CURRENT AFFAIRS
WEEKLY

WEEK -3 **JUNE, 2019**

MAINS

PT

GSSCORE
An Institute for Civil Services

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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 (JUNE, 2019)

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IAS

FOUNDATION 2020-21

1 Yr. & 2 Yrs.

GS FOUNDATION COURSE

MORNING 2nd BATCH STARTS **24** JUNE

EVENING BATCH **12** JULY

- ↗ 10 Months Foundation Class to cover entire syllabus of GS Prelims, CSAT, GS Mains Paper 1, 2, 3, 4 & Essay
- ↗ 60 Days Target PT Revision Classes
- ↗ 50 Days GS Mains Contemporary Issues Classes after Prelims
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OPTIONAL SUBJECTS

GEOGRAPHY
By: Rohit Lodha

STARTS 21 JUNE

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
By: Ashutosh Pandey

STARTS 24 JUNE

POLITICAL SCIENCE
By: Dr. Piyush Choubey

STARTS 24 JUNE

HISTORY
By: Piyush Kumar

STARTS 26 JUNE

SECTION: A
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WAR AGAINST PLASTIC

CONTEXT

- Today, 13,000,000 tonnes of plastic leak into the ocean every year, what among other damage, kill 100,000 marine animals annually.

- The theme for this year's World Oceans Day is 'gender for the ocean', handling plastic pollution in oceans remains the biggest task in front of everyone. Once it enters the ocean, plastic can take almost 500 years to biodegrade.

⊙ ABOUT:

- Plastic pollution is when plastic has gathered in an area and has begun to negatively impact the natural environment and create problems for plants, wildlife, and even the human population.

- Often this includes killing plant life and posing dangers to local animals. Plastic is an incredibly useful material, but it is also made from toxic compounds known to cause illness, and because it is meant for durability, it is not biodegradable.

⊙ BACKGROUND:

- Plastic is everywhere, even on those items you may not expect it to be. Milk cartons are lined with plastic, water bottles are handed out everywhere, and some products may even contain tiny plastic beads.

- Commercial fishing is an economic necessity for many parts of the world, and tons of people eat fish for their daily survival.

- However, this industry has helped contribute to the problem of plastics pollution in the oceans in several ways. The nets used for certain large-scale trolling operations are usually made of plastic.

- First, these spend long times submerged in water, leaking toxins at will, but they also often get broken up or lost, left to remain wherever they fall.

- This not only kills and harms local wildlife, but also ensures that pollutants enter the water and fish of the area.

⊙ ANALYSIS

- Plastic is meant to last, it is nearly impossible to break down. Burning plastic is incredibly toxic, and can lead to harmful atmospheric conditions and deadly illness. Therefore, if it is in a landfill, it will never stop releasing toxins in that area.

Serious Effects of Plastic Pollution

- **It upsets the Food Chain:** While most plastics are expected to remain intact for decades or centuries after use, those that do erode end up as micro-plastics, consumed by fish and other marine wildlife, quickly making their way into the global food chain.

- **Groundwater Pollution:** Water conservation is already a concern in places ranging from California to parts of India, but the world's water is in great danger because of leaking plastics and waste. Groundwater and reservoirs are susceptible to leaking environmental toxins.

- Many lakes and oceans have reported alarming cases of plastic debris floating on water surfaces, affecting a great number of aquatic creatures. It leads to dreadful consequences to marine creatures that swallow the toxic chemicals.

- Besides, the hazardous plastic chemicals contaminate water and reduce its quality. Estimations reveal the existence of billions of tons of plastics in swirling convergences constituting about 40% of the globe's oceanic surfaces.

- **Land Pollution:** When plastic is dumped in landfills, it interacts with water and form hazardous chemicals. When these chemicals seep underground, they degrade the water quality. Wind carries and deposits plastic from one place to another, increasing the land litter. It can also get stuck on poles, traffic lights, trees, fences, tower etc. and animals that may come in the vicinity and might suffocate them to death.

- **Air Pollution:** Burning of plastic in the open air, leads to environmental pollution due to the release of poisonous chemicals. The polluted air when inhaled by humans and animals affect their health and can cause respiratory problems.

- Plastic pollution poses even greater impacts on the environment because of its widespread usage and its durability component.

- The global plastic consumption throughout the globe was approximated at 260 million tons in

2008, and it was predicted to be more than 300 tons in 2015 – according to the Global Industry Analysts.

◉ These plastics wind up negatively affecting wildlife habitat, wildlife, and humans by affecting lands, oceans, and waterways.

◉ Wildlife and marine creatures at times confuse plastics wastes for food, affecting them when ingested or may be exposed to the toxic chemicals present in the plastics that can cause biological upsets. Human biological functions are also affected by the plastic's toxic chemicals.

Implications for Human Health

◉ Plastics are made up of a variety of toxic chemicals. As such, its uses and exposure are associated with a number of human health concerns. Chemicals leached from the plastics contain compounds like polybrominated diphenyl ether (PBDE), bisphenol A (BPA), and phthalates. These chemicals have been established to upset the endocrine system and thyroid hormones and can be very destructive to women of reproductive age and young children

Global Initiatives to Ban or Reduce Consumption of Single-Use Plastics

◉ **By Governments:**

➤ Seychelles has banned the importation of single-use plastic straws

➤ Britain has announced its intention to ban the sale of plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds

➤ In Taiwan, from 2020, free plastic straws will be banned from all food and beverage outlets.

➤ Under the new plans, all plastic packaging on the EU market will be recyclable by 2030, the consumption of single-use plastics will be reduced and the intentional use of microplastics will be restricted.

➤ The Chinese government responded to widespread plastic pollution by banning distribution of single-use plastic bags in grocery stores and shops around the country.

➤ In January 2018, the European Commission adopted the first-ever European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy. The plan seeks to eliminate plastic pollution and change the way plastics are produced and consumed in the EU with a focus on plastic bags, other single-use plastics, and fishing materials.

◉ **By Business:**

➤ In 2018, Alaska Airlines removed all non-recyclable plastic stir straws and citrus picks and replacing them with sustainable, marine-friendly alternatives on all domestic and international flights.

➤ In January 2018, UK-based Costa Coffee announced that it "will remove plastic drinking straws from its stores.

➤ Ikea is to phase out all single-use plastic products from its stores and restaurants by 2020.

> **Plastic Pollution Coalition** is a growing global alliance of more than 750 organizations, businesses, and thought leaders in 60 countries working toward a world free of plastic pollution and its toxic impact on humans, animals, waterways, the ocean, and the environment.

◉ **The government of India is treading a judicious path - controlling toxicity of the plastics and also utilizing its efficacy for the growth and development efforts:**

➤ Plastics have been used in cars since 1950s—originally in sports cars to improve agility and to increase speed. Today, plastics help make cars safer and more efficient since they are present in crucial safety areas such as seatbelts, airbags and crumple zones.

➤ Carbon fiber reinforced plastic can absorb 6–12 times as much energy as steel since 10% weight reduction in vehicles can increase fuel economy by 8%, making carbon fiber-reinforced plastics a great choice for automakers. India is expected to have the fourth largest auto components industry by 2025.

➤ One of the latest technologies i.e. 3D printing is used for making the complex geometry of plastics components easily. This is the technology where replicates of artificial, functional human parts can be made. These days, tissue engineering and implants fully rely upon the plastic materials.

➤ No doubt, the plastic industry clearly plays a vital role in the growth of Indian economy. The average consumption of plastics is roughly 13 kilograms per capita per year.

➤ The country's plastics industry also offers immense potential in terms of capacity, infrastructure and skilled manpower. India is currently ranked among the top five consumers of polymers in the world and has 30,000 plus plastic processing units employing over four million people across the country.

➤ CIPET (Central Institute of Plastics Engineering & Technology) acts as a bridge to fill the technological gap between the Indian and global polymer industries.

➤ In line with the change in industrial environment and needs of the industries, CIPET needs to constantly upgrade and update its facilities with latest technological developments in the field of Polymer Science & Technology for the benefit of Indian polymer industries to compete globally.

➤ It may focus more on developing indigenous technologies and innovations on products in order to support automotive, aerospace and health care industries to facilitate export growth.

◉ **WAY FORWARD:**

◉ Plastics are a necessary evil. Due to their extensive utility and affordability it is difficult to completely remove them from the economy.

◉ Besides providing higher 'strength to weight' ratio as compared to conventional materials, a life-cycle analysis of plastic products indicates that these substances not only save significant amounts of energy and water but also emit lower quantum of green house gases

◉ More than ban, sustainable use and waste re-cycling is the need of the hour.

📑 Practice Question

◉ **"Plastics and plastic-based products have become an integral part of the global economy; there is a need to create awareness and educate people on the need to recycle, re-purpose and reuse plastic items". Discuss the methodology which can be employed and evaluate the options available - at India as well as global level.**

INDIA – IRAN RELATIONS

CONTEXT

- One of the most difficult tasks that the Indian foreign policy-makers has been facing on and off is to balance their relations with Iran while enhancing their proximity with the global superpower, the United States.

◉ ABOUT:

- Present advice of the U.S. administration to the oil importing countries to stop all oil purchases from Iran is definitely not a good news for New Delhi.

- Iran was until 2006 India's second-largest supplier of crude oil. But it dropped to number seven by the end of 2013-14 importing only 6 per cent.

- However, India continues to be Iran's second-largest buyer, next only to China. In terms of quantity, India's imports came down from 27.14 million tonnes in 2016-17 to 17.62 million tonnes during 2018-2019.

- More than oil, the current diplomatic tussle gives an opportunity to analyze the criticality of:

    ➤ How to re-balance and stick to long term policy alignments in the wake of USA's shifting stance?

    ➤ Can USA guarantee stability in Oil supply and price levels post departure of Iran's oil from the market?

    ➤ Who would 'tame' OPEC's hegemony and why?

    ➤ If not Iran, where else will India go to access Central Asia?

◉ BACKGROUND:

- India's indifferent relations with China and Pakistan mean that Iran provides the only access to the untapped markets of Afghanistan and Central Asia for Indian goods, as well as India's only option for tapping the vast untapped energy and other mineral resources of the region.

- Iran also provides India the shortest access to the vast energy resources of the Caspian basin and the Caucasus region.

- The growing Indian economy not only requires the vast untapped markets of the central Eurasian landmass, but also needs newer sources of energy supplies.

- For five centuries prior to the British rule, the Persian language was the second language in most of South Asia. It became the language of the elite in many princely states and the medium for higher education.

- The Urdu language, which is the official language of Pakistan and is spoken widely across India and other countries in South Asia, is written in the Persian script and is deeply influenced by the Persian language. There are similarities between the oldest Indian scriptures, the Vedas, and the Iranian Avesta.

◉ ANALYSIS

Criticality of the Civilizational links:

- Iran has come to symbolise the aspirations of Shias worldwide. Accordingly, in India, there is strong support for the Iranian viewpoint amongst the Shia clergy as well as the masses.

- In cities like Lucknow, this pro-Iran sentiment is clearly discernable to any observer. There are approximately 25 million Shias in India, who visit various places of pilgrimage in Iran and look up to Iran and the Iranian clergy for spiritual guidance.

- Besides Shias, the miniscule but economically significant Parsi (Zoroastrian) population of India has its centres of pilgrimage in Iran. It also has a small Zoroastrian minority still living there, with whom Indian Parsees have emotional bonds

- One of the oldest continuously inhabited civilizations, it forms a bridge between the Semitic world and the Indo-Aryan civilization of South Asia and has had strong historical linkages with the Indian civilization.

- Despite strong convergence, Indo-Iran relations in recent times have been affected by Iranian relations with the US.

- The identification of Shiite masses with Iran allows it a significant role in Afghanistan, which not only is a neighbouring country, but also has a substantial Shia population.

Geo-economic significance of Iran:

- The main contributory factor to Iran's significance continues to be its huge hydrocarbon resource, which contributes to 80 per cent of its exports.

- Moreover, Iran's energy resources have gained further significance with the depletion of energy resources in other oil producing states.

- From India's point of view, Iran's energy resources provide one of the closest and cheapest energy resources available to fuel India's growth.

- Accordingly, India has been looking at the North South Transport Corridor and Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline to resolve its energy shortages.

- The IPI was proposed as a pipeline that would transport 36 billion cubic metres of gas every year from Bandar Abbas to Calcutta. Of this, 70 per cent gas was meant for India while 10 and 20 percent were meant for Iran and Pakistan respectively.

- Despite huge oil reserves, Iran lacks adequate refining capacity and as against an annual consumption of 64.5 million litres of petrol, its refineries can refine only 43 million litres, which forces it to import approximately one-third of its consumption.

- Iran has been a major destination for the products of some Indian refineries in the private sector, which are unable to market their products locally as the petroleum products are subsidised by the government.

Strait of Hormuz dilemma:

- One of the most significant capabilities of Iran is its ability to disrupt maritime access to the Persian Gulf through the narrow Strait of Hormuz.

- The disruption of oil and gas production or its transportation through the Strait of Hormuz, would lead to a big spurt in the prices of oil and gas, which, in all probability, would create a major global economic crisis.

- Even if the strait is not closed, any conflict in the region could increase the global oil prices drastically.

Iran factor can influence remittance earning:

- Iran has the capability to create disturbances in any of the Persian Gulf states. The presence of a substantive Shia population in most of these states further increases Iran's leverage.

- There is a huge Indian Diaspora in these states and a major source of foreign exchange earnings for India are the remittances sent by overseas Indians. In fact, India tops the global list of countries receiving remittances.

But, is it all bonhomie?

- The issue that has drawn maximum attention on Iran in recent times is its attempt to set up a uranium enrichment facility. It does not serve India's interests to have another nuclear state in its vicinity. Iran's bomb may lead to an arms race in the Gulf.

- Despite the recent bonhomie between India and Iran, successive Iranian regimes have, by and large, taken an anti-India stance on Kashmir. Iran had provided material support to Pakistan during both the 1965 and 1971 Wars.

Anyhow, Iran is geo-politically important for India:

- Iran's significance for India as gateway to Eurasia, its growing role and levers in West Asia and Afghanistan make it difficult for India to abandon Iran under the U.S pressure.

- Regionally, India needs Iran both for its connectivity projects INSTC and Chabahar, support and engagement in Afghanistan and its cooperation to maintain balanced ties with China, Pakistan and Russia.

Summing up:

- To conclude, it would not be incorrect to state that Iran's unique geography, its population and nature have bestowed upon it a unique strategic significance, making it one of the important players in the global arena.

- From India's perspective, good relations with Iran are an essential imperative for India's sustained growth and development.

- Its energy resources could easily speed up India's growth and its landmass could provide Indian manufacturers' access to Central Asia and the Caucasus.

- On the other hand, Iran's nuclear weapons programme does pose a threat to regional and global peace. It could also irrevocably disturb the balance of power in the geo-strategically significant Persian Gulf.

- Any disturbance in the region could adversely affect India's economic well-being. The recent accord between the West and Iran has given diplomacy a chance.

📑 Practice Question

- Isolating Iran is not likely to bring any peace and development in the region. Mitigating hostility is likely to deliver better results not only for the US and Iran but bring greater benefits for the larger international and regional community as well. Discuss criticality of India-Iran relations within this perspective.

