

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK - 4
JANUARY, 2020

MAINS

Examining India's Fiscal Situation

ECONOMY

What is the agreement to settle Bru refugees in Tripura

GEOGRAPHY

Law against sexual harassment at work

GOVERNANCE

How close are Iran and the US to war?

India - Nepal

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Rethink Speaker's power to disqualify lawmakers: SC

POLITY

PRELIMS

Indian Protectionism
ECONOMY

Bhashan Char Island to house 100,000 Rohingya refugees

GEOGRAPHY

Collapsing trade between India and Pakistan

UAE has been declared 'reciprocating territory' by India. What does this mean?

WESP 2020

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In Economist's Democracy Index, India at its lowest ranking ever

New MoEF guidelines for elephant deaths from anthrax

Three capitals for Andhra Pradesh — it's logic and the questions it raises

What is enemy property in India, and how has the government dealt with it?

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Centre of Excellence in Blockchain Technology

Why Pune-Mumbai Hyper loop may be scrapped

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Locust attacks

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan
The gulf between rich and poor, men and women, globally

The Pulse Polio Programme

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China and Myanmar

Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b

National Mission of Clean Ganga (NMCG)

National Startup Advisory Council

Vyom Mitra

What is the Yada Yada virus?

What is Xenobot?

Wings India 2020

World Gold Council (WGC) Report

Z-Morh Tunnel

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— **Disclaimer** —

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

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

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK-4 (JANUARY, 2020)

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27 JANUARY
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10:00 AM onwards

BATCH-5 STARTS

12 FEBRUARY
2020

Test Timings:
3:30 PM to 4:30 PM
Class Timings:
4:30 PM onwards

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- 15 Current Affairs classes covering last 2 years current topics/issues, updates on Indian Year Book (IYB), PIB, Budget and Economic Survey supplemented by notes.
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SECTION: A
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

EXAMINING INDIA'S FISCAL SITUATION

CONTEXT

- As India's economic slowdown has intensified, so has the debate on whether the government should stick to fiscal consolidation or run a higher deficit to push growth. We examine here the fiscal situation of the economy, and understand recurring concepts like off-budget liabilities.

◎ ABOUT

- **Slowing economy:** India's economic growth decelerated to a six-and-a-half-year low of 4.5% in the September quarter.
 - ▶ Manufacturing sector growth has contracted.
 - ▶ Core sector growth has contracted.
 - ▶ Growth in non-food credit is slow.
 - ▶ Employment data is dismal.
 - ▶ Many agencies have downgraded India's growth forecast.
- **Tight fiscal situation:** Government had reduced its fiscal deficit target to 3.3 per cent of the GDP for 2019-20 from the initial estimate of 3.4 per cent of the GDP in the interim Budget presented in February.
 - ▶ However, the fiscal deficit overshoot the budget estimate for the entire year.
 - ▶ Even after taking into account the windfall gains in non-tax revenue, following the transfer of surplus reserves from RBI, and even without accounting for any off-budget liabilities, the fiscal deficit could be between 3.9 - 4.2% of the estimated GDP.
 - ▶ This number can be higher if the off-budget liabilities are included.

Basic economic concepts

- **Growth stimulus:** An economic stimulus is the use of monetary or fiscal policy changes to kick-start growth during a recession. Governments can accomplish this by using tactics such as lowering interest rates, increasing government spending, and quantitative easing, to name a few.
- **Fiscal deficit:** The difference between total revenue and total expenditure of the government is termed as fiscal deficit. It is an indication of the total borrowings needed by the government.
- **Gross Domestic Product:** It is the monetary value of all finished goods and services made within a country during a specific period.
- **Recession:** An economy that is seeing negative growth rate or shrinking GDP for two consecutive quarters may be considered to be in a recessionary phase. A recession may be the outcome of tight monetary and fiscal policies aimed at controlling inflation.

- **Depression:** When recession is severe in terms of the contraction in GDP and extends over a longer period of time, it turns into a depression.
- **Stagflation:** Stagflation is a period of high inflation in a period of slow economic growth. Typically, costs push inflation, caused by supply side issues, or excessive liquidity in the system cause such inflationary conditions. Higher prices affect demand and further aggravate economic slowdown.
 - ▶ Policy prescriptions in a situation of stagflation can be tricky since increasing interest rates to control inflation will make it difficult for the economy facing slowing growth to recover.
 - ▶ At the same time, keeping rates low to support recovery may exacerbate the inflationary situation.
- **Tax buoyancy:** Tax buoyancy refers to the responsiveness of tax revenue growth to changes in GDP. When a tax is buoyant, its revenue increases without increasing the tax rate.
- **Multiplier effect:** The multiplier effect refers to the proportional amount of increase in final income which results from an injection of spending.
- **Easy monetary policy:** An easy money policy is a monetary policy that increases the money supply usually by lowering interest rates.
 - ▶ It occurs when a country's central bank decides to allow new cash flows into the banking system.
- **Counter-cyclical fiscal measures:** These are policy measures which counteract the effects of the economic cycle. For example, when the economy is slowing it includes increasing government spending or cutting taxes to help stimulate economic recovery.

◎ ANALYSIS

Industry's demand for fiscal stimulus

- **Industry demand:** Businesses are clamouring for a government stimulus to restart the investment cycle.
 - ▶ **Private sector itself is not able to drive growth** in the economy due to liquidity

crunch on account of crisis in the non-banking financial company (NBFC) sector that is acting as a hurdle for private investment.

- ▶ The demand for fiscal stimulus by industry is more by way of **higher government spending** on infrastructure sectors such as roads and railways that could have a **multiplier effect** on downstream industries and the economy as a whole.
- While businesses are clamouring for a government stimulus, the **government has very little fiscal space** for any significant growth stimulus.

Reasons for small fiscal space

- **Economic slowdown:** The spike in deficit numbers is largely on account of a pronounced slowdown in revenue, exacerbated by economic slowdown. Total revenue receipts are short of the budgeted amounts.
- **Low GST collections:** As the economy has slowed, so have tax collections. GST revenue collection has been slow owing to operational difficulties.
 - ▶ Estimated shortfall is more than ₹1 trillion.
- **Low direct tax collections:** Government's net revenue growth from direct taxes has decelerated sharply reflecting low tax buoyancy in the wake of slowdown in economy.
- **Low disinvestment receipts:** Disinvestment receipts are likely to fall short of the target this fiscal year.
- **Compensation cess gap:** With state goods and service tax (SGST) collections also taking a hit, the compensation cess collections of the government is falling short of compensation requirement of states.
 - ▶ And union government may have to use its own exchequer to make up for any such shortfall, and fulfil its constitutional guarantee to the states.
- **Corporate tax cut:** The effective corporate tax rate came down from around 35% to 25%. While it was done with the intention to revive demand, it did not happen. It in fact further tightened the fiscal space of the government because of shortfall in corporate tax revenue.

Non-tax revenue options for the government

- Slowing revenues prompt the government to tap **non-tax revenue options**.
- **Dividends and surplus:** Given that tax revenue side appears bleak, among the non-tax revenue options, dividends and surplus from the **RBI, banks and financial institutions and public sector enterprises** are crucial to meet revenue requirements.

- **Issuance of overseas sovereign bonds in foreign currency:** Unlikely to be implemented due to criticism.
- **Expenditure cuts:** Expenditure cuts can help government meet fiscal targets, but it could be detrimental for the already slowing economic growth.
 - ▶ Government has incurred a lower capital expenditure (capex) as revenues declined.
 - ▶ Decline in investment activity evidenced by a nearly 30 per cent drop in capex in June 2019 quarter.
- **Transfer of surplus reserves from RBI:** In line with recommendations of the Bimal Jalan Committee RBI transferred ₹1.76 trillion to the government this fiscal year.
 - ▶ Some of these funds were used to recapitalize public sector banks.
 - ▶ Excess money was reserved to meet the expected shortfall in tax revenues.
 - ▶ This will help contain any fiscal slippage in FY20.

- **Operation twist:** Lately RBI launched operation twist to bring down long term yields, help government borrow cheap money against its bonds, and thereby induce demand for private sector loans (read PT article on Operation Twist).

Off-budget liabilities

- **Off-budget financing:** It refers to expenditure that's not funded through the budget. Off-budget liabilities are basically 'withheld payments'.
 - ▶ Deferred payments are not considered as expenses, and the government takes advantage to defer these payments to one of its 'own' firms.
 - ▶ It may also undertake borrowing which are not included in government's debt.
- **Why is it done:** Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India have many times pulled up the government for increased use of off-budget financing for schemes and subsidies in order to comply with the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act.
 - ▶ Since it remains outside the budget, there is little parliamentary control on such spending.
- **Budget implications:** Off-budget financing by its nature isn't taken into account when calculating fiscal indicators. Such financing tends to hide the actual extent of government spending, borrowings and debt and increase the interest burden.
 - ▶ If the government's off-budget liabilities are taken into account the 'real' deficit of current fiscal would shoot up to 5.5% of GDP.

- **Examples:** Off-budget liabilities are basically payments withheld by the government; Examples include:
 - ▶ National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) loans to public entities (as FCI, NHAI, and IRFC) and government-serviced bonds.
 - ▶ Unpaid food subsidy bills to FCI (avails NSSF loans to run operations).
 - ▶ Covering the fertilizer bills through special banking arrangements.
 - ▶ Borrowing from NABARD under the Long Term Irrigation Fund to implement Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme.
 - ▶ Creating special purpose vehicle (SPV) to construct a bridge (or other activities). The SPV will likely borrow money on the strength of a government guarantee.
- **CAG suggestions:** A policy framework for off-budget financing that should include disclosures to parliament about the amount, rationale and objective of such funding.

Should India opt for fiscal stimulus?

- **Empirical results:** During episodes of systemic banking crisis in advanced and emerging market countries during 1980-2008, timely **countercyclical fiscal measures** contributed to shortening the length of banking crisis episodes by stimulating aggregate demand.
 - **Fiscal consolidation:** But given India's high debt situation, it should stay the course on fiscal consolidation path. It is important that the deficit stays within target.
 - ▶ There is also a risk of inflationary pressures building up.
 - **Avoid fiscal stimulus, opt for easing policy:** According to the IMF Indian government should avoid a fiscal stimulus to boost the sagging economy and, instead, opt for an easier monetary policy.
 - ▶ Given cyclical weakness of the economy, in near-term, **monetary policy should maintain an easing bias**, at least until the projected recovery takes hold.
- ▶ Fiscal stimulus should be avoided, **given that the fiscal space is at risk.**
 - **Temporary fiscal stimulus:** In the event of a more severe economic slowdown than currently envisaged, any **fiscal stimulus should be temporary**, focusing on measures to boost **near-term growth**, such as immediate investment or public infrastructure spending.

Policy suggestions

- **Reformative budget:** Taking government borrowing together with public sector borrowing, there is little space for any fiscal expansion. It is important to do policy changes, focusing on ease of doing business, and structural reforms that catalyse private investments.
- **Increasing government consumption:** Stimulus packages that rely mostly on measures to support government consumption are more effective in shortening the crisis duration, than those based on public investment.
- **Reducing consumption taxes:** Reducing the share of income taxes is less effective than reducing consumption taxes; as the later can help boost consumer spending, increase investment sentiments and thereby ease the banking crisis.
 - ▶ IMF said that personal income tax collections could be increased by ending exemptions, reducing the minimum threshold for taxpayers, and by raising contributions of top earners (Ex. Surcharging their income).
- **Medium term measures for fiscal consolidation:**
 - ▶ Subsidy-spending should be rationalized.
 - ▶ Tax-base should be enhanced.
 - ▶ Revenue projections should be more realistic.
 - ▶ Fiscal transparency and budget coverage should be enhanced.

WHAT IS THE AGREEMENT TO SETTLE BRU REFUGEES IN TRIPURA

CONTEXT

- Twenty-three years after ethnic clashes in Mizoram forced 37,000 people of the Bru (or Reang) community to flee their homes to neighbouring Tripura; an agreement has been signed to allow them to remain permanently in the latter state.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The agreement among the Bru leaders and the governments of India, Tripura, and Mizoram, signed.
- It gives the Bru the choice of living in either state.
- In several ways, the agreement has redefined the way in which internal displacement is treated in India.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is in the Bru agreement?

- All Bru currently living in temporary relief camps in Tripura will be settled in the state, if they want to stay on.
- The Bru who returned to Mizoram in the eight phases of repatriation since 2009, cannot, however, come back to Tripura.
- To ascertain the numbers of those who will be settled, a fresh survey and physical verification of Bru families living in relief camps will be carried out.
- The Centre will implement a special development project for the resettled Bru; this will be in addition to the Rs 600 crore fund announced for the process, including benefits for the migrants.
- Each resettled family will get 0.03 acre (1.5 ganda) of land for building a home, Rs 1.5 lakh as housing assistance, and Rs 4 lakh as a one-time cash benefit for sustenance.
- They will also receive a monthly allowance of Rs 5,000, and free rations for two years from the date of resettlement.
- All cash assistance will be through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), and the state government will expedite the opening of bank accounts and the issuance of Aadhaar, permanent residence certificates, ST certificates, and voter identity cards to the beneficiaries.

When will the Bru resettlement take place?

- Physical verification to identify beneficiaries will be carried out within 15 days of the signing of the deal.

- The land for resettlement will be identified within 60 days, and the land for allotment will be identified within 150 days.
- The beneficiaries will get housing assistance, but the state government will build their homes and hand over possession.
- They will be moved to resettlement locations in four clusters, paving the way for the closure of the temporary camps within 180 days of the signing of the agreement.
- All dwelling houses will be constructed and payments completed within 270 days.

Where will the Bru be resettled?

- Tripura is a small state, the government would explore the possibility of diverting forest lands, even reserve forest areas if necessary, to grant the new entitlements.
- Diverting forest land for human settlements will, however, need clearance from the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, which is likely to take at least three months.

In what condition are the migrants now?

- The Bru or Reang are a community indigenous to Northeast India, living mostly in Tripura, Mizoram, and Assam.
- In Tripura, they are recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
- They were targeted by the Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Zirwlai Pawl (MZP), and a few ethnic social organisations of Mizoram who demanded that the Bru be excluded from electoral rolls in the state.
- They depended on the wild for vegetables, and some of them have been practising slash-and-burn (jhum) cultivation in the forests.
- They live in makeshift bamboo thatched huts, without permanent power supply and safe drinking water, with no access to proper healthcare services or schools.

How did the agreement come about?

- In 2018, Bru leaders signed an agreement in Delhi with the Centre and the two state governments, providing for repatriation to Mizoram.

- Most residents of the camps, however, rejected the “insufficient” terms of the agreement.
- Only 328 families returned to Mizoram, rendering the process redundant.
- The camp residents said the package did not guarantee their safety in Mizoram, and that they feared a repeat of the violence that had forced them to flee.
- The Bru were originally from Tripura, and had migrated to Mizoram after their homes were flooded due to the commissioning of the Dumboor hydroelectric power project in South Tripura.

How is this agreement different from the earlier initiatives taken for the Bru?

- Successive state and central governments had thus far stressed only on peacefully repatriating

the Bru, even though the enduring fear of ethnic violence remained a fundamental roadblock.

- The two other “durable solutions” for refugees and displaced persons suggested by the UN Refugee Agency — local integration or assimilation, and resettlement — were never explored.
- Apart from their own Kaubru tongue, the Bru speak both Kokborok and Bangla, the two most widely spoken languages of the tribal and non-tribal communities of Tripura, and have an easy connection with the state.
- Their long stay in Tripura, albeit in exile and in terrible conditions, has also acquainted them very well with the state’s socio-political ecology.

LAW AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK

CONTEXT

- The Group of Ministers (GoM), constituted in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement after many women shared their ordeal on social media, has finalised its recommendations.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- The Group of Ministers (GoM) was constituted first in 2018 in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement after many women shared their ordeal on social media.
- It was reconstituted in July 2019 under Home Minister Amit Shah.
- The other members of the GoM are Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Human Resource and Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal and Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani.
- The GoM also examined the report of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee that was constituted in the wake of the Nirbhaya gang-rape and murder in 2012.
- The Verma committee had recommended an employment tribunal, instead of an ICC, as dealing with such complaints in-house could discourage women from coming out.

What is in the box?

- The recommendations include the addition of new provisions to the **Indian Penal Code**.
- The proposed amendments would be largely based on the **Vishaka Guidelines** laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997, on which the 2013 Act was based.
- It made the employer responsible to prevent or deter acts of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- The 2013 Act had shortcomings like giving the powers of a civil court to the internal complaints committee (ICC) without specifying if the members need to have a legal background.
- It only imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on employers for non-compliance.
- The Act said the employer shall provide assistance to the woman if she chooses to file a complaint under the IPC "against the perpetrator after the conclusion of the enquiry".

◎ ANALYSIS:

What is sexual harassment?

- Workplace sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination which violates a woman's

fundamental right to equality and right to life, guaranteed under Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India.

- As per the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013**, any of the following circumstances, if it occurs or is present in relation to or connected with any act or behaviour of sexual harassment may amount to sexual harassment:
 - ▶ implied or explicit promise of preferential treatment in her employment
 - ▶ implied or explicit threat of detrimental treatment in her employment
 - ▶ Interferes with her work or creating an intimidating or offensive or hostile work environment for her
 - ▶ Humiliating treatment likely to affect her health or safety
- This is further reinforced by the **UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, which is signed and ratified by India.

Statistical Overview of Sexual Harassment:

- As per the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, the number of sexual harassment incidents at work or office premises registered under **Section 509 IPC (words, gesture or act to insult the modesty of a woman)** were **479** and **401** in the years 2017 and 2018 respectively.
- Among the cities, the highest number of such cases were registered in Delhi (28), Bengaluru (20), Pune (12) and Mumbai (12) in 2018.
- The total number of sexual harassment incidents in 2018 including that in public places, shelter homes and others was 20,962.

Laws against sexual harassment:

- India's first legislation specifically addressing the issue of workplace sexual harassment; the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013** ("POSH Act") was enacted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- The Act seeks to cover all women (irrespective of their age or employment status) and protect them against sexual harassment at all workplaces both

in public and private sector, whether organized or unorganized.

- It makes it mandatory for all workplaces, including homes, universities, hospitals, government and non-government offices, factories, other formal and informal workplaces to constitute an internal committee for redressal of complaints.
- **Section 354A** of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) deals with offences related to sexual harassment, which includes physical contact, unwelcome and explicit sexual overtures, demand or request for sexual favours, showing pornography to a woman against her will and making sexually coloured remarks.

Vishaka Guidelines:

- The elimination of gender-based discrimination has been one of the fundamentals of the Constitutional edifice of India.
- The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution, in its Preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and Directive Principles.
- However, workplace sexual harassment in India was for the very first time recognized by the Supreme Court of India in its landmark judgment of **Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan** ("Vishaka Judgment").
- As per the Vishaka judgment, 'Sexual Harassment' includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether directly or by implication) as:
 - ▶ Physical contact and advances
 - ▶ A demand or request for sexual favours
 - ▶ Sexually coloured remarks
 - ▶ Showing pornography
 - ▶ Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or nonverbal conduct of sexual nature.
- It proposed that sexual harassment is recognized as a violation of women's fundamental right to equality and that all workplaces/establishments/institutions be made accountable and responsible to uphold these rights.

International legislative frameworks:

- The following standards and frameworks include key contents on promoting equality and addressing sexual harassment:
 - ▶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
 - ▶ ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958
 - ▶ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
 - ▶ United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979

- ▶ ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989
- ▶ ILO Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention, 2011
- ▶ UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993
- ▶ The Beijing Platform of Action, 1995
- ▶ ILO HIV and AIDS Recommendation, 2010

How does sexual harassment impact the nation?

- The impact of sexual harassment at the workplace is far-reaching and is an injury to the equal right of women.
- Workplace sexual harassment not only creates an insecure and hostile working environment for women but also impedes their ability to deliver in today's competing world.
- Apart from interfering with their performance at work, it also adversely affects their social and economic growth and puts them through physical and emotional suffering.

Recent initiatives by Government to control harassment:

- **SHe-Box:** The ministry of women and child development has set up what it calls the Sexual Harassment electronic-Box (SHe-Box), an online complaint system for registration of complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace. This can be used by employees of the government and private sectors.
- **Dedicated committee:** Union Ministry for Women and Child Development announced the formation of a committee consisting of four retired judges to conduct public hearings of cases of arising from the #MeToo movement in 2018.

CONCLUSION:

- Despite the horrors of Nirbhaya and the anti-rape laws, it is still a frightening reality that complainants continue to suffer victim-blaming, humiliation and distrust at police stations. Without a robust mechanism in place, things cannot be improved. The Government must work towards development of a permanent mechanism for prevention, prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment at the workplace.

HOW CLOSE ARE IRAN AND THE US TO WAR?

CONTEXT

- Following the assassination of Maj Gen Qassem Soleimani, President Donald Trump tweeted on Saturday that if “Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets” in retaliation, the US would target 52 sites in Iran, “some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture”.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Iran is home to one of the world’s oldest civilisations dating back to 10,000 BC. Its rich heritage and culture is an amalgam of Arab, Persian, Turkish and South Asian cultures.
- Twenty-four Iranian sites are on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, two of which are natural sites and the rest cultural sites.
- Among the main World Heritage Sites in Iran are the Meidan Emam and Masjed-e-Jame in Isfahan; the Golestan Palace in the historic heart of Tehran; Pasargadae and Persepolis, capitals of the Achaemenid Empire, founded by Cyrus II and Darius I in the 6th century BC; and the archaeological site of Takht-e Soleyman, which has the remains of an ancient Zoroastrian sanctuary.
- During the **Siege of Dubrovnik** in 1991-92 by the Yugoslav People’s Army, the old town of Dubrovnik in Croatia was targeted in an attempt to wipe out Croatian history and cultural heritage.
- In 2001, the **Taliban destroyed statues of the Buddha** that had been carved into sandstone cliffs in Bamiyan, Afghanistan.
- In 2006, the UN and the Cambodian government established the **Khmer Rouge Tribunal** to prosecute the destruction of Cambodia’s cultural assets that included mosques, churches and temples along with other sites of cultural significance.
- Between 2014 and 2017, the **Islamic State** destroyed several places of religious and cultural significance. In 2015, the IS captured and destroyed the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

◎ ANALYSIS

What is the problem with targeting cultural heritage?

- Following the unparalleled destruction of cultural heritage in World War II, the nations of the world adopted at **The Hague in 1954**, The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.
- The Rome Statute of 1998**, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, describes as a “war crime” **any intentional attack against a historical monument, or a building dedicated to religion, education, art, or science**.
- Article 8 of the Rome Statute deals with war crimes.
 - Article 8(2)(b)(ii) says war crimes include “intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives”
 - 8(2)(b)(ix) mentions “intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives”.

When has cultural property been targeted earlier?

US-Iran crisis is pushing India to clarify its stand

- It is very likely that India is now taking the side of the US against Iran, with the blessings of Israel and Saudi Arabia which is becoming an important partner and investor along with the UAE. In this context, **Iran may turn to China more actively**.
- This **US-Pakistan rapprochement** is not the only bad consequence that this new crisis in the Middle East may have for India.
- Economic sanctions on Iraq** will have a major impact on the Indian economy. Iraq continues to be India’s top crude oil supplier and any US-led economic sanctions will force India to look for alternative oil suppliers, as in the case of Iran.
- This will substantially increase the **costs associated with purchase of crude oil for India** and the country’s dependence vis-à-vis the UAE, Saudi Arabia and the US, to which India has already turned, to make up for the anti-Iran sanctions.
- India cannot afford to take sides. Energy supplies and the safety and security of its vast **diaspora in the Gulf are of utmost importance**. India has a substantial Shia population too, with sympathy for Iran.

What is Iran nuclear deal?

- It is deal between Iran and **six major powers – US, UK, France, Russia, China and Germany** and

European Union signed in 2015 under which Iran agreed to limit its nuclear program in return for the relief from US and other economic sanctions.

- **Limitations imposed on Iran:**
 - ▶ Iran could only maintain a stockpile of 300 kilograms of low-enriched uranium, compared to the 100,000 kilograms of higher-enriched uranium it once had.
 - ▶ It could enrich uranium to 3.67 percent, which can be used to fuel a reactor but was far below the 90 percent needed to produce a weapon.
 - ▶ The deal limited the number of centrifuges Iran can run and restricted it to an older, slower model.
 - ▶ It asks Iran to reconfigure a heavy-water reactor so it couldn't produce plutonium and to convert its Fordo enrichment site into a research centre.
 - ▶ Under it Iran granted more access to International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors and allowed it to inspect other sites.
- **Benefits given to Iran:**
 - ▶ In exchange, world powers lifted the economic sanctions that had kept Iran away from international banking and the global oil trade.
 - ▶ It allowed Iran to make purchases of commercial aircraft and reach other business deals.
 - ▶ It also unfroze billions of dollars Iran had overseas.

Why US pulled out of Iran nuclear deal and re imposed sanctions?

- The deal has a provision that fifteen years after the deal, restrictions on Iran's uranium enrichment and stockpile size will end.
- US argued it allows Iran to build a bomb after it expires, something Iran had explicitly promised in the accord not to do.
- In theory, Iran could have an array of advanced centrifuges ready for use, the limits on its stockpile would be gone, and it could then throw itself wholeheartedly into producing highly enriched uranium.
- US withdrew from the deal in October 2018, and revived a range of sanctions against the countries buying oil from Iran.

Why were waivers given?

- US, however, granted a six-month waiver from sanctions to eight countries - China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy, and Greece.
- Waivers were given to these countries to give them flexibility and time to end their dependence on Iranian oil imports. These countries had showed

that they have made important moves toward reducing Iranian oil imports to zero.

What are the consequences of sanctions?

- **International trade:** Imposition of sanctions would hinder international companies working in Iran as they could not access US market for their business activities.
- **Oil prices:** US sanctions would reduce Iran's oil exports and put pressure on global markets resulting in rising oil prices. Further in response, Iran has threatened to shut the Strait of Hormuz, a key maritime chokepoint for Persian Gulf producers, a third of the world oil passes through it. This will further reduce the oil supply to the world.
- **Nuclear threat:** Sanctions would prompt Iran to restart its nuclear programme. It will also affect the denuclearisation efforts taken so far.
- **West Asia:** The sanctions would aggravate the already existing instability in West Asia. It will further bitter the Iran - Israel and Iran - Saudi Arabia relations.

What are the consequences on India?

- Iran in 2017-18 was India's third-largest supplier after Iraq and Saudi Arabia and meets about 10 per cent of total needs. The sanctions will significantly reduce the crude supply to India.
- The substitute crude suppliers — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Nigeria and the US — do not offer the attractive options that Iran does, including 60-day credit, and free insurance and shipping. The challenge is to secure an alternative supplier at competitive terms in an already tightening global situation.
- **Current account deficit:** Higher crude oil prices will widen the trade deficit and current account deficit, given that the value of imports goes up with crude oil, and that the quantity imported tends to be sticky in general.
- **Rupee:** The currency could be impacted if the trade and current account deficits were to widen. An increase in the import bill will tend to put pressure on the rupee.
- **Inflation:** There could be significant impact on inflation, given how crude oil prices move and the extent to which the government allows the pass-through to the consumer.
- **Fiscal impact:** There could be a two pronged impact on government finances — both on the revenue side and on the expenditure side. On the revenue side, higher oil prices mean more revenue for the states as tax is a percentage of base prices. The expenditure impact would primarily be on account of fuel subsidy outlays-the government has to allocate more funds for subsidy.

Way forward

- India should make all efforts for a second waiver, keeping in view the close strategic partnership and the new role New Delhi is acquiring in the India-Pacific as a counter-balancing power vis-a-vis China.
- Indian refiners should increase their planned

purchases from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Mexico, and even the US to make up for the loss of Iranian oil.

- India should diversify its source of energy from oil to liquefied natural gas and renewable sources like- solar energy, wind energy, hydro power and geothermal energy.



INDIA - NEPAL

CONTEXT

- Recently, Nepal's Prime Minister and PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the second Integrated Check Post (ICP) on the India-Nepal border. On this occasion, the Nepali PM, Mr. Oli called for a resolution of what he termed as 'pending issues' with India.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The **Jogbani (Bihar)-Biratnagar (Nepal) check post** is the second to be opened since the 2018 inauguration of the **Raxaul-Birgunj check post**.
 - The **ICPs** are aimed at boosting **commercial and people-to-people links**.
- "**Neighbourhood First**" is a key plank of Indian government and improving cross-border connectivity is a key element of this.
- Open borders:** India and Nepal share a **unique relationship of friendship and cooperation** characterized by open borders. Nepalese and Indian nationals **can move freely** across the border **without passports or visas** and may live and work in either country.
 - While Indians aren't allowed to own land-properties or work in government institutions in Nepal, Nepalese nationals in India are allowed to work in Indian government institutions (except in some states and some civil services - IFS, IAS, and IPS).
- Border sharing:** Nepal has an area of 147,181 sq. kms and a **population of 29 million**.
 - It shares a **border of over 1850 kms** in the east, south and west with **five Indian States – Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand**.
 - In the north** it shares border with the **Tibet Autonomous Region** of the People's Republic of China.
- Importance of Nepal to India:** Nepal along with Bhutan acts as buffer against any possible aggression from China.
 - Rivers originating in Nepal feed the perennial river systems of India.
 - Many Hindu and Buddhist religious sites in Nepal make it an important pilgrim site.

◎ ANALYSIS:

What are the 'pending issues'?

- Kalapani issue:** There is a border dispute along the India-Nepal border close to China at a point, called Kalapani, which is **on the tri-junction**

between India, Nepal and China.

- It has been guarded on the Indian side by **Indo-Tibetan Border Police since 1962**.
- India and Nepal both claim Kalapani, a 35sq. km area**—India as part of Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district and Nepal as part of its Darchula district.
- The issue acquired fresh currency after India published its new map following the **bifurcation of Kashmir** into two Union territories.

Kalapani claims:

- Nepal claims** that the river to the west of Kalapani is the main Kali river hence the area should belong to Nepal. **India claims** that the river to the west of Kalapani is not the main Kali river, and, therefore the border there should be based on the ridge lines of the mountains Om Parvat to the east of the river.
- India-Nepal peace and friendship treaty:** There is a demand from Kathmandu to **rework** the 1950 India-Nepal peace and friendship treaty **to reflect current realities**.
 - In 2014, the two countries had agreed to "**review, adjust and update**" the pact but progress has been slow.

- India-Nepal peace and friendship treaty 1950:** The **Indian government and Rana rulers of Nepal**, stated that "neither government shall tolerate any threat to the security of the other by a foreign aggressor" and obligated both sides "**to inform each other of any serious friction or misunderstanding** with any neighbouring state likely to cause any breach in the friendly relations subsisting between the two governments."
 - The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 **forms the bedrock of the special relations** that exist between India and Nepal.
 - Under the provisions of this Treaty, the Nepalese citizens have enjoyed unparalleled advantages in India, **availing facilities and opportunities at par with Indian citizens**.

Infrastructure Development

- **Earthquake relief:** A 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal in 2015. Government of India swiftly dispatched **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)** teams and **special aircrafts** with rescue and relief materials to Nepal.
 - ▶ India's **assistance reached Nepal within six hours** of the earthquake.
 - ▶ **Medical teams** from India were deployed in various parts of Nepal.
 - ▶ India helped in **restoring 3 power sub-stations** in Kathmandu valley.
 - ▶ The total Indian relief assistance to Nepal amounted to approx. **US\$ 67 million**.
 - ▶ Another **US\$ 1 billion** was announced later, one-fourth of which would be as grant.
 - ▶ Nepal recently completed construction of **50,000 houses**, made possible through the **Indian grant**.
- **Water resources:** A **three-tier mechanism** was established in 2008 to discuss all bilateral issues relating to cooperation in **water resources and hydropower**.
 - ▶ Assistance for strengthening and **extension of embankments along Lalbakeya, Bagmati and Kamla rivers**.
 - ▶ Setting up a **Development Authority** to carry out **Pancheshwar Multipurpose project**.
- **Electricity:** An agreement on "Electric Power Trade, Cross-Border Transmission Interconnection and Grid Connectivity" popularly known as the **Power Trade Agreement (PTA)** was signed in 2014.
 - ▶ There are more than twenty **transmission interconnections** which are used both for **power exchange** in the bordering areas and **power trade**.
- **Development:** GoI works in creation of **infrastructure at the grass-root level**, under which various projects have been implemented in areas of infrastructure, **health, water resources, education and rural & community development**.
 - ▶ Establishment of **Integrated Check Posts**.
 - ▶ India has **gifted ambulances and school buses** to various institutions and health posts across Nepal's 75 districts.
 - ▶ **Development of human resources** in Nepal has been one of the major aspects of bilateral cooperation.
- **Connectivity:** The issue of better **connectivity is important** in case of India and Nepal, **because the relationship is not simply of neighbours but of shared history and geography**.
 - ▶ India is working on cross-connectivity projects including **road, rail and transmission lines** in

Nepal.

- **Agriculture: 'India-Nepal New Partnership in Agriculture'** was launched to focus on collaborative projects in agricultural research, development and education.

Culture

- There is a **people-to-people contact** in the area of **art & culture, academics and media** between the two countries.
- **Cultural MoUs** between:
 - ▶ Sahitya Kala Akademi (India) and the Nepal Academy.
 - ▶ Doordarshan and Nepal TV, Press Council of India and Press Council of Nepal, Lalit Kala Akademi, India and Nepal Academy of Fine Arts.
 - ▶ MoU on Youth Exchange.
- Three **sister-city agreements** for twinning of **Kathmandu-Varanasi, Lumbini-Bodhgaya and Janakpur-Ayodhya**.
- India is establishing an **E-library system across Nepal**.
- The **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** is involved in renovation of **Pashupatinath Temple Complex** in Kathmandu.
- An **Indian Cultural Centre** was set up in Nepal in 2007.
- The **Nepal-Bharat Library** was founded in 1951 in Kathmandu. It is regarded as the first foreign library in Nepal.
- Around **6,00,000 Indians are living/domiciled in Nepal**. While nearly **6 million Nepali citizens live and work in India**.
- The age old bond between the two nations through marriages and familial ties is popularly known as **Roti-Beti ka Rishta**.
- **Buddhism:** India and Nepal share similar ties in terms of **Hinduism and Buddhism** with Buddha's birthplace **Lumbini** located in present day Nepal.
 - ▶ Setting up of a Light & Sound show at Lumbini with Indian assistance

Economic

- **Indian firms are the biggest investors in Nepal**, accounting for about 38.3% of Nepal's total approved foreign direct investments.
- There are about **150 operating Indian ventures in Nepal** engaged in manufacturing, services (banking, insurance, dry port, education and telecom), power sector and tourism industries.
- Some large Indian investors include **ITC, Dabur India, Hindustan Unilever, VSNL, TCIL, MTNL,**

SBI, PNB, LIC and more.

Exchanges and Bilateral agreements

- There are regular exchanges of **high level visits and interactions** between India and Nepal.
- In 2014, Nepalese Prime Minister **visited India to attend the swearing-in ceremony** of PM Modi.
- Share multiple multilateral forums:** **BBIN** (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal), **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) **NAM**, and **SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) etc.
- India and Nepal have several **bilateral institutional dialogue mechanisms**, including the **India-Nepal Joint Commission**.

Military exercises

- Regular military exercises** between India and Nepal have helped strengthen friendly relations between the two militaries for centuries.
- SURYA KIRAN:** Joint military exercise '**SURYA KIRAN – XIV**' was conducted in December 2019. The aim of the exercise is to conduct a **battalion-level combined training** between **Indian Army and Nepal Army** to increase interoperability in **jungle warfare and counter terrorist operations** in mountainous terrain, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, medical and environmental conservation including aviation aspects.
 - Exercise SURYA KIRAN - XIV is an **annual event** which is conducted alternatively in Nepal and India.

Political support

- Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of November 2006:** A 12-Point understanding was reached between Seven Party Alliance and Maoists at Delhi in November 2005.
 - India also supported the roadmap laid down by the historic CPA towards political stabilization in Nepal, through peaceful reconciliation and inclusive democratic processes.
- 2015 Constitution:** Nepal's second Constituent Assembly promulgated a Constitution in 2015. At the time, India expressed its concern regarding the **Madhes protests**.

- Madhes Movement** a political movement launched by various political parties, especially those based in Madhes; southern region of Nepal, for equal rights, dignity and identity of **Madhesis and Tharus, Muslims and Janjati** groups. In nearly a decade, Nepal witnessed three Madhes Movements - in 2007, in 2008 and finally in 2015.

Relationship timeline

- The 1950 friendship treaty with India was signed against the backdrop of **fear** of Rana rulers that the **China-backed communist government will overthrow their (Rana) autocratic regime**.
- This was the start of increased involvement of **India in Nepal's politics**.
- Soon **Nepal's Royal family's dissatisfaction** with India's growing influence began to emerge, and **overtures to China were initiated by Nepal as a counterweight to India**.
- During the cold war era, Nepal showed a pro-USA tilt** by establishing diplomatic ties with Israel, while India at the time supported Palestine.
- Following the **1962 Sino-Indian border war**, relationship between India and Nepal eased. India also won a **monopoly on arms sales to Nepal**.
- In **1969 relations again became stressful** as Nepal challenged the existing mutual security arrangement and asked that the Indian security check posts and liaison group be withdrawn.
- Tensions escalated in the mid-1970s**, when Nepal pressed for substantial changes in the **trade and transit treaty** and openly **criticised Sikkim's 1975 annexation** by India.
 - In 1975, the then king of Nepal proposed Nepal to be recognized internationally as a '**Zone of Peace**' where military competition would be off limits. **Nepal's proposal received support from Pakistan and China, but not from India**, as India saw it as possible threat to its security.
 - In **1978 India agreed to separate trade and transit treaties**, satisfying a long-term Nepalese demand.
 - But India consistently **allowed the opposition parties of Nepal to use Indian soil** to launch agitation against the Nepalese government.
 - Nepalese government retaliated by refusing to accommodate India's wishes for a single trade and transit treaty stating that '**it violates the principle of freedom to trade' and rights of a land-locked country**.
 - It also attempted to acquire Chinese weaponry in 1988.
 - As a retaliatory measure **India imposed economic sanctions on Nepal** causing Nepal's GDP growth rate to decrease from 9.7% in 1988 to 1.5% in 1989.
 - Higher tariffs were imposed.
 - Calcutta port was closed for trade.
 - Finally, Indian government, with the help of Nepalese opposition parties operating from India, managed to bring a **change in Nepal's political system**, in which the king was forced to institute a **parliamentary democracy**. The new government,

led by pro-India parties, sought quick **restoration of amicable relations with India.**

Current relationship and Concerns

- **Political instability:** Nepal over the years has witnessed chronic political instability damaging Nepal's development and economy.
 - ▶ There is also an **anti-India feeling** among certain ethnic groups in Nepal which perceive India to over indulge in affairs of Nepal threatening; its political sovereignty.
- **Terrorism:** Its open borders with India are exploited by terrorist outfits and insurgent groups from North Eastern part of India.
- **Fake currency:** Nepal Route has become a point of entry for fake Indian currency. Earlier, the demonetisation of 500 and 1000 rupee notes caused difficulty in Nepal.
- **China factor: India and China are geo-political rivals in Nepal,** competing for more economic and political space in the region.
 - ▶ Recently China promised Nepal to realise its dream of becoming a "land-linked" country. Feasibility study of a **trans-Himalayan railway link** was conducted with the aim to help land-locked Nepal to realise its goal of achieving

"strategic autonomy".

- ▶ Growing diplomatic relations between Nepal and China and China's growing influence in Nepal has overtime widened **trust deficit between India-Nepal.**
- **Nepal revisiting its foreign policy:** Recently Nepal has taken steps to broaden its foreign policy horizons beyond India and China. It ruling party attempts to engage with old partners like UK, US, Japan, and other European countries.
 - ▶ It will also pay more attention to Gulf countries, which host millions of Nepali migrant workers.
- **Aggressive policies towards India:** And once again after a long gap, Nepal is pursuing aggressive policies in diverse sectors to distance itself from India's sphere of influence.
 - ▶ Mandatory teaching of Mandarin in schools. And opposing teaching of Hindi language.

Way forward

- Nepal and India must work towards reducing their differences. Otherwise, the growing distance could prove counterproductive to the interests of both countries.

RETHINK SPEAKER'S POWER TO DISQUALIFY LAWMAKERS: SC

CONTEXT

- The Supreme Court of India has asked Parliament to amend the Constitution to strip Legislative Assembly Speakers of their exclusive power to decide whether legislators should be disqualified or not, under the Anti-Defection Law.

What is 'Anti-Defection Law'?

- The 'anti-defection law' was passed through an Act of Parliament in 1985.
- Passed as the **52nd Amendment Act**, it added the law as the **10th Schedule** of the Constitution of India. Articles 102 (2) and 191 (2) deals with anti-defection.
- *Aaya Ram Gaya Ram* was a phrase that became popular in Indian politics after a Haryana MLA Gaya Lal changed his party thrice within the same day in 1967.
- The anti-defection law sought to prevent such political defections which may be due to reward of office or other similar considerations.
- It lays down the process by which legislators may be disqualified on grounds of defection by the Presiding Officer of a legislature based on a petition by any other member of the House.
- A legislator is deemed to have defected if:
 - ▶ He either voluntarily gives up the membership of his party
 - ▶ He disobeys the directives of the party leadership on a vote
- This implies that a legislator defying (abstaining or voting against) the party whip on any issue can lose his membership of the House.
- The law applies to both Parliament and state assemblies.

Exception:

- There are few exceptions in the law. However, this exception is applicable only if not less than two-thirds of the members of the party in the House have emerged to the merger.
- A person shall not be disqualified if his original political party merges with another, and:
 - ▶ He and other members of the old political party become members of the new political party, or
 - ▶ He and other members do not accept the merger and opt to function as a separate group.

SC on the issue:

- A three-judge Bench led by Justice Rohinton F. Nariman questioned why a Speaker, who is a member of a particular political party and an insider in the House, should be the "sole and final arbiter" in the disqualification of a political defector.
- "It is time Parliament had a rethink on whether disqualification petitions ought to be entrusted to a Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto".
- For that matter, it asked why disqualification proceedings under the Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) should be kept in-house and not be given to an "outside" authority.
- Even the final authority for removal of a judge is outside the judiciary and in Parliament.
- **Replacing Speaker with tribunal:** Disqualification petitions under the Tenth Schedule should be adjudicated by a mechanism outside Parliament or the Legislative Assemblies. The court suggested a permanent tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or a former High Court Chief Justice to determine the fate of an MP or an MLA who has switched sides for money and power.

BACKGROUND

- This is the second time in as many months, the SC has highlighted the issue of taking away the disqualification power under the Tenth Schedule from Speakers.
- In a 109-page judgment by a three-judge Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana in the Karnataka MLAs' disqualification case, the court had held that a Speaker who cannot stay aloof from the pressures and wishes of his political party does not deserve to occupy his chair.
- This judgment of November last, also urged Parliament to "reconsider strengthening certain aspects of the Tenth Schedule, so that such undemocratic practices are discouraged".

Power of Speaker under Tenth Schedule:

- The Speaker is the head of the Lok Sabha Secretariat which functions under her ultimate control and direction.
- Under the provisions of the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution of India (para-6) Presiding Officer of the concerned House is the sole and final authority to determine the alleged question of disqualification on the ground of defection.
- On the other hand, to determine the question as to whether the Speaker/Chairman of a House has indeed defected, the Tenth Schedule provides for a procedure according to which a member of concerned House is elected on an ad-hoc basis to determine the alleged question of disqualification on the ground of defection.
- After **Kihoto Hollohan versus Zachilhu case (1993)**, the Supreme Court declared that the decision of the presiding officer is not final and can be questioned in any court.
- It is subject to judicial review on the grounds of malafide, perversity, etc.

Major cases on the Anti-Defection Law:

Dr. Kashinath vs. Speaker, Goa Assembly (1993)

- The Speaker cannot review his own decision over defection to disqualify a candidate, due to lack of provision in the 10th Schedule.

Ravi S Naik v. Union of India (1994)

- SC rules that "Voluntary giving up membership" has a wider meaning, and that inference of giving up membership of his conduct.

G. Vishwanath VS. Speaker, Tamil Nadu Assembly (1996)

- SC rules that a member expelled from a party would be 'unattached' in House, and that his joining a party after that would be considered defection

Anti-Defection Law in other countries:

- Among the Commonwealth countries, anti-defection law is prevalent in 23 nations.
- The anti-defection law in Bangladesh, Kenya, South Africa and Singapore disqualifies a legislator on his ceasing to be a member of the party or when he is expelled.
- In the United Kingdom Parliament, a member is free to cross over to the other side, without being daunted by any disqualification law.
- In the United States, Canada, and Australia, there is no restraint on legislators switching sides.

The need for amendment:

- The Anti-Defection Law has several loopholes that obstruct the democratic functioning of the electoral process.
- **Controversial:** The law has invited controversy from the beginning, being challenged in court multiple times. Soon after its introduction, it was taken to the SC for being "unconstitutional."
- **Misuse:** Though it curbed the free movement of legislators between parties, its loopholes still enabled the misuse of its provisions for partisan ends. In 1987, paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Tenth Schedule came into question because they did not allow room for judicial review of cases of defection.
- **Partisan Speakers:** The power to decide petitions seeking disqualification of lawmakers under the anti-defection law i.e. the Tenth Schedule rests with the Speaker. The speaker necessarily belongs to a political party, and therefore, their judgment cannot be impartial. This negates the spirit of the Anti-Defection Law.
- **Delay in duty:** In most cases, Speakers have failed to act in an impartial manner, forcing the top court to intervene from time to time.
- **Pressure & criticism:** The anti-defection law has put the entire onus on the Speaker in the matters related to disqualification of members of the Legislative House. Even if the Speaker is impartial, he faces undue pressure and criticism.

Benefits of amendment:

- **More power:** An amendment will give teeth to provisions in the Tenth Schedule, which are vital to the proper functioning of democracy.
- **Unbiased & quick decision:** Setting up of a permanent tribunal will ensure that such disputes are decided both swiftly and impartially.
- **Improving the structure:** For now, tightening and cleaning up the anti-defection law is among the most urgently needed reform. It is essential to tend to the health of the world's largest democracy.
- **To combat the constitutional crisis:** Despite the anti-defection law, the phenomenon still prevails (defections in Karnataka, Goa). These incidents have raised questions on the validity of the anti-defection law and its application. Reforms are needed to combat constitutional crises.
- In the world's largest democracy, political changes will keep happening and the country cannot escape from it. Therefore, it is essential to ponder upon the politics of defection not only because it leads to a constitutional crisis but also it makes the democracy of India more vulnerable and weak. It is time to re-evaluate whether the present law of anti-defection can ensure political ethics or morality.

SECTION: B

(PRELIMS)

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INDIAN PROTECTIONISM

◎ CONTEXT

- Recent escalation of protectionist steps between US and China has raised questions about India's policy response.

◎ ABOUT

- **After independence in 1947**, India spent decades trying to survive without international trade.
- While this **protection** succeeded in creating a **large and highly diversified industrial base**, it also led to **inefficiency in the use of resources**.
- India ditched its model of local production for local consumption following a **currency crisis in early 1990s**. It **open up to foreign investment** and removed trade barriers in exchange of help from **IMF**.
- Since 1991, the tariff policy of India has led to a systemic **reduction in India's weighted effective average tariff**.
- **Decline in average tariff** has coincided with a **sharp rise in GDP** and **higher growth rate**. Lower tariffs offered following few **benefits**:
 - **Rise in exports** and **reduction in poverty** at the fastest pace in India's history.
 - India emerged as a **leader in exports of IT services**, and is now a key player in **pharmaceuticals**.
 - It also helped India run a **trade surplus** - whereby it sells more than it buys - **in goods and services with US**.
 - Trade liberalization fostered an atmosphere of intense **competition**, leading to better use of inputs and innovation, driving **productivity growth**.
- **Current Scenario**: Recent trade experience has been mixed.
 - **Export growth is slow paced**.
 - The current economic slowdown has led to a **drop in the value of imports**, thus **shrinking the current account deficit**.

"Infant industry" argument

- Protecting 'infant' domestic industries: The argument in favour of high tariffs or import substitution is that in developing countries, industries are yet to develop and, therefore, need to be protected from international trade.
- Import substitution policy: Government uses trade tariffs as a policy instrument to encourage domestic industry, the idea being to substitute imports with domestic goods.
 - ▶ The "infant industry" argument was often cited to justify the policy of tariffs, licences and quotas that predated the 1991 reforms.

India a "tariff King" and growing protectionism

- A few months back, President Donald Trump described India as **"the tariff king"**, accusing it of imposing **"tremendously high" tariffs on American products**.
- When higher tariffs are supplemented by **higher current account deficit** and **fall in rupee**, they reinforce a growing **trend of protectionism**.
- **India is among the most heavily protected economies in the world**:
 - Among members of BRICS grouping—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa—India has the **highest effective tariff rates on food items, automobiles and industrial inputs**.

- Data from the Global Trade Alert (GTA) database shows that India and the US introduced the **most trade restrictions in 2018**.
- Number of harmful **interventions implemented by India has increased** in last decade.
- A recent World Bank report accused India of increasingly resorting to trade remedy measures such as **anti-dumping and safeguard actions**.
- In its latest report on global trade barriers, the US trade department singled out India as having the **highest tariffs "of any major world economy" - averaging 13.8%**.
- While import tariffs may provide the economy with **short-term relief**, growing protectionism **can have long term adverse consequences**.

Case against growing protectionism

- At a time when other economies are also raising trade barriers, it is easy to fall into the **protectionist trap**.
- **Will undo trade liberalisation benefits:** India's trend to protectionism threatens to undo more than two decades of trade liberalization measures that have powered India's growth over the past quarter century, boosting incomes and helping cut poverty levels.
- **Will be hardest hit:** A recent OECD report warned that **India, Australia and China would be the biggest losers in terms of per-capita income** growth if the current wave of trade protectionism escalates and slows down global growth.

Higher tariffs do not aid Make in India

- **Disincentive competition:** There is adequate empirical evidence, including India's experience, that suggests protectionism and tariff barriers act as a disincentive for domestic industries to become competitive.
- **Higher input cost:** A higher tariff on imported inputs result in higher input costs for manufacturers, which could otherwise be **competitive if they could import cheaper inputs**.
 - Hence, a comprehensive view of the supply chain must be taken while making any changes to tariff policies.
- **High-level advisory group suggestions:** Amidst US-China trade war, it is possible that higher tariffs might be imposed by other countries on Indian goods and services. It would be **beneficial for India does not retaliate with tariffs**.
 - Any move to raise tariffs **must consider the integrated supply chains** and the fact that Indian imports are largely for domestic consumption.

Suggested policy response

- As production takes place through supply chains, India should **integrate with global markets to ensure adequate labour-intensive manufacturing jobs**.
- As India has a natural **comparative advantage in labour-intensive economic activities**, such activities should benefit from **provision of adequate infrastructure for manufacturing** and the **elimination or reform of crippling anti-business labour laws**.
- Tariffs can be part of a revenue-raising strategy, but it is **better to have a small, uniform (same for all goods) tariff, rather than large tariffs** in seemingly arbitrary sectors.
 - This would help avoid the problem of "effective" rate of protection deviating from the nominal rate, and the possible worsening of the problem of tariff inversion.

Effective rate of protection (ERP): In economics, ERP is a measure of total effect of the entire tariff structure on the value added per unit of output in each industry, when both intermediate and final goods are imported.

Nominal rate of protection (NRP): NRP is the percentage tariff imposed on a product as it enters the country.

Tariff inversion: It is a case where tariffs on intermediate inputs are higher than tariffs on final goods, making domestic production inefficient.

BHASHAN CHAR ISLAND TO HOUSE 100,000 ROHINGYA REFUGEES

◎ CONTEXT

- Bhashan Char, a Bangladeshi island regularly submerged by monsoon rains is ready to house 100,000 Rohingya refugees.

◎ ABOUT

- The **Bhashan Char**, also known as **Thengar Char**, is an uninhabited island around 30 kilometres east of **Hatiya island** in South-East Bangladesh.
- Hatiya has a population of 600,000. Bhashan Char island was formed about two decades ago on the mouth of river Meghna.
- In the Bengali language "Bhashan Char" means "floating island".
- It's also not ancient as Hatiya, which was formed over 500 years ago. Bhashan Char emerged around 20 years ago.
- During the full moon or new moon half of the Island goes under the water, and during monsoon, **60% of the Island submerged under the water.**



Who are Rohingyas?

- Rohingyas are an ethnic group (largely comprising Muslims), who predominantly live in the Western Myanmar province of Rakhine. They speak a dialect of Bengali, as opposed to the commonly spoken Burmese language.
- Though the group have been living in the South East Asian country for generations, Myanmar considers them as persons who migrated to their land during the Colonial rule.
- So, the country has not granted Rohingyas full citizenship.
- According to the 1982 Burmese citizenship law, a Rohingya (or any ethnic minority) is eligible for citizenship only if he/she provides proof that his/her ancestors have lived in the country prior to 1823. Else, they are classified as "resident foreigners" or as "associate citizens" (even if one of the parents is a Myanmar citizen).
- Since they are not citizens, they are not entitled to be part of civil service. Their movements are also restricted within the Rakhine state.
- In August 2017, the Myanmar army launched a crackdown on the Rohingya minority, forcing over 700,000 of the ethnic community to cross the border and take shelter in overcrowded refugee camps at Cox's Bazar.

Challenges & Issues:

- The Bhashan Char which has emerged less than two decades back from the sea falls in an ecologically fragile area prone to floods, erosion and cyclone.
- Too many serious questions remain unanswered regarding protection, freedom of movement, access to livelihoods, logistics, and the availability of services.
- There is also a slim chance of humanitarian services of non-government organizations (NGOs) on that remote island.
- At present, many international and local NGOs are working at the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, providing much-needed food, shelter, healthcare, and other aid to the refugees.

However, the Bangladeshi government has claimed that they have built quality infrastructure, even villages in Bangladesh have never seen such good work. The Government have built multi-family concrete homes, hospitals, mosques, schools, playgrounds and roads. There are solar-power facilities, a water supply system. They have constructed raised concrete buildings that could be used as cyclone shelters.

COLLAPSING TRADE BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

◎ CONTEXT

- Tensions between India and Pakistan in 2019 have reduced the already low volumes of trade between the two countries to near zero.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Following the terrorist attack on the CRPF convoy in Pulwama in February, India withdrew **Most Favoured Nation (MFN)** status for Pakistan and raised customs duty on Pakistani imports to 200% and, in April, suspended cross-LoC trade to stop the misuse of this route by Pakistan-based elements.
- Pakistan on its part **closed its airspace** to India for a prolonged period.
- The decisions by both countries, while targeted at hurting the neighbour, have severely impacted the livelihoods of individuals and families involved in cross-border trading activities.

Analysis of trade:

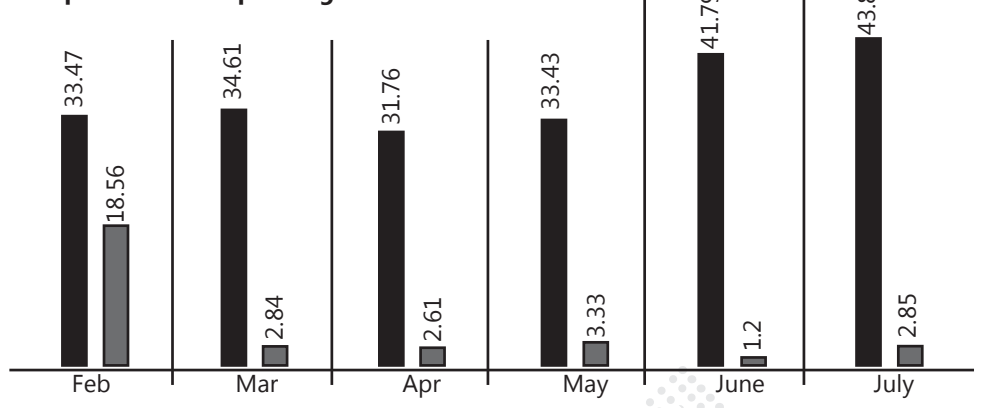
- In 1948-49, about 56% of Pakistan's exports were to India, and 32% of its imports came from India.
- From 1948-65, India and Pakistan used a number of land routes for bilateral trade; there were eight customs stations in Pakistan's Punjab province and three customs checkposts in Sindh.
- India remained Pakistan's largest trading partner until 1955-56.
- Between 1947 and 1965, the countries signed 14 bilateral agreements on trade, covering avoidance of double taxation, air services, and banking, etc.
- In 1965, nine branches of six Indian banks were operating in Pakistan.

Scenario after attacks:

- Monthly average of trucks crossing from Wagah to Attari fell from 4,381 in April-November 2018 to 348 in the same period in 2019.
- Monthly average of trucks crossing from Attari to Wagah fell from 223 in April-November 2018 to 113 during the same period in 2019.
- It stopped altogether from September onwards.

PAK EXPORTS TO INDIA AFTER PULWAMA ATTACK (in \$ mn)

Compared to corresponding month in 2018

**Major items of exports and imports:**

- Currently, there are two important trade routes between India and Pakistan:
 - **Sea route:** Mumbai to Karachi
 - **Land route** through Wagah border
- However, business is also done through Chakan Da Bagh in Poonch and Salamabad in Uri.

Indian import from Pakistan

- India imports a total of 19 major products from Pakistan: dry food, fresh fruits (guava, mango and pineapple), cement, finished leather, spices, wool, rubber products, minerals and ores, inorganic chemicals, alcohol beverages, medical equipment, sporting goods, marine goods, plastic and raw cotton etc.

Indian Export to Pakistan:

- Pakistan mainly imported tomato from India. However, Pakistan has banned the import of Indian tomato.
- After the Pulwama Attack India snatched the “Most Favoured Nation” status of Pakistan that is why India imposed 200% export duty on the tomato exported to Pakistan which increased the price of tomato up to Rs. 200 per kg in Pakistan.
- There are 14 items mainly imported by Pakistan from India: tea, sugar, oil cake, cotton yarn, tires, rubber, dye, petroleum oil, raw cotton and chemicals etc.

◎ BACKGROUND

- Pakistan is geographically located at a strategic position between India and the energy-rich Gulf. It serves as a vital land link between South Asia and Central Asia. If India and Pakistan can make their relations friendly or at least trade-friendly the entire region can gain. It requires both the countries to engage in trade again and re-establish the trade ties. It will help to boot their economies.

UAE HAS BEEN DECLARED ‘RECIPROCATING TERRITORY’ BY INDIA. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

◎ CONTEXT

- Ministry of Law and Justice issued an Extraordinary Gazette Notification, declaring the United Arab Emirates to be a “reciprocating territory” under Section 44A of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908. The notification also declared a list of courts in the UAE to be “superior Courts” under the same section.

◎ **ABOUT**

- Apart from UAE, the other countries declared to be “reciprocating territories” are:
 - United Kingdom,
 - Singapore,
 - Bangladesh,
 - Malaysia,
 - Trinidad & Tobago,
 - New Zealand,
 - the Cook Islands (including Niue) and the Trust Territories of Western Samoa,
 - Hong Kong,
 - Papua New Guinea,
 - Fiji,
 - Aden.

What is a ‘reciprocating territory’ and what are superior courts?

- Essentially, orders passed by certain designated courts from a ‘reciprocating territory’ can be implemented in India, by filing a copy of the decree concerned in a District Court here.
- The courts so designated are called ‘superior Courts’.

What does Section 44 of the CPC say?

- Section 44A, titled “Execution of decrees passed by Courts in reciprocating territory”, provides the law on the subject of execution of decrees of Courts in India by foreign Courts and vice versa.
- Decree passed by “a superior Court” in any “reciprocating territory” can be executed in India by filing a certified copy of the decree in a District Court, which will treat the decree as if it has been passed by itself.
- The scope of the Section is restricted to decrees for payment of money, not being sums payable “in respect of taxes or other charges of a like nature or in respect of a fine or other penalty”.
- It also cannot be based on an arbitration award, even if such an award is enforceable as a decree or judgment.

Which UAE courts are now “superior Courts”?

- Federal Court
 - Federal Supreme Court
 - Federal, First Instance and Appeals Courts in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain and Fujairah
- Local Courts
 - Abu Dhabi Judicial Department;
 - Dubai Courts;
 - Ras Al Khaimah Judicial Department;
 - Courts of Abu Dhabi Global Markets;
 - Courts of Dubai International Financial Center.

Why is the move significant?

- The decision is believed to help bring down the time required for executing decrees between the two countries.
- Notification was the only remaining part of a 1999 agreement between the UAE and India related to cooperation in civil and commercial matters.

- Indian expatriates in the UAE would no longer be able to seek safe haven in their home country if they are convicted in a civil case in the UAE.

WESP 2020

◎ CONTEXT

- Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations recently released a publication titled ‘World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2020’.

◎ ABOUT

- According to the **United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2020**, impacted by prolonged **trade disputes**, the global economy suffered its **lowest growth in a decade**, slipping to **2.3 per cent in 2019**.
- **Economic Forecast:** The Report states that growth of **2.5 per cent in 2020 is possible**, but trade tensions, financial turmoil, or an escalation of geopolitical tensions could derail a recovery.
 - In a **downside scenario**, global growth can slow to **just 1.8 per cent** this year.
- **Risks:** Prolonged **weakness in global economic activity** may cause significant setbacks for **sustainable development**, including the goals to eradicate **poverty** and create **decent jobs** for all.
 - Pervasive **inequalities** and deepening **climate crisis** are fuelling growing **discontent** in many parts of the world.
- **State of emerging economies:** Growth in large emerging countries, like Brazil, India, Mexico, the Russian Federation and Turkey, is expected to gain some momentum in 2020; while progress towards **higher living standards has stalled** for many.
- **Commodity price downturn:** Many countries around the world are still ailing from effects of the commodity price downturn **of 2014-16**, which resulted in persistent **output losses** and **setbacks in poverty reduction**.
 - In one-third of commodity-dependent developing countries (home to 870 million people), average real incomes are lower today than they were in 2014.
 - This includes several large countries such as Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.
- **Poverty:** The number of people living in extreme poverty has risen in several sub-Saharan African countries and in parts of Latin America and Western Asia.

United States

- Recent **interest rate cuts** by the US Federal Reserve may support to **economic activity**.
- However, given persistent policy uncertainty, **weak business confidence** and **waning fiscal stimulus**, GDP growth in United States is **forecast** to slow from 2.2 per cent in 2019 to 1.7 per cent in 2020.

European Union

- In European Union, manufacturing will continue to be held back by **global uncertainty**, but this will be partially offset by steady **growth in private consumption**, allowing a **modest rise in GDP growth** from 1.4 per cent in 2019 to 1.6 per cent in 2020.

East Asia

- East Asia remains the **world’s fastest growing region** and the **largest contributor to global growth**.
- Supported by more **accommodative monetary and fiscal policies**, in **China**, GDP growth is projected to moderate gradually from 6.1 per cent in 2019 to **6.0 per cent in 2020** and 5.9 per cent in 2021.

Africa

- Africa has experienced a **decade of near stagnation in per capita GDP**.
- The number of people living in **extreme poverty** has risen in several **sub-Saharan Africa**.
- UN estimates indicate that to eradicate poverty in much of Africa, annual per capita growth of **over 8 per cent would be needed**, compared to just 0.5 per cent average rate over the past decade.

South Asia

- **Slow growth:** Regional GDP growth fell faster than the global average, **dropping from 5.6 per cent in 2018 to 3.3 per cent in 2019**, but was moderated by strong growth in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal.
- **Reasons:** Prospects for some countries in the region are dampened by **political uncertainty, extreme weather events, commodity price fluctuations and growing security concerns**—and their negative impact on **investment and consumer sentiment**;
- **Problem countries:** The economic slump in **India**, the deepening recession in the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, and the looming twin fiscal and balance-of-payments crises in **Pakistan** have affected the outlook for many of the smaller economies in the region.
- **Recovery:** Economic growth is expected to recover as one-off factors wane and fiscal stimulus kicks in.

GDP – not an adequate measure

- Headline **GDP growth misses' crucial aspects** of sustainability and well-being.
- Beyond GDP growth, other measures of well-being paint an even bleaker picture in several parts of the world.
- Policymakers should **move beyond a narrow focus on merely promoting GDP growth**, and instead aim to enhance well-being in all parts of society.
- This requires **prioritizing investment in sustainable development projects** to promote education, renewable energy, and resilient infrastructure.

Dealing with the climate crisis

- The **climate crisis**, persistently **high inequalities**, and rising levels of **food insecurity and undernourishment** continue to affect the quality of life in many societies.
- If per capita emissions in developing countries were to rise towards those in developed economies, global carbon emissions would increase by more than **250 per cent** – compared to the global goal of reaching net zero emissions by 2050.
- **Shift energy mix:** Compounding economic slowdown, rising global temperatures and increasing frequency and intensity of weather-related shocks there is urgent need for dramatic shift in the global energy mix.
- This will require massive adjustments in the **energy sector**, which currently account for about **three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions**.

Need for a more balanced policy mix

- **Revisiting reliance on monetary policy:** Overreliance on monetary policy is not just insufficient to revive growth; it also entails significant costs, including the exacerbation of financial stability risks.
- **Balanced mix:** A more balanced policy mix is needed, one that stimulates economic growth while moving towards greater social inclusion, gender equality, and environmentally sustainable production.

IN ECONOMIST'S DEMOCRACY INDEX, INDIA AT ITS LOWEST RANKING EVER

◎ CONTEXT

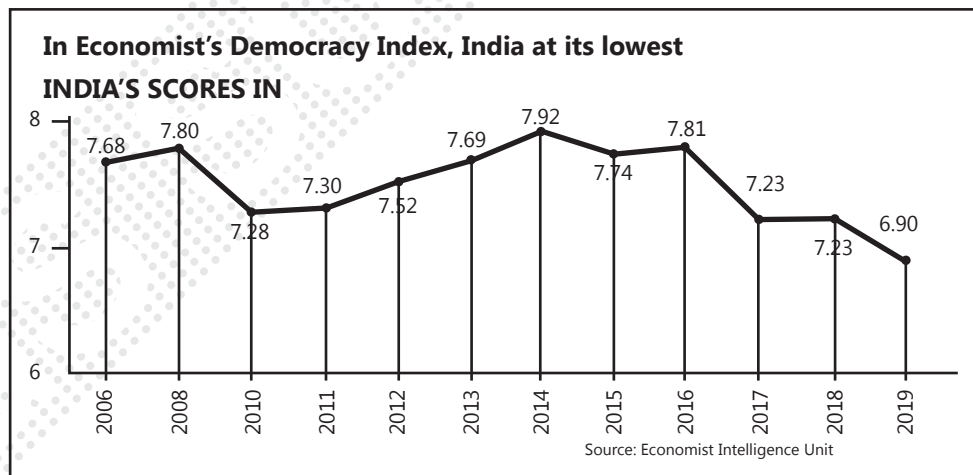
- India slipped 10 places to 51st position in the latest Democracy Index global rankings published by The Economist Intelligence Unit.

◎ ABOUT

- The score, down from 7.23 in 2018 to 6.90 in 2019, is its lowest ever since the Democracy Index was begun in 2006.
- The report ranks 165 independent states and two territories, covering almost the entire population of the world.

Major causes for decline in the rank

- The primary cause of the democratic regression was an erosion of civil liberties in the country.
- It mentioned the stripping of Jammu and Kashmir's special status with the repeal of Articles 370 and 35A, the various security measures that followed the bifurcation of the state including restriction of Internet access, and the exclusion of 1.9 million people from the final NRC (National Register of Citizens) in Assam.
- "Civil liberties" is one of five categories on which the Democracy Index is based.
- The other four are electoral process and pluralism; functioning of government; political participation; and political culture.
- On a scale of 0 to 10, India's scores were 8.67 in electoral process and pluralism, 6.79 in functioning of government; 6.67 in political participation; 5.63 in political culture; and 6.76 in civil liberties.



Calculation methods and other major outcomes

- Based on the total score, countries are classified as
 - "full democracy" (scores greater than 8);
 - "flawed democracy" (greater than 6 and up to 8);
 - "hybrid regime" (greater than 4 and up to 6); or
 - "authoritarian regime" (less than or equal to 4).
- India's score of 7.23 places it in the "flawed democracy" category, which also includes Bangladesh (5.88).
- Pakistan, with a score of 4.25, is categorised as a "hybrid democracy"

- China (2.26) and North Korea (bottom-ranked with 1.08) are categorised as “authoritarian regimes”
- Norway (top-ranked with 9.87) is counted as a “full democracy”.
- Following Norway at the top of the rankings are Iceland (9.58), Sweden (9.39) and New Zealand (9.26).
- Other “full democracies” include Germany, the United Kingdom and France.
- The United States, with a score of 7.96 that is just below the benchmark for a “full democracy”, is a “flawed democracy”, in the same category as India.

SELECTED COUNTRIES 2019		
Country	Score	Rank
Norway	9.87	1
Iceland	9.58	2
Sweden	9.39	3
New Zealand	9.26	4
Germany	8.68	13
UK	8.52	14
France	8.12	20
United States	7.96	25
Israel	7.86	28
India	6.90	51
Brazil	6.86	52
Sri Lanka	6.27	69
Bangladesh	5.88	92
Nepal	5.28	92
Pakistan	4.25	108
Myanmar	3.55	122
Russia	3.11	134

NEW MOEF GUIDELINES FOR ELEPHANT DEATHS FROM ANTHRAX

◎ CONTEXT

- The Indian government’s Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has come out with a standard operating procedure (SOP) to handle elephant deaths caused or suspected to have been caused, by anthrax.

What is Anthrax?

- Anthrax is an “**acute widespread infectious disease**” caused by gram-positive, rod-shaped bacteria known as *Bacillus anthracis*.
- It can be found naturally in soil. Animals can become infected when they come in contact with contaminated soil, plants, or water.
- Animals like goats, horses, pigs may get the infection as well and because it is a **zoonotic disease**, humans can get the infection through infected cattle.
- The disease is found in all parts of the world and, in India, it occurs countrywide. Some districts are even considered as anthrax districts (anthrax belts).

- It is usually found in animals in southern Indian states and is less frequent to absent in the northern Indian States.
- In the past years, the anthrax cases have been reported from Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Karnataka.
- Regarding susceptibility, no mammals have absolute natural immunity against anthrax but the most susceptible animals are cattle and sheep, followed by horse and pig.
- The disease has also been reported amongst camels and elephants in the country.

Types of Anthrax:

- **Cutaneous, or skin, anthrax:** It is the most common form. It is usually contracted when a person with a break in their skin, such as a cut or abrasion, comes into direct contact with anthrax spores.
- **Gastrointestinal anthrax:** It is caught from eating meat from an infected animal. It causes initial symptoms similar to food poisoning but these can worsen to produce severe abdominal pain, vomiting of blood and severe diarrhoea.
- **Inhalation or pulmonary anthrax:** It is the most severe form of human anthrax. Though the rarest, it is the form of human anthrax causing the most current concern. It is caused when a person is directly exposed to a large number of anthrax spores suspended in the air and breathes them in.

Key-highlights of the guidelines:

- Latest guidelines released by the environment ministry however, advise against burying of carcass suspected with anthrax, an infectious disease found primarily in animals.
- The SOP also lays down rules for the constitution of a team to oversee assessment and disposal of elephant carcasses suspected to be infected with anthrax.
- The SOP called for the complete burning of carcasses of animals suspected of dying due to anthrax and complete sanitisation of the area to prevent its further spread.
- The SOP, aimed at preventing an outbreak of the infection among captive or wild elephants and other wildlife, cautioned that while disposing of the carcasses of animals in all anthrax/suspected anthrax cases, the "carcass should be burnt completely and under no circumstance be buried" to prevent further spread of the disease.
- The overall authority responsible at the state level under the SOP's provisions will be the chief wildlife warden, in accordance with the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- The procedure will also have steps to assess whether the elephant died due to anthrax and the collection of biological samples. A map of anthrax hotspots is to be created as well.
- Recently, a four-year-old elephant suspected to have died due to anthrax was found in Sambalpur in Odisha.
- The population of the elephant, India's national heritage animal, as per the last elephant estimation in 2017, is 29,964.

Why Anthrax is dangerous?

- Anthrax outbreak is a particularly dangerous disease because it can quickly spread to other animals.
- It is an effective agent for a bioterrorist attack as it:
 - is easily found in nature
 - can be produced in a lab
 - can last for a long time without stringent storage conditions.
 - can be easily released
- Anthrax spores are microscopic. They might not be noticeable by taste, smell, or sight.

- Infected animals shed the bacilli in terminal haemorrhage or spilt blood at death. Anthrax spores can persist in soil for many years.

How does Government deal with such diseases?

- The central government's department of animal husbandry and dairying implements a centrally sponsored scheme 'Livestock Health & Disease Control (LH&DC)' to focus on controlling and containment of economically important animal diseases.
- Under this scheme, vaccination is carried out for control of diseases like anthrax as well as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Brucellosis, Hemorrhagic Septicemia (HS), Black Quarter (BQ), Classical Swine Fever, Ranikhet disease, etc.

THREE CAPITALS FOR ANDHRA PRADESH — IT'S LOGIC AND THE QUESTIONS IT RAISES

◎ CONTEXT

- The Andhra Pradesh Assembly has passed 'The Andhra Pradesh Decentralization and Equal Development of All Regions Bill, 2020', paving the way for three capitals for the State.

◎ BACKGROUND

- After a long fight for independence eventually on October 1, 1953, 11 districts of the then Madras State became the State of Andhra Pradesh with Kurnool as the capital.
- Finally, on November 1, 1956, Andhra Pradesh emerged as the first linguistic state. The erstwhile State of Andhra was united with the Telangana region of the state of Hyderabad.
- With the enactment of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2014, Andhra Pradesh was divided into two states:
 - State of Andhra Pradesh
 - State of Telangana
- The Act came into effect from June 2, 2014, it also had a provision for separate High Courts for State of Telangana and State of Andhra Pradesh.
- Hyderabad, which was the capital of the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh is now part of Telangana and has become its capital.

- The state of Andhra Pradesh traces its history and origin back to the 5th century BC when Kuberaka had a kingdom in the coastal Andhra.
- In the 4th century BC, the Mauryans extended their kingdom to rule over this oldest kingdom in South India.
- In the 3rd century BC, the Mauryan Empire was declined when Andhra Satavahanas arrived on the scene.
- With the fall of Satavahanas in 220 CE, the state was ruled by many rulers including Ikshvakus, Pallavas, Vishnukundinas, Anandagotrikas and Cholas.
- During the rule of Renati Cholas, in the 5th century CE, Telugu emerged as a popular medium of communication. In the reigning period of Vishnukundina Kings, Telugu was accredited to be the official language of the state.
- By the 12th and 13th centuries CE, Chalukyan influence was undermined with the incursion of Kakatiya dynasty.

- In 1323 CE, Ghiaz-ud-din Tughlaq captured Warangal, with the assistance of Ulugh Khan. Once again, Warangal came under the control of Musunuri Nayaks, who ruled it for over 50 years. Alla-ud-din Hasan Gangu established an independent Muslim state (Bahmani kingdom) in 1347 CE to revolt against the Delhi Sultanate. For about 200 years, the Qutb Shahi dynasty ruled over the Andhra kingdom.
- The Northern Circars became an element of the British Madras Presidency in colonial India. Soon after the surrender of five territories to the British by the Nizam, a region emerged by the name of Rayalaseema. The Nizams still controlled the princely state of Hyderabad. In 1947, India became free from the clutches of the British. The Muslim Nizam of Hyderabad preferred to be independent of India; however, Hyderabad was enforced to become part of the Republic of India in 1948.

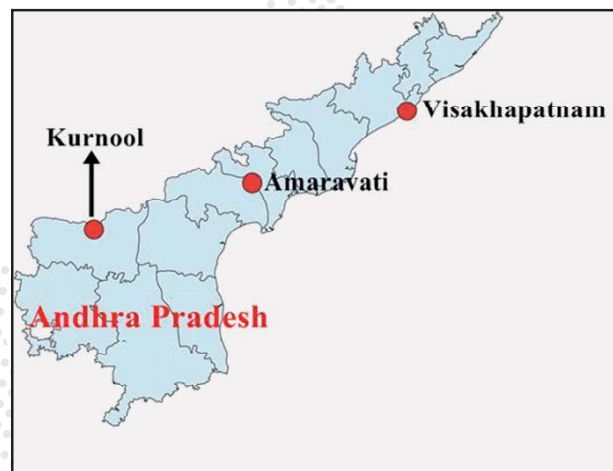
© ANALYSIS

• The Three new capitals:

- The three new capitals of Andhra Pradesh will be:

- Amaravati will now be only the legislative capital
- Visakhapatnam will be the executive capital
- Kurnool will be the judicial capital

- Executive capital Visakhapatnam is 700 km from judicial capital Kurnool, and 400 km from legislative capital Amaravati. The Amaravati-Kurnool distance is 370 km.



Is it new for India?

- The concept of having more than one capital is not new in India.
- In Rajasthan, the high court is located in Jodhpur, and not in the capital city of Jaipur.
- Even Maharashtra has summer and winter capitals (Mumbai and Nagpur).
- Himachal Pradesh has capitals at Shimla and Dharamshala, while the former state of Jammu and Kashmir had Srinagar and Jammu as capitals.
- However, in Uttarakhand, 5 governments in 19 yrs failed to decide where the capital should be. It holds a unique distinction in Independent India's history of being the only state with no permanent capital.

Parliament VS State: Who has the power to decide?

- Article 2 and Article 3 of the Constitution of India confer exclusive and plenary powers upon Parliament to form or establish or completely alter and destroy the identity of the existing state.
- It is within the exclusive domain of Parliament to form any state, set boundaries, and name a state, set boundaries, and name a state in the Union as defined in Article 1 of the Constitution.
- The power to establish a state's capital is inherent to, and inseparable from, the power conferred upon Parliament under Articles, 2, 3 and 4 of the Constitution of India.
- The matter of establishing the capital of a new state formed by Parliament by law is not covered by any Entry in List-II of the Schedule-VII of the Constitution.

- It is specifically because the capital of a state shall foster the needs of all sections of the society of the state without any political discrimination as to the development of a particular region of such a state.
- Therefore, only the Indian Parliament can, by law, establish the capital of a newly reconstituted state, which after reconstitution and reorganization by enacting a law, under Article 3(a)(c)(d) of the Constitution.
- The current proposal of three capitals in the state has not received the consent of the central government.

The idea of “decentralization”:

- The first reference of decentralisation was made in the **Sri Bagh pact**, which was signed by the then political leaders from Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema on November 16, 1937.
- According to the pact, for a balanced decentralisation, it was decided to continue with Andhra University in Visakhapatnam and the High Court and the capital be divided between the two regions.
- Decentralisation was the central theme in recommendations of all major committees that were set up to suggest a suitable location for the capital of Andhra Pradesh.
 - **G N Rao Committee:** A Committee constituted under former IAS officer G N Rao, in its December 2019 report, recommended three capitals for balanced growth, and four regional commissioners along the lines of Karnataka.
 - **BCG recommendation:** The global management consulting firm Boston Consultancy Group, on January 3, 2020, recommended that Visakhapatnam should be the seat of the Governor, Chief Minister, and all government departments, and a High Court Bench, and have provisions for a Legislative Assembly for use in an emergency; Vijayawada/Amaravati should have the Assembly and a High Court Bench; Kurnool should have the High Court and tribunals.
 - **High-powered Committee:** A high-power Committee appointed to study the recommendations of the G N Rao Committee and the BCG suggested that the state should be demarcated into zones with separate zonal planning and development boards in order to ensure inclusive development and that infrastructure projects focussed Rayalaseema and North Coastal Andhra should be prioritised.

Why would Andhra Pradesh need three capitals?

- **Positive side:**
 - The state government claims that it would allow an even development of the state. It would ensure justice to everyone and every region.
 - It also claims it's a good idea to decentralise power across the state as there have been several imbalances among the regions which had often led to agitations. Three capitals will lead to equitable development.
 - Furthermore, it would be a boost to urbanisation and then economic development. In India, cities contribute anywhere between 59% and 70% of the GDP.
- **Negative side:**
 - Andhra Pradesh has shrunk in size after Telangana was carved out of it in 2014, and it's hard to see how having government functions sprawled across three locations would lend itself to efficient governance.
 - Its immediate effect, though, would mostly be an artificial spike in real estate prices in the two new proposed capital regions, and land sharks would move into part people from their land before the state turns up with offers.
 - Instead of pursuing experiments of this sort, the state should dedicate itself to fulfilling the aspirations of its people. Assuredly, a single capital would be good enough.

However, the idea of three capitals can also restore regional balance in governance. But the state needs to have an effective plan for coordination among all sector and especially the three institutes of the democracy as the three pillars cannot operate from far away places.

WHAT IS ENEMY PROPERTY IN INDIA, AND HOW HAS THE GOVERNMENT DEALT WITH IT?

◎ CONTEXT

- A Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by Union Home Minister will monitor the disposal of over 9,400 enemy properties, which the government estimates is worth about Rs 1 lakh crore.

◎ ABOUT

- In the wake of the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, there was migration of people from India to Pakistan.
- Under the Defence of India Rules framed under The Defence of India Act, 1962, the Government of India took over the properties and companies of those who took Pakistani nationality.
- The same was done for property left behind by those who went to China after the 1962 Sino-Indian war.
- The Tashkent Declaration of January 10, 1966 included a clause that said India and Pakistan would discuss the return of the property and assets taken over by either side in connection with the conflict.
- However, the Government of Pakistan disposed of all such properties in their country in the year 1971 itself.

How did India deal with enemy property?

- The Enemy Property Act, enacted in 1968, provided for the continuous vesting of enemy property in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India.
- Some movable properties too, are categorised as enemy properties.
- In 2017, Parliament passed The Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2016, which amended The Enemy Property Act, 1968, and The Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971.
- The amended Act expanded the definition of the term "enemy subject", and "enemy firm" to include the legal heir and successor of an enemy, whether a citizen of India or a citizen of a country which is not an enemy; and the succeeding firm of an enemy firm, irrespective of the nationality of its members or partners.
- The Custodian, with prior approval of the central government, may dispose of enemy properties vested in him in accordance with the provisions of the Act, and the government may issue directions to the Custodian for this purpose.

Which state has the highest number of such properties?

- Together UP and West Bengal have over 80% of these immovable properties. Over 98% of it belongs to Pakistani nationals

Is it the first time such a rule is being enacted in India?

- No. After the beginning of the Second World War the British had enacted a Defence of India Act in 1939.
- Under this Act Germany, Italy and Japan were declared enemy countries and similar measures were adopted so their citizens should not be allowed to have any financial gain from India.
- After Independence, the Act was abrogated as the Indian government did not identify these countries as India's enemy.

Why were these amendments brought?

- The thrust of the amendments was to guard against claims of succession or transfer of properties left by people who migrated to Pakistan and China after the wars.
- The amendments denied legal heirs any right over enemy property.
- The main aim was to negate the effect of a court judgment in this regard.
- The statement of objects and reasons in the Bill said: "Of late, there have been various judgments by various courts that have adversely affected the powers of the Custodian and the Government of India as provided under the Enemy Property Act, 1968.
- In view of such interpretation by various courts, the Custodian is finding it difficult to sustain his actions under the Enemy Property Act, 1968."

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY

◎ CONTEXT

- **The National Informatics Centre (NIC) has set up the Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Blockchain Technology in Bengaluru, Karnataka, aiming to provide Blockchain as a service and allowing all stakeholders to benefit from shared learning, experiences and resources.**

About the Centre of Excellence:

- The Centre of Excellence aims to facilitate the Government Departments in building proof of concepts for use of Blockchain technology in different dimensions of governance leading to large scale deployment of some such applications.
- The CoE has developed Blockchain-based **Proof of Concepts (PoCs)** for select government use cases to understand the potential benefits provided by this emerging technology.
- It will provide world-class blockchain services to the government by identifying and sharing suitable data for the use of government departments.
- New and previously unforeseen applications of Blockchain in the Government are expected to enhance transparency, traceability and trust in e-governance systems.
- With National Informatics Centre (NIC) providing a robust and agile infrastructure, the CoE shall also provide Blockchain as a Service (BaaS) for efficient hosting of Blockchain network.
- Apart from CoE in Bengaluru, the govt is also planning to launch another CoE for blockchain technology in **Gurugram**, Haryana also.

National Informatics Centre (NIC), established in 1976, has emerged as a promoter of digital opportunities for sustainable development. It functions under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology. NIC spearheaded "Informatics-Led-Development" by implementing ICT applications in social and public administration and facilitates electronic delivery of services to the government (G2G), business (G2B), citizen (G2C) and government employee (G2E).

Understanding blockchain:

- A blockchain is, in the simplest of terms, a time-stamped series of immutable records of data that is managed by a cluster of computers not owned by any single entity.
- Each digital record or transaction in the thread is called a block (hence the name), and it allows either an open or controlled set of users to participate in the electronic ledger. Each block is linked to a specific participant.

- The following features make the revolutionary technology of blockchain stand out:
 - Decentralised
 - Peer-to-Peer Network
 - Immutable
 - Tamper-Proof

Significance of the initiative:

- **Knowledge enrichment:** The Centre of Excellence (CoE) will share its blockchain-based proof of concepts with selected government entities. This way, it will help different wings of the government to understand the potential of the technology.
- **Better hosting of networks:** With the enhanced infrastructure provided by NIC, the CoE will additionally offer Blockchain-as-a-Service (BaaS) for better hosting of Blockchain network.
- **Smooth implementation of policies:** Blockchain technology is upcoming & niche technology and adoption of the same in sectors such as health, finance, agriculture and various other sectors would aid the government in implementing various programmes and provide trust and immutability to the assets.
- **Transparency & trust:** The applications of blockchain in the public sector will increase transparency, traceability and trust in e-governance systems.
- **Effective e-governance service:** The Centre would help to bring a revolutionary change in the lives of the people by delivering e-governance services effectively through the data-centric model.

WHY PUNE-MUMBAI HYPER LOOP MAY BE SCRAPPED

◎ CONTEXT

- The proposed Pune-Mumbai Hyper loop project, an ultra-modern transport system that will reduce the travelling time between the two cities to 25 minutes from 2.5-3 hours, may be scrapped by the state government.

◎ ABOUT

What is the Hyper loop technology?

- In 2012, Elon Musk, co-founder of Tesla, Inc and several other firms, unveiled his vision of the new transport system, which he called a 'Hyper loop'.
- It is envisioned as a transport system which would never crash and would be immune to weather's vagaries.
- It would also be thrice or four times as fast as a bullet train, with an average speed that would be twice of an aircraft.
- It could be passenger-packed pods which would travel through long tubes at 1,220 km/h, using solar energy.
- The Hyper loop project could be the right solution for high-traffic city pairs which are about 1,500 km apart.
- The high speed is achieved as the pods, which carry passengers, move using magnetic levitation.
- The speed increases further due to the near-vacuum conditions inside the tubes, which reduce resistance to the pod as it travels within the tube.

How was Pune-Mumbai Hyperloop envisaged?

- Hyperloop connectivity in Maharashtra between central Pune and the Navi Mumbai airport was announced in 2018.

- The responsibility of the project was given to the Pune Metropolitan Region Development Authority (PMRDA).

Which other cities are exploring a Hyperloop?

- Currently, nine companies are working on the technology, and they have announced construction of test tracks as well as intercity transport systems in various parts of the world.
- Prominent among these companies are US-based Virgin Hyperloop One, Hyperloop Transportation Technologies and Canada-based TransPod. An Indian company, called the DGWHyperloop India, has also entered the arena.
- Various companies have announced a number of routes, with the leading projects being the Pune-Mumbai hyperloop, one connecting Los Angeles and San Francisco, one between Abu Dhabi and Al Ain, another from Amravati to Vijayawada, a track connecting Missouri's largest cities including St Louis, Kansas City and Columbia, and several routes in Canada including Toronto-Montreal, Toronto-Windsor and Calgary-Edmonton.
- The Hyperloop project has not been undertaken anywhere in the world.

Benefits or advantages of Hyperloop Technology

- The technology offers very fast speed of transportation which is twice that of aircraft.
- It has very low power consumption.
- It is low cost transportation system on long run.
- It is immune to bad weather conditions.
- It is resistant to earthquakes.
- It is safe mode of transportation system.
- Uses Solar Energy for power
- In the event of equipment or electrical failure, the system comes to a stop (does not fall from the sky).
- Automation reduces the risk of human error

Challenges or disadvantages of Hyperloop Technology

- High speed of capsule (almost at speed of sound) may cause dizziness to the passengers travelling due to vibration and jostling.
- Initial cost of investment to have the system in place is very high. The long vacuum chamber manufacturing requires more technical skills. Moreover this is costly and also risky to maintain.
- Land use rights will be concern for deployment of the project.
- It has very high risk to life when something wrong happens to the system.
- It has limited space in the train and hence people cannot move freely.
- As hyperloop uses steel for track, it expands and changes shape when outside temperature is changed. This may destroy the track of hyperloop technology. This needs to be considered while designing the system based on environment of the location where it is being deployed.
- The installation requires cutting of large number of trees. This leads to environment loss.
- It is an Unproven system yet.

GLOBAL SOCIAL MOBILITY INDEX

◎ CONTEXT

- **The World Economic Forum has created a new index to measure social mobility. It came out with its first-ever Global Social Mobility Report.**

© ABOUT

- World Economic Forum (WEF) released 1st edition of a report titled “**The Global Social Mobility Report 2020: Equality, Opportunity and a New Economic Imperative**”.
- The **global social mobility index (GSMI)** of 82 countries was launched in this report.
- As per the Index, **India ranked at the 76th position** with a score of 42.7, while **Denmark topped the list**.
- **Global social mobility index:** The GSMI focuses on drivers of relative social mobility instead of outcomes.
 - It looks at policies, practices and institutions.
 - This allows it to enable effective comparisons throughout regions and generations.
 - It uses 10 pillars, which in turn are broken down into five determinants of social mobility – health, education, technology access, work opportunities, working conditions and fair wages and finally, social protection and inclusive institutions.
- **World Economic Forum:** WEF is based in Cologny-Geneva, Switzerland. It is an NGO, founded in 1971 by Klaus Schwab. It is a membership-based organization of the world’s largest corporations. It hosts annual meeting at the end of January in Davos.
 - **Mission:** “Committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas”.
 - **European Management Forum:** WEF was first named the European Management Forum, and the name was changed in 1987 when it broadened its vision to include a platform for resolving international conflicts.

Social Mobility

- **Absolute social mobility:** Social mobility can be understood as the movement in personal circumstances either “upwards” or “downwards” of an individual in relation to those of their parents.
 - In absolute terms, it is the ability of a child to experience a better life than their parents.
- **Relative social mobility:** On the other hand, relative social mobility is an assessment of the impact of socio-economic background on an individual’s outcomes in life.
 - It can be measured against a number of outcomes ranging from health to educational achievement and income.

Fact findings

- GSMI there are **only a handful of nations with the right conditions** to foster social mobility.
- **Drag on social mobility:** Most countries underperform in four areas- fair wages, social protection, working conditions and lifelong learning.
- **Rapid growth countries not immune:** Inequalities are rising even in countries that have experienced rapid growth.
- **Nordic countries top the list:** **Denmark** tops the rankings with a social mobility score of 85.2, closely followed by **Finland** (83.6), **Norway** (83.6), **Sweden** (83.5) and **Iceland** (82.7).
- **G7 countries:** Among the G7 economies, **Germany** is the most socially mobile, ranking 11th with 78 points followed by **France** in 12th position. **Canada** ranks 14th followed by **Japan** (15th), the **United Kingdom** (21st), the **United States** (27th) and **Italy** (34th).
- **Emerging economies:** Among the world’s large emerging economies, the **Russian Federation** is the most socially mobile of the BRICS grouping, ranking 39th with a score of 64 points. Next is **China**, which ranks 45th, followed by **Brazil** (60th), **India** (76th) and **South Africa** (77th).
- **Wage disparities:** In the US, the top 1% of income earners in 2018 earned 158% more than in 1979, in comparison to just 24% for the bottom 90%.

India findings

- India ranks **76th out of 82 economies**.
- It ranks **41st** in lifelong learning and **53rd** in working conditions.
- India is among the five countries that **stand to gain the most from a better social mobility** score (China, the United States, India, Japan and Germany).
- **Areas of improvement** for India include social protection (76th) and fair wage distribution (79th).

Key findings

- **Driver of income equality:** Upward social mobility is a key driver of income equality. Increasing social mobility by 10 per cent would benefit social cohesion and boost the world's economies by nearly 5 per cent by 2030.
- **Historical inequalities:** Children who are born into less affluent families typically experience greater barriers to success.
 - Problem is not only for the individual, but also society and the economy.
 - **Human capital** is the driving force of economic growth.
 - As a result, anything that undermines the best allocation of talent and impedes the accumulation of human capital may significantly hamper growth.
- **Five key dimensions:** Measuring countries across five key dimensions distributed over 10 pillars – health; education (access, quality and equity); technology; work (opportunities, wages, conditions); and protections and institutions (social protection and inclusive institutions) .
- **Fourth Industrial Revolution:** Globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution have generated significant benefits, but have also exacerbated inequalities.
 - **Continuing disruption to labour markets**, will likely compound differences in social mobility for those countries unprepared to take advantage of new opportunities.
 - **Declining income share of labour** relative to an increase in the income share of capital has significantly driven economic inequality.
 - **Wage disparities** have grown exponentially since the 1970s.
- **Globalization:** Globalisation has increased inequalities within countries by transferring low-skilled jobs in high-productivity sectors in high-income economies to lower-income counterparts. This has effectively penalized workers in specific locations and types of job.
- **Technology:** Technology has polarized inequalities by reducing demand for low-skilled jobs while rewarding highly skilled jobs disproportionately.
 - **“Superstar” firms** have exacerbated this polarisation. They have high profits and a low share of labour, and as models of great productivity, have come to increasingly dominate markets.

Recommendations

- There is need for a new standard which could be used to identify priority **policy actions and business practices** that would improve social mobility.
- Achieving higher levels of social mobility needs to be perceived as an important element of a wider move towards a **stakeholder-based model of capitalism**.
- **“Digital leapfrogging”** will not happen unless the issues are systemically addressed. Technology has the potential to equalize barriers to entry to knowledge, but only if the conditions are conducive.
- **Governments must play the role of equalizer**, levelling the playing field for all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic background. It must develop a new social protection contract which would offer holistic protection to all workers irrespective of their employment status, particularly in a context of technological change and industry transitions.

- Create new financing model for social mobility.
- Improving tax progressivity on personal income.
- Formulate policies that address wealth concentration.
- Re-balance sources of taxation which support the social mobility agenda.
- Public spending and policy incentives must put greater emphasis on social spending.
- More support for education and lifelong learning.
- Targeted improvements in the availability, quality and distribution of education.
- Promoting skills development throughout an individual's working life.
- New approach to jointly finance efforts between the public and private sector.
- **Businesses must place purpose over profits** to perform better in the long term. Companies face equal risks from system challenges, including inequality. Paying fair wages and eliminating the gender pay gap will be crucial to boost social mobility.
 - Businesses must take the lead by promoting a culture of meritocracy.
 - Companies must create action plans specific to each industry.

LOCUST ATTACKS

◎ CONTEXT

- **Recently, locust attacks emanating from the desert area in Pakistan have struck parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat, causing heavy damage to standing crop.**

◎ ABOUT

- **Locusts**, which are part of the grasshopper family, are **highly mobile insects** that can migrate across different countries and cause extreme damage to crops.
- India has suffered the **biggest Locust Attack in 25 Years**, which is not fully controlled yet.
 - **History:** Although no locust plague cycles have been observed after 1962, during 1978 and 1993, large scale attacks were reported.
 - This year the first locust swarms left to **Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and south-west Iran.**
 - The locust department in India has blamed Pakistan for this year's attack, saying it failed to conduct control operations successfully.
- **Crop damage:** Estimates say crops were affected in more than 3.5 lakh hectares in districts of Rajasthan and Gujarat.
 - Crops of **mustard, cumin and wheat** have been most damaged.
 - Farmers whose crop was damaged would be **entitled to compensation.**
- **Measures India has taken:** India has a locust control and research scheme that is being implemented through the **Locust Warning Organisation (LWO)**, established in 1939 and amalgamated in 1946 with the Directorate of Plant Protection Quarantine and Storage (PPQS) of the Ministry of Agriculture.
 - LWO's responsibility is monitoring and control of the locust situation in Scheduled Desert Areas, mainly in Rajasthan and Gujarat, and partly in Punjab and Haryana.
- **International measures: Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** of the United Nations is the international agency that monitors and manages locust invasions.
 - All locust-affected countries transmit data about attacks to the FAO.
 - FAO also provides forecasts for locust attacks up to six weeks in advance and issues warnings for each country.

Locust facts

- **From grasshopper family:** Locusts are a group of **short-horned grasshoppers**. The word "locust" is derived from the Vulgar Latin *locusta*, meaning grasshopper.
- **Polyphