phenomenon which is devastating the livelihoods of tens of millions across the world, demands immediate attention to development solutions to mitigate the impact of its inevitable return.
- ▶ Scientists should make mathematical models to predict El Nino events. The most complete models should aim to represent as wide a range of physical processes as possible. The results thus far, though by no means perfect, give a better indication of the climatic conditions that will prevail during the next one or two seasons.
- ▶ Developing risk map and adaptive plan for climate smart agriculture.
- ▶ Increase the water storage capacities by building more reservoirs, recharging the ground water, reducing the run-off by streams and rivers, managing the water allocation to every sector, covering the soil layer with straw to reduce the moisture evaporation.



#### **Practice Question**

- Discuss the consequences of weak El Nino conditions with reference to India. Also suggest measures to mitigate its impact.

# UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME AND ETHICAL CONCERNS

## CONTEXT

- Universal Basic Income (UBI), first mooted by Economic Survey 2016-17, has once again become the centre of public discourse in the wake of general elections in India following the Indian National Congress (INC) party's manifesto promising a minimum income guarantee anti-poverty programme or Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) scheme which seeks to cover 20% of the population.
- Union government also started a targeted Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) scheme for farmers, PM-KISAN (Kisan Samman Nidhi), in Union Budget 2019-20. Other similar schemes are KALIA of Orissa government and Rythu Bandhu scheme of Telangana government.

## ◎ ABOUT:

### What is Universal Basic Income?

- UBI is a universal income grant available to every citizen without conditions like means test or work requirement. It would alleviate abject poverty and redistribute wealth. The universal basic income is a more cost-efficient replacement for current welfare systems as a method of alleviating poverty. It also provides a greater level of autonomy to the recipients to spend government issued money as per their own needs and requirements, which cannot be found in current welfare systems where money is issued paternalistically and restrictively.

### Need of Basic Income:

- UBI is a form of social security which will help in eliminating abject poverty and containing as well as reducing inequalities.
- It provides dignity to the individuals along with security as it provides them autonomy and agency to decide their needs & requirement and spend money accordingly.
- It seeks to reduce paternalistic state's role in people's lives.
- UBI helps in tackling the problem of leakage and pilferage in other welfare programmes as it's universal and more efficient.
- UBI is seen as imperative by the technology sector which sees it as a solution to endemic unemployment as the human labour gets substituted by technology and wages along with purchasing power gets reduced in the wake of technologies like Artificial Intelligence.

to the pursuit of happiness and the mitigation of unhappiness. UBI fosters social solidarity by alleviating poverty through the redistribution of wealth and, thus, reduces inequality. Although this might violate individual rights as money is redistributed from the rich to the poor. However, utilitarianism permits infringing the rights of a few if the act yields happiness for the majority. UBI, thus, becomes morally permissible on the grounds it maximizes utility.

## ◎ ANALYSIS:

### Ethical C3ns of UBI:

#### • Utilitarian Analysis:

- In utilitarianism, the principle of greatest happiness guides the actions. Utility also refers

#### • Consequentialist Analysis:

- Consequentialism is closely associated with utilitarianism, as both determine an action's moral value based on the consequences it yields. A consequence in the sense of consequentialism refers to the action and the outcome brought about by this action. UBI seeks to provide basic income to the population, provides them a basic and decent standard of living, and reduces abject poverty. Thus, consequentialist ethics favour a basic guaranteed income.

#### • Categorical Imperative or Kantian Ethics:

- The Categorical Imperative (CI) prescribes a standard of rationality to which all moral and rational agents are held. It places significance on the duty aspect rather than the consequences of the actions. The concept of duty is essential to moral decision-making as it provides a clear conception of the obligations as to 'what ought to be done'. Kantian ethics also dictates human beings should be treated as 'ends in themselves'. The moral permissibility of a UBI is through our duties of beneficence i.e. helping others, and duties of perfection i.e. cultivating one's talents, and UBI fulfils both of these duties independently.

#### • Fiscal Imperatives:

- One of the major issues with UBI is the inability of countries to fund UBI. A UBI may

be economically infeasible if countries cannot afford the program without high taxation rates. The latter may consequently act as disincentives to work and entrepreneurship. It, specially, is an area of concern for India as the subsidy burden of Indian economy is itself very high given the various subsidies like fertilizer subsidy, food subsidy, and other social programmes.