SALIENCE OF INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND STATES IN INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

CONTEXT

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first visit abroad in his second term to Maldives and Sri Lanka is being billed as the reaffirmation of Delhi's traditional diplomatic emphasis on "neighborhood first".**

- **While partnerships between big and middle powers will determine the balance of power in the region, Indian Ocean Islands States will shape the new framework for a security architecture.**

⊙ ABOUT:

- The visit to Male and Colombo offers the opportunity to firmly place the Indian Ocean island states into India's regional geography.

- A beginning was indeed made in his first term, when Modi travelled to Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka in early 2015 and outlined an Indian Ocean strategy called SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

- Modi must now expand the ambit of the strategy to draw in Madagascar, Comoros, Reunion and Diego Garcia. Reunion is part of France and Diego Garcia hosts a major American military facility.

- Throughout history, rising nations have controlled strategic islands to project power across vast areas of the globe.

- Access to and influence over islands will provide strategic advantages, thereby influencing the response from the other competitors.

- It is in these terms that the foreign policy of India has seen a strategic re-alignment and this article intends to cover this angle - comprehensively.

⊙ BACKGROUND:

- The most widely discussed strategic islands in the Indian Ocean are Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles.

- These islands span the ocean from India to Africa. Their strategic importance is highlighted by their location along key sea lines of communication (SLOCs).

- These islands are vital to, and can facilitate a navy's continuous presence along, key international shipping routes, allowing a navy to patrol and secure SLOCs during peace times and an option to interdict and cut off an adversary's communications during times of conflict.

- Such presence allows navies to project power, increasing their profile as a net security provider. While operations from and near these four islands provide good coverage of the south and central Indian Ocean, there are other islands which are equally important but poorly examined.

⊙ ANALYSIS

Criticality of islands and the intertwined security architecture:

- Part of Indian Territory, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the eastern Indian Ocean are located near the Straits of Malacca. These islands allow a navy to cover the key waterway facilitating trade between East and Southeast Asian countries with Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

- As the main entry point into the Indian Ocean from the western Pacific, these islands could provide India with unparalleled advantages as Beijing expands its presence in the Indian Ocean.

COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS

- The Cocos (Keeling) Islands, an Australian external territory, is an archipelago similarly located in strategic waters, south of Sumatra. The Indonesian straits of Sunda, Lombok, and Ombai are the alternative routes to the Indian Ocean, especially for military vessels.

- These straits will become important as China continues to explore ways to send their sub-surface vessels to the Indian Ocean undetected. The strategic value of these islands is closely related to their ability to monitor the Indonesian as well as the Malacca Straits.

SOCOTRA

- The island of Socotra sits at the mouth of the Gulf of Aden just past the Bab el Mandeb—a critical chokepoint between the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean.

- Any disruption in the waterways of the Bab el Mandeb would result in blockage of the Suez Canal, interrupting all traffic between Europe and Asia. Socotra provides an ideal position to monitor traffic in and out of the Gulf and the Horn of Africa.

MADAGASCAR

- The island of Madagascar is a prime location for operations in the western Indian Ocean or along the eastern coast of Africa. The island also borders the Mozambique Channel, once a primary trading route between Asia, Europe, and the Americas before the opening of the Suez.

- While commercial traffic has dropped off, the Mozambique Channel remains strategically important for the eastern coast of Africa. Additionally, an estimated 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the area is likely to bring attention back to this channel.

DIEGO GARCIA

- Diego Garcia is the biggest island of the Chagos archipelago, in the central Indian Ocean. The island is a part of British Indian Ocean Territory which was leased by Mauritius post-independence.

- There is an ongoing territorial dispute between Mauritius and the United Kingdom over claims on the islands. The U.S. military continues to operate from and stage through Diego Garcia for all of their Indian Ocean operations.

LA REUNION

- La Reunion is a French territory in the Indian Ocean, located southwest of Mauritius. The French navy maintains a strong presence in the western Indian Ocean and the eastern coast of Africa through this base.

- France also patrols and deploys to the Mozambique Channel from La Reunion, maintaining a presence in the exclusive economic zone around several French islands in the channel.

- The French and U.S. militaries also maintain their presences in the western Indian Ocean through their respective bases in Djibouti and the United Arab Emirates, locations which allow access to the Bab el Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz.

- Considering the sheer importance of marine economic security architecture and heavy reliance on ocean led growth, it is but obvious that Indian foreign policy has attempted to strategically link criticality of island security with its overarching foreign policy.

India's past actions:

- Although India has traditional ties with most of the island states in the Indian Ocean region, it has failed to leverage its strategic advantages. India's island diplomacy has been one of confidence bordering on dismissal.

- When Prime Minister Narendra Modi toured Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Seychelles in 2015, it was the first visit by an Indian head of government in over two decades.

Contemporary and stated actions:

- India's military strengths lie in the northern and eastern Indian Ocean, with operational limitations specifically in the western Indian Ocean.

- If India is serious about playing a dominant role across the Indian Ocean region, it would have to step up its presence in the Gulf, western Indian Ocean, and the eastern coast of Africa.

- As the navy moves to a mission based deployment, a prospect which proposes continuous deployments in seven key areas of the Indian Ocean, access to and collaboration with islands and littorals has become significantly more important.

- While India has always maintained a presence through annual patrols and assistance to Mauritius and Seychelles in those waters, it requires facilities for logistical support at the minimum to ensure the sustained presence necessary for an effective mission based deployment. These facilities need to be strengthened in the Gulf and western Indian Ocean.

- Indian efforts at building possible military infrastructure in Seychelles and Mauritius underlines Delhi's understanding of its challenges in operating in those waters.

- India's operational challenges could also be bridged through joint collaboration, such as logistics agreements with France and the United States.

- The French agreement can provide logistical support to Indian ships operating in the western Indian Ocean and the eastern coast of Africa through its bases in Djibouti, United Arab Emirates, and perhaps in the Mozambique Channel.

- India can explore similar engagements through the agreement with the United States. In the meantime, India will have to continue re-examining its relationship with Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles to address the challenges in its island diplomacy.

⊙ WAY FORWARD

- Delhi should have no problem recognizing that Islamabad is not ready for economic integration with India; it wants a settlement of the Kashmir question to precede any economic and political cooperation with India.

- That might take a while. But should we hold up the rest of the region until Pakistan is comfortable with India-centered regionalism?

- It is these narratives that has re-oriented Indian diplomacy to shift its stance towards BIMSTEC with a heavy reliance on Indian Ocean trajectory.

- India needs to develop its own national capabilities — especially in the delivery of strategic economic

and security assistance to the island states. Without that the ambitious goals identified under the SAGAR vision will remain elusive.

◉ Capacity augmentation must follow capital intensive "neighborhood first" dimension. The project timelines should be met with swiftest accountability norms.

◉ Care must be taken as not to antagonize China - as India is yet to match the latter's 'funding capabilities'.

Practice Question

◉ "With the SAGAR vision, the government signaled India's readiness to work with other powers in promoting regional prosperity and security in the Indian Ocean. There are big possibilities for collaboration with France, the US, Australia and Japan in different corners of the Indian Ocean". Discuss while elaborating key nodes of the stated architecture.

APPROVAL FOR RECONSTITUTION OF NITI AAYOG

CONTEXT

- **Prime Minister approved reconstitution of policy think tank NITI Aayog, renaming Rajiv Kumar as its vice chairman and appointing Home Minister Amit Shah as an ex-officio member.**

⊙ ABOUT:

NITI Aayog

- The National Institution for Transforming India or NITI Aayog was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on January 1, 2015.

- It is the premier policy 'Think Tank' of the GOI, providing both directional and policy inputs. While designing strategic and long term policies and programmes for the GOI, it also provides relevant technical advice to the Centre and States.

- NITI Aayog replaced the Planning Commission instituted in 1950. This was done in order to better serve the needs and aspirations of the people of India.

- An important evolutionary change from the past, NITI Aayog acts as the quintessential platform of the GOI to bring States to act together in national interest, and thereby fosters Cooperative Federalism.

Why NITI Aayog replaced Planning Commission?

- Reform of the Planning Commission was long overdue. An intensive exercise was undertaken. Many stakeholders were consulted. International practices were examined. An outline was drawn of a substantially reformed institution which would have a capability for "systems reform" rather than making of Five-Year Plans, and which would have the "power of persuasion" without providing budgets.

- A commission chaired by **C. Rangarajan** examined budgetary processes, divisions of responsibilities between the Finance Ministry and the Planning Commission, and distinctions between 'plan' and 'non-plan' expenditures. It concluded that budgetary responsibility must be concentrated in the Finance Ministry, and it was no longer desirable for the Planning Commission to have powers for financial provisions.

- Some in the Planning Commission were worried that it would lose its teeth if it did not have any financial power. Chief Ministers retorted that the Planning Commission must improve its ability to understand their needs and to develop ideas that they would want to adopt because they accepted the ideas as good for them, not because they would have to if they wanted the money.

- It is not surprising, therefore, that the bold charter of NITI Aayog announced in 2015.

Functions of NITI Aayog

- To evolve a shared vision of national development priorities sectors and strategies with the active involvement of States in the light of national objectives.

- To foster cooperative federalism through structured support initiatives and mechanisms with the States on a continuous basis, recognizing that strong States make a strong nation.

- To develop mechanisms to formulate credible plans at the village level and aggregate these progressively at higher levels of government.

- To pay special attention to the sections of our society that may be at risk of not benefiting adequately from economic progress.

- To design strategic and long term policy and programme frameworks and initiatives, and monitor their progress and their efficacy.

- To provide advice and encourage partnerships between key stakeholders and national and international like-minded Think tanks, as well as educational and policy research institutions.

- To create a knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurial support system through a collaborative community of national and international experts, practitioners.

- To actively monitor and evaluate the implementation of programmes and initiatives, including the identification of the needed resources so as to strengthen the probability of success and scope of delivery.

- To focus on technology up gradation and capacity building for implementation of programmes and initiatives.

Composition of NITI Aayog

- The full-time organizational framework will comprise of, in addition to the Prime Minister as the Chairperson.

- **Vice-Chairperson:** To be appointed by the Prime Minister.

- **Members:** Full-time

- **Part-time members:** Maximum of 2 from leading universities research organizations and other

relevant institutions in an ex-officio capacity. Part time members will be on a rotational basis.

○ **Ex Officio members:** Maximum of 4 members of the Union Council of Ministers to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

○ **Chief Executive Officer:** To be appointed by the Prime Minister for a fixed tenure, in the rank of Secretary to the Government of India.

New Reconstitution

○ The Prime Minister will serve as the Chairman of Niti Aayog.

○ Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar continues in his post along with Permanent members VK Saraswat, Ramesh Chand and VK Paul.

○ The ex-officio members now include Defence Minister, the Home Minister, the Finance Minister and Agriculture Minister.

○ Special invitees to NITI Aayog include **Minister of Road**, **Transport and Highways, Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, Minister of Railways and Minister of Statistics.**

⊙ ANALYSIS

Earlier Fallouts

○ Recent ruling government needs to increase employment and incomes; revive investments and growth; untangle the financial sector; navigate muddied-up international trade; solve the perennial problems of poor education and health, and the growing problems of environmental pollution and water scarcity.

○ Regardless of whether or not India has the fastest growing GDP, it has a long way to go to achieve economic and social inclusion, and restore environmental sustainability. India's problems are complex because they are all interrelated. Fixing one part of the system alone can make matters worse.

○ Now, when the country's economy has not performed to the high expectations, the performance of the NITI Aayog is under scrutiny, as it should be. Many people are even nostalgically recalling the Planning Commission, including some who were very critical of it and wanted it overhauled.

Arguments in favour for it

○ Changes with continuity are necessity of time. This step of reconstitution is a good starting point for a new journey in transforming the governance of the Indian economy. This will enhance an open-minded review of what NITI Aayog has achieved so far to adopt the new role described in its charter — that of a catalyst of change in a complex, federal, socioeconomic system.

○ This will make governance more effective. This step has provided a new bottle. It points to the need for new methods of cooperative learning and cooperative implementation by other ministries.

Reaction against it

○ This created uproar not only within the government, but also in the political circles.

○ Implementation of radical change is never easy. If things don't go well soon, nostalgia will rise for the old order — even though there was dissatisfaction with it. And the change-maker will be blamed for the disruption.

○ There is deep concern that NITI Aayog has lost its integrity as an independent institution to guide the government; that it has become a mouthpiece of the government and an implementer of the government's projects. Many insist that NITI Aayog must have the ability to independently evaluate the government's programmes at the Centre and in the States.

Will this reconstitution help India?

○ As four ministries have been included, this reform will include changes in labour laws, privatisation moves, and creation of land banks for new industrial development. It will bring more totality in the nature of NITI Aayog.

○ The newly top council of NITI Aayog will more focus on crucial matters like water management, agriculture and aspirational district programmes, which is crucial to stem the declining trend in economic growth.

⊙ WAY FORWARD

○ This measure requires evaluations and course-corrections in the midst of action.

○ It requires new methods to speed up 'organisational learning' amongst stakeholders in the system who must make plans together and implement them together rather than reconstituting. Participation from other people is also necessary to make Aayog not a think-tank only from the above but from below also.

○ Merely filling this new bottle with reconstituting from above will not transform India. The debate about NITI Aayog's efficacy must focus on whether or not it is performing the new role it must, and what progress it has made in acquiring capabilities to perform this role, rather than slipping back into the reconstitution of NITI Aayog.

📰 Practice Question

○ 'NITI Aayog' is the missing pillar of India's good governance. Do you agree with the recent reconstitution of Aayog? How far this step will improve the capability of governance in India?

SECTION: B
(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

FACEBOOK TO LAUNCH CRYPTOCURRENCY, 'GLOBALCOIN'

⊙ **CONTEXT:**
- **Facebook is planning to launch its own cryptocurrency, likely to be named GlobalCoin. The currency would initially be launched in just around a dozen countries and Facebook may start testing it by the end of this year.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

What is Cruptocurrency?

- Cryptocurrency is an encrypted decentralized digital currency transferred between peers and confirmed in a public ledger via a process known as mining.

Steps taken by Facebook

- Facebook is planning to have physical portals for users to purchase the cryptocurrency, which, according to previous reports, is called **GlobalCoin**. It is finally code named as **Libra**.

- Facebook has registered a company called Libra Networks in Switzerland for financial services, Reuters reported. Libra could be a play on the word LIBOR, an abbreviation for the London Inter-bank Offered Rate that's used a benchmark interest rate for borrowing between banks. LIBOR is for banks, while Libra is meant to be for the people.

- The cryptocurrency will be a stablecoin — a token designed to have a stable price to prevent discrepancies and complications due to price fluctuations during a payment or negotiation process. Facebook is working with various countries to pre-approve the rollout of the stablecoin.

Advantages of Libra

- Libra could unlock a new era of commerce and payments for the social network.

- It is apparently aimed to allow users to make transactions via the social media platform, and might also be offered to Facebook employees who want to be paid in the cryptocurrency.

- It could be used to offer low or no-fee payments between friends or remittance of earnings to family's from migrant workers abroad who are often gouged by money transfer services.

- Sidestepping credit card transaction fees could also allow Facebook's cryptocurrency to offer a cheaper way to pay merchants for traditional ecommerce, or facilitate micro transactions. And a better understanding of who buys what or which brands or popular could aid Facebook in ad measurement, ranking, and targeting to amplify its core business.

- It will be transferrable with zero fees via Facebook products including Messenger and WhatsApp.

- Facebook also wants to roll out physical devices for ATMs so users can exchange traditional assets for the cryptocurrency.

