GS SCORE

An Institute for Civil Services

CURRENT AFFAIRS

ANALYST

— *WEEKLY* —

Week - 4

MARCH, 2019

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

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SECTION: A
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

J&J'S FAULTY ASR HIP IMPLANTS

CONTEXT

- Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) recently directed Johnson & Johnson (J&J) to compensate a Maharashtra-based patient fitted with ASR (articular surface replacement) hip implant with over Rs 74.5 lakh in following a formula approved by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

◉ BACKGROUND:

- J&J had marketed the ASR implants in India through its subsidiary DePuy (Deputy International Ltd.) between 2004 and 2010. ASR is a metal-based hip replacement device wherein both the socket and prosthetic ball are metal based, mainly Cobalt, Chromium, and Molybdenum.

- Metal-on-metal implant is considered to be more durable and provides more range of motion as compared to conventional ones. However, in case of metal-based implants, due to the friction, the metal debris would produce which may enter the bloodstream and cause metal poisoning (Cobalt and Chromium).

- The device was used in over 93,000 hip replacement surgeries worldwide which was soon followed by the complaints of complications like metal-poisoning and implant failure.

- Australia took legal action against J&J following the complaints of complications leading to replacement of faulty ASR hip implants in 2009.

- In 2010, J&J started a global recall of the device following a UK-based study which showed that these implants had a higher failure rate.

- In USA alone, J&J announced a compensation package of over $2.5 billion to around 8,000 patients in 2013.

Status in India:

- J&J got licence to import the ASR hip replacement device in India in 2006.

- In India, around 4,700 surgeries with faulty hip implants were performed, out of which J&J could trace only 2,300 and reimbursed only 275 till September, 2018.

- The maximum compensation amount paid India is around Rs. 3.5 lakh which includes revision surgery, doctor visit, tests, and loss of job during surgery.

- The amount paid in India is inadequate and miniscule when compared to compensation paid in countries like USA. Expert committee formed by the Indian government has also found grave inadequacy in steps taken by the company towards compensating the patients.

Steps taken by Government of India:

- CDSCO cancelled the import of ASR implants and issued an alert following a case in Maharashtra of medical complication following the hip implants in 2013.

- Expert committee formed by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare under Arun Kumar Aggarwal to examine issues arising out of ASR hip implants in India in 2017.

- The expert committee provided a compensation formula would make patients eligible for amounts between Rs 30 lakh and Rs 1.23 crore, depending on their age and level of disability.

- Committee also recommended for constituting regional expert committees to assess the disabilities among patients, creation of registry of usage of medical devices, creation of a centralised registry of patients' health assessment records, and amendment to Medical Devices Rules, 2017 to insert provisions for compensation following complications due to medical device usage.

Major ethical issues:

- **Criminality on J&J's part:** Company suppressed facts about the issues associated with the implants and about compensation in USA, lack of professional standards, lack of concerted effort at tracing the patients, and making money out of human sufferings.

- **Inadequate efforts:** Company did not track the patients citing the doctor-patient confidentiality issue despite the method of tracing the trail of receipts from distributors to retailers being in place.

- **Conflict of interest:** Company sought out patients to pay them meagre compensation after making assessments on its own to prevent future legal suits.

- **Negligence:** CDSCO renewed J&J's licence in 2009 despite the implants being recalled and replaced in Australia in 2009 following issues of metal-poisoning and other complications.

- **Legal issues:** Absence of compensation law in India and ambiguities in the compensation formula presented by the Expert Committee. CDSCO had initially relied on assurances by the firm that it would provide compensation.

- **Doctor-corporate nexus:** Professional ethics and principle of beneficence compromised for short-term monetary gains.

- **Conduct of regulatory bodies:** Ineffective regulations, absence of effective accountability mechanism, along with issues like corruption without consideration of adverse consequences in terms of patients' health.

- **Violation of patients' rights:** Like right to safe & quality healthcare, breach of trust, unfair treatment and compensation, etc.

Current status and issues:

- J&J is currently challenging the compensation formula given by the expert committee of MoHFW in a court.

- At present, there is no provision in the Indian laws to compensate victims of faulty devices. If CDSCO is able to enforce the compensation formula of expert committee, a precedent might be set for similar cases of patients seeking competition for faulty implants.

- Some patients have raised concerns about the formula approved by the government of

ambiguities and deficiencies as it lacks clarity on compensation for any deaths that have occurred as a result of the implants.

◉ WAY-FORWARD:

- Need of effective risk-monitoring system: India needs adequate post-market follow-up studies on usage of medical devices and other healthcare products to timely detect the defects, if any, and take corrective measures. The Materiovigilance Programme started in 2015 is an effective step in this direction. However, it needs to accelerated and strengthened further.

- Compensation laws need to be mainstreamed to provide the patients effective, adequate and timely compensation. The recommendations of expert committee should be implemented in letter and spirit.

- Regulatory environment needs overhaul for better monitoring and regulation of the market. Quality healthcare is the right of patients and it must be the centre of all healthcare-related policies.

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A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF SWACHH SURVEKSHAN PROGRAMME

CONTEXT

- It has been alleged that 2019 Swachh Survekshan survey has rewarded cleanliness over sustainable waste management, thereby defeating the purpose behind this exercise.

◉ BACKGROUND:

- Swachh Bharat Mission is aimed at ensuring door-to-door garbage collection and proper disposal of municipal solid waste in all urban areas by 2019. The mission seeks the active participation of various stakeholders including the private sector and the citizens for Swachh Bharat to become a mass movement.

- The Union Ministry of Urban Development is responsible for achieving the objectives of Swachh Bharat Mission in urban cities and towns.

- Swachh Survekshan was started in 2016 by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) to rank and recognize the performance of cities on sanitation and solid waste management (SWM).

- The idea was that such a ranking would instill a sense of competitiveness among cities and thus improve waste management practices across the country.

◉ ANALYSIS:

Government's viewpoint:

- Swachh Survekshan 2019 has seen several innovations (technological interventions) and best practices (active stakeholder engagement) emerging from the cities.

- India has made impressive achievements under the SBM (Swachh Bharat Mission). Urban areas of 23 states / UTs have become ODF. More than 94% cities are already ODF.

- Waste processing has gone up to 52% (compared to a mere 18% at the start of the Mission).

Timelines of the survey:

- First 'Swachh Survekshan-2016' was conducted in January 2016 for ranking 73 cities (Urban Local Bodies).

- Second survey in January-February 2017 covered 434 cities.

- Swachh Survekshan 2018' saw a massive increase in scale of survey and intensity of participation, with 4,203 cities covered.

- In 2019, it covered 4,237 cities, in a record time of 28 days, in a completely paperless, digital format for data collection.

- In this short span of time, assessors managed to visit nearly 73,000 wards, 21,000 commercial areas, 69,000 residential areas, 75,000 community/public toilets, and more than 3100 waste to compost plants across the country.

Objectives of the Swachh Bharat Mission include:

- Elimination of open defecation

- Eradication of manual scavenging

- Modern and Scientific Municipal Solid Waste Management

- To effect behavioral change regarding healthy sanitation practices

- Generate awareness about sanitation and its linkage with public health

- Capacity Augmentation for Urban Local Bodies (ULB)

- To create an enabling environment for private sector participation in Capex (capital expenditure) and Opex (operation and maintenance)

Methodology involved in the first Swachh Survekshan:

- The first survey was conducted by Quality Council of India. The methodology, process and outcome indicators of the survey were designed by MoUD.