- **Increased Role of Private Sector:**

- ▶ One of the fundamental ideas behind UBI is that when everybody has a guaranteed income, market forces are allowed full play without being circumscribed by market-distorting social schemes. But private sector pricing of some essential sectors might lead to rent-seeking as private sector runs on the principle of profit-making primarily. Examples of higher education and private schools in India show that private players in social sector are not desirable in the present status of Indian socio-economy.

- **Other ethical issues:**

- ▶ A concern with increased autonomy that comes with UBI is the elimination of the incentive to work or to exceed job expectations. This may lead to one type of moral hazard in the population. Also, the UBI does not really tackle the economy's structural problems that keep people poor or

generate vast inequalities in economy. Countries like Switzerland have rejected the idea of UBI because of these reasons.

### **Conclusion:**

- The utilitarian and consequentialist approach along with Kantian ethics warrant the granting of basic income to individuals as a distinctive legal rights status, although their methods of arriving at the conclusion that a UBI is morally permissible are different.
- The universal basic income has conceivably gained political traction chiefly because of its appealing potential to address the shortcomings of the current welfare state, but the questions of where funds for the program come from, who benefits and who loses are still being answered in experiments as no country has fully functional policy of UBI as yet.
- It is challenging to assess the moral permissibility of an action where the consequences have yet to materialize, forcing us to apply foreseeable consequences that may differ considerably from actual consequences. However, UBI will be very difficult to repeal once introduced and so the government must take caution and deliberate over the issue before taking the plunge due to its populist attraction.

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# US-ISRAEL RELATIONS: CHANGING GEO-POLITICS

## CONTEXT

- The United States of America came under sharp criticism from 14 other United Nations Security Council nations for its decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in violation of international law.

### ◎ ABOUT:

- President Donald Trump signed a proclamation which recognized Israel's annexation of the strategic plateau.
- Three Security Council resolutions call on Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights, which it seized from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed - a move not recognized internationally.
- This US move appears to be normalizing "occupation", without attempting to leverage its authority and striving for collective consensus based peace solutions.

### ◎ BACKGROUND:

- Israel captured Golan, a strategically important plateau beside the Sea of Galilee, from Syria in the 1967 war.
- Among the territories it captured in the war, Israel has returned only the **Sinai Peninsula**, to Egypt.
- Unlike Egypt in the 1970s, Syria had neither the military ability nor the international clout to launch a campaign to get its territory back.
- The Syrian government, after fighting eight years of a civil war, is debilitated and isolated, and the U.S. move is unlikely to trigger any strong response, even from the Arab world.

### ◎ ANALYSIS

#### Repercussion of the proclamation:

- Trump's proclamation that the Golan Heights was part of Israel, raises questions about the future of a UN peacekeeping force after its mandate expires on June 30, 2019.
- The 1,000-strong UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was dispatched to a buffer zone between Israel and Syria in the Golan in 1974, tasked with monitoring a ceasefire.

#### What are the geo-political considerations behind this move?

- After **Syria** disintegrated during its civil war and its reemergence in the last year, the importance of the Golan Heights has become even more

important because of the deep **involvement of Iran and Hezbollah**.

- Secondly, in the American declaration, there is a **form of compensation** for the crack created in the inter-regional equation of the area, in consequence to the US declaration of its intention to end its military presence on the Syrian front.
- Russia, who took "ownership" in the area, has low interest to keep Israel's national security interests.
- USA's declaration on the Golan Heights signals to the Russians to not push Israel into corner.
- Israel will be required to conduct a complicated legitimization battle, while increasing its effort to prevent an Iranian establishment on the other side of the Golan Heights.

#### What has been the response of UNSC and other UN members?

- Speaker after speaker at the council session supported Syria's sovereignty over the Golan Heights and opposed Israel's annexation after Trump's proclamation.
- **South Africa:** This unilateral action does nothing to assist in finding a long-term peaceful solution to the conflict in the Middle East.
- Syria's closest ally, **Russia**, urged governments to continue to view the Golan Heights as Israeli-occupied territory.
- **France** warned any attempt to turn from international law was "doomed to fail".
- **China** recalled that UN resolutions had declared the Golan as a territory occupied by Israel.

#### Is the recent move a categorical flip or a well calculated action?

- It may sound ironic that a President who promised to facilitate a deal between Israelis and Palestinians has turned out to be the most pro-Israel President in U.S. history.
- Trump has already recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a city which was captured in parts in the 1948 and 1967 wars and which is claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians.
- Of late, US State Department report had dropped the word 'occupied' in references to Golan Heights



and the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank, hinting at where the US administration stood on the issue.

- Whatever be the paradigm, US President's decision flouts international norms and consensus in the similar fashion as of China's (UNCLOS and maritime islands/South China Sea 9 dash line claims), and sets a dangerous precedent for nations involved in conflicts.

#### Creation of Israel

- USA supported the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which favored the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine.
- President Franklin D. Roosevelt assured the Arabs in 1945 that the United States would not intervene without consulting both the Jews and the Arabs in that region.
- The British, who held a colonial mandate for Palestine until May 1948, opposed both the creation of a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine as well as unlimited immigration of Jewish refugees to the region.
- On November 29, 1947 the United Nations adopted Resolution 181 (**also known as the Partition Resolution**) that would divide Great Britain's former Palestinian mandate into Jewish and Arab states in May 1948 when the British mandate was scheduled to end.
- Although the United States backed Resolution 181, the U.S. Department of State recommended the creation of a United Nations trusteeship.
- This Trusteeship was mandated to place limit on Jewish immigration and create a division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab provinces but not states.
- On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel.

- U.S. President Harry S. Truman recognized the new nation on the same day.

#### Six-Day War (1967)

- The Six-Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors was not about one particular concern or dispute. The war occurred, rather, after a series of events escalated tensions.
- The Six-Day War ended with Israel capturing the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.
- Of these, only the Sinai Peninsula was returned, per the Israel-Egypt Camp David Accords peace treaty, while the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem were formally annexed by Israel.
- Meanwhile, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were placed under Israeli military occupation, while the Palestinians sought to establish an independent Palestinian state in those territories.
- The Six-Day War also marked the start of a new phase in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, since the conflict created hundreds of thousands of refugees and brought more than one million Palestinians in the occupied territories under Israeli rule.

#### Camp David Accords (Egyptian-Israeli History)

- It was signed on September 17, 1978 between Israel and Egypt that led to a peace treaty, the first such treaty between Israel and any of its Arab neighbors.
- It was brokered by U.S. President Jimmy Carter between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat.

#### Practice Question

- Recently, USA recognized Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. In this context, critically examine the possibility of peaceful resolution of Arab- Israel problem.

**SECTION: B**  
**(PRELIMS)**  

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## COFFEE BLOCKCHAIN INITIATIVE

### ◎ CONTEXT

- The Coffee Board launched the pilot of the country's first blockchain-based marketplace app for trading in Indian coffee, aimed at getting growers better returns by removing myriad middlemen.

### ◎ ABOUT:

- Known as the Coffee Blockchain initiative, the pilot was activated simultaneously by the executive director of the International Coffee Organisation, Nairobi and Anup Wadhawan, India's commerce secretary.
- The blockchain-based solution was developed in coordination with Eka Software Solutions.
- India became the third country having a coffee blockchain after France and Ethiopia.
- It will allow a coffee producer to directly transact with multiple buyers.
- The aim of using blockchain is to "premium-ise" coffee, add "bean-to-cup traceability" and cut the role of middlemen.
- Blockchain is no longer a technology that is just about powering cryptocurrencies like bitcoin and ether. But a distributed digital ledger technology (DLT), and it is also being used by manufacturing companies to improve their supply chains; by healthcare and electricity companies; and by the financial sector to make transactions more transparent.
- In India, coffee is cultivated in about 454,000 hectares by 366,000 coffee farmers -- 98% of them small farmers -- whose returns are meagre.

## GI TAG FOR FIVE COFFEE VARIETIES

### ◎ CONTEXT:

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has recently awarded GI tag to — Coorg Arabica, Chikmagalur Arabica and Bababudangiris coffee from Karnataka, Wayanad Robusta coffee from Kerala, , Araku Valley Arabica from Andhra Pradesh.

### ◎ ABOUT:

- India is the only country in the world where the entire coffee cultivation is grown under shade, hand-picked and sun dried, it said adding the country produces some of the best coffee in the world, grown by tribal farmers in the Western and Eastern Ghats, which are the two major bio-diversity hotspots in the world. Indian coffee is highly valued in the world market and sold as premium coffee in Europe.

#### Coffee Varieties which have been awarded GI tag

- **Coorg Arabica coffee:** It is grown specifically in the region of Kodagu district in Karnataka.
- **Wayanaad Robusta coffee:** It is grown specifically in the region of Wayanad district which is situated on the eastern portion of Kerala.
- **Chikmagalur Arabica coffee:** It is grown specifically in the region of Chikmagalur district and it is situated in the Deccan plateau, belongs to the Malnad region of Karnataka.
- **Araku Valley Arabica coffee:** It can be described as coffee from the hilly tracks of Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha region at an elevation of 900-1100 Mt MSL. The coffee produce of Araku, by the tribals, follows an organic approach in which they emphasise management practices involving substantial use of organic manures, green manuring and organic pest management practices.
- **Bababudangiris Arabica coffee:** Grown specifically in the birthplace of coffee in India and the region is situated in the central portion of Chikmagalur district. Selectively

hand-picked and processed by natural fermentation, the cup exhibits full body, acidity, mild flavour and striking aroma with a note of chocolate. This coffee is also called high grown coffee which slowly ripens in the mild climate and thereby the bean acquires a special taste and aroma.

### Benefits of getting GI Tag

- The recognition and protection will allow the coffee producers of India to invest in maintaining the specific qualities of the coffee grown in that particular region.
- It will also enhance the visibility of Indian coffee in the world and allow growers to get maximum price for their premium coffee.

### Coffee Cultivation in India

- In India, coffee is cultivated in about 4.54 lakh hectares by 3.66 lakh coffee farmers of which 98% are small farmers.
- Coffee cultivation is mainly done in the Southern States of India:
  - ▶ Karnataka – 54%
  - ▶ Kerala – 19%
  - ▶ Tamil Nadu – 8%
- Coffee is also grown in non-traditional areas like Andhra Pradesh and Odisha (17.2%) and North East States (1.8%).

## IL&FS & FINANCIAL ISSUES

### ◎ CONTEXT:

- The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) asked the government and the IL&FS to provide financial details, including amounts payable to creditors, regarding 13 group entities that have been classified under the 'amber' category.
- During the proceedings, the bench said that whatsoever step is taken by the newly-appointed board and the government for resolution of IL&FS and its group companies would have to be approved by the appellate tribunal.

### ◎ ABOUT:

#### Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL & FS):

- It is an Indian infrastructure development and finance company.
- It was formed in 1987 as an "RBI registered Core Investment Company" by three financial institutions, namely the Central Bank of India, Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) and Unit Trust of India (UTI), to provide finance and loans for major infrastructure projects.
- It operates through 256 group companies including subsidiaries, joint venture companies and associate entities.
- Its projects include some of the largest infrastructure projects in India including India's longest tunnel, Chenani-Nashri Tunnel (in the state of Jammu and Kashmir), which was opened for traffic in April 2017.
- Gradually, as the organization needed better financing, it additionally opened itself to two large international players, namely Mitsubishi (through Orix corporation Japan) and the Abu Dhabi Investment authority. Subsequently, Life Insurance Corporation India, Orix and ADIA became its largest shareholders, a pattern that continues to this day.

#### Cause of concern:

- IL & FS has run short of cash. In addition a recent drying up of new infrastructure projects, IL&FS has felt the pain from interest rates that have soared to multi-year highs for short-term borrowings.



- Some of IL&FS's own construction projects, including roads and ports, have faced cost overruns amid delays in land acquisition and approvals.
- IL&FS Financial Services has about \$500 million of repayment obligations over the next six months. Its debts total about \$12.6 billion.

**Green, Amber and Red categories:**

- Under its resolution plan, the government has categorised IL&FS group entities into green, amber and red categories based on their respective financial positions.
- Entities classified as 'green' would continue to meet their payment obligations, while 'amber' category firms can meet only operational payment obligations to senior secured financial creditors. Those falling in the 'red' category are the entities which cannot meet their payment obligations towards even senior secured financial creditors.

**National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)**

- It was constituted under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 for hearing appeals against the orders of National Company Law Tribunal(s) (NCLT), the orders passed by NCLT(s) under Section 61 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) and any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

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**PUBLIC DISCLOSURE NORM & IRDAI**

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**◎ CONTEXT:**

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) moots public disclosure norm.

**◎ ABOUT:****What is Public Disclosure Norm?**

- A public disclosure norm requires all general insurers, health insurers, specialised insurers and reinsurers, including branches of foreign reinsurers, to share information at specified intervals about their financials and performance.
- The norms require the insurers to share information about revenue, profit and loss account and balance sheet, as well as provide segmental reporting and schedules to accounts.

**What is the objective of norm?**

- It is to ensure the safety of the policyholders.
- It recognises the fact that insurers have an equal responsibility towards the policyholders as their duty towards investors.
- This is so because when insurers become insolvent, loss to policyholders is much more than that to investors.

**Why the norm is introduced?**

- Public disclosures on the risks faced by the insurers provide information to the policyholders to make informed decisions before entering into an insurance contract.
- Besides safety of policyholders, other objectives behind the proposed disclosure norm are to serve as a tool to assess risk exposure of an insurer.
- It educates investors on company's financial performance, financial position, risk exposure, corporate governance and management.
- It measures orderly growth of the insurance sector and is critical for ensuring its fairness.

- Though they may not be listed on any stock exchange, such public disclosures become necessary even for all the insurance companies. The exposure draft makes it mandatory for the insurers, other than those into life insurance, to upload on their website the details on a quarterly basis and publish in newspapers the details on a half yearly basis.

### **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)**

- It is an autonomous, statutory body tasked with regulating and promoting the insurance and re-insurance industries in India.
- It was constituted by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999, an Act of Parliament passed by the Government of India.
- IRDAI is a 10-member body including the chairman, five full-time and four part-time members appointed by the government of India.
- It was created based on the recommendations of the Malhotra Committee.
- Its headquarters is in Hyderabad.

### **What are the functions of IRDAI?**

- The functions of the IRDAI are defined in Section 14 of the IRDAI Act, 1999 and include:
- Issuing, renewing, modifying, withdrawing, suspending or cancelling registrations
- Protecting policyholder interests
- Specifying qualifications, the code of conduct and training for intermediaries and agents
- Specifying the code of conduct for surveyors and loss assessors
- Promoting efficiency in the conduct of insurance businesses
- Promoting and regulating professional organisations connected with the insurance and re-insurance industry
- Levying fees and other charges
- Inspecting and investigating insurers, intermediaries and other relevant organisations

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## **GLOBAL ENERGY & CO<sub>2</sub> STATUS REPORT**

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### **◎ CONTEXT:**

- The IEA's second Global Energy and CO<sub>2</sub> Status Report released in March 2019 provides a snapshot of recent global trends and developments across fuels, renewable sources, and energy efficiency and carbon emissions, in 2018.

### **◎ ABOUT**

#### **Global Trends**

- Energy consumption worldwide grew by 2.3% in 2018, nearly twice the average rate of growth since 2010, driven by a robust global economy as well as higher heating and cooling needs in some parts of the world.
- As a result of higher energy consumption, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions rose 1.7% in 2018 and hit a new record.
- The biggest gains came from natural gas, which emerged as the fuel of choice last year, accounting for nearly 45% of the increase in total energy demand.
- Demand for all fuels rose, with fossil fuels meeting nearly 70% of the growth for the second year running.
- Renewables (gas, solar and wind) grew at double-digit pace, but still not fast enough to meet the increase in demand for electricity around the world.

- As a result of higher energy consumption, global energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions increased to 33.1 Gt CO<sub>2</sub>, up.
- Coal-fired power generation continues to be the single largest emitter, accounting for 30% of all energy-related carbon dioxide emissions.
- Higher energy demand was propelled by a global economy that expanded by 3.7% in 2018, a higher pace than the average annual growth of 3.5% seen since 2010.
- China, the United States, and India together accounted for nearly 70% of the rise in energy demand.
- The United States had the largest increase in oil and gas demand worldwide. Gas consumption jumped 10% from the previous year, the fastest increase since the beginning of IEA records in 1971.
- Weather conditions last year were also responsible for almost a fifth of the increase in global energy demand as average winter and summer temperatures in some regions approached or exceeded historical records.
- Cold snaps drove demand for heating and, more significantly, hotter summer temperatures pushed up demand for cooling.

### Trends by technology

- Global gas demand expanded at its fastest rate since 2010, with year-on-year growth of 4.6%. Oil demand grew 1.3% and coal consumption rose 0.7%. Oil and coal together accounted for a quarter of global demand growth.
- Renewables, which grew by over 4%, met around one-quarter of the growth in total primary energy demand.
- This was largely due to expansion in electricity generation, where renewables accounted for 45% of the growth in 2018.

### India

- India emitted 2,299 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2018, a 4.8% rise from last year.
- India's emissions growth in 2018 was higher than that of the United States and China — the two biggest emitters in the world
- India's per capita emissions were about 40% of the global average and contributed 7% to the global carbon dioxide burden.
- India saw primary energy demand increase 4% or over 35 Mtoe (million tonnes of oil equivalent), accounting for 11% of global growth, the third-largest share.
- Growth in India was led by coal (for power generation) and oil (for transport), the first and second biggest contributors to energy demand growth, respectively.
- India's energy intensity improvement declined 3% from last year even as its renewable energy installations increased 10.6% from last year.

#### International Energy Agency

- Founded in 1974, the IEA was initially designed to help countries co-ordinate a collective response to major disruptions in the supply of oil, such as the crisis of 1973.
- While this remains a key aspect of its work, the IEA has evolved and expanded significantly.
- It is at the heart of global dialogue on energy, providing authoritative analysis through a wide range of publications, including the flagship **World Energy Outlook and the IEA Market Reports**; data and statistics.
- The four main areas of IEA focus are: Energy Security, Economic Development Environmental Awareness: and Engagement Worldwide.
- **India is not a member of IEA.**

## MENACE OF STUBBLE BURNING

### ◎ CONTEXT:

- Paddy fields in Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala, look black these days with some of them emitting plumes of smoke. Relatively a new phenomenon in this part of the region, setting paddy fields on fire after harvest by 'padashekhara samitis' and farmers is emerging as a major cause for concern.

### ◎ ABOUT:

#### More on news:

- In Punjab or Haryana, residue burning is rampant after harvest, resulting in heavy smog choking the region every year.
- In Kerala, the rampant burning of fields started only a few years ago. The smoke from stubble contains carbon monoxide and other toxic chemicals, which adversely affect human health and environment. However, the farmers are yet to be aware of the dangers.
- In Kuttanad, the farmers are burning fields to destroy stubble, to check the germination of weedy rice and prevent diseases, as part of preparing their fields for the next crop season. They believe setting the fields on fire will improve the soil fertility.
- Experts, however, say the burning impacts the quality of soil as it robs the soil of vital nutrients.

#### What is Stubble burning?

- Stubble burning is intentionally setting fire to the straw stubble that remains after wheat, paddy and other crops have been harvested.
- The burning of stubble, contrasted with alternatives such as ploughing the stubble back into the ground, has a number of consequences and effects on the environment.

#### How it is beneficial to farmers?

- This method is quick one for clearing the fields.
- It is a cheap method.
- It kills weeds, including those resistant to herbicide and also kills slugs and other pests.
- It can reduce nitrogen tie-up.

#### What are the harmful effects of stubble burning?

- It causes loss of nutrients.
- It contributes to pollution from smoke.
- It has risk of out of control spreading of fire.
- It damages electrical and electronic equipment from floating threads of conducting waste.

#### What is the solution to it?

- The most prominent solution presented is the in-situ management which involves ploughing back the stubble in the ground. This is economically unfeasible for farmers because of the high cost of both manual labour and mechanised options. The government should incentivize this method.
- The happy seeder machine which adopts a low tillage system to cut the straw and distribute mulch on the field. The government should provide subsidy on the machine.
- Another solution is to cut, bail and transport the straw to cardboard factories or bio-mass based power plants. This will earn revenue to the farmers.
- Diversify the cropping pattern away from the paddy cultivation. Farmers should grow crops which do not leave behind the stubble. If the crop grown is less remunerative to the farmers, the government should remunerate it by announcing MSP of these new crops same as that of rice.

## ELECTORAL BONDS

### ◎ CONTEXT

- The Election Commission of India filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court, saying that the introduction of electoral bonds and the removal of the cap will have a “serious impact” on the transparency of political funding.

### ◎ ABOUT

#### More on news

- The court is hearing a petition filed by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), challenging the validity of the scheme of electoral bonds.
- Election Commission told the court that it had communicated its concerns about electoral bonds to the Union Ministry of Law and Justice.
- In a situation where contributions received through electoral bonds are not reported, on perusal of the contribution reports of the political parties, it cannot be ascertained whether the political party has taken any donation in violation of provisions under Section 29-B of the Representation of People Act, 1951.
- RPA, 1951 prohibits the political parties from taking donations from government companies and foreign sources.
- Election Commission had proposed an amendment to the Representation of People Act to reduce the limit of anonymous cash donations to Rs 2,000 against the Rs 20,000 at present.
- According to the Commission, the amendments to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 2010, made through the Finance Act, 2016, will allow “unchecked foreign funding” of political parties in India.

#### What are electoral bonds?

- An electoral bond is designed to be a bearer instrument like a Promissory Note — in effect, it will be similar to a bank note that is payable to the bearer on demand and free of interest.
- It can be purchased by any citizen of India or a body incorporated in India.
- The bonds will be issued in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore and will be available at specified branches of State Bank of India.
- They can be bought by the donor with a KYC-compliant account. Donors can donate the bonds to their party of choice which can then be cashed in via the party's verified account within 15 days.

#### What are the other conditions?

- Every party that is registered under section 29A of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951 (43 of 1951) and has secured at least one per cent of the votes polled in the most recent Lok Sabha or State election will be allotted a verified account by the Election Commission of India.
- Electoral bond transactions can be made only via this account.
- The bonds will be available for purchase for a period of 10 days each in the beginning of every quarter, i.e. in January, April, July and October as specified by the Central Government.
- An additional period of 30 days shall be specified by the Central Government in the year of Lok Sabha elections.
- The electoral bonds will not bear the name of the donor. In essence, the donor and the party details will be available with the bank, but the political party might not be aware of who the donor is.
- The intention is to ensure that all the donations made to a party will be accounted for in the balance sheets without exposing the donor details to the public.

**Representation of People Act, 1951**

- It is an act of Parliament of India to provide for:
  - the conduct of election of the Houses of Parliament and to the House or Houses of the Legislature of each State,
  - the qualifications and disqualifications for membership of those Houses,
  - the corrupt practices and other offences at or in connection with such elections and
  - the decision of doubts and disputes arising out of or in connection with such elections.

**WORLD AUTISM DAY****◎ CONTEXT:**

- The World Autism Awareness Day was observed across the world on April 2, 2019 with an aim to raise awareness about autism throughout the world.

**◎ ABOUT:**

- The theme of World Autism Awareness Day 2019 was "Assistive Technologies, Active Participation".
- Also, it aims to encourage the Member States of the United Nations to take measures to raise awareness about autism.

**What is Autism?**

- Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong developmental disability that manifests itself during the first three years of life.
- It results from a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain, mostly affecting children and adults in many countries irrespective of gender, race or socio-economic status.
- It is characterized by impairments in social interaction, problems with verbal and non-verbal communication and restricted, repetitive behaviour, interests and activities.
- Though there is no cure for it, therapeutic and behavioural guidance can considerably improve quality of life.

**Symptoms:**

- Failing to, or being slow to respond to someone calling their name
- Echolalia (repeating the same phrase over and over)
- Repetitive movements, such as flapping hands, rocking back and forth, or flicking fingers
- limited interest in interacting with other people
- over- or under-sensitivity to sensory stimuli, such as sounds, smells, colours and lights
- Getting upset by slight changes in a routine etc.

**When was the day proclaimed?**

- The day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly through the resolution 62/139 and was passed in the UN Council on November 1, 2007.
- It was in 2008 when the UN General Assembly unanimously declared 2 April as World Autism Awareness Day.
- World Autism Day is also one of the only four official health-specific UN Days.



- ◎ **SIGNIFICANCE:**
- For people suffering from autism, the access to affordable assistive technologies is a must to enable them to exercise their basic human rights and thereby contribute to the understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
  - Assistive technology can help them participate on an equal basis with others.

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## TERROR MONITORING GROUP

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- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- To take action against “hard core sympathisers amongst government employees, including teachers, who are providing covert or overt support” to terror-related activities, the Ministry of Home Affairs has formed a Terror Monitoring Group (TMG).

◎ **ABOUT:**

**Terror Monitoring Group:**

- It is a multi-disciplinary monitoring group under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The group will meet on a weekly basis.

**Mandates of group:**

- To ensure synergised, concerted and coordinated action against terror financing and other terror-related activities in Jammu and Kashmir and bring them to logical conclusion.
- TMG shall identify all key persons including leaders of the organisations who are involved in supporting terrorism in any form and take concerted action against them.
- It will investigate the networks of various channels being used to fund terror and terror-related activities and take action to stop flow of such funds.

**Members:**

- The seven-member TMG shall be headed by the Jammu and Kashmir additional director general of police (ADGP). It shall also have representatives from the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), National Investigation Agency (NIA), Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), and Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC). The Jammu and Kashmir police inspector-general shall be the seventh member of the TMG.
- However, the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which has attached several properties in terror funding cases, did not find mention in the order.

**Reasons for its creation:**

- According to an estimate of the NIA, Pakistan-based terror groups finance terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir by generating millions in donations through their charity organisations. Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF), a charity run by terror outfits Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Al Rehmat Trust, backed by terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), have been supporting militants and funding terrorism in Kashmir.
- The groups collect millions of dollars in donations through crowd funding in the name of social service.
- According to a 2012 report of an intelligence agency, 780 million Pakistani rupees were collected for funding terrorism in Kashmir.

## VITAMIN DEFICIENCY WIDESPREAD AMONG HEALTHY LOOKING URBAN INDIANS

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- Scientists from Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) conducted a study on 270 apparently healthy adults (147 men and 123 women) between 30 and 70 years of age to check their vitamin levels.
  - Blood levels of vitamins (A, B1, B2, B6, B12, folate and D) and homocysteine were assessed.
  - Study revealed that a large number of healthy looking urban Indians are suffering from vitamin deficiency.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- Vitamins are micronutrients essential for normal cellular and molecular functions, growth and maintenance of body tissues.
  - The study has revealed that half the people had vitamin B2 deficiency followed by vitamin B6 deficiency (46 per cent).
  - These results are very important as it shifts the focus to the serious consequences of vitamin B2 deficiency, which has largely been ignored till date.
  - The study showed that food people consume was only catering for a small amount of the actual requirement of vitamins. Deficiencies mainly result from inadequate diet.
  - The very high dietary inadequacy of vitamin B12 (96%) and folate (91%) observed in the study was a matter of concern. The high dietary inadequacy of vitamin B2 (71%) could be the result of milling of rice and wheat as riboflavin present in the germ and barn of grains is lost.
- Key Facts:-**
- Vitamin B1 or thiamine deficiency results in dementia, Alzheimer's disease, cancer and metabolic diseases.
  - Vitamin B2 or riboflavin deficiency is associated with nerve-related diseases, anemia and heart diseases.
  - Vitamin B6 deficiency is associated with failure of higher brain functions, fits, cancer, migraine, chronic pain, heart involvement, low immunity and depression.
  - Vitamin B12 and A deficiency can also have serious consequences, the scientists have cautioned.
- ◎ **SIGNIFICANCE:**
- This study provides first-hand information to researchers, medical professionals and policy makers regarding the magnitude of the prevailing situation.
  - Since the Urban population constitutes main workforce, deficiency of micronutrients can have implications on their productivity.
  - The major component of an Indian diet consists of cereal/pulse-based foods. Less consumption of foods rich in vitamins such as vegetables, fruits and dairy products results in deficiencies.

## ZIKA VIRUS: US RELAXES TRAVEL WARNINGS TO INDIA

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- The US government's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has modified its advisory against travelling to India which it had issued after Zika cases were reported in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.



- The Indian government had urged the US to “withdraw or modify” its advisory in January by providing evidence of the contained outbreak in the country.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- It said that the Zika virus strain isolated from Rajasthan matches with the Brazilian Zika strain associated with outbreaks and microcephaly or Congenital Zika Syndrome (CZS).
- The ICMR-NIV Pune has initiated mice/animal studies to understand the potential of this virus to cause microcephaly or CZS.
- The ICMR has also initiated a study to understand the outcomes of pregnancy among women infected with Zika and also the occurrence of CZS as well as other neurological malformations in their newborns. The study is being rolled out in Rajasthan in the first week of April and in Bhopal by the end of April.

◎ **BACKGROUND:**

- In December 2018, the CDC, USA, issued a travel health notice on Zika virus in India. The travel advisory depicted that India has an ongoing outbreak of the disease in Rajasthan and its surrounding states.
- The advisory further cautioned pregnant women not to travel to areas with ongoing Zika outbreaks.
- Women planning pregnancy were also alerted on travel. Such an advisory could have serious implications on travel and trade in India.

### What is Zika Virus?

- Zika virus is similar to dengue fever, yellow fever and West Nile virus. Carried by infected Aedes aegypti mosquitos, Zika is largely transmitted through bites, but can also occur through intrauterine infection.
- It was first identified in 1947 in Zika Forest, Uganda from where it derives its name. If a woman is bitten by an infected mosquito and becomes infected, Zika can cross into the placenta and affect the fetus.
- While anyone can contract Zika, pregnant women are the most at risk due to the potential for fetal microcephaly and other neurologic abnormalities.
- **Symptoms include** fever, headache, red eyes, skin rash, fatigue, muscle pain etc.

### Treatment and Prevention

- There is no specific treatment or vaccine currently available to treat Zika. The best form of prevention is protection against mosquito bites and clearing stagnant water where mosquitoes breed.

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