Governance issues

- Facebook is in talks to create an independent foundation to oversee its cryptocurrency.

- It's asking companies to pay $10 million to operate a node that can validate transactions made with its cryptocurrency in exchange for a say in governance of the token.

- It's possible that node operators could benefit financially too. By introducing a level of decentralization to the governance of the project, Facebook may be able to avoid regulation related to its holding too much power over a global currency.

Risk associated with Libra

- Digital currencies, being in electronic format, are prone to losses arising out of hacking, loss of password etc. This step by Facebook will drop the secrecy and will lead to lack of privacy for example if someone is browsing, then Facebook can collect such data and track every dollar spend by that person, which is threat to privacy.

- The exchanges are located in various parts of the world, making the law enforcement a tricky thing for the multiple jurisdictions available.

- This can easily be used for illegal activities anonymously.

⊙ **WAY AHEAD:**
- Facebook may further set up physical portals for users to purchase the cryptocurrency.

- Facebook is working with merchants to accept the token as payment, and may offer sign-up bonuses.

FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

⊙ **CONTEXT:**
- **As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data published by the NSSO, fewer women are working now, and those who work are working for long hours with low pay.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

Major Findings of the NSSO Data

- India's female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)—the share of working-age women who report either being employed, or being available for work—has fallen to a historic low of 23.3% in 2017-18, meaning that over three out of four women over the age of 15 in India are neither working nor seeking work. *(The age of 15 is the cut-off used for global comparisons by the International Labour Organization).*

- Among urban women who do work, domestic cleaning work is the second most common profession after textile-related jobs.

- India's low LFPR was already a matter of concern in 2011-12, and placed India 12th from the bottom globally.

- The further fall comes mainly from rural areas—female LFPR crashed by seven percentage points, while male LFPR remained roughly the same.

- While some of the fall in women's workforce participation is explained by higher rates of higher education enrolment, indicating that more young women are in higher education rather than working or looking for jobs, the data also points to a fall in working rates for older women.

- While the LFPR for women aged 15-29 fell by eight percentage points between 2011-12 and 2017-18 to 16.4%, the LFPR for women fell by at least seven percentage points for every age bracket between 30-50 as well.

- The decline in LFPR was highest among women aged 35-39 years which fell 9 percentage points to 33.5%.

- Among women in the prime working ages of 30-50, more than two in three women are not in the workforce, with the majority of them reporting that they are "attending to domestic duties only".

- Muslim women have the lowest LFPR while among Hindu women, forward caste women have the lowest LFPR, implying that social norms and religious conservatism might play a role in women being "allowed" to work.

- Among Indian states, Bihar has by far the lowest rates of female workforce participation, while the southern and eastern states do better.

- Among those in the workforce, rural women work overwhelmingly in agriculture, which highlight the probability of shortage of non-farm jobs, especially for women.

- The most common jobs for urban women are of garment workers, domestic cleaners and 'directors and chief executives'.

- 99% of (women workers described as directors and chief executives) were self-employed, of which around one-third worked as unpaid family workers. Such women were mainly engaged within the self-help groups and co-operatives as partners and had thus been recorded as directors or working proprietors, even as their activities, for the most part, remained confined to food processing and garment manufacturing.

- A large proportion of self-employed women workers were also engaged in outsourced manufacturing work, typically characterised by low earnings, long hours of work and lack of any form of social protection."

- The high-skilled, white collar jobs for young women are rare. Instead, domestic work, house cleaning and salespeople dominate the urban sector for women. The only exception is the teaching profession, which makes it to the top 10 most common jobs for women.

- The average employed Indian woman worked 44.4 hours per week (in the April-June 2018 period) as against the developing country average of 35-36 hours, as per ILO estimates. But in both developed and developing countries, women perform the vast majority of unpaid household and care work.

- The unadjusted gender wage gap—the gap in the earnings of men and women in regular, salaried jobs, without accounting for differences in hours worked and educational qualifications—is significant. In rural areas, a male salaried employee earned nearly 1.4 to 1.7 times a female salaried employee, while in urban areas, salaried men earned 1.2 to 1.3 times a salaried woman.

- Just nine countries around the world, including Syria and Iraq, now have a fewer proportion of working women than India. The female labour force participation in Bihar is less in comparison to any country of the world.

BIG DATA ANALYTICAL TOOLS TO IMPROVE OFFICIAL STATISTICS

◉ **CONTEXT:**

- **The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has proposed to set up a 'National Data Warehouse' with a view to leveraging big data analytical tools to further improve the quality of macro-economic aggregates.**

◉ **ABOUT:**

More on news:

- Over a period of time, there have been increasing demands on the statistical system for the production of relevant and quality statistics. MoSPI has been accommodating these demands by optimising the available resources and use of technology.

- As in any system, the advent of technology necessitates reforms in statistical processes and products with an aim to synergise the existing resources so that the system remains responsive.

- The recent step for the merger of CSO and NSSO was aimed at leveraging the strengths of the two organisations so that it can meet the increasing demands.

- MoSPI has been criticised in some sections for the quality of macro-economic data.

- As per MoSPI, revision in GDP estimates occur when data coverage from administrative sources improves over time and these improvements get well documented. Consequently, the initial estimates of GDP tend to be conservative.

- To improve GDP estimation it would require concomitant changes in the sectoral data flows and associated regulatory framework in the data source agencies to facilitate the use of more macro modelling techniques.

- MoSPI has also proposed to establish a **National Data Warehouse on Official Statistics**, where technology will be leveraged for using Big Data Analytical tools for further improving the quality of macro-economic aggregates.

- Efforts are also on to evolve a legislative framework under which the National Statistical Commission (NSC) may function with independence and give holistic guidance for improving the national statistical system.

⊙ **WAY AHEAD:**
- The reforms being undertaken in MoSPI will lead to better data sets and better estimates in future, and will be duly deliberated on by the ACNAS during the Base Year revision.

- As all these reforms are an ongoing process, it is important that the readers and users understand and appreciate the limitations of data and the challenges in estimation.

ROADMAP FOR FOOD CORPORATION OF INDIA (FCI)

⊙ **CONTEXT:**
- **The government had set up a 6 member committee to suggest restructuring or unbundling of FCI to improve its financial management and operational efficiency in procurement, storage and distribution of food grains.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**
- Primacy will be given to ensuring that the functioning of FCI is streamlined and fast paced as per recommendations of the Shanta Kumar Committee.

- The high level committee was set up to look into the restructuring of Food Corporation of India to improve its financial management and operational efficiency in procurement, storage and distribution of food grains.

Objectives of this step

- Food and Public Distribution asserted that the main objective of the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs is to ensure that not a single grain of food being produced by the hard work and labour of farmers gets wasted and all of it is procured by the government at Minimum Support Price while ensuring that corruption is completely removed.

- The objective of plan is to create 100 lakh ton silo storage capacity in the country.

- Now RITES has been assigned the task of changing the silo model and they will give their recommendations in 90 days to FCI. The target for completion of remaining silos is 2021.

> RITES Limited is an engineering consultancy company, specializing in the field of transport infrastructure. Established in 1974 by the Government of India, the company's initial charter was to provide consultancy services in rail transport management to operators in India and abroad.

- The committee calls for setting up of negotiable warehouse receipt (NWR) system for outsourcing of stocking of grains.

- In the new system, farmers can deposit their produce in these registered warehouses and get 80 per cent of the advance from bank against their produce on the basis of MSP.

- It has recommended measures to ease entry of private players in the business of procurement of grains. This would be done by putting an end to the practice of states giving bonuses on crop MSP to farmers, and restricting taxes and statutory levies on food grains at uniform to 3 per cent of MSP.

- Direct recruitment process of FCI is being made more transparent through online examination which is being done in two phases.

- This step will bring all workers of FCI under a single, uniform system which will bring stability of tenure and secured wages for all.

- In order to improve the usage of Information Technology in FCI, a Human Resource Management System (HRMS) will be implemented, the work for which will begin in August, 2019 and will be completed by August 2020.

- The committee has recommended that FCI should involve itself in full-fledged grains procurement only in those states which are poor in procurement. In the case of those states which are performing well, like Haryana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, the states should do the procurement.

◉ **WAY AHEAD:**
- Integration work for depot online of FCI and CWC will be done in consultation with State governments and meetings will be held with the Food Ministers and Secretaries of State government to set the targets for integration.

Food Corporation of India (FCI)

- FCI is a government organization that implements effective price support systems, distribution of food-grains, maintaining buffer stocks etc. But there are some loopholes in its functioning:
  - ➤ There is an inadequate storage facility, which leads to lot of food-grains, get rotten due to less silo capacity.
  - ➤ Irregular opening of PDS shops, Adulteration of food, subsidies etc.
  - ➤ Malpractices have been practiced like diverting the quality procured food to the market.
  - ➤ There are lot of procurement issues and transportation problems.
  - ➤ There is lack of food processing facilities.
  - ➤ Leakage through Public Distribution System.
- **Reforms that can be taken to address the issues:**
  - ➤ Increasing the number of silos and the storing capacity.
  - ➤ Make procurement more transparent through online process.
  - ➤ Rationalising subsidies.
  - ➤ Security of tenure and secure wages to employees of FCI, HRMS (Human Resource Management System) can be introduced for their welfare.
  - ➤ Leakages have to be controlled; administration has to be made accountable.
  - ➤ **Shanta Kumar Committee** recommendations can be implemented which talks about reducing the no. of beneficiaries, allowing entry of private players, Direct Benefit transfer in subsidy.

SEBI, AND MCA SIGN PACT FOR MORE DATA SCRUTINY

◉ **CONTEXT:**
- **In an effort to better tackle the increasing instances of corporate frauds affecting the economy, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) have agreed to begin automatic sharing of data related to companies.**

◉ **ABOUT:**

More on News

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will facilitate the sharing of data and information between the regulator and the MCA on an automatic and regular basis, while enabling sharing of specific information such as details of suspended companies, delisted firms, shareholding pattern from the SEBI and financial statements filed with the Registrar by corporates, returns of allotment of shares and audit reports relating to corporates.

- The MoU will ensure that both the MCA and the SEBI have seamless linkage for regulatory purposes and in addition to regular exchange of data, the two will also exchange with each other, on request, any available information for scrutiny, inspection, investigation and prosecution.

- A Data Exchange Steering Group has been constituted for the initiative, which will meet periodically to review the data exchange status and take steps to further improve the effectiveness of the data sharing mechanism.

- This assumes significance as the MCA has the database of all registered firms while SEBI only regulates listed entities that may have unlisted subsidiaries, with the MCA having access to all the data of such unlisted entities.

- The MoU marks the beginning of a new era of cooperation and synergy between the two regulators.

Backdrop of frauds

- The MoU comes in the wake of increasing need for surveillance in the context of corporate frauds affecting important sectors of the economy. As the private sector plays an increasingly vital role in economic growth, the need for a robust corporate governance mechanism becomes the need of the hour.

- Incidentally, there is already a protocol of sharing of data between the capital markets regulator Ministry and, in many cases; the regulator has also sent its orders against various entities to the MCA for further action.

> The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is the regulator for the securities market in India. It was established in 1988 and given statutory powers in 1992 through the SEBI Act, 1992.

WASTE-TO-ENERGY

⊙ **CONTEXT:**
- **DMRC becomes India's 1st project to receive Power from Waste-to-Energy.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

More on news:

- Delhi Metro has started receiving 2 MW power from a 12 MW capacity waste-to-energy plant set up in Ghazipur and the plant will mitigate over 8 million tons of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) over the life of the project.

- DMRC will take approximately 17.5 million units per annum from this plant, however, the energy off-take will depend upon the actual generation of the plant.

- The waste-to-energy plant set up by East Delhi Waste Processing Company Limited (EDWPCL) is based on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) involving the Delhi government and East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC), besides the EDWPCL.

- The plant is India's first Euro norms compliant waste-to-energy facility and the state of the art facility is set up to process above 1,500 tonnes per day (TPD) of waste and generate 12 MW of green power.

- The Delhi Metro has been working continuously towards the conservation of the environment since the inception of the organization and is the first ever rail based organisation in the world to claim carbon credits.

- The DMRC has also commissioned a facility at Rohini (Delhi) on PPP model with IL&FS Environmental Infrastructure & Services Ltd (IEISL) for recycling of Construction and Demolition (C&D) waste with a capacity of 150 tons per day.

- Currently, DMRC is producing 28 MW of solar power from the various rooftop solar power plants, which have been set up in its stations, depots and residential premises.

- The mass transit operator has also started to receive solar power from the off-site solar power plant at Rewa in Madhya Pradesh.

- In construction also, DMRC plants 10 trees for each tree that is cut. Close to 4 lakh vehicles are being removed from the streets because of the Delhi Metro.

Waste-to-Energy

- Waste-to-Energy (WtE) or Energy-from-Waste (EfW) is a form of energy recovery and the process of generating energy in the form of electricity and/or heat from the primary treatment of waste, or the processing of waste into a fuel source.

- Most WtE processes generate electricity and/or heat directly through combustion, or produce a combustible fuel commodity, such as methane, methanol, ethanol or synthetic fuels.

- Incineration, the combustion of organic material such as waste with energy recovery, is the most common WtE implementation method.

- All new WtE plants in OECD countries incinerating waste (residual MSW, commercial, industrial or RDF) must meet strict emission standards, including those on nitrogen oxides (NOx), sulphur dioxide (SO2), heavy metals and dioxins. Modern incinerators reduce the volume of the original waste by 95-96 percent, depending upon composition and degree of recovery of materials such as metals from the ash for recycling.

- Incinerators may emit fine particulate, heavy metals, trace dioxin and acid gas, even though these emissions are relatively low from modern incinerators. Other concerns include proper management of residues: toxic fly ash, which must be handled in hazardous waste disposal installation as well as incinerator bottom ash (IBA).

Other WtE methods which convert the energy into liquid or gaseous fuels

- **Thermal technologies:**

  ➤ **Gasification:** Produces combustible gas, hydrogen, synthetic fuels

  ➤ **Thermal depolymerization:** Produces synthetic crude oil, which can be further refined

  ➤ **Pyrolysis:** produces combustible tar/biooil and chars

  ➤ **Plasma arc gasification or plasma gasification process (PGP):** Produces rich syngas including hydrogen and carbon monoxide usable for fuel cells or generating electricity to drive the plasma arch, usable vitrified silicate and metal ingots, salt and sulphur.

  ➤ **Landfill Gas Collection**

- **Non-thermal technologies:**

  ➤ **Anaerobic digestion:** Biogas rich in methane

  ➤ **Fermentation production:** Examples are ethanol, lactic acid, hydrogen

  ➤ **Mechanical biological treatment (MBT)**

      ⊙ MBT + Anaerobic digestion

      ⊙ MBT to Refuse derived fuel

ADIDAS SET TO TAP INDIAN FIRM'S PET PROJECT TO CUT VIRGIN PLASTIC USE

◉ **CONTEXT:**

- **Global sportswear giant Adidas aims at eliminating the use of virgin plastics in its products by 2024 — with a little help from a Maharashtra-based firm — the only one of its kind in the country to produce yarn out of discarded PET bottles.**

- **Discarded bottles are upcycled to make high-quality polyester filament yarn for Adidas products.**

◉ **ABOUT:**

More on news:

- At its first factory set up in Nashik five years ago, Polygenta Technology Limited deploys an unique technology to break down used **PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate)** bottles and convert them into polyester filament yarn.