- The survey confirmed work done by 73 municipalities on construction of individual household toilets, community and public toilet seats, door-to-door collection of garbage, waste management and treatment.

- Cities were given two months' preparatory time to support the data collection activities carried out during the field visits. A team of 110 assessors was deployed on the ground to conduct the survey.

- The survey involved assessors visiting all the 73 cities and their ULBs to collect data from the ground level.

Quality Council of India

- It is an autonomous body of Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion.

- It was created jointly by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) & Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM).

- Main objectives of it :
  ➤ To establish and operate national accreditation structure.
  ➤ To monitor and administer the National Quality Campaign.

Is Swachh Survekshan 2019 rewarding wrong end of waste management?

- A study by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a non-profit public interest research and advocacy group based in New Delhi, did a reality check of cities that secured the top 50 ranks in 2019.

- It found that the Swachh Survekshan 2019 has rewarded cities that implemented a cleanliness drive during the two to three months of the survey.

- Many cities that work all year towards household-level segregation, decentralized recycling and reuse of waste were given poor rankings.

Visual cleanliness has become key?

- Swachh Survekshan rankings have become like an annual affair when cities work to get good ranking for three-four months, and are lax for the rest of the year.

- The study found that only the top three cities – Indore, Ambikapur and Mysuru – had source segregation levels beyond 80%.

- Nearly half of the 50 cities have segregation levels below 40%. Rajkot, Ranchi, Satara, Ghaziabad and Chandigarh, launched their segregation campaign just a few months before the survey, and have segregation levels below 20%.

- Sustainable waste processing has been missing from most of the top-rated cities. Ujjain (rank 4), Ahmedabad (6), Ghaziabad (13) still dump bulk of their waste in landfills.

- To the contrary, cities in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, that have invested in decentralized waste processing systems, which are more sustainable, were ranked below 300.

- Nearly half of India's incineration-based Waste-to-Energy (WtE) plants are defunct or are working below capacity, and many don't comply with Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, but most cities have proposed and promoted WtE plants.

- In the survey, 75 per cent of the score was dependent on information collected through a third-party certifier, direct observation by a survey agency and citizen feedback. But this methodology was not strictly adhered to:

- Swachh Survekshan 2019's on-ground assessment was completed in a mere 28 days. The survey did not use adequate numbers of expert and qualified surveyors and certifiers to visit cities for data collection and observation. Many urban departments and city administrations raised their concerns about the incompetence of the surveyors.

- Surveyors did not visit every city that they claimed to have assessed. For instance, site visits were made in only in six-seven of the 26 cities that were rated in Bihar. The remaining cities were asked to share documents and pictures on the online portal.

- While releasing the results of the Survekshan, the MoHUA claimed that the country-wide segregation of waste at source has increased to 60 per cent and waste processing has gone up to 52 per cent (compared to a low 18 per cent at the start of the Swachh Bharat Mission). However, the CSE research report stated that the segregation levels have reached only about 40 per cent and waste processing is not more than 30 per cent.

- The source segregation campaign has been reduced to mere distribution of green and blue bins in many cities, but it is not enough to inculcate behavior change. It requires constant follow up and propagation, which has not happened in a majority of the cities.

⊙ WAY FORWARD

- In the long run, an effective reform involves a sustained and knowledge based process that requires benchmarking, consultation, sharing of information and most importantly monitoring and evaluation. This report is inspired by the notion that, "What gets measured gets done" and therefore, it is intended to trigger a multi-stakeholder, participatory and reform-driven process.

- There is a need for major reform in the way Swachh Survekshan is done. Swachh Survekshan has to follow the criteria established under the SWM Rules, 2016 that emphasize on segregation, have penalties for non-segregation and littering and user-fee collection.

- Moreover, Survekshan should introduce cut-off criteria on all defined benchmarks where any city/associated stakeholders can objectively key-in data on a regular basis.

📋 Practice Question

⊙ **Swachh Survekshan 2019 has rewarded cities that implemented a cleanliness drive during the duration of the survey. Many cities that work year-round towards household-level segregation and decentralized recycling and reuse of waste were given poor rankings. Substantiate by giving suitable examples.**

WITHDRAWAL OF GSP AND RISK TO INDO-US RELATIONS

CONTEXT

- The US has announced that it intends to terminate India's and Turkey's designations as beneficiary developing countries under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program because they no longer comply with the statutory eligibility criteria.

- The move comes two days after President Trump's reference to India as a "very-high tariff nation" and his demand for a "reciprocal tax" on goods from India, and is in line with Washington's concerted attacks on India's trade stance.

⊙ BACKGROUND

- The GSP, the largest and oldest US trade preference programme, is designed to promote economic development by allowing duty-free entry for thousands of products from designated beneficiary countries. India has been the biggest beneficiary of the GSP regime and accounted for over a quarter of the goods that got duty-free access into the US in 2017. Exports to the US from India under GSP at $5.58 billion were over 12 per cent of India's total goods exports of $45.2 billion to the US that year. The US goods trade deficit with India was $22.9 billion in 2017.

- Although the Indian government noted that the "GSP concessions extended by the U.S. amounted to duty reduction of only $190 million" per year, this decision could spill over and adversely affect other aspects of the U.S.-India relationship. Moreover, by revoking India's GSP benefits, the Trump administration may also worsen America's trade deficit with other countries, notably China.

⊙ ANALYSIS

Risks to the U.S.-India Relationship:

- The decision to revoke India's GSP benefits was a culmination of a decision by the Office of the United States Trade Representative to initiate a review of India's eligibility for the program in April 2018. The key factors for the review were unfavourable market access for U.S. dairy and medical devices. Over the next 10 months, as both countries attempted to negotiate a mutually agreeable trade deal, other issues such as Indian local content rules, price controls, rules mandating data localization, and changes to FDI rules regarding e-commerce became crucial parts of the agenda.

- However, the policy dispute overlooked the fact that U.S.-India trade was booming over the past year. Total goods trade grew 16.7 percent between December 2017 and November 2018, with U.S.

exports to India growing at 27 percent during the same time frame. Revoking GSP at this juncture risks threatening this growth in trade. India has been postponing retaliatory tariffs to U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminium imports in hopes of reaching a favourable agreement with the United States. While India's commerce secretary has said that New Delhi will keep these retaliatory tariffs out of discussions with the United States following the decision to revoke India's GSP benefits, that may still change in the future and threaten this fast-growing trade relationship.

- The United States and India have also taken strides to advance their broader relationship. India signed the Communication, Compatibility, and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in September 2018, and the United States has outlined a central role for India as part of its new "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy. With steady, continued progress in the defense relationship, both countries will need to be careful that the trade dispute does not spill over into these other aspects of the relationship.

Benefits for Chinese Goods:

- The decision to withdraw GSP benefits to India also creates opportunities for China, which maintains a trade surplus with both India and the United States, to expand its exports to the United States. In response to the decision by USTR to initiate reviews of India's eligibility under the GSP program, several members of India's business communities warned that Chinese goods would benefit if GSP benefits for India are revoked. For example, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry argued that "by removing the GSP benefits availed by India, the exports to the United States from India could potentially be replaced by China."

- Several specific products, such as bulk industrial bags, footwear, and plastics are likely to become less competitive against Chinese products without the GSP benefits. For instance, India and China

are the two major suppliers of these FIBC bags to the USA, commanding an almost equal share of the market. Without GSP benefits, exported industrial bags will become less competitive vis-à-vis China, allowing the Chinese to increase their market share.

- Furthermore, Until GSP, China alone controlled 85 percent of all U.S. travel goods imports, if GSP benefits are withdrawn for India, Indonesia, and Thailand, companies will have no choice but to return to sourcing from China. This argument underscores just how beneficial this decision to revoke GSP benefits for India is for Chinese goods, which only conflicts with Trump's goal to reduce the trade deficit with China and make trade with it fairer.

- Trade tensions between the United States and India have risen to a new level following Trump's decision to notify his intent to terminate India's designation of India as a GSP beneficiary country. While both countries have taken strides to strengthen their relationship in recent years, the revocation of GSP benefits for India could spill over and negatively impact the broader relationship. And trade diversion away from India could worsen U.S. trade deficits with other nations, further fuelling the Trump administration's concerns about global trade flows.

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FATF'S BLACKLISTING OF PAKISTAN AND INDIAN CONCERNS

CONTEXT

- India's security agencies had prepared a dossier nailing the culpability of Pakistan in the Pulwama terror strike.
- This was presented to the terror financing watchdog, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to push for Pakistan's inclusion in the FATF's black list.

⊙ ABOUT:

- A delegation of the Asia-Pacific Joint Group (APJG), which is a regional association of the FATF, is scheduled to reach Islamabad, and following a review over the next two days, submit its report to the FATF.
- Pakistan has objected to India as being a Co-Chair of APJG and has asked FATF to appoint any other member country as co-chair "to ensure that the review process is fair, unbiased and objective.

⊙ BACKGROUND:

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- It is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering.
- The objectives are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- It is a "policy-making body" which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
- It monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally.
- In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.
- Its decision making body, the FATF Plenary, meets three times per year.
- It was not formed as a formal international organization. Rather, the FATF is a task force composed of member governments who agree to fund the FATF on temporary basis with specific goals and projects.

Financial Intelligence Unit – India (FIU-IND)

- It was set by the Government of India as the central national agency responsible for receiving, processing, analyzing and disseminating information relating to suspect financial transactions.
- It is also responsible for coordinating and strengthening efforts of national and international intelligence, investigation and enforcement agencies in pursuing the global efforts against money laundering and related crimes.
- It is an independent body reporting directly to the Economic Intelligence Council (EIC) headed by the Finance Minister.

⊙ ANALYSIS:

- The FATF's 38 members (36 member jurisdictions and two regional organizations, the European Commission and Gulf Cooperation Council), two observer jurisdictions (Indonesia and Saudi Arabia), and multiple observer organizations (mainly international banks and law enforcement bodies) attend the Plenary.

India is an FATF member; Pakistan is not.

- In 2018, FATF approved the nomination for monitoring of Pakistan under its International Cooperation Review Group, commonly known as the 'grey list'.
- The move backed by the US and the UK was passed by the body that works to combat money laundering and terrorist financing after China and the Gulf Cooperation Council withdrew their opposition.
- The action plan was forwarded to the International Cooperation Review Group (ICRG) of the Asia Pacific Group (APG).

- The ICRG identified four key areas of concerns:
  - Deficiencies in supervision of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regimes.
  - Illicit cross-border movement of currency by terror groups.
  - Progress in terror financing investigation and prosecution.
  - Implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions 1267 and 1373 for curbing terror financing.

- In June 2018, Pakistan submitted a 26-point action plan to the FATF, committing to implement it over the next 15 months.

- The action plan included a squeeze on the finances of Jamaat-udDawa, Falah-i-Insaniyat, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban.

- The failure to negotiate the action plan could have led to Pakistan being blacklisted.

- In January 2019, the FATF decided to keep Pakistan on the grey list, based on a review that concluded that the country had made "limited progress" in curbing money laundering and terrorism.

- Pakistan was on the FATF watch list between 2012 and 2015 as well, but only for money laundering.

- Whether Pakistan remains in the grey list or is placed in the black list will be clear by October 2019.

India's stand at the FATF:

- India has been an active member in the FATF and in its various sub-groups after 2013 following New Delhi's effort to introduce changes to the AML/CFT (combat money laundering and terrorist financing) systems and laws.

- India has been lobbying hard for the strict monitoring of Pakistan, and highlighting the funding of terrorist activities by that country.

- India has in the past provided evidence of the involvement of Pakistani officials in peddling fake currency, and planning attacks on Indian assets on foreign soil.

What happens if Pakistan gets blacklisted

- The FATF black list means the country concerned is "non-cooperative" in the global fight against money laundering and terrorist financing

- Currently, the list is populated by North Korea and Iran.

- If Pakistan lands on the list, FATF members could decide to restrict, target or even prohibit financial transactions with it. This spells serious consequences for Pakistan's financial sector and its economy.

- It may not only negatively impact foreign investor sentiment but also lead to a downgrading of the country by multilateral lenders like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, ADB, EU and also a revision in risk rating by Moody's, S&P and Fitch.

- Pakistan's all-weather allies China and Saudi Arabia have also refused to protect Pakistan at the FATF. The blacklisting will prevent institutions like IMF from financially supporting Pakistan, which is anticipating a financial crisis.

- This could become a difficult circumstance for Pakistan given that Pakistan is likely to secure an IMF bailout soon to stave off a balance of payment crisis and help shore up its economy - the country's foreign currency reserves have reportedly dwindled to around $8 billion, just enough to cover about two months of imports. Landing on the FATF black list might jeopardize such plans.

Practice Question

- **Pakistan has revised its terrorism financing risk assessment; however, it does not demonstrate a proper understanding of the terrorism financing risks posed by Da'esh, Al Qaeda and the related terrorist organizations that operate from its soil. How far would the FATF framework help in taming Pakistan? Critically evaluate.**

UNSC'S 1267 AL QAEDA SANCTIONS COMMITTEE ON JAISH-E-MOHAMMAD CHIEF MASOOD AZHAR

CONTEXT

- **With Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad having claimed responsibility for the Pulwama terrorist attack, the focus is back on Jaish chief Maulana Masood Azhar.**

- **India considers China-Pakistan move of not doing enough against the terror outfit as brazen claim. India has failed multiple times to list him as a "global terrorist" at the United Nations Security Council.**

⊙ ABOUT:

- The proposal to designate Pakistan-based Azhar as a global terrorist by the UN Security Council under the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council was moved by France, UK and the US.

- China has blocked the move by India and other member nations three times in the past to designate Azhar as global terrorist. China has been insisting that the solution should be acceptable to all.

⊙ BACKGROUND:

- The JeM, headed by the 50-year-old Azhar, carried out many terror strikes in India and was also involved in the attack on Parliament, the Pathankot air force base, army camps in Jammu and Uri.

- Azhar was released by the A B Vajpayee government in December 1999, along with Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar and Omar Sheikh, in exchange for the release of the passengers of the hijacked Indian Airlines flight IC-814.

Resolutions 1267 and 1373:

- The UNSC resolution 1267 was adopted unanimously on October 15, 1999. It is a consolidated list of people and entities it has determined as being associated with Al Qaeda or the Taliban, and laws which must be passed within each member nation to implement the sanctions.

- Masood Azhar has been linked to Osama bin Laden and, hence, can be sanctioned under 1267 sanctions committee.

- Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) requires Member States to "ensure that any person who participates in the financing, planning, preparation or perpetration of terrorist acts or in supporting terrorist acts is brought to justice".

- In order to comply with this requirement, it is essential that States establish fully functioning and professional law enforcement capacities. Because of the transnational nature of terrorism, these capacities must also be reflected at the regional and international levels.

Why the issue is important:

- After India blamed Jaish for the attack on the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot on January 2, 2016, India put forward a proposal in February 2016 to designate Azhar as a terrorist under the aegis of the UNSC 1267 committee.

- China intervened at Pakistan's behest and placed a technical hold on India's move in March 2016, and again in October 2016. It subsequently used its veto power to block the proposal in December 2016, a day before the technical hold ended.

⊙ ANALYSIS:

- India has always raised the issue of listing of Azhar as a logical conclusion since JeM has already been designated as a terror outfit.

- Despite its "disappointment" over China's decision to place a hold on the terror listing of Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar at the United Nations, India has indicated that it would continue its efforts to convince Beijing, rather than adopt a collision course with it.

- France decided to freeze all assets of Pakistan based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed, JeM chief Masood Azhar, in the application of the country's Monetary and Financial Code.

China's real intentions behind its 'technical hold' on Masood Azhar:

- Masood Azhar-led Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) is one of the many terror groups Beijing considers as important cogs for security and stability in its restive Xinjiang province.

- Masood Azhar is Beijing's go-to man to ensure security of its geostrategic investments under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China's flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Af-Pak region.

- China's romance with terrorists in the Afghanistan-Pak region has a historical legacy based on its vested economic, security and geostrategic interests.

- China's Uyghur Muslim-dominated Xinjiang province came under religious and cultural influence of Pakistan as it was opened up post the reform period of 1978.

A brief history of this stated legacy:

- Pakistani mullahs started teaching the fundamentals of Islam and their distorted interpretation of jihad to inflame the Uyghurs in the wake of the Afghanistan situation.

- Such misplaced religious awakening created centrifugal tendencies among Uyghurs who started anti-China agitations in Xinjiang in 1980, 1981, 1985 and 1987.

- The situation changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union as the Afghan mujahedeen gained power in their country.

- The tipping point for the Chinese was the Baren incident, where Uyghurs started mass protest in April 1990 to wage jihad against the Chinese and establish the East Turkestan state.

- Post USSR's disintegration, fears that foreign powers will use the Taliban and Pakistan-based terrorists against China grew in Beijing.

Beijing's response was two sided:

- It resorted to a state response that was nothing short of an ethnic cleansing. Even today, over one million Uyghurs are reportedly imprisoned in re-education camps (concentration camps) across Xinjiang.

- China's devised a narrow approach and self-driven diplomacy when its senior diplomat had a meeting with the Taliban leader. Mullah Omar promised that Taliban will not allow Uyghurs to launch attacks on China in Xinjiang.

- After the Gulja incident of 1997, Xinxiang has neither witnessed any major terrorist attack, nor have automatic weapons been used by the Uyghurs in the restive region.

Economic and geo-strategic interests behind the "Veto":

- Located in northwest China, Xinjiang is the starting point of China's much-hyped BRI projects, especially the controversial CPEC.

- The motives behind CPEC are clearly to serve China's own geostrategic and economic interests than helping Pakistan's ailing economy.

- CPEC's infrastructure projects connect Kashgar in Xinjiang to Baluchistan's Gwadar port, giving China ready access to West Asia and Africa for its energy imports.

- CPEC greatly reduces China's dependency on the traditional route through the narrow Strait of Malacca, which, if cut, can choke Beijing economically.

- To reiterate, China recognized Azhar's influence over radicalized elements and used him to safeguard its own strategic and economic interests in the region.

- China is not happy with India's warm relationship with the Afghan government. Azhar's influence is therefore covertly used by both Pakistan and China to strengthen the Taliban, who are averse to Indian interests in Afghanistan as well as in Kashmir.

- India's relationship with the US after 2001 and the signing of Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) are the other factors that have provoked China to appease Masood Azhar and also to court the Taliban.

- Chinese Perspective: when India criticizes the world of double standards on terrorism, it has itself long supported separatist groups in Pakistan's Baluchistan province who launch terror attack in the country.

What is likely to happen?

- Post the Pulwama carnage, there is a feeling in some sections that increased pressure from the Indian government may force China to rethink its stand on Masood Azhar. However, considering Beijing's "narrow approach", such a move at this juncture will only make China and the Chinese people living in Pakistan more vulnerable to terrorism. China's U-turn on Masood Azhar, therefore, seems unlikely.

📑 Practice Question

- The Pakistani army and the ISI revived the JeM in 2008 under its "good" versus "bad" terrorists' strategy which was actively supported by China. China recognized Azhar's influence over radicalized elements and used him to safeguard its own strategic and economic interests in the region. In such a scenario, critically evaluate the likely outcomes of UNSC resolutions under 1267.

WOMEN RESERVATION IN PARLIAMENT

CONTEXT

- **Regional parties have decided that at least a third of their candidates in the Lok Sabha elections will be women.**

- **Biju Janata Dal (BJD) declared 33% reservation for women in the forthcoming elections. While Trinamool Congress (TMC) declared to allocate 41% of Lok Sabha poll tickets to women.**

◉ BACKGROUND:

- The Women's Reservation Bill, 2008 that reserves 33% of seats in parliament for women was approved by the Rajya Sabha, but failed to find support in Lok Sabha.

- According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2014 women make up only 11.8 percent of the Indian Lok Sabha and 11.4 percent of Rajya Sabha

- Among its South Asian neighbors, India ranks fifth in women's political representation in parliament falling behind Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.

- In 1952, women participation was as low as 5% of entire house. The growth to 11% even after 72 years into democracy has been slow and dismal.

◉ ANALYSIS:

- **Feminizations of Indian politics:** India was one of the earliest states in the world that saw female head of the state. Currently also females occupy important positions in cabinet in defense and foreign portfolio. Yet these inspiring examples are handful in relation to current share of females in Indian population which is around 49%.

- According to the Economic Survey 2018, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding gender roles, domestic responsibilities, female illiteracy, lack of confidence or finances and the threat of violence, are just some of the obstacles women face

- Domestic work and rearing children are still tasks primarily performed only by women. There is a huge stigma associated with women who choose to work, and even more for women who choose to join politics.

- Thus low representation of women in the legislature can be traced to the patriarchal structure of Indian politics. In addition to this lack of reservation for women in parliament and state assemblies is due to unwillingness among political parties to give tickets to women, a general lack of awareness of electoral politics among women and the lack of family support.

- **Lack of Consensus:** Lapse of Women reservation bill and its pending since last one decade has shown that politicians have failed to agree to 33% reservation as there is also debate among regional and national political parties over the percentage of reservation.

- **Why representation Matters:** In 1994, India ratified the 73rd and the 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution, granting women 1/3 reservation in rural and urban democratic bodies. Women leaders of panchayat (village councils) often serve as positive role models for many girls. Women sarpanchs accounted for 43 per cent of total gram panchayats (GPs) across the country, exhibiting active leadership of women in local government.

- **Economic development and women empowerment:** Some of the most economically advanced countries like USA grapple with skewed gender ratio in Parliament. It does not reach global gender average of 24% of lower house seats by women. On the other hand in Rwanda around two third of its seats are held by women, it is the highest female representation in parliament. Countries like Bolivia and Cuba also have more women in parliament than men. This shows that level of economic development does not necessarily promise women a place in legislatures as some advanced societies too can be plagued by gender bias and political unwillingness. Even when women enter they are often given junior roles, and usually restricted to "soft issue" portfolios, such as social affairs and family. Thus what truly makes a difference is that gender quotas are sincerely implemented. As happened with reservation at village bodies and municipalities through 73rd and 74th amendment act. It was seen that women panchayat leaders are more likely to invest in priorities for women because they understand and share these priorities. States like Odisha and Bihar 19 other states, have increased this reservation to 50% from 33%. Thus Political empowerment can be the first step towards a more inclusive and equal society

- Women are emerging as a strong political force in Indian democracy with this they must have bigger voice in decision making. However this has to start with gender sensitization at school and college level. Discriminatory attitude and gender

stereotyping is the result of many years of social conditioning which can be broken with inspiring examples and political support.

- Globally, some women are beating the odds to rise to high political office. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, the longest serving female head of government. Nancy Pelosi has become the most powerful women in American politics. New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has proved that motherhood is no barrier to the top job, becoming the second leader in history to give birth while in office.

◉ WAY FORWARD

- Women reservation bill or issues related to women political participation should not just be confined to time of elections. It should be in fact part of political discourse throughout.

- Lack of confidence and finance among women should be addressed to encourage more participation from them.

- Bottoms up approach can help in removing entry barriers for women. Political parties should nominate more women in their internal working committee and field more women candidates during elections.

- While women contribute about 50% to Indian population. 33% is an under representation in legislatures. Efforts must be made to push for percentage that adequately represents the dreams and aspirations of women.

📋 Practice Question

◉ **Empowerment of women is a major issue in Indian political discourse but is not limited to politics only. Do you agree?**

SECTION: B
(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

AFINDEX-19

⊙ **CONTEXT**
- **The India-Africa Joint field training exercise was held between the Indian Army and 16 African nations in Pune.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

AFINDEX-19

- The 10-day long joint exercise was held in two locations in Pune. They are Foreign Training Node at Aundh Military Station and College of Military Engineering in Kirkee.
- Indian Army will be represented by the personnel of Maratha Light Infantry.
- Besides, the personnel from the participating nations of African continent, officers from Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Madagascar would also attend the exercise as Observers.
- The aim of the exercise is to train the participating contingents in Humanitarian Mine Assistance (HMA) and Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) under the United Nations Charter.
- The joint exercise will also focus on achieving interoperability, learning each other's methodologies and tactics through synchronized operational level planning and tactical level training.
- The joint exercise will also cover the dynamics of raising a Mission headquarters, nuances of establishing military observer team sites in disturbed areas.
- AFINDEX-19 is expected to greatly facilitate sharing of Indian Armed Forces experiences and shall significantly enhance relations with the African continent.

TROPEX 19

⊙ **CONTEXT**
- **The Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) recently concluded annual Theatre Level Readiness and Operational Exercise (TROPEX).**

⊙ **ABOUT**
- It is a yearly exercise that takes place on Western Seaboard.
- It is conducted to test various aspects of not only joint combat capabilities but also to test war capabilities of three services in war like situation.
- The day long review of TROPEX 2019 was undertaken to examine the conduct of exercise and to assess operational readiness of the Indian Navy.
- Lessons learnt from the exercise will provide the Indian Navy accurate assessments to fine tune combat deployments, force structuring requirements, operational logistics as also material and training imperatives.

⊙ **SIGNIFICANCE**
- TROPEX 2019 was thus far the largest in terms of geographical extent covering the IOR, and also with regard to number of units participating.
- About 60 ships of Indian Navy, 12 ships of Indian Coast Guard and 60 aircraft participated in TROPEX 19.
- As a prelude to TROPEX, the largest coastal defence exercise over codenamed 'Sea Vigil', was conducted on 22 and 23 Jan 19 with participation of all coastal states and union territories along with all maritime stake holders.
- Overall, the exercise validated the Navy's readiness and capability to meet various mandated roles, in support of national objectives.

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON DISASTER RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

⊙ **CONTEXT**

- **International Workshop on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure is being is being organised by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in collaboration with United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), and in partnership with the Global Commission on Adaptation, United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

- The workshop will bring together countries from different parts of the world, multilateral development banks, UN agencies, academia and research institutions, the private sector, academics and policy think tanks to discuss and collaborate on promoting policies and practices towards achieving disaster resilience of large infrastructure systems (transport, telecom, energy, water). This will also be a great opportunity to learn from the unique experiences of different countries.

- Various international agreements have also reiterated the importance and long-term benefits of investing in resilient infrastructure.

- The first International Workshop on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (IWDRI 2018) was held in January 2018.

The workshop aims to:

- Identify good practices of disaster risk management in key infrastructure sectors,

- Identify specific areas and pathways for collaborative research on DRI (Transport, Energy, Telecom and Water),

- Discuss and co-create the broad contours of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) as well as a notional roll-out plan for the next three years, and

- Build a forum for members to work on areas of common interest and make specific commitments.

The main objectives of the workshop are to:

- Take stock of impact of disasters on different infrastructure sectors and good practices in making infrastructure disaster resilient;

- Identify critical gaps in current practices that need to be addressed in the coming years; and

- Identify good practices and potential areas of collaboration along four themes:

- development of risk assessment methodologies, risk metrics and indicators of sustainability for different infrastructure classes;

- Issues of standards, design and regulation for infrastructure development, operations and maintenance;

- Financing for disaster resilient infrastructure including risk transfer mechanisms; and

- Reconstruction and recovery of key infrastructure sectors after disasters.

- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), 2015-2030, which is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, identifies investing in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) for resilience and to build back better in reconstruction as priorities for action towards reducing disaster risk.

- Goal 9 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognizes disaster resilient infrastructure as a crucial driver of economic growth and development.

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK

⊙ **CONTEXT**

- **The sixth Global Environment Outlook, recently released by United Nations Environment Programme at UN Environment Conference in Nairobi.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

More on news:

- Report is another stark warning that the world is unsustainably extracting resources and producing unmanageable quantities of waste.

- The theme of the report is "Healthy Planet, Healthy People," with a focus on highlighting the damages that has been done and will likely to impact the human civilization on planet earth.

- The GEO draws on hundreds of data sources to calculate the environmental impact on over 100 diseases.

Global Environment Outlook:

- It is often referred to as UN Environment's flagship environmental assessment.

- Its first publication was in 1997.

- It is a flagship report because it fulfils the core functions of the organization, which date back to the UN Environment Programme in 1972.

- It is a consultative and participatory process to prepare an independent assessment of the state of the environment.

- It provides a platform to analyse the effectiveness of the policy response to address these environmental challenges and the possible pathways to be achieve various internationally agreed environmental goals.

Highlights of the report:

- GEO-6 estimates that the top 10% of populations globally, in terms of wealth, are responsible for 45% of GHG emissions, and the bottom 50% for only 13%.

- A quarter of all premature deaths and diseases worldwide are due to manmade pollution and environmental damage. Poor environmental conditions "cause approximately 25 per cent of global disease and mortality" - around 9 million deaths in 2015 alone

- Deadly smog-inducing emissions, chemicals polluting drinking water, and the accelerating destruction of ecosystems crucial to the livelihoods of billions of people are driving a worldwide epidemic that hampers the global economy.

- Despite the Paris Agreement 2015 which aims keeping the global temperature below 1.5 degree Celsius to that of pre-industrial level, health impacts of pollution, deforestation and the mechanised food-chain are less well understood.

- Lacking access to clean drinking supplies, 1.4 million people die each year from preventable diseases such as diarrhoea and parasites linked to pathogen-riddled water and poor sanitation.

- Chemicals pumped into the seas cause "potentially multi-generational" adverse health effects, and land degradation through mega-farming and deforestation occurs in areas of Earth home to 3.2 billion people.

- The report says air pollution causes 6-7 million early deaths annually.

- Unchecked use of antibiotics in food production will see drug-resistant superbugs become one of the largest causes of premature death by mid-century.

- Food waste accounts for 9 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

- The "grow now, clean up later approach" in most parts of the world "has not factored in climate change, pollution or degradation of natural systems. This approach has also contributed to increasing inequality within and between countries.

Pointers for India

- India could save at least $3 trillion (₹210 trillion approx.) in healthcare costs if it implemented policy initiatives consistent with ensuring that the globe didn't heat up beyond 1.5 degrees celsius by the turn of the century.

- Air pollution killed about 1.24 million in India in 2017.

- As India's population grows, it must worry that agricultural yields are coming under stress due to increase in average temperature and erratic monsoons.

- The implications of these forecasts for food security and health are all too evident, more so for the 148 million people living in severe weather 'hotspots'.

- The task before India is to recognise the human cost of poorly enforced environment laws and demonstrate the political will necessary to end business-as-usual policies.

- It would mean curbing the use of fossil fuels and toxic chemicals across the spectrum of economic activity.

INDIA URBAN OBSERVATORY

⊙ **CONTEXT**

- **Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA), aligned with its mission to help cities across India become more productive, innovative and livable, in partnership with Cisco, Quantela Inc, ESRI and AWS announced the inauguration of a state-of-the-art India Urban Observatory in New Delhi.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

- The Observatory will help in getting reliable, up-to-date information on a meaningful set of indicators over various domains such as transport, health, environment, water, finance and so on, which will further assist in developing best practices, future strategies and policy interventions as and when required.

- The first-of-its-kind observatory will leverage data analytics to optimize city operations, improve governance and enhance economic performance of cities across the country. The conceptualization of this Observatory recognizes the value of enhancing engagement among all four stakeholders of the 'quadruple-helix' model— Government, citizens, academia, and industry, along with improvements in the internal workflow and decision-making processes of city Governments.

- The India Urban Observatory will progressively become the chief data analysis and Management Hub of the Ministry and would enable evidence-based policy formulation, capacity building of ecosystem partners on data-driven governance, foster innovation through development of newer and better use cases thereby enabling solutions at scale and speed.

- It will further provide scientific response to the complex challenges to urbanization through use of state-of-the-art technologies and collaborations.

- The India Urban Observatory is an important component of the recently launched DataSmart Cities strategy that envisions to create a 'Culture of Data' in cities, for intelligent use of data in addressing complex urban challenges. The strategy aims to lay down the basic premise, three foundational pillars vis. People, Process, Platform, and a suggested roadmap for cities to improve their readiness for intelligent use of data. Making cities 'DataSmart' is key to realizing the full potential of technology interventions and innovation ecosystems in cities.

- The DataSmart Cities Strategy also presents a Data Maturity Assessment Framework (DMAF) that measures the readiness and evolution of cities in their efforts to implementing the Data strategy. The assessment of cities as per the DMAF will foster a culture of data and drive innovation in India's Smart Cities through a spirit of collaboration and healthy competition.

- The concept of Urban Observatories was formally initiated at the UN Habitat-II Conference in 1997 in Istanbul.

UNNATEE

⊙ **CONTEXT**
- **Bureau of Energy Efficiency has developed a national strategy document for accelerating energy efficiency in India titled UNNATEE (Unlocking National Energy Efficiency potential).**

⊙ **ABOUT**

More on news:

- The strategy document describes a plain framework and implementation strategy to establish a clear linkage between energy supply-demand scenarios and energy efficiency opportunities.

- The document offers a comprehensive roadmap to address India's environmental and climate change mitigation action through energy efficiency measures.

- The document has now been released for larger public consultation and seeking comments/ valuable inputs from all the stakeholders.

- This exercise is first of its kind, clearly delineating the energy efficiency targets for the respective demand sectors upto the state levels. Developing India's blueprint of effective energy efficiency strategy is a leap towards stimulating energy efficiency ecosystem and enabling reduction of the pressure on demand. PwC India has assisted BEE in executing this assignment. This document has been prepared after extensive discussion with various departments, organisations and authorities.

Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE):

- The Government of India has set up BEE in 2002 under the provision of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

- The mission of Bureau of Energy Efficiency is to assist in developing policies and strategies with a thrust on self-regulation and market principles with the primary objective of reducing energy intensity of the Indian economy within the overall framework of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

- This will be achieved with active participation of all stakeholders, resulting into accelerated and sustained adoption of energy efficiency in all sectors.

CHINA-INDIA (XUZHOU) IT CORRIDOR PROJECT

⊙ **CONTEXT**
- **India has launched its third IT corridor in China that will facilitate partnerships between Indian and Chinese companies.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

- The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) entered into a partnership with China's Xuzhou city from Jiangsu Province in China to help develop the IT corridor.

- The IT industry body has already launched such corridors at Dalian and Guiyang cities to cash in on the burgeoning Chinese IT industry market. These have sprung up opportunities to the tune of 24 Million RMB (USD 4.6 million) and 62 Million RMB (USD 8.9 million) respectively.

- The first two corridors have paved the way for cooperation in co-create mode in the emerging technologies such as AI, IoT and Analytics in the Chinese market.

- Through this partnership, the platform will be launched that will facilitate match-making

between Indian companies wanting to collaborate with companies in Huai Hai economic zone looking to adopt digital transformation from verticals such as manufacturing, retail, automotive, healthcare and utilities and help them create innovative product and solutions in the co-create mode.

- This partnership will help create more jobs in Xuzhou and India and facilitating talent transfer between the two countries.

FINANCIAL STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (FSDC)

⊙ **CONTEXT**

- **Recently, a meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) headed by RBI Governor Shakti Kant Das was held to in Mumbai.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

More on news

- The Sub-Committee reviewed the major developments on the global and domestic fronts that impinge on the financial stability of the country.
- It discussed ways to address challenges pertaining to the quality of credit ratings; and interlinkages between housing finance companies and housing developers.
- It also deliberated on interlinking of various regulatory databases and National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI).
- It reviewed the functioning of State Level Coordination Committee (SLCCs) in various States / Union Territories (UTs), activities of its various Technical Groups, and a thematic study on financial inclusion and financial stability.

What is Financial Stability and Development Council?

- It is an apex regulatory body constituted by the Government of India.
- FSDC was created after the global financial crisis of 2008 when some similar institutions were created in some other countries.
- FSDC has replaced the High-Level Coordination Committee on Financial Markets, which was facilitating the regulatory coordination functions prior to setting up of FSDC, though it was not a formal body.
- It was constituted on the recommendations of the Raghuram Rajan Committee on Financial Sector Reforms in 2008. The FSDC is an autonomous body which deals with the financial regularities in the entire financial sector of India.

What are the functions of FSDC?

- As the name of the council itself states about its functions, the FSDC is responsible for Financial stability and the Development of Financial Sector in India.
- Other than these two functions, FSDC is also responsible for Inter-regulatory coordination, financial literacy and financial inclusion within the country.
- No funds are allocated separately to the council for undertaking its activities.

Who are the members of FSDC?

- The Finance Minister of India is the chairman of Financial Stability and Development Council.

Members from Regulatory Bodies

- RBI Governor (RBI Governor is also the head of FSDC Sub-committee).
- Chairman of Securities and Exchange Board of India i.e. SEBI.
- Chairman of Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India i.e. IRDAI.

- Chairman of Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority i.e. PFRDA.
- Chairman of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India i.e. IBBI.
- Members from Government Departments
- Finance Secretary or Secretary of Department of Economic Affairs.
- Secretary of Department of Financial Services.
- Secretary of Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- Chief Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance.
- Secretary of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology i.e. MeitY. (Included in May 2018 by the Government of India through a Gazette notification. The reason to add was increased focus of the government on the digital economy).

19th Meeting of the FSDC

- It was held in New Delhi in October 2018.
- The council discussed many issues related to real interest rate, current liquidity situation, including segmental liquidity position in NBFCs (Non-Banking Financial Companies) and the mutual fund sector.
- RBI Governor Urjit Patel said the liquidity scenario among NBFCs was not as severe as it was being made out to be. But he also assured the government that the RBI would ensure adequate liquidity in the system.
- All four RBI deputy governors attended the FSDC meeting along with RBI Governor Urjit Patel. Currently, the four Deputy Governors of RBI are as shown in the picture below.

TRANSPORTS INTERNATIONAUX ROUTIERS (TIR) CONVENTION

⊙ **CONTEXT**
- **Recently India received its first shipment under the United Nations 'Transports Internationaux Routiers' (TIR) convention from Afghanistan through Iran's Chabahar Port.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

More on news:

- The consignments arrived at port of Nhava Sheva, Mumbai and Mundra.
- India had joined the TIR Convention (the United Nations Customs Convention on International Transport of Goods under cover of TIR Carnets) in June 2017.
- The convention allows goods to be outlined in a TIR carnet and sealed in load compartments.
- Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has been appointed as National Issuing & Guaranteeing Association for TIR carnets to be issued by India.
- The system is managed worldwide by the International Road Transport Union (IRU), Geneva and overseen by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

What is UNCCITG-TIR Carnets?

- The Customs Convention on International Transport of Goods under cover of TIR Carnets, 1975 (TIR Convention), is an international transit system under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).
- It is one of the most successful international transport conventions and is so far the only universal Customs transit system in existence.

- It aims to facilitate the seamless movement of goods within and amongst the Parties to the Convention.
- At present there are 76 parties to the Convention, including the European Union.
- It covers the whole of Europe, North Africa and Middle East.

What is so special about TIR convention?

- It facilitates the international carriage of goods from one or more customs offices of departure to one or more customs offices of destination (up to a total of four customs offices departure and destination) and through as many countries as necessary.
- As a rule, the vehicle remains sealed throughout the TIR transport and, thus, goods are generally not inspected at border crossings.
- However, customs authorities remain entitled to perform inspections whenever they suspect irregularities or randomly.

Is it only applicable to road transport?

- The Convention applies to transports with road vehicles, combinations of vehicles as well as containers and allows for the use of the TIR Carnet for all modes of transport, provided that some portion of the journey is made by road.

What is TIR Carnet?

- A document issued pursuant to the TIR permitting sealed road transport shipments to traverse European TIR-members countries without undergoing customs inspection until reaching the destination country.
- Each TIR Carnet has a unique reference number.
- Each individual TIR Carnet can be used for only one TIR transport.

INDIA'S FIRST LOKPAL

⊙ **CONTEXT**

- **Former Supreme Court judge Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose has been appointed as the first Lokpal, a national anti-corruption ombudsman.**
- **This comes five years after the President had given assent to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

- A Lokpal is an anti-corruption ombudsman who represents the public interest. The concept of an ombudsman is borrowed from Sweden.

Who will be covered under the Act?

- A wide range of public servants – from Prime Minister, Chief Minister, Ministers and MPs, to groups A, B, C and D employees of the central government – come under the purview of the act.
- The Act also includes the Lokpal's own members under the definition of "public servant". The Chairperson, Members, officers and other employees of the Lokpal shall be deemed, when acting or purporting to act in pursuance of any of the provisions of this Act, to be public servants.
- A complaint under this Act shall only relate to a period during which the public servant was holding or serving in that capacity.

Who will be selected in Lokpal?

- A search committee will prepare a panel of candidates, a selection committee will recommend names from among this panel, and the President will appoint these as members.

- The Lokpal should consist of a chairperson and such number of members, not exceeding eight. The selection process of other members is same as that of chairperson. Of this 50% should be judicial members. At least 50% should be from SCs, STs, OBCs, Women or minorities.

- Salaries, allowances and service conditions of the Lokpal chairperson will be the same as those for the Chief Justice of India; those for other members will be the same as those for a judge of the Supreme Court.

What happens after the selections to anti-corruption Ombudsman:

- The Lokpal will set about creating its various wings.

- It will have an Inquiry Wing, headed by the Director of Inquiry, for the purpose of conducting preliminary inquiry into any offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant punishable under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

- It will also have a Prosecution Wing, headed by the Director of Prosecution, for the purpose of prosecution of public servants in relation to any complaint by the Lokpal under this Act.

- Once the other members of the Lokpal are appointed, the process for more appointments will start: Secretary, Director of Inquiry and Director of Prosecution and other officers and staff of the Lokpal.

Background

- The term "Lokpal" was coined by Dr. L.M.Singhvi in 1963.

- The concept of a constitutional ombudsman was first proposed in parliament by Law Minister Ashoke Kumar Sen in the early 1960s.

- The first Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) recommended the enacting of the Office of a Lokpal.

- Forty five years after its first introduction and after ten failed attempts, the Lokpal Bill was finally enacted in India on 18 December 2013.

NATIONAL SUPERCOMPUTING MISSION

⊙ **CONTEXT**

- **IIT Kharagpur will receive a 1.3 petaflop high power computing facility and a data centre under the National Supercomputing Mission (NSM).**

⊙ **ABOUT**

What is National Supercomputing Mission?

- • It envisages empowering our national academic and R&D institutions spread over the country by installing a vast supercomputing grid comprising of more than 70 high-performance computing facilities.

- These supercomputers will also be networked on the National Supercomputing grid over the National Knowledge Network (NKN).

- Academic and R&D institutions as well as key user departments/ministries would participate by using these facilities and develop applications of national relevance.

- The Mission also includes development of highly professional High Performance Computing (HPC) aware human resource for meeting challenges of development of these applications.

- The Mission implementation would bring supercomputing within the reach of the large Scientific & Technology community in the country and enable the country with a capacity of solving multi-disciplinary grand challenge problems.

- The Mission is implemented and steered jointly by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) at an estimated cost of Rs.4500 crore over a period of seven years (2015-2022).

- The first Supercomputer designed and built under Build approach of National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) by C-DAC at Indian Institute of Technology (BHU), Varanasi was dedicated to the scientific and research community of the nation in order to strengthen the research and development activities in the country.

- Named "PARAM Shivay", the supercomputer uses more than one lakh twenty thousand compute cores (CPU + GPU cores) to offer a peak compute power of 833 TeraFlops.

Application areas:

- Climate Modelling

- Weather Prediction

- Aerospace Engineering including CFD, CSM, CEM

- Computational Biology

- Molecular Dynamics

- Atomic Energy Simulations

- National Security/ Defence Applications

- Seismic Analysis

- Disaster Simulations and Management

- Computational Chemistry

- Computational Material Science and Nanomaterials

- Discoveries beyond Earth (Astrophysics)

- Large Complex Systems Simulations and Cyber Physical Systems

- Big Data Analytics

- Finance

- Information repositories/ Government Information Systems

Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)

- It is the premier R&D organization of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for carrying out R&D in IT, Electronics and associated areas.

- Different areas of C-DAC, had originated at different times, many of which came out as a result of identification of opportunities.

National Knowledge Network (NKN)

- It is a state-of-the-art Pan-India network and is a revolutionary step towards creating a knowledge society without boundaries.

- It will provide unprecedented benefits to the knowledge community and mankind at large.

- Using NKN, all vibrant institutions with vision and passion will be able to transcend space and time limitations in accessing information and knowledge and derive the associated benefits for themselves and for the society.

- It will facilitate the development of India's information infrastructure, stimulate research, and create next generation applications and services.

GLOBAL INFLUENZA STRATEGY FOR 2019-2030

◉ **CONTEXT**

- **The World Health Organization has launched a strategy to protect people worldwide over the next decade against the threat of influenza.**

◉ **ABOUT**

Global Influenza Strategy for 2019-2030:

- It aims at protecting people in all countries from the threat of influenza. The goal of the strategy is to prevent seasonal influenza, control the spread of influenza from animals to humans, and prepare for the next influenza pandemic.

- The new strategy outlines a path to protect populations every year and helps prepare for a pandemic through strengthening routine programmes.

- It has two overarching goals:

  ◎ Build stronger country capacities for disease surveillance and response, prevention and control, and preparedness. To achieve this, it calls for every country to have a tailored influenza programme that contributes to national and global preparedness and health security.

  ◎ Develop better tools to prevent, detect, control and treat influenza, such as more effective vaccines, antivirals and treatments, with the goal of making these accessible for all countries.

- The strategy meets one of WHO's mandates to improve core capacities for public health, and increase global preparedness and was developed through a consultative process with input from Member States, academia, civil society, industry, and internal and external experts.

- Through the implementation of the new WHO global influenza strategy, the world will be closer to reducing the impact of influenza every year and be more prepared for an influenza pandemic and other public health emergencies.

Influenza:

  ◎ Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is an infectious disease caused by an influenza virus. Symptoms can be mild to severe.

  ◎ It remains one of the world's greatest public health challenges.

  ◎ Three of the four types of influenza viruses affect humans: Type A, Type B, and Type C.

  ◎ Type D has not been known to infect humans, but is believed to have the potential to do so.

  ◎ WHO recommends annual influenza vaccination as the most effective way to prevent influenza. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of serious influenza complications and for health care workers.

  ◎ Every year across the globe, there are an estimated 1 billion cases, of which 3 to 5 million are severe cases, resulting in 290 000 to 650 000 influenza-related respiratory deaths.

WEST NILE FEVER

◉ **CONTEXT**

- **A six year old child died in Malappuram, Kerala due to West Nile Fever, claimed to be the first victim of the virus in the recent past.**

⊙ **ABOUT**

More on news:

- Health experts claimed this could be the first confirmed death in the State due to the relatively unknown viral infection that leads to neurological diseases.

- Birds are the natural hosts of the virus and vaccine is not available for it.

What is West Nile Fever?

- West Nile fever is a zoonotic disease (an animal disease affecting humans). Disease is caused by West Nile virus (WNV), which is a flavivirus related to the viruses that cause St. Louis encephalitis, Japanese encephalitis, and yellow fever.

- WNV is commonly found in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North America and West Asia.

- WNV is maintained in nature in a cycle involving transmission between birds and mosquitoes.

- Humans, horses and other mammals can be infected.

Had there been any major outbreak in the past?

- The largest outbreaks occurred in Greece, Israel, Romania, Russia and USA. Outbreak sites are on major birds' migratory routes.

- In its original range, WNV was prevalent throughout Africa, parts of Europe, Middle East, West Asia, and Australia.

- Since its introduction in 1999 into USA, the virus has spread and is now widely established from Canada to Venezuela.

What is the mode of transmission?

- Human infection is most often the result of bites from infected mosquitoes. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, which circulate the virus in their blood for a few days.

- The virus eventually gets into the mosquito's salivary glands. During later blood meals (when mosquitoes bite), the virus may be injected into humans and animals, where it can multiply and possibly cause illness.

- The virus may also be transmitted through contact with other infected animals, their blood, or other tissues.

What are the signs and symptoms of the WNV?

- Infection with WNV is either asymptomatic (no symptoms) in around 80% of infected people, or can lead to West Nile fever or severe West Nile disease.

- About 20% of people who become infected with WNV will develop West Nile fever. Symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, occasionally with a skin rash (on the trunk of the body) and swollen lymph glands.

- The symptoms of severe disease (also called neuroinvasive disease, such as West Nile encephalitis or meningitis or West Nile poliomyelitis) include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis.

- It is estimated that approximately 1 in 150 persons infected with the West Nile virus will develop a more severe form of disease.

- Serious illness can occur in people of any age, however people over the age of 50 and some immune-compromised persons (for example, transplant patients) are at the highest risk for getting severely ill when infected with WNV.

- The incubation period is usually 3 to 14 days.

West Nile Fever in India

- It is highly prevalent in India. Infection usually presents as a mild, non-fatal dengue like illness in humans.

- Febrile illness and encephalitis cases in epidemic form were observed in Udaipur district of Rajasthan, Buldhana, Marathwada and Khandesh districts of Maharashtra.

- Human sera collected from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan showed presence of WNV neutralizing antibodies.

- Serologically confirmed cases of WNV infections were reported from Vellore and Kolar districts during 1977, 1978 and 1981.

- Presence of WNV was documented in north- eastern region of India during the year 2006 from four districts (Japanese encephalitis (JE) endemic areas) of Assam.

- During an outbreak of AES in Kerala, in May 2011, presence of WNV was confirmed in clinical specimens. Since then, WNV encephalitis cases have regularly been reported in Kerala.

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