

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK - 3 | AUGUST, 2019

MAINS

ENVIRONMENT

- ② Forest Rights Act
- ② Waterbodies Conservation

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- ② Crypto Currencies

SCHEMES & BILLS

- ② Airports Economic
- ② Regulatory Authority (AERA) Bill 2019

DEFENCE

BrahMos Cruise Missiles ②

INDIAN ECONOMY

- Corporate Social Responsibility ②
- Economic Census ②
- Khanij Bidesh India Ltd ②

ENVIRONMENT

- Deforestation in the Amazon rainforest ②
- Soil Health Card ②
- Tiger Census ②

GOVERNANCE

- One Nation One Ration Card Scheme ②
- Triple Talaq ②

HISTORY & CULTURE

- Indus Valley inscriptions ②

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- UN Convention on International Settlement Agreements resulting

POLITY

- Disqualification under Anti-Defection Law ②
- Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill 2019 ②
- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2019 ②

SECURITY

- ASAT Missile ②

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- ② Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)
- ② Diabetes
- ② Eugenics
- ② Global Coalition of the Willing on Pollinators

SOCIAL ISSUES

- ② Female Foeticide
- ② Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojana
- ② Mission Shakti of Maharashtra Government

MISCELLANEOUS

- ② Atal Community Innovation Centre (ACIC) Program
- ② Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2019

PRELIMS

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— **Disclaimer** —

The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

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-3 (AUGUST, 2019)

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SECTION: A

(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOREST RIGHTS ACT

CONTEXT

- The Supreme Court is currently hearing several cases filed by various Environmental Organizations against the provisions of Forest Rights Act 2006.

◎ BACKGROUND

- In India, nearly 275 million poor people depend on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) for subsistence and livelihoods.
- Unfortunately, Indian laws since colonial times have considered forest dwellers as "encroachers" and have criminalised their forest-related livelihood activities rather than recognizing their customary rights over their land.
- It was the first time in 1990, that the Government of India recognized the symbiotic relationship between tribal people and forests in the National Forest Policy, 1988.
- In order to implement the provisions of the policy, Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) issued the required guidelines but it failed to implement them.
- Then, in 2004, when mass protests were held by the tribal communities, MOEF issued supplementary guidelines to recognize the legal right of tribal communities to forest land and resources. However, the Supreme Court issued a stay order on the Guidelines.
- Finally, in 2006, the Government enacted the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006

- The Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 is a piece of social legislation which aims to address the historical injustice that our forest dwelling communities have had to face for nearly 150 years by providing them with security of tenure over land for cultivation and habitation through individual rights. Ministry of Tribal Affairs is primarily responsible for its implementation.
- The FRA also empowers forest dwelling communities to protect, regenerate, conserve and manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use.
- It has the provision for creating critical wildlife habitats within protected areas which currently is the strongest conservation provision among existing laws of the country.

- It aims to positively impact the livelihood of the forest dependent tribals, but due to the lack of clear understanding and irregular implementation this goal was not fully achieved.
- As a result, the very constitutionality of the FRA was challenged in the Supreme Court in 2008
- Moreover, the Supreme Court in Feb 2019 had ordered the eviction of lakhs of forest dwellers whose claims have been rejected under the FRA. This was later stayed by the court.

◎ ANALYSIS

Issues related to the Forest Rights Act

• Human Rights Vs Environmental Rights

The Act is highly criticised as land distribution legislation. But this criticism is not justified as:

- It clearly states that forest dwellers who are either Scheduled Tribes or Other Traditional Forest Dwellers are only entitled to claim both individual and community forest rights (not land) through a clear process of submitting a claim. The rights granted to the forest dwellers does not mean that the forest is a pie to be divided and then they can do anything on the piece of land.
- Moreover, the act does not sanction any fresh clearance of forest, as individual rights over land will only be granted if the forest dweller was in possession of that parcel of land on December 13, 2005.
- It also places an upper limit of four hectares per claimant for individual rights.

• Lack of Awareness

- The government has made little effort to disseminate information about the application and approval process even though most beneficiaries are unaware of the full provisions of the Act, especially those pertaining to community rights.

• Improper Execution

- Ministry of Tribal Affairs has erected administrative barriers against implementation and set arbitrary deadlines for completing the

process for recognizing these rights.

- ▶ The law is yet to be implemented in 11 states
 - ▶ The MoEF continues to divert land without the approval of those affected and relocates people and communities.
 - ▶ Many state governments have admitted that almost no action has been taken pertaining to community rights.
 - ▶ The law requires coordination between tribal, forests, revenue and local self-government departments in the implementation of the Act. Each department interprets the law according to its own mandate and objectives and devises its own set of rules.
 - ▶ Rehabilitation and compensation was often reported to be not satisfactory.
 - ▶ The trade of Minor Forest Produce like tendu leaves, mahua and saal seeds is controlled by state governments. The monopoly curbs competition as well as restricts benefits to government officials only.
- **Legal Challenge**
 - ▶ The Act is criticized on the basis that the Centre has no power to frame a law on forest land, as land is a state subject.

Recommendations

- Awareness Campaigns - There are several examples where information provided to tribals and other forest dwellers have helped them in applying for community rights. Information dissemination campaigns should have several dimensions to reach out to the people. They should have a mass communication approach i.e. reaching out through radio, television and other media to ensure that people receive the basic messages

- Capacity Building –Systematic efforts should be made to organise effective trainings to familiarise officials and others involved in implementing the Act with its provisions.
- Improve implementation mechanism - There is significant improvement in filing and sanctioning of claims for user rights, particularly individual claims. Also, improved implementation ensures better distribution of FRA entitlements and more coherent convergence of development and poverty alleviation programmes at the local level to improve the quality of life of the poor.
- Village Maps - Technology needs to be utilised to support implementation and make the process more efficient and effective. The ICT initiative of the Madhya Pradesh government - a web-based application has helped in speeding up the formation of committees at all levels across the state.
- Collective Participation - Civil society groups should be involved at all levels of implementation. Tribal affairs ministry should clarify that the rights certificates issued should be recorded in settlement records and the land with individual rights be treated as private land. It must- clarify if it should be converted to revenue land

CONCLUSION

- The FRA, by design, has tremendous potential to strengthen the conservation regime across India by recognising rights of forest dwellers over land and community forest resources, a key factor for conservation to succeed as shown both by research and practice in many countries. However, implementing the FRA in letter and spirit with empathy for forest dwellers should be the priority for the government to achieve conservation justice.



Practice Question

- illustrate the provisions of forest rights act 2005. Also, examine whether it has been successful in preserving tribal rights. Elucidate with examples.

Forest Rights Act, 2006

CONTEXT

The Supreme Court is currently hearing several cases filed by various Environmental Organisations against the provisions of Forest Rights Act 2006

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About FRA

Since colonial times, Indian laws had considered forest dwellers as “encroachers” and criminalised their forest-related livelihood activities rather than recognising their customary rights over their land

So, FRA, 2006 was enacted with an aim to correct this historical injustice meted out to the forest dwellers

grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities

The Act

vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land in forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers

eligibility to claim rights

Primarily residing in forests or forest lands and depending on forests and forest land for a livelihood

either the claimant must be a member of the **ST** in that area or be a ‘**Other traditional forest dweller**’ i.e. must have been residing in the forest for 75 years

It clearly states that these claimants are **only entitled to claim both individual and community forest rights (not land)** through a clear process of submitting a claim

the act **does not sanction any fresh clearance of forest**, as individual rights over land will only be granted if the forest dweller was in possession of that parcel of land on December 13, 2005

It also places an **upper limit of four hectares** per claimant for individual rights

Little effort has been made to disseminate information about the application and approval process

Lack of Awareness

Legal Challenge

It is criticized on the basis that the Centre has no power to frame a law on forest land, as land is a state subject

Issues related to the Forest Rights Act

The MoEF continues to divert land without the approval of those affected

Improper Execution

Rehabilitation and compensation was often reported to be not satisfactory

The law requires coordination between tribal, forests, revenue and local self-government departments in the implementation

Each department interprets the law according to its own mandate and objectives and devises its own set of rules

The tribals should be made aware about the provisions of the FRA via a mass communication approach

to ensure better distribution of FRA entitlements and more coherent convergence of development and poverty alleviation programmes

Awareness campaigns

Improve implementation mechanism

Way Ahead

Collective Participation

Capacity Building

Civil society groups should be involved at all levels of implementation.

Systematic efforts should be made to organise effective training to officials involved

The FRA has tremendous potential to strengthen the conservation regime across India by recognising rights of forest dwellers over land and community forest resources. However, it would require implementing the FRA in letter and spirit with empathy for forest dwellers.