- The firm, with a capacity to convert 30 tonnes of PET bottles into yarn a day, plans to scale up capacity to around 100 tonnes a day in the next two years to meet demand from the likes of Adidas — one of its first clients.

- Polygenta would be converting around 8 to 10 million bottles a day in a couple of years from now. At present, the company recycle roughly two million bottles a day.

- The yarn produced by Polygenta, currently sent to Adidas' manufacturing centres to be converted into sportswear, and may also be tapped to potentially upcycle clothes made from polyester yarn.

- According to the United Nations, around 300 million tonnes of plastic are produced every year — roughly the weight of the entire human population. Of this, eight million tonnes of plastic waste ends up in the oceans; PET bottles are the main contributors to plastic waste globally and in India.

- PET material collection rate in India is nearly 80% — among the best in the world — but a good portion of these bottles are downcycled, eliminating the possibility of further recycling. Downcycling is reuse of waste in a manner that the recycled product is of lower value than the original material.

Energy efficient

- The upcycling process consumes 86% less water and 75% less energy than conventional manufacturing, but costs approximately 10% more.

- A key area where costs can be reduced is curbing the level of contamination in PET bottles. If PET bottles are disposed and collected properly, one can expect savings to the tune of ₹5 per kg. In Japan individuals dispose PET bottles after removing the caps and the labels.

> Virgin Plastic, is the resin produced directly from the petrochemical feed-stock, such as natural gas or crude oil, which has never been used or processed before.

RUSSIA PREPARED TO DROP NUCLEAR WEAPONS AGREEMENT TREATY WITH USA

⊙ **CONTEXT:**

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin has announced their country is prepared to suspend the NEW START treaty with the U.S.A. because USA has showed no genuine interest in conducting talks on extending the New START treaty which caps the number of nuclear warheads well below Cold War limits.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

More on News

- Putin also said that the potential implications of letting New START treaty expire would be huge, suggesting its demise could fuel a nuclear arms race.

- Along with this, Russia also warned global catastrophe if Washington keeps dismantling a global arms control regime.

- Together with Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, New START is considered a centrepiece of superpower arms control.

New START Treaty

- The **New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty** (New START) was signed in April, 2010 in Prague by Russia and the USA and entered into force in February 2011.

- It replaced the 1991 START I treaty, which expired December 2009, and superseded the 2002 **Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty** (SORT), which terminated when New START entered into force.

- It continues the bipartisan process of verifiably reducing USA and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals begun by former Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

- It is the first verifiable USA-Russian nuclear arms control treaty to take effect since START I in 1994.

- It does not limit the number of non-deployed ICBMs and SLBMs, but it does monitor them and provide for continuous information on their locations and on-site inspections to confirm that they are not added to the deployed force.

> **INF nuclear treaty**
>
> - The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, or INF treaty, bans Russia and the United States from possessing, producing or conducting test flights of ground-launched cruise missiles and ballistic missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometres (310 to 3,420 miles).
>
> - It allows sea-based and air-delivered missiles at those ranges as well as research and development of ground-launched systems.
>
> - It was signed between President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987. By the time it was implemented in 1991 an entire class of conventional and nuclear-capable missile systems had been destroyed, boosting security at the end of the Cold War.
>
> - It remained in force after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Earlier this year, USA announced its intention to withdraw from this treaty within six months.

NATIONAL PARTY STATUS TO NPP

⊙ **CONTEXT:**

- **The Election Commission of India (ECI) declared the National People's Party (NPP) as a national party.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

- The NPP is the eighth party to get that recognition — after Congress, BJP, BSP, NCP, CPI, CPI(M) and Trinamool Congress — and the **first from the Northeast.**

- The party was founded by P.A. Sangma after his expulsion from the NCP in July 2012.

How ECI assigns the different tags to political parties?

- ECI lists political parties as "national party", "state party" or "registered (unrecognised) party".

- The conditions for being listed as a national or a state party are specified under the **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968.**

- A party has to satisfy any one of a number of these conditions.

For recognition as a national party, the conditions specified under Paragraph 6B of the 1968 Order are:

- a 6% vote share in the last Assembly polls in each of any four states, as well as four seats in the last Lok Sabha polls; or

- 2% of all Lok Sabha seats in the last such election, with MPs elected from at least three states; or

- recognition as a state party in at least four states.

The NPP has satisfied the last of these conditions. It is recognised as a state party in four states — Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland, besides Meghalaya. It has earned that recognition by fulfilling different conditions in different states.

For recognition as a state party, any one of five conditions needs to be satisfied. These are specified under paragraph 6A of the Order:

- Two seats plus a 6% vote share in the last Assembly election in that state; or

- one seat plus a 6% vote share in the last Lok Sabha election from that state; or

- 3% of the total Assembly seats or 3 seats, whichever is more; or

- one of every 25 Lok Sabha seats (or an equivalent fraction) from a state; or

- an 8% state-wide vote share in either the last Lok Sabha or the last Assembly polls.

In Meghalaya, the NPP easily satisfies all five conditions, with 19 Assembly seats out of 59 and a 20.60% vote share in 2018, followed by one of the state's two Lok Sabha seats and a 22% vote share this year. In the other three states, it did not win a single Lok Sabha seat or get an 8% vote share in any, but earned recognition as a state party by virtue of its Assembly poll performances. In Manipur, it won four seats in 2017, which satisfied condition (iii) listed under Paragraph 6B. In Assembly elections to Nagaland last year and Arunachal this year, the NPP fulfilled the conditions (i) and (iii).

When can a party lose its tag?

- Once recognised as a national or a state party, a political party retains that status irrespective of its performance in the next elections.

- It loses the given status only if it fails to fulfil any of the conditions for two successive Assembly and two successive Lok Sabha elections.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION (STI)

⊙ **CONTEXT:**
- **The World Health Organization's latest report reveals that more than a million new cases of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are detected every day.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

Highlights of the Report

- The study found more than 376 million new cases of the four infections in 2016. By infection, there were 127 million new cases of chlamydia, 87 million cases of gonorrhoea, 6.3 million of syphilis and 156 million of trichomoniasis.

- Every 25th person in the world has a sexually transmitted infection.

- More than one million new cases of curable sexually transmitted infections are diagnosed every day in the age group of 15-59.

- The research also showed that the prevalence of chlamydia, gonorrhoea and trichomoniasis increased more in women than men.

- Approximately 13.5 per cent (50.8 million) of these infections occurred in low-income countries, 31.4 per cent (118.1 million) in lower middle-income countries, 47.1 per cent (177.3million) in upper middle-income countries and 8 per cent (30.1 million) in high-income nations, according to the report.

- Chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhoeaare bacterial infections spread through vaginal, anal or oral sex. And trichomoniasis is caused by a parasite called Trichomonasvaginalis.

- Like Chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhoea, trichomoniasis also spreads through sexual contacts. Both males and females are susceptible to all these four infections.

Chlamydia:

- It is one of the most common sexually transmitted disease. This infection is easily spread because it often causes no symptoms and may be unknowingly passed to sexual partners.

- It is caused by Chlamydia trachomatis bacterium and is most commonly spread through vaginal, oral and anal sex.

- It's also possible for a mother to spread chlamydia to her child during delivery, causing pneumonia or a serious eye infection in her new-born.

Gonorrhoea:

- This Sexually Transmitted Disease comes from a bacterium called Neisseria gonorrhoeae. One can get this bacterium just from touching an infected area on another person.

- Women who have gonorrhea can pass the disease on to their baby during a vaginal delivery.

Syphilis:

- Syphilis is caused by the bacteria Treponema pallidum.

- Symptoms: Syphilis infection occurs in three distinct stages:

  ➤ Primary stage: People with primary syphilis will develop one or more sores. The sores are usually small painless ulcers.

  ➤ Secondary Stage: People with secondary syphilis experience a rosy "copper penny" rash typically on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet.

  ➤ Tertiary Stage: This stage is characterized by severe problems with the heart, brain, and nerves that can result in paralysis, blindness, dementia, deafness, impotence, and even death if it's not treated.

Trichomoniasis (trich):

- It is caused by a tiny, one-celled parasite called Trichomonas vaginalis.

SHORT WAVE TRANSMISSION

⊙ **CONTEXT:**

- **Prasar Bharati has asked All India Radio to come up with a proposal to phase out Short Wave (SW) transmitters.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

Concerns of All India Radio

- All India Radio will have to stop all global short wave transmissions — eighty years after it began international broadcasting in 1939. The external services are broadcast to 150 countries in 13 Indian languages and 15 foreign languages. AIR is resisting the move arguing that it will curtail its global reach.

- There are about 46 short wave transmitters that run both domestic and external services. Out of these, 28 are used for the external services alone. Barring three transmitters that were recently installed, all the others will have to be shut down over the next six-months.

- The short wave is the only effective way to reach to any part of the world. FM and other modes don't work.

- Even live streaming on web can't be the complete substitute to this due to varied penetration of internet connectivity. Any country that wants to scuttle Indian radio can just shut down Indian web channel.

Prasar Bharati's Justification

- There would be fresh investments in expanding in DD India, AIR World Service and Prasar Bharati's Gobal Digital Platform.

- AIR world service will be primarily a digital service which will leverage FM and Medium Wave capabilities where available and short wave in a limited way for strategic purposes.

- Prasar Bharati will also explore hiring airtime in transmitters outside India on a need basis where feasible.

- China has recently started buying air time on Nepalese radio channels for its programmes and India too may soon follow suit.

- In present scenario the international opinion is not made on radio any more the primary vehicle has to be digital.

Limited Audience

- A study on short wave transmitters conducted by the Prasar Bharati had revealed that shutting down these transmitters would save the AIR nearly ₹60-70 crore.

- The majority of the transmitters were nearly 25 years old and obsolete. Short Wave, as a mode of transmission, has very limited audience, which is further dwindling with time.

- The short wave transmission did not bring in revenue and there was no way to assess the actual size of the audience that tune in to it. Questions were also raised about lack of editorial scrutiny.

Advantages of Using Shortwave

- Shortwave radio has a huge range – it can be received thousands of miles from the transmitter, and transmissions can cross oceans and mountain ranges. This makes it ideal for reaching nations without a radio network. SW transmissions are easy to receive, too: even cheap, simple radios are able to pick up a signal.

Other mode of Transmission

- **Medium-wave radio** is generally used for local broadcasts and is perfect for rural communities. With a medium transmission range, it can reach isolated areas with a strong, reliable signal. Medium-wave transmissions can be broadcast through established radio networks - where these networks exist.

- **Frequency Modulation (FM)** provides a short-range signal - generally to anywhere within sight of the transmitter, with excellent sound quality. It can typically cover the area of a small city or large town - making it perfect for a radio station focusing on a limited geographical area speaking into local issues. While shortwave and medium-wave stations can be expensive to operate, a license for a community-based FM station is much cheaper.

- **Internet Radio:** The rapid development of web-based technology offers huge opportunities for radio broadcasting. Internet-based stations are quick and easy to set up (sometimes taking as little as a week to get up and running and costs a lot less than regular transmissions. And because the internet has no borders, a web-based radio audience can have global reach.

PRESIDENT OF UNGA 74TH SESSION

⊙ **CONTEXT:**

- **Nigeria's Ambassador to the United Nations Tijjani Muhammad-Bande has been elected by acclamation as President of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly.**

⊙ **ABOUT:**

More on news:

- The 193-member General Assembly elected Muhammad-Bande, 61, who had been nominated by Nigeria and endorsed by the African group.

- In accordance with the rules, the President of the 74th session of the General Assembly had to be elected from among the African States.

- Muhammad-Bande was elected by acclamation and he will succeed Maria Fernanda Espinosa as the President of the next General Assembly session that will commence in September.

- **Espinosa** was only the **fourth woman** to be elected President of the General Assembly in the world organization's 73 year-old history and the first woman ever from Latin America and the Caribbean region.

- After being elected Muhammad-Bande said the implementation of existing mandates and the 2030 Agenda with particular focus on peace and security, poverty eradication, zero hunger, quality education, climate action and inclusion will constitute the major properties of his presidency.

- India had supported Muhammad-Bande's candidature describing him a great friend and a well-known son of Africa during an informal interactive dialogue.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA/GA/AG)

- It is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN), the only one in which all member nations have equal representation, and the main deliberative, policy-making, and representative organ of the UN.

- Its powers are to oversee the budget of the UN, appoint the non-permanent members to the Security Council, appoint the Secretary-General of the United Nations, receive reports from other parts of the UN, and make recommendations in the form of General Assembly Resolutions. It has also established numerous subsidiary organs.

- The General Assembly currently meets under its president or secretary-general in annual sessions at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City, the main part of which lasts from September to December and part of January until all issues are addressed (which often is just before the next session's start). It can also reconvene for special and emergency special sessions.

- Its composition, functions, powers, voting, and procedures are set out in Chapter IV of the United Nations Charter.

- Voting in the General Assembly on certain important questions, namely, recommendations on peace and security, budgetary concerns, and the election, admission, suspension or expulsion of members is by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting. Other questions are decided by a straightforward majority. Each member country has one vote.

- Apart from approval of budgetary matters, including adoption of a scale of assessment, Assembly resolutions are not binding on the members.

- The Assembly may make recommendations on any matters within the scope of the UN, except matters of peace and security under Security Council consideration.

Tijjani Muhammad-Bande

- He is a Nigerian political scientist, administrator and career diplomat.

- He was the permanent representative of Nigeria to the United Nations and served as the Vice-President of the General Assembly during its 71st session in September 2016.

TRAFFIC INDEX 2018

◉ **CONTEXT:**
- **Recently, TomTom an Amsterdam-based company, published Traffic Index 2018. The latest index ranks 403 cities across 56 countries, including 13 new cities.**

◉ **ABOUT:**
- According to the Traffic Index report, the top 5 congested cities were Mumbai, Colombian capital, Bogota, Lima in Peru, New Delhi and Russian capital, Moscow.

- For this study, congestion has been defined in terms of the additional time taken to reach a destination as opposed to when the road would have been clear of traffic.

- Mumbai being a most congested city means that the extra travel time is 65% more than an average trip would take during uncongested conditions. For Delhi, by the same yardstick, the extra travel time is 58% more.

- Average times are of actual taken trips, across every vehicle in the entire network, 24/7. This is worked out by establishing a baseline of travel times during uncongested conditions across each road segment in each city; travel times are analysed across the entire year (24/7) for each city.

- The index factors for peak hours, accidents, inclement weather, construction work and all other factors likely to cause disruptions.

Mumbai and Delhi

- In both cities, traffic congestion during morning and evening peak hours varies between 73% and 102%.

- The index found that traffic flows most freely between 2 am and 5 am in both cities.

Around the world

- Nearly 75% of the cities part of the 2018 index had increased or stable congestion levels between 2017 and 2018, with only 90 cities showing measurable decreases.

- Congestion in Jakarta decreased by 8 % points while that in Lima rose by the same number of points.

- Globally, traffic congestion is rising. And that's both good, and bad, news. It's good because it indicates a strong global economy, but the flip side is drivers wasting time sitting in traffic, not to mention the huge environmental impact.

- **TomTom** is an Amsterdam-based company that offers traffic solutions, uses location technology to collect traffic information, and has been publishing city rankings for eight years.

- The TomTom Traffic index statistics are calculated from anonymized GPS data collected via navigation devices, in-dash systems and smartphones.

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