WATERBODIES CONSERVATION

CONTEXT

- United Nations and Niti Ayog reports has said that the demand for water will reach twice the available supply, and 40 per cent of India's population will not have access to clean drinking water by 2030

◎ BACKGROUND

- India is endowed with extraordinarily diverse and distinctive traditional waterbodies found in different parts of the country, commonly known as ponds, tanks, lakes, vayalgam, ahars, bawdis, talabs and others.
- They play an important role in maintaining and restoring the ecological balance. They act as sources of drinking water, recharge groundwater, control floods, support biodiversity, and provide livelihood opportunities to a large number of people.
- Currently, a major water crisis is being faced by India, where 100 million people are on the frontlines of a nationwide water crisis and many major cities facing an acute water shortage.
- The situation will worsen as United Nations and Niti Ayog reports say that the demand for water will reach twice the available supply, and 40 per cent of India's population will not have access to clean drinking water by 2030.

◎ ANALYSIS

Issues

- One of the reasons is increasing negligence and lack of conservation of waterbodies.
- Since independence, the government has taken control over the waterbodies and water supply.
- With a colonial mindset, authorities move further and further away in the quest of water supply, emphasising more on networks, infrastructure and construction of dams.
- It has led to the neglect of waterbodies and catchments areas.
- Thus, we have started valuing land more than water.
- Rapid urbanisation and unplanned growth have put waterbodies under continuous and unrelenting stress.
- Waterbodies are being polluted by untreated effluents and sewage that are continuously being dumped into them.
- Lack of data and action plans, encroachments, interrupted water flow from the catchment, siltation, and violations of laws, solid waste deposit and polluted water and involvement of too many agencies.

Impacts

- Encroachment of waterbodies has been identified as a major cause of flash floods in Mumbai (2005), Uttarakhand (2013), Jammu and Kashmir (2014) and Chennai (2015).
- Across the country, 86 waterbodies are critically polluted, having a chemical oxygen demand or COD concentration of more than 250 mg/l.
- In urban India, the number of waterbodies is declining rapidly. For example, in the 1960s Bangalore had 262 lakes. Now, only 10 hold water.
- Similarly, in 2001, 137 lakes were listed in Ahmedabad. However, by 2012, 65 were already destroyed and built upon.
- The decline in both the quality and quantity of these waterbodies is to the extent that their potential to render various economic and environmental services has reduced drastically.
- India is facing its 'worst' water crisis in history and that demand for potable water will outstrip supply by 2030 if steps are not taken.
- Nearly 600 million Indians faced high to extreme water stress and about 2,00,000 people died every year due to inadequate access to safe water.
- There will be a 6% loss in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) if this water crisis continues.
- Critical groundwater resources, which accounted for 40% of India's water supply, are being depleted at "unsustainable" rates and up to 70% of India's water supply is "contaminated".

Actions Taken

- Sufficient policies and acts for protection like Water Conservation Act 1974 have been enacted for protection and restoration of waterbodies
- Realising the seriousness of the problem confronting waterbodies, the Centre had launched the Repair, Renovation and Restoration of Water Bodies' scheme in 2005 with the objectives of comprehensive improvement and restoration of traditional waterbodies.
- Ministry of Environment and Forests notified the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2010 to ensure better conservation and management and to prevent degradation of existing wetlands in India.

- It included increasing tank storage capacity, ground water recharge, increased availability of drinking water, improvement of catchment areas of tank commands and others.
- Jal Shakti Abhiyan, a time-bound, mission-mode water conservation campaign initiated by the new Jal Shakti ministry is a welcome step focussing on rainwater harvesting, rejuvenation of waterbodies, reuse of treated wastewater, and intensive afforestation.
- Many cities are working towards conservation of waterbodies like the steps initiated in the capital city of Delhi for instance. In turning Delhi into a city of lakes, rejuvenation of 201 waterbodies has been finalised.

◎ WAY FORWARD

- Urban planning needs to be engaged more critically with the city's terrain, along with propagation of knowledge

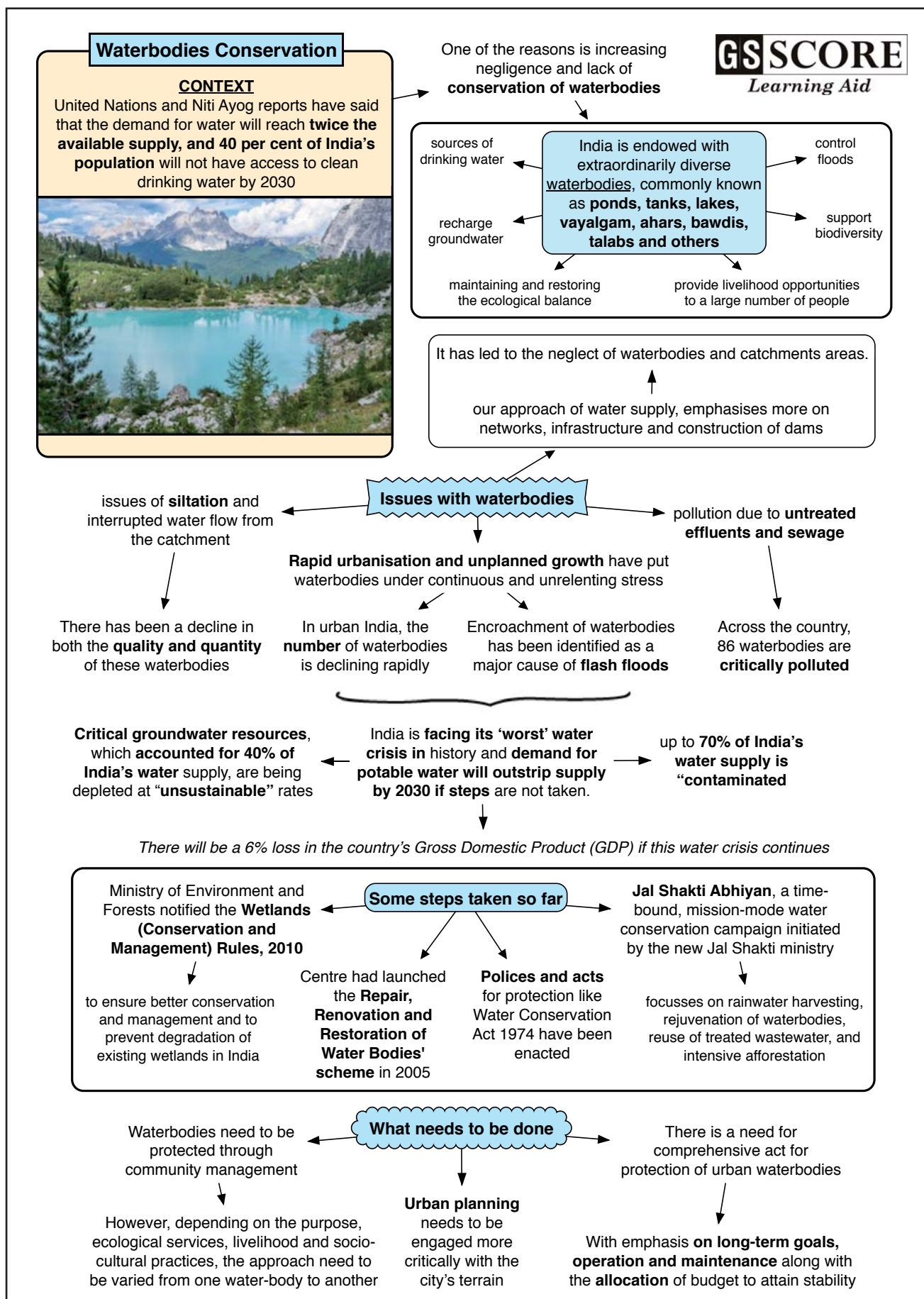
about the local history of lakes, meaningful community engagement and ownership of waterbodies.

- Waterbodies being an important source of water, their protection through community management and the need of a comprehensive act for the protection of urban waterbodies.
- No one size fits all approach - Depending on the purpose, ecological services, livelihood and socio-cultural practices, the approach need to be varied from one water-body to another.
- Emphasis on long-term goals, operation and maintenance should be included along with the allocation of budget to attain stability.
- Invest in governance, capacitating our institutions, strong regulations and their enforcements.
- Let us not destroy our waterbodies in the name of development. Rather, we should value their importance.



Practice Question

- Explain how conserving waterbodies can help tackle India's worst water crisis.



CRYPTO CURRENCIES

CONTEXT

- Recently, a government panel headed by senior bureaucrat Subhash Chandra Garg placed in the public domain a draft bill calling for a complete ban on private crypto currencies in India.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- The panel recommended a fine of up to Rs. 25 crore and a jail term of up to 10 years for anyone found to be owning or handling private crypto currencies.
- As an alternative to private crypto currencies, the panel recommended the introduction of a single crypto currency for the whole country that is backed by the Reserve Bank of India.
- Volatility doesn't sound like a good rationale to ban crypto currencies because if crypto currencies are volatile, so are many other asset classes.
- Also, banning the consumption of a good or service doesn't really mean that people will stop consuming it.

What is Crypto Currency and general information?

- A crypto currency is a digital asset designed to work as a medium of exchange that uses strong cryptography to secure financial transactions, control the creation of additional units, and verify the transfer of assets.
- A crypto currency is a digital or virtual currency that uses cryptography for security.
- A crypto currency is difficult to counterfeit because of this security feature.
- Many crypto currencies are decentralized systems based on block chain technology, a distributed ledger enforced by a disparate network of computers.
- The first block chain-based crypto currency was Bit coin, which still remains the most popular and most valuable.

◎ ANALYSIS

Advantages of Using Crypto currency

- Easy access and globally recognized:** Crypto currency is readily accessible to all its intended users. It can be used by whoever it wants. It is a decentralized system of currency which can be used and accessed globally. In the case of Fiat currency the value of Euro, Dollar or yen may go up or down, but in the case of crypto currency, the market remains worldwide the same.

- Quick and easy payments:** It is a quick transaction process. It takes hardly a few minutes to initiate a transaction. You have no obligation to disclose and share your personal details unless the details of your crypto wallet. Only the payer and the receiver will get to know about the payment and transaction and that is completely secured. The simplicity and advantage of anonymous dealings are one of the advantages that are making crypto currency popular.
- Facility of faster settlement:** Unlike RTGS or NEFT payment method, you need not wait for getting your payment processing if you are doing your transaction using crypto currency. Being based on Block chain, crypto currency works in the peer-to-peer algorithm and the payment settlement gets completed flawlessly almost immediately.
- Private and secured:** Cybercrime has become a global threat and doing online financial transaction has become extremely irksome due to the risk of identity theft, phishing, unwanted tracking of the regulatory body, non-transparency in the online payment system, etc.
- Facilitate e-commerce trade:** It is a global currency and there is no restriction of using or paying by this global currency, which is easier and convenient for business and shopping portals. If the ultimate aim of an e-commerce portal is to business, crypto currency transaction can simply facilitate that. If e-commerce is the ultimate of global business, crypto currency can be the global currency for facilitating the business worldwide.
- Free from the risk of identity theft:** Identity theft is one of the biggest risks of the online transaction but with block chain integration in crypto currency, the risk of identity theft is not prevalent at all. While doing payment by using crypto currency you can keep your personal information secret, and that is the reason, the risk of identity theft gets completely minimized here.

Disadvantages of Using Crypto currency

- It can be difficult to understand:** Crypto currency is a new age currency and based on quite complicated block chain technology. It has lots of tweaks and twists in its learning curve. Without understanding the nitty-gritty of crypto currency, it is unsafe to deal with it.

- **Uncertainty and volatility:** The market for crypto currency is quite volatile hence it is unpredictable. It can be risky to invest in crypto currency without understanding its risk factors. Because of its volatile market, a group of people still feel uncertain about dealing with this digital currency.
- **Still not accepted by all:** Although crypto currency is a global concept and people have gained adequate knowledge about it, it is not accepted still by all. Some countries in the world have not legalized the use of crypto currency, and that is the reason, buying and selling via crypto currency is still some uncertain.
- **No way to reverse the payment:** Unlike check stop payment or request for cancellation of NEFT, it is next to impossible to stop the transaction of crypto currency once it is done. This irrevocable nature of payments may create a problem in business dealings, which cannot be countered.
- **Losing wallet:** If a user forgets his crypto wallet password, it is not possible to revive the lost data because of tight security encrypted block chain integration, which can be disastrous for its users.
- **Problem of scaling:** The crypto currency transaction speed can be limited due to the smart contract design. However, only by proven design,

this problem of scaling can be solved, and it is expected also that in near-future crypto currency programmer will be able to sort out this scaling issue.

These are all about the advantages and disadvantages of crypto currency. However, as this digital currency is being counted as one of the on uses of near future's fiscal transactions, it is extremely important to know its pros and cons. As the knowledge about advantages will help you to utilize its best leverages, the knowledge of disadvantages will help you to stay away from the pitfalls.

◎ WAY FORWARD

- To contain the flow of black money and demolish parallel economy.
- To cleanse the political or NGO, SHGs related funding.
- To tackle inflation and for better transmission of policy rates.
- To reduce the cost of the transaction.
- To improve tax collection by maintaining proper records.

📄 Practice Question

- Do you think recent recommendation by Subash Garg committee for a complete ban on private crypto currencies in India is feasible? Elaborate.

Crypto Currencies

CONTEXT

Recently, a government panel headed by senior bureaucrat Subhash Chandra Garg placed in the public domain a draft bill calling for a complete ban on **private** crypto currencies in India

Doors Shut for Crypto

PANEL ON VIRTUAL CURRENCY
PROPOSED STRINGENT LAW

» **COMPLETE BAN ON** any activity involving cryptocurrency

» **ALL MAJOR OFFENCES** will be cognisable and non-bailable

» **FINE UP TO ₹25 cr** or 3 times of loss caused/gains made

» **UP TO 10 YEARS JAIL** for direct or indirect use of cryptocurrency

KEY TAKEAWAYS
High-level panel led by finance secy Subhash C Garg has submitted its report

» **ALL PRIVATE** cryptocurrencies be banned in India

» **HAVE AN OPEN** mind towards a Central Bank Digital Currency

» **DEA, RBI, MEITY, DFS** to examine, develop a model of digital currency

» **RBI SHOULD** regulate this digital currency

» **DEA TO FACILITATE** use of DLT in the entire financial field

BUT, WITH SOME CONCESSIONS



Makes provision for 'Digital Rupee' to be issued by RBI



RBI can recognise foreign digital currency as foreign currency



Law permits use of DLT for research, experiments not involving crypto

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non-official (i.e., without a central regulating authority) virtual currencies can be used to **defraud** consumers

such currencies often experience tremendous **volatility** in their value and this could have huge implications

there is no grievance **redressal** mechanism in such a system, as all transactions are irreversible

risk to users

Reasons for ban on private crypto currencies

macro effects on country

Scaling up such a currency system over a large population would require crippling levels of energy resources. This could be an **environmental disaster**

Their anonymity makes them vulnerable to **money laundering** and use in **terrorist financing** activities while making law enforcement difficult

If private cryptocurrencies are allowed to function as legal tender, the **RBI would lose control over the monetary policy and financial stability**, as it would not be able to keep a tab on the money supply in the economy

Crypto Currencies : An Overview

It is a digital asset designed to work as a medium of exchange and uses strong cryptography to

secure financial transactions

verify the transfer of assets

control the creation of additional units

It is difficult to counterfeit them because of these security features

Many crypto currencies are decentralised systems based on block chain technology, a distributed ledger technology (DLT) enforced by a disparate network of computers

So, what are views of the panel on cryptocurrencies?

Internationally, the applications of this technology is being explored in various areas of finance

Thus, it has recommended that the Department of Economic Affairs could consider taking necessary measures to facilitate the use of this technology in the entire financial field after identifying its uses

It also recommends that regulators (RBI, SEBI, IRDA, PFRDA, and IBBI) explore evolving appropriate regulations for development of DLT in their respective areas

Although it has recommended a ban on "private" cryptocurrencies, it is open to a cryptocurrency that the RBI may unveil

AIRPORTS ECONOMIC REGULATORY AUTHORITY (AERA) BILL 2019

CONTEXT

- Recently, both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha passed Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) Bill 2019 amending the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- Before introduction of this act private players were operating civilian airports. Typically, airports run the risk of becoming a monopoly because cities usually have one civilian airport which controls all aeronautical services in that area. To ensure that private airport operators do not misuse their monopoly, the need for an independent tariff regulator in the airport sector was felt. Consequently, the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008 (AERA Act) was passed which set up AERA.

Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA)

- The authority is a statutory body constituted under the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008.
- The regulator has the powers to set the tariffs charged at airports.
- It was established by the Government with its head office at Delhi.
- It's statutory functions are:
 - To determine the tariff for the aeronautical services taking into consideration:
 - The capital expenditure incurred and timely investment in improvement of airport facilities.
 - The service provided, its quality and other relevant factors.
 - The cost for improving efficiency.
 - Economic and viable operation of major airports.
 - Revenue received from services other than the aeronautical services.
 - The concession offered by the Central Government in any agreement or memorandum of understanding or otherwise.
 - To determine the amount of the Development Fees and Passengers Service Fee levied in respect of major airports.
 - To monitor the set Performance Standards relating to quality, continuity and reliability

of service as may be specified by the Central Government or any authority authorized by it in this behalf.

◎ ANALYSIS

Need of bringing AERA Act 2008

- AERA regulates tariffs and other charges-development fee and passenger service fee for aeronautical services like air traffic management, landing and parking of aircraft, ground handling services at major airports. Major airports include civilian airports with annual traffic above 15 lakh passengers. In 2018-19, there were 32 such airports. As of June 2019, 27 of these are being regulated by AERA.
- Before AERA was set up, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) fixed the aeronautical charges for the airports under its control and prescribed performance standards for all airports and monitored them. Various committees had noted that AAI performed the role of airport operator as well as the regulator, which resulted in conflict of interest. Hence a need was felt to have an independent regulatory authority.

Need for introducing 2019 bill amending the Act of 2008

- When AERA was created in 2008, there were 11 airports with annual passenger traffic over 15 lakh. With increase in passenger traffic across airports, currently 32 airports are above this threshold and AERA regulates tariffs at 27 of these. The Bill increases the threshold of annual passenger traffic for major airports to over 35 lakh. With this increase in threshold, 16 airports will be regulated by AERA.
- The exponential growth of the aviation sector has put tremendous pressure on AERA, while its resources are limited. Therefore, if too many airports come under the purview of AERA, it will not be able to perform its functions efficiently.
- This bill tries to solve this challenging situation for AERA. It answers the question of whether this problem can be resolved by reducing its jurisdiction or by improving its capacity.

Major provisions of this newly introduced 2019 bill:

- Currently, AERA regulates tariffs and other charges for aeronautical services provided at civilian airports with annual traffic above 15 lakh passengers. If the amendment is passed by Parliament, the definition of major airports will change to any aerodrome which has or is designated to have an annual passenger capacity of 3.5 million.
- Sixteen airports will be under the jurisdiction of AERA. All the other airports which would not be major airports will continue to be looked after by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Government of India.
- Major Airports:**

Airports with annual traffic above 35 lakh		
Ahmedabad	Goa	Mumbai
Bengaluru	Guwahati	Patna
Bhubaneswar	Hyderabad	Pune
Chennai	Jaipur	Thiruvananthapuram
Cochin	Kolkata	
Delhi	Lucknow	
Airports with annual traffic between 15 and 35 lakh		
Amritsar	Madurai	Srinagar
Bagdogra	Mangalore	Trichy
Calicut	Nagpur	Varanasi
Chandigarh	Port Blair	Vishakhapatnam
Coimbatore	Raipur	
Indore	Ranchi	

- The amendment will allow the authority to bid out any new airport at a pre-determined tariff structure.

Issues with this bill

- It is expected that the bill will not protect the interests of 344 million people (figure of airline passengers) but instead deeply affect their pockets.
- There was the need for a level playing field and by amending the definition of a major airport,

the regulator's jurisdiction is being reduced and handed over to private entities.

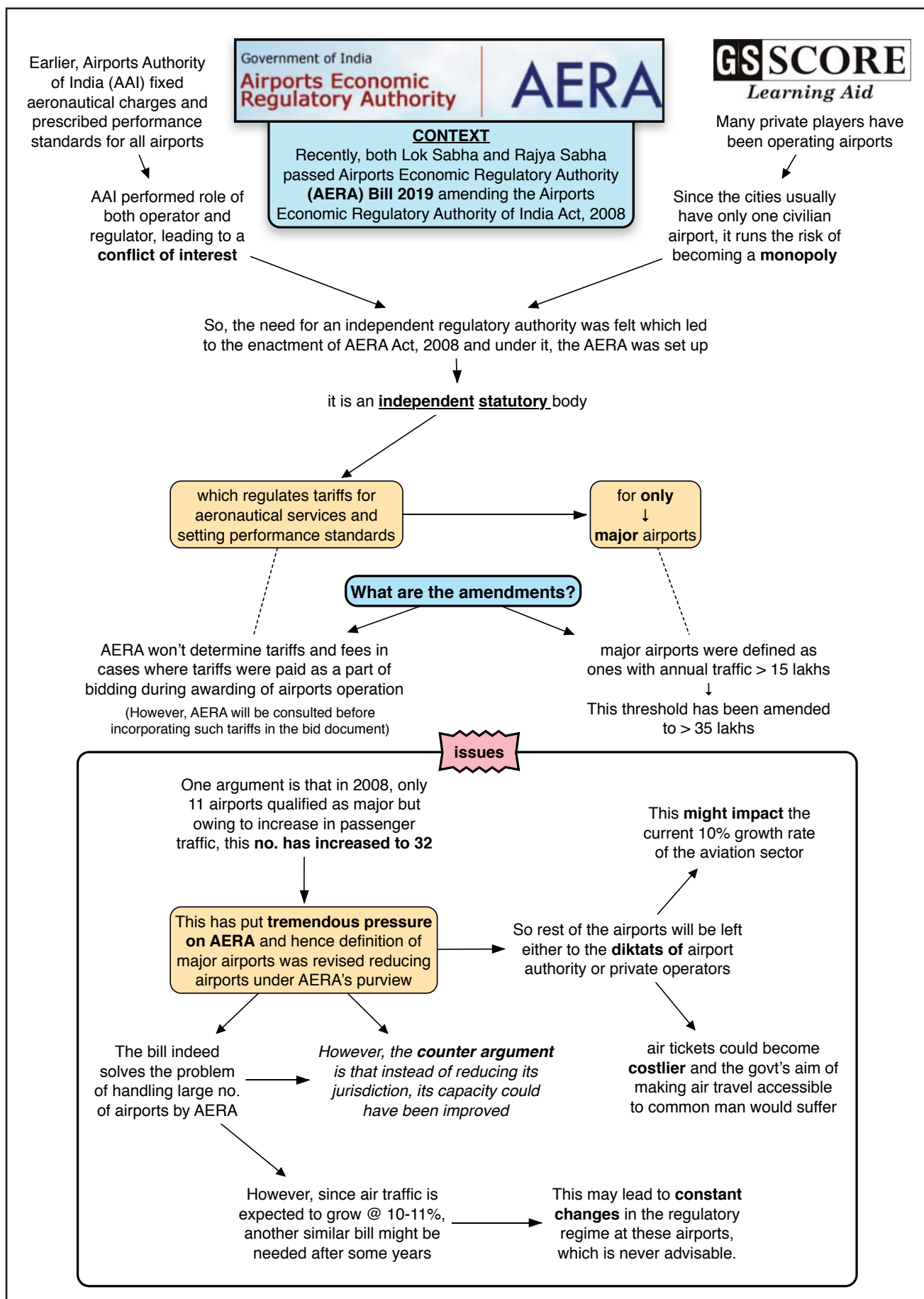
- Currently 32 airports come in the category of major airports. Out of that, because of the change of definition, there will be only 16. So rest of the airports will be left either to the diktats of airport authority or private operators.
- This privatisation of the airports and bidding system would impact the growth rate of the aviation sector, which is presently growing at around 10%.
- After this Bill, the government would not be able to fulfill its target to take the air travel to common man as air tickets would be costlier after this.
- Contrary to the provisions in the Act of 2008, the Bill adds that AERA will not determine: (i) tariff, (ii) tariff structures, or (iii) development fees, in certain cases. These cases include those where such tariff amounts were a part of the bid document on the basis of which the airport operations were awarded.

CONCLUSION:

- The bill very aptly solves the problem faced by the AERA of handling such large numbers of airports that too with limited resources. It will unburden their work. However, after some years from now, it will be needed to bring another bill amending the Act as air traffic in the country is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 10-11%. This implies that in a few years, the traffic at the other 16 airports will increase to over 35 lakh and they will again fall under the purview of AERA. This may lead to constant changes in the regulatory regime at these airports.
- However for the present situation with this bill the problem needs to be addressed is the original issue which caused the introduction AERA Act 2008- handling over of the airports to the private players, their monopoly and increase in the fares of the air travel. This will affect the expenditure of the common man and is against the vision of the government- "UDAAN"- Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik.

**Practice Question**

- Recently Parliament has passed Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) Bill 2019 amending the AERA Act 2008. Discuss why the Act of 2008 was introduced, why it was needed to be amended now and what are the possible issues that may come up due to this bill in the long run..



SECTION: B
(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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BRAHMOS CRUISE MISSILES

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- Thailand is in talks with India to buy BrahMos cruise missiles.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- In possibly the first sale of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to another country, Thailand.
- As part of the expanding defence cooperation between the two countries, Thailand has made a request for repair and refurbishing their Dornier maritime patrol aircraft.
- Discussions are on to integrate Thailand into India's coastal surveillance radar chain network.
- The inaugural India, Thailand and Singapore trilateral naval exercise announced at Shangri-La dialogue is scheduled to be held later this year.
- The two navies already conduct a Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) and a new bilateral exercise is also in the works apart from the trilateral.
- As members of the Indian Ocean rim association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Naval symposium (IONS), navies of India and Thailand are working closely in the areas of disaster risk management, maritime security safety, information sharing and interoperability.

About BrahMos cruise missiles.

- The BrahMos is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile that can be launched from submarine, ships, aircraft, or land.
- It is the fastest supersonic cruise missile in the world.
- It is a joint venture between the Russian Federation's NPO Mashinostroyeniya and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) who together have formed BrahMos Aerospace.
- It is based on the Russian P-800 Oniks cruise missile and other similar sea-skimming Russian cruise missile technology.
- The name BrahMos is a portmanteau formed from the names of two rivers, the Brahmaputra of India and the Moskva of Russia.
- It is the world's fastest anti-ship cruise missile in operation.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- Recently, Parliament has passed amendments to the Companies Act, 2013 to strengthen laws governing corporate social responsibility (CSR).

◎ **ABOUT CSR:**

- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable.
- It is also called corporate citizenship.
- By practicing CSR, companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society including economic, social, and environmental.

Current provisions governing CSR:

- The laws governing CSR come under the Companies Act, 2013, and became effective on 1 April 2014.
- These laws state that companies with a net worth of Rs. 500 crore or revenue of Rs. 1,000 crore or net profit of Rs. 5 crore during the immediately preceding fiscal should spend 2% of their average net profit in the last three years on activities related to social development such as sanitation, education, eradication of hunger, poverty and

malnutrition, conservation of heritage, art and culture, and vocational training such as setting up grooming outlets or training centres for sewing.

- If a company is unable to fully incur the CSR expenditure in a given year, it could carry this amount forward and spend it in the next 12 months, in addition to the money for that year.

New changes proposed:

- Under the new laws, any unspent amount will have to be deposited into an escrow account within 30 days of the end of that fiscal.
- This amount will have to be spent within three years from the date of its transfer, failing which it will be put into a fund, which could even be the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.
- The government also plans to include a specific penal provision in the Companies Act in case of non-compliance with CSR. Companies violating CSR norms will attract fines ranging from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 25 lakh, with the officers concerned liable for imprisonment of up to three years.
- Listed firms need to disclose their CSR activities, amount spent and framework created to ensure adherence to norms.
- Companies need to have a CSR team that provides a regular progress report and updates to the CSR committee of the board. The committee is given a report of the activities undertaken each quarter, along with targets and reasons for variance, if any. All this is needed to be submitted to the corporate affairs ministry.

ECONOMIC CENSUS

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- Puducherry launched its seventh Economic Census.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- Economic census is the complete count of all establishments engaged in non-agricultural economic activities located within the geographical boundary of India.
- The economic census provides disaggregated information on various operational and structural variables of all establishments of the country.
- One of the main aims of the Economic Census is preparation of a National Business Register which can be linked with existing databases at the central and state government levels.
- The seventh census would witness the use of Information Technology for data collection.
- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation carries out economic census every five years. The ministry has partnered with CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, a Special Purpose Vehicle under the Ministry of Electronics and Information.

Significance

- It is a unique initiative in the sense that it will set a precedent for the entire country for carrying out a large-scale survey work like this.
- Also, planning of schemes would become more effective with availability of accurate data.

KHANIJ BIDESH INDIA LTD

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- Ministry of Mines is setting up a joint venture company namely Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL)

◎ **ABOUT:**

- It will be set up with the participation of three Central Public Sector Enterprises namely,
 - National Aluminium Company Ltd.(NALCO)
 - Hindustan Copper Ltd.(HCL)
 - Mineral Exploration Company Ltd. (MECL)
- It would carry out identification, acquisition, exploration, development, mining and processing of strategic minerals overseas for commercial use and meeting country's requirement of these minerals.
- The equity participation between NALCO, HCL and MECL is in the ratio of 40:30:30

Significance

- It is a move to ensure a consistent supply of critical and strategic minerals to Indian domestic market.
- In other words, it will ensure mineral security of the Nation.
- It will help in building partnerships with other mineral rich countries like Australia and those in Africa
- It would also help in realizing the overall objective of import substitution.

'DEFORESTATION IN THE AMAZON RAINFOREST'

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- There has been rapid increase in the deforestation in the Amazon forests of Brazil.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- Deforestation in the Amazon rainforest is increasing rapidly since January, when JairBolsonaro took office as President.
- Satellite images show that about 4,200 sq km of forests have been destroyed up to now under the new government.
- New government is in favour of "reasonable" exploitation of these forests which have emboldened illegal expansion into forest.
- Armed gold-hunting gangs have reached tribal areas.

Significance of Amazon forests

- Climate science data show that Amazon basin spreads across millions of hectares in multiple countries and thus play a larger environmental role along with economic gain.
- It hosts massive sinks of sequestered carbon and the forests are a key factor in regulating monsoon systems.
- It harbours rich biodiversity and about 400 known indigenous groups who have prevented commercial from overrunning the lands.
- It's called the "lungs of the planet" for its role in sucking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and adding fresh oxygen to it.

Way forward

- Brazil must engage with the international community on meeting the opportunity cost of leaving the Amazon undisturbed.
- It should seek higher funding for forest protection by various international organizations as globally there is a tremendous momentum to save Amazon forests.
- It must welcome initiatives such as the billion-dollar Amazon Fund backed by Norway and Germany.

- Remedial funding accounting for the value of environmental services is the most productive approach.

About Amazon rainforests

- **The Amazon** is the **world's biggest rainforest**, larger than the next two largest rainforests — in the Congo Basin and Indonesia — combined.
- The Amazon River is by far **the world's largest river by volume**.
- The Amazon River once had flown **west-ward instead of east-ward** as it does today. The rise of the Andes caused it to flow into the Atlantic Ocean.
- It is bounded by the **Guiana Highlands to the north**, the **Andes Mountains to the west**, the **Brazilian central plateau to the south**, and the **Atlantic Ocean to the east**.

'SOIL HEALTH CARD'

◎ CONTEXT:

- Evaluation of Soil Health Card Scheme has revealed significant reduction in usage of area in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra.

◎ ABOUT:

Soil Health Card Scheme

- **Soil Health Card Scheme** was launched in **2015** to issue '**Soil card**' to farmers which will **carry crop-wise recommendations of nutrients and fertilizers** required for the individual farms.
- This is aimed to help farmers to **improve productivity through judicious use of inputs**.
- It is promoted by the **Department of Agriculture & Co-operation under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare**.
- It is being implemented through the **Department of Agriculture of all the State and Union Territory Governments**
- It is made available **once in a cycle of 3 years**, which indicates the status of soil health of a farmer's holding for that particular period.

The unique features of SHC scheme are:-

- **Collecting soil samples** at a grid of 2.5 ha in irrigated area and 10 ha in un-irrigated areas.
- **GPS enabled soil sampling** to create a systematic database and allow monitoring of changes in the soil health over the years.
- **Uniform approach in soil testing** adopted for 12 parameters viz. **primary nutrients (NPK); secondary nutrient (S); micronutrients (B, Zn, Mn, Fe & Cu); and other (pH, EC & OC)** for comprehensiveness.
- It also provides **crop wise fertiliser recommendations**.
- It would also lead to **crop diversification** in the country.

Government interventions to promote Soil Health Card

- **Extension activities** like farmers training, demonstration on farmer's field, farmer's mela/camps, promotion of micronutrients and workshops **are organized by State Governments**.
- To enable quick soil sample testing and distribution of soil health cards, the **soil test infrastructure** has been upgraded and **soil testing labs** have been sanctioned to States.

TIGER CENSUS

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- Prime Minister on Monday released the All India Tiger Estimation Report 2018
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- Gist of tiger census**
- India has 2,967 tigers, a third more than in 2014, according to results of a tiger census
 - This gargantuan exercise is been conducted once in four years.
 - Madhya Pradesh saw the highest number of tigers, closely followed by Karnataka and Uttarakhand.
 - Chhattisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in tiger population and all other States saw a "positive" increase.
 - This gargantuan exercise is been conducted once in four years.
 - Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh recorded the highest number of tigers; Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu registered the "maximum improvement."
 - India accounts for many of the 3,500-odd tigers that are scattered among Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russian Federation, Thailand and Vietnam.
- Measures to improve tiger conservation efforts in the country**
- Protect tigers and their habitat.
 - Build capacity in range states.
 - Reduce human-tiger conflict.
 - Conduct scientific research on tigers to help inform conservation strategies.
 - Promote tiger-friendly policies.
 - Monitor tiger numbers, population trends, and threats to tigers and their habitats.
 - To build more tiger reserves in India.
 - To enforce complete ban on poaching.

‘ONE NATION ONE RATION CARD SCHEME’

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- One nation one ration card scheme was launched on a pilot basis in four states- Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- ‘One Nation One Ration Card’ scheme**
- Launched by **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.**
 - It will be available across the country from **July 1, 2020.**
 - The main objective is to introduce **nation-wide portability** of ration card holders under **National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA)**
 - It will allow **portability of food security benefits** i.e. to lift their entitlement food grains from any Fair Price Shop in the country
 - This means **poor migrant workers** will be able to buy subsidised rice and wheat **from any ration shop in the country**, so long as their ration cards are **linked to Aadhaar.**
 - It would **integrate** the existing PDS systems/portals of States/UTs with the Central systems/portals.

National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA)

- The **National Food Security Act, 2013** was enacted to provide **for food and nutritional security** in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity.
 - It provides for coverage of up to **75% of the rural population** and up to **50% of the urban population** for receiving subsidized food grains under **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**.
 - The eligible persons will be entitled to receive **5 kgs of food grains per person per month** at subsidized prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per Kg for rice/wheat/coarse grains.
 - To ensure the food security of poorest of poor, the existing **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** households will continue to receive **35 Kgs of foodgrains per household per month**.
 - **Pregnant women and lactating mothers** are entitled to a nutritious "take home ration" of 600 Calories, 18-20 grams of protein and a maternity benefit of at least Rs 6,000 for six months.
 - The **eldest women of the household of age 18 years or above** will be the **head** of the household for the purpose of issuing ration cards.
 - **Children 6 months to 14 years of age** are to receive free hot meals or "take home rations".
 - **States are the implementing agencies** and the **Central Government** will be responsible to provide funds to states in case of **short supplies of food grains**.

Universal Public Distribution System (PDS)

- **Universal Public Distribution System (PDS)** was introduced in **India in 1965** to improve the health conditions and provide food grains to common people at affordable prices. It served the aim of
 - Maintaining **stability in the prices** of essential commodities across regions
 - Keeping a check on **private trade, hoarding and black-marketing**.

Targeted PDS (TPDS)

- The PDS was converted into **Targeted PDS (TPDS) in 1997**
- It classified population into **Above Poverty Line (APL)** and **Below Poverty Line (BPL)** categories.
- **Only those households classified as BPL** were made eligible for subsidized purchase of commodities from the ration shops.
- But the **poorest of poor, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households** will continue to receive **35 Kgs of foodgrains per household per month**.

TRIPLE TALAQ

◎ **CONTEXT:**

- President Ram Nath Kovind gives assent to triple talaq Bill.

◎ **ABOUT:**

- Any pronouncement of 'talaq' by a Muslim husband to his wife in any manner, spoken or written, shall be void and illegal.
- Any Muslim husband who communicates the 'talaq' orally or in writing may face a punishment up to three years in jail. The punishment may be also extended.
- Despite the presence of general laws in force, if a Muslim man pronounces 'talaq' to his wife, then the woman and her children are entitled to receive an allowance for

subsistence. Such amount can be determined by a Judicial Magistrate of the First Class.

- Muslim woman is entitled to the custody of her minor children even if her husband has pronounced 'talaq' to her.
- The offence pronouncing talaq is cognizable if the Muslim woman, on whom it is pronounced, communicates the information to a police officer.
- The offence is also compoundable, if the Muslim woman insists for the same and the Magistrate allows certain terms and conditions which he may determine.
- A person accused of this offence cannot be granted bail unless an application is filed by the accused after a hearing in the presence of the Muslim woman (on whom talaq is pronounced) is conducted and the Magistrate is satisfied about the reasonable grounds for granting bail.

INDUS VALLEY INSCRIPTIONS

◎ CONTEXT:

- A research paper published recently in Palgrave Communications, a Nature group journal claims that majority of the Indus Valley inscriptions were written logographically (by using word signs) and not by using phonograms (speech sounds units).
- Another paper, titled "Interrogating Indus inscription to unravel their mechanism of meaning conveyance", published recently points out that the inscriptions can be compared to the structured messages found on stamps, coupons, tokens and currency coins of modern times.

◎ ABOUT:

- Indus Valley inscriptions are discovered from 4,000 ancient inscribed objects, including seals, tablets, ivory rods, pottery shards, etc.
- These Indus inscriptions are one of the most enigmatic legacies of the Indus Valley civilization but these have not been deciphered due to the absence of bilingual texts, extreme brevity of the inscriptions, and ignorance about the language(s) encoded by Indus script.

Findings of the paper:

- The paper focuses on understanding how Indus inscriptions conveyed meanings, rather than on deciphering what they conveyed.
- Analysing the brevity of the inscriptions, the rigid positional preferences maintained by the signs of the inscriptions, and the co-occurrence of restriction patterns demonstrated by certain classes of Indus signs, it was inferred that such patterns can never be phonological co-occurrence restrictions (two or more sound units that cannot be pronounced together).
- A very compelling, nearly unassailable proof of the logographic nature of Indus inscriptions comes from the co-occurrence restriction patterns maintained within them.
- It classifies all the signs into nine functional classes.
- The inscribed seals and tablets were used in some administrative operation that controlled the commercial transactions prevalent in the trade-savvy settlements of the ancient Indus valley Civilisation.
- The inscriptions can be compared to the messages found on stamps, coupons, tokens and currency coins of modern times, where we expect formulaic texts that encode certain type of information in some pre-defined ways, rather than freely composed narrative.
- A common perception among some scholars is that the Indus script is logo-syllabic, where one symbol can be used as a word sign at one time and as a syllable-sign at

another. This method, where a word-symbol also gets sometimes used only for its sound value, is called the rebus principle. For example, we can combine the pictures of a honey bee and a leaf to signify the word "belief" (bee+leaf).

- The paper states that, though many ancient scripts use rebus methods to generate new words, the inscriptions found on the Indus seals and tablets have not used rebus as the mechanism to convey meaning.

UN CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS RESULTING

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- The Union Cabinet had approved the signing of the UN Convention on International Settlement Agreements resulting from mediation by India

- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- UN Convention on International Settlement Agreements**

- It is also known as the "Singapore Convention on Mediation".
- It provides an efficient and harmonized framework for cross-border enforcement of settlement agreements
- It ensures that a settlement reached by parties becomes binding and enforceable in accordance with a simplified and streamlined procedure.
- It is an essential instrument in the facilitation of international trade and in the promotion of mediation as an alternative and effective method of resolving trade disputes

India's Other Initiatives to promote Mediation

- The Government is in the process of establishing the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) as a statutory body
- Commercial Courts Act, 2015 has been amended and amendment to the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, is currently underway.

Significance

- This move will provide a positive signal to foreign investors about India's commitment to adhere to international practice on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

DISQUALIFICATION UNDER ANTI-DEFECTION LAW

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- Delhi Assembly Speaker had disqualified rebel AAP MLA Kapil Mishra under the anti-defection law.

- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- Whether only resignation constitutes voluntarily giving up membership of a political party?**

- Voluntarily giving up the membership is **not the same as resigning from a party**.
- The Supreme Court in **Ravi S. Naik v. Union of India** has held that the words "voluntarily giving up membership" have a **wider meaning**.
- An inference can also be drawn from the **conduct of the member** that he has voluntarily given up the membership of his party.
- In this case, the Aam Admi Party MLA was found to be campaigning for Bharatiya Janta Party in the recent 2019 Lok Sabha Election.
- With this conduct, the Speaker of Delhi Assembly concluded that he (Kapil Mishra) had **"given up the membership of his original political party"**.

Anti-Defection provisions under the Tenth Schedule**• Disqualification**

- If a member of a house belonging to a political party:
 - Voluntarily gives up the membership of his political party, or
 - Votes, or does not vote in the legislature, contrary to the directions of his political party.
 - However, if the member has taken prior permission, or is condoned by the party within 15 days from such voting or abstention, the member shall not be disqualified.
- If an independent candidate joins a political party after the election.
- If a nominated member joins a party six months after he becomes a member of the legislature.

• Power to Disqualify

- The Chairman or the Speaker of the House takes the decision to disqualify a member.
- If a complaint is received with respect to the defection of the Chairman or Speaker, a member of the House elected by that House shall take the decision.

• Exception - Merger

- A person shall not be disqualified if his original political party merges with another, and:
 - He and other members of the old political party become members of the new political party, or
 - He and other members do not accept the merger and opt to function as a separate group.
- This exception shall operate only if not less than two-thirds of the members of party in the House have agreed to the merger.

‘MOTOR VEHICLES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019’

◎ CONTEXT:

- Parliament has passed the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill 2019 to make Indian roads safer.

◎ ABOUT:**Need of amendment**

- Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 was unable to meet the needs of rising travel demand, fast-paced motorisation, major shifts in technology and deteriorating road safety.
- Last mile connectivity and accessibility for rising population is an issue.
- Rural transport needed a significant reform.
- Rising road accidents and related deaths without any accountability.
- Rising corruption in the transport office.
- Rising cab aggregators without any proper guidelines.

Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill 2019

- The Bill has amended the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 to provide for road safety.

Salient features of the Act are:

- Road safety: The bill has increased penalties for traffic violations and offences like juvenile driving, drunken driving, driving without licence, dangerous driving, over-speeding, overloading etc. Penalty to be increased by 10% every year.

- **Vehicle Fitness:** The Bill has mandated automated fitness testing to reduce corruption for vehicles and introduced penalty for deliberate violation of safety/ environmental regulations.
- **Recall of vehicles:** Defective vehicles will be compulsorily recalled. The manufacturer will either will reimburse for full cost or replace the defective vehicle.
- **Road Safety Board:** A National Road Safety Board will be created to advise the central and state governments on all aspects of road safety and traffic management.
- **Protection of Good Samaritan:** The bill defines 'Good Samaritan' is defined as a person who renders emergency medical or non-medical assistance to road accident victims. Guidelines have been incorporated to prevent their harassment.
- **Cashless Treatment during Golden Hour:** The time period of up to one hour following a traumatic injury, during which the likelihood of preventing death through prompt medical care is the highest.
- **Compulsory insurance:** Motor Vehicle Accident Fund to be constituted to provide compulsory insurance cover to all road users in India.
- The bill also tackle issues like regulation of taxi aggregators, third party insurance and development of a National Transportation Policy and improving Services using digitalisation and e-Governance.
- The vehicle owner or the guardian will be held in case of traffic violations by juveniles. Aadhar has been made mandatory for getting a driving licence and vehicle registration.

Way forward

- Centre must present its National Transport Policy without delay.
- States must be incentivised and use modern management practices to provide clean, comfortable and affordable services for all users, including people with disabilities.
- Effective implementation is required as zero tolerance enforcement of even small fines reduces violations, while stringent penalties are either not enforced or lead to more bribery.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

◎ CONTEXT:

- The landmark legislation for child rights, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2019, was passed by both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and now requires President's assent to become the law.

◎ ABOUT:

Provisions in the bill

- The amendment bill has a number of provisions to safeguard children from offences of sexual assault and sexual harassment:
 - For aggravated penetrative sexual assault on children, the bill proposes death penalty with a minimum of 20 years of rigorous imprisonment.
 - The bill significantly defines child pornography as "visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a child" including photograph, video, digital or computer generated image.
 - The punishment of using a child for pornographic purposes is a minimum of five years of jail term and on a repeat offence for seven years along with a provision for fine.
 - The bill aims at making offences against children gender-neutral. It provides added legal protection to 39 per cent of population or 43 crore children, irrespective of whether they are a girl or boy.
 - There are cases wherein children were administered drugs and hormones to make them sexually active. This bill is aimed at providing stringent punishment to such offenders.

Issues with the bill:

- The provision of death penalty for juvenile offenders is not appropriate as there would be no chance of reform left to them if death penalty is meted out.

Solution: If a juvenile is involved in the sexual offence against the children, such cases come under juvenile justice act and the death penalty could be given only if he is above 16 years of age and juvenile justice board finds that he has an adult mind.

- Easy access of mobile phones and social media has increased the possibility of spread of child pornography. The media while reporting the cases of sexual harassment exposes the identity of children. The bill does not address this issue.

Solution: The bill should penalize the social networking sites not attempting to stop the spread of child pornography and the media houses not restraining while reporting on such cases.

Other efforts by the government to prevent child abuse:

- Nirbhaya Fund was established by the government. Under this 1023 fast track courts will be established across the country and 18 state governments have already been taken on board by the government.
- A national database for such cases has been started and about 6.2 lakh sexual offence cases are registered in that base.
- CBSE will carry out awareness programme among children in school across the country to make aware children about good and bad touch. More than 40,000 teachers are being trained for the same.

ASAT MISSILE

◎ CONTEXT:

- Mission Shakti initiated for successful anti-satellite (ASAT) missile test.

◎ ABOUT:

- Anti-satellite weapons (ASAT) are space weapons designed to incapacitate or destroy satellites for strategic military purposes.
- No ASAT system has yet been utilised in warfare, a few nations have shot down their own satellites to demonstrate their ASAT capabilities in a show of force.
- India conducted Mission Shakti, an anti-satellite missile test, from the Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam Island launch complex. This was a technological mission carried out by DRDO.
- The significance of the test is that India has tested and successfully demonstrated its capability to interdict and intercept a satellite in outer space based on complete indigenous technology.
- With this test, the country joins an exclusive group of space faring nations consisting of USA, Russia, and China.
- 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.
- The test is not directed against any country. India's space capabilities do not threaten any country and nor are they directed against anyone.

ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE (AMR)

◎ CONTEXT:

- Madhya Pradesh has become the second state after Kerala to develop an action plan to manage antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

- The government will carry out state- level AMR surveillance across all sectors including human health, animal husbandry, fisheries, environment, and food.
- The move will encourage other states to develop their own plans, which in turn, will help in tackling AMR on the national level.

◎ ABOUT

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines AMR as “the ability of a microorganism (like bacteria, viruses, and some parasites) to stop an antimicrobial (such as antibiotics, antivirals and antimalarial) from working against it. As a result, standard treatments become ineffective, infections persist and may spread to others.”
- One of the sources of antibiotic resistance development is the presence of antibiotics in the environment, which generates foci of resistant bacteria through bacterial exposure to antibiotics.

Causes of AMR:

- Misuse of antibiotics in humans, animals, aquaculture, hospital effluents and antibiotic use in livestock and poultry contributes to AMR.
- Poor management of waste from farms, factories, healthcare settings and households adds to this problem.

Problems due to AMR:

- Antimicrobial resistance, for which Madhya Pradesh now has a plan, is a global environment and public health threat according to the WHO.
- The vast scale and diversity of the country in terms of population, food animal sectors (for instance, commercial and backyard farming), extent of antibiotic use adds to the challenges of addressing this multi-sectoral issue.

Impact of increasing AMR:

- With rising AMR, antibiotics are increasingly becoming ineffective for treating diseases in humans.
- If there is no timely containment, AMR is likely to cause nearly 10 million deaths by 2050 and result in significant global economic losses.
- It would impact nutrition security, livelihood and hinder the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Methods of controlling the spread of AMR:

- Tracking antibiotic use in humans, animals, fisheries, crops.
- Ensuring effective infection prevention and control in human and animal health, community and environment.
- Optimised use of antimicrobial agents in the health, animal and food sectors.
- Promoting investments for AMR activities, research and innovations for AMR containment.

DIABETES

◎ CONTEXT:

- The South Asian population, including Indians, have been showing symptoms of diabetes for at least 11,000 years now. Besides, the stature of this population began to reduce and since 7,000 years, has fallen by 8.5 cm among males and by 7.7 cm among females, a new study has found.

◎ ABOUT:

- Origins of the diabetes have been traced to the Mesolithic period.
- That is the time when the lean mass of the South Asian population began to dip, making their bodies more susceptible to type-2 diabetes.

- Lower lean mass is associated with poorer control of blood glucose and greater susceptibility to the diabetes.
- South Asian population began growing shorter in height than the Europeans due to major dietary and environment changes which began to occur around 7,000 years ago.

Diabetes:

- Diabetes is a metabolic disease that causes high blood sugar. The hormone insulin moves sugar from the blood to cells to be stored or used for energy.
- With diabetes, body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't effectively use the insulin it does make.
- Untreated high blood sugar from diabetes can damage nerves, eyes, kidneys, and other organs.

Different types of Diabetes:

- Type 1 diabetes: It is an autoimmune disease. The immune system attacks and destroys cells in the pancreas, where insulin is made. It's unclear what causes this attack. About 10 percent of people with diabetes have this type.
- Type 2 diabetes: It occurs when body becomes resistant to insulin, and sugar builds up in your blood. It stems from a combination of genetics and lifestyle factors.
- Pre-diabetes: It occurs when blood sugar is higher than normal, but it's not high enough for a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes.
- Gestational diabetes: It is high blood sugar during pregnancy. Insulin-blocking hormones produced by the placenta cause this type of diabetes.

Mesolithic Period

- The Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age is an archaeological term used to describe specific cultures that fall between the Paleolithic and the Neolithic Periods.
- The use of small chipped stone tools called Microliths and retouched bladelets are the key factor to identify the Mesolithic as a prehistoric period.
- Mesolithic people likely continued the art forms developed during the Upper Paleolithic Period, including cave paintings and engravings, small sculptural artifacts, and early megalithic architecture.
- Some Mesolithic sites are Bagor in Rajasthan and Adamgarh in Madhya Pradesh.

EUGENICS

◎ CONTEXT:

- **Eugenics in relation to Jeffrey Epstein**

◎ ABOUT:

- Eugenics is the science of improving the human species by selectively mating people with specific desirable hereditary traits.
- It aims to reduce human suffering by "breeding out" disease, disabilities and so-called undesirable characteristics from the human population.
- Eugenics encouraged people of so-called healthy, superior stock to reproduce and discouraged reproduction of the mentally challenged or anyone who fell outside the social norm.
- Modern eugenics, more often called human genetic engineering, has come a long way scientifically and ethically and offers hope for treating many devastating genetic illnesses. Even so, it remains controversial.
- While eugenic principles have been practiced as early as ancient Greece, the

contemporary history of eugenics began in the early 20th century, when a popular eugenics movement emerged in the United Kingdom,

- A major criticism of eugenics policies is that, regardless of whether negative or positive policies are used, they are susceptible to abuse because the genetic selection criteria are determined by whichever group has political power at the time.
- Negative eugenics in particular is criticized by many as a violation of basic human rights, which include the right to reproduce.
- Another criticism is that eugenics policies eventually lead to a loss of genetic diversity, thereby resulting in inbreeding depression due to a loss of genetic variation.
- Another criticism of contemporary eugenics policies is that they propose to permanently and artificially disrupt millions of years of evolution, and that attempting to create genetic lines "clean" of "disorders" can have far-reaching ancillary downstream effects in the genetic ecology, including negative effects on immunity and species resilience.

GLOBAL COALITION OF THE WILLING ON POLLINATORS

◎ CONTEXT:

- **Nigeria becomes fourth African nation to join global coalition to protect pollinators**

◎ ABOUT:

- Nigeria became the fourth African country to join the Global Coalition of the Willing on Pollinators
- While Morocco became a member of this group in May this year, Ethiopia was the first African nation to be part of this global coalition in 2017. Burundi was the second African country to join this global group.
- Other non-African nations such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dominican Republic, Ireland and Mexico had joined the global group last year
- The coalition now has 28 signatories including 17 European countries, five from Latin America and the Caribbean and four from Africa.
- The organisation was formed three years ago, to follow up on the findings of IPBES Assessment on Pollinators, Pollination and Food Production, which found that many of the world's pollinator species are on the decline.
- By signing the declaration to join the coalition, Nigeria, said the news report, has demonstrated its commitment to protect pollinators and their habitats by developing and implementing national pollinator strategies.
- As part of the coalition, Nigeria will also focus on research to conserve pollinators and share its experiences on the same.
- The annual market value of the five to eight per cent of production that is directly linked with pollination services.
- On an average, pollinator-dependent crops have higher prices than non-pollinator dependent crops.
- In fact, most of Nigeria's exports of food crops depend significantly on pollinators. At least nine crops depend on pollination service.
- The availability of pollinators and their pollination services not only affects crop production in terms of their quantity but also quality.
- Pollination by honeybees and wild bees significantly increased yield quantity and quality of crops on average up to 62 per cent, while exclusion of pollinators caused an average yield gap of 37 per cent in cotton and 59 per cent in sesame.
- While there is a well-documented decline in some species of wild pollinators, data on the status of most wild species is lacking. There are no global red list assessments

conducted specifically for insect pollinators, according to the United Nations.

- But protecting pollinators will be important for addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) too. The goals relevant to pollinators are SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 15 (life on land), and SDG 3 (good health and well-being) through access to sufficient nutritious food (highly dependent on pollinators) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) too as 1.4 billion people work in agriculture.
- With just 10 years left to meet the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, a lack of data on the pollinators is a challenge that needs to be addressed by Nigeria along with other African nations and the world too.

‘FEMALE FOETICIDE’

◎ CONTEXT:

- As per the Sample Registration System (SRS) data released in July for the period 2015-2017, female foeticide continues to increase at an alarming rate.

◎ ABOUT:

Sample Registration System (SRS) data findings on sex ratio at birth (SRB)

- The **sex ratio at birth (SRB)** has been **dropping continuously** since Census 2011, coming down from 909 girls per thousand boys in 2011-2013 to **896 girls in 2015-2017**.
- Of the 21 large States, only two — **Kerala and Chhattisgarh** — had an SRB of **above 950 girls** per 1000 boys
- At present, **about 5% of girls are ‘eliminated’** before they are born, despite the promises of the BetiBachaoBetiPadhao scheme.

Economic Survey 2017-2018 also highlighted this problem.

- The **biologically determined natural sex ratio at birth is 1.05 males for every female**. Any significant deviation from this is on account of human intervention – **specifically, sex-selective abortion**.
- While India has shown improvement in several parameters related to women’s empowerment, **the preference for a son has not diminished**.
- As a result, the **stock of missing women** as of 2014 was **nearly 63 million** and more than 2 million women go missing across age groups every year (either due **to sex selective abortion, disease, neglect, or inadequate nutrition**).
- There has been **son meta-preference** in Indian parents who prefer to have children until the desired numbers of sons are born.
- This has led to the creation of **21 million “unwanted” girls** in India between 0 and 25 years. They are neglected of adequate nutrition.
- The **male child preference** is **highest in Punjab and Haryana** and **lowest in Meghalaya**.

Way forward

- Stringent implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) is required.
- Schemes such as BetiBachao, BetiPadhao, SukanyaSamridhiYojana, enhanced maternity leave and mandatory creches in workplaces are steps in the right direction and must be implemented effectively.
- Stronger commitment on the gender front is required similar to the government’s push for Ease of Doing Business and the nation must confront the societal preference for male offspring.

About Sample Registration System

- **Office of the Registrar General, India**, under the **Home Ministry** initiated **Sample Registration System (SRS)** in 1964-65 on a pilot basis and on full scale from 1969-70.
- The SRS since then has been providing data on regular basis. It provides accurate, up-to-date **fertility and mortality data via registration of births and deaths**.
- It thus helps in an **adequate evaluation** of a number of programs in the health sector, including **family planning, maternal and reproductive health, and immunization programs**.

JAI BHIM MUKHYAMANTRI PRATIBHA VIKAS YOJANA

◎ CONTEXT:

- Delhi SC/ST Welfare Minister chaired a meeting with around 15 heads private coaching institutes to include more such institutes in an existing free coaching programme for SC students.

◎ ABOUT:**Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojana**

- It was launched by the **Delhi Government** in **2018** to provide **quality coaching for economically disadvantaged Scheduled Castes (SCs)** candidates to enable them to compete in Competitive examination and succeed in obtaining an appropriate job in Public/ Private sector.
- The scheme will be implemented through the **reputed institutions/centers run by the registered private institutions /NGOS**.
- Only students belonging to **SCs residing in Delhi** & who have **passed 10th and 12th class** (or studying in class XII) from the schools in Delhi , having **total family income of not more than Rs.6.00 lakh per annum** will be eligible under the scheme.
- The ratio of students who have completed their studies from Govt. and Private Schools to be coached under the Scheme will be **75:25**.
- Under the scheme, the government currently pays a **maximum of Rs. 40,000 to selected eight institutes** for the coaching of each student. Apart from it, a **monthly stipend of Rs. 2,500 is given to each student**. Now, the amount will be increased **from Rs. 40,000 to Rs. 1,50,000** and the duration of the coaching will also be extended.

Outcome

- Of the 107 students who got free coaching for engineering and medical entrance exams under the Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojana, 13 have been declared successful in the JEE Main and 22 in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET).

MISSION SHAKTI OF MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT

◎ CONTEXT:

- Bollywood actor Aamir Khan will be part of Maharashtra Government's Mission Shakti' initiative to groom sportspersons with medal-winning potential for the upcoming 2024 Paris Olympics.

◎ ABOUT:

Mission Shakti

- Under this mission, the government is focusing on six sports– weight lifting, archery, shooting, swimming, athletics, volleyball and gymnastics.
- The students will be provided training of international level in the related sports type.
- The required financial help will be sought from the corporate sector.

Significance

- Youth from remote and rural areas like Chandrapur and Gadchiroli will get a chance to bring laurels to India in events like the Olympics in future.

Other initiatives by the name of Mission Shakti

- On March 27, 2019 India conducted **Mission Shakti, an anti-satellite missile test**. This was a **technological mission** carried out by **DRDO**. The test required an extremely high degree of precision and technical capability.
- **Mission Shakti of Odisha Government** aims to provide **interest-free loan up to Rs 3 lakh** for the women **self-help group members**. It will benefit around 70 lakh women associated with six lakh groups.

ATAL COMMUNITY INNOVATION CENTRE (ACIC) PROGRAM

◎ CONTEXT:

- Recently, the Atal Community Innovation Centre (ACIC) program was launched by Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) to foster innovation in India.

◎ ABOUT:

- The programme is aimed at spurring community innovation in underserved and unserved areas of the country. The significance of innovation can be understood by the fact that through innovation India can become a USD 5 trillion economy by 2024-25.
- ACIC can serve as the bridge between the knowledge base existing in communities and the advanced technical ecosystem prevalent in the market base, addressing the needs of society.

Importance of ACIC:

- India is set to become the largest consumer of fossil fuel in the next 15 years. Hence, there is a dire need to reduce India's crude oil import bill which is pegged at Rs 6 lakh crore per annum. This program can come up with innovative methods like waste to wealth, which will help India in reducing its fossil fuel import bill.
- The program can be connected to every Panchayati Raj Institutions to help innovators at grassroots level become part of the policy framework and leverage their creativity to translate their products and services into innovation led commercial utilization for society.
- The program can play a major role towards establishing India as Innovation and Technology led Start-up nation and improve the ranking of India in Global Innovation Index.

JALLIANWALABAGH NATIONAL MEMORIAL (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

◎ CONTEXT:

- The Lok Sabha recently passed JallianwalaBagh National Memorial (Amendment) Bill, 2019 by a voice vote.
- A high-pitched verbal duel over the bill saw ruling National Democratic Alliance members accuse the Congress of holding on to the post despite it being the centenary year of the memorial.

© ABOUT:

Amendments included in the bill:

- The Bill amends the JallianwalaBagh National Memorial Act, 1951 which was passed to erect a National Memorial in memory of those killed and wounded in the JallianwalaBagh massacre of over 1,000 people on April 12, 1919.
- Under the provisions of the Act, the trustees of the Memorial include the Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Congress president, the Minister-in-charge of Culture, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, the Governor and Chief Minister of Punjab, and three eminent persons nominated by the Centre as its members. The bill seeks to remove the Congress president as a permanent member of this trust.
- The bill says that "the Leader of Opposition recognised as such in the House of the People, or where there is no such Leader of Opposition, then the Leader of the single largest Opposition Party in that House" will be on the trust.
- The bill allows the central government to terminate the term of a nominated trustee before the expiry of the period of his term.
- The bill is introduced so that such organizations or trusts could not be politicized and should instead be nationalized.

Opposition to the bill:

- Some members of the Parliament believe that the only intention of the government is to wipe out history. They say that the stalwarts of the Congress remained in the party, they went to jail, fought for the Independence movement. The museum was built by them; the money was donated by them. Hence Congress president should continue as a permanent member of the trust.
- Some members of the Parliament consider such bills as a waste of Parliament's precious time. They are not of any use for solving the grievances of the common public. It is a trivial issue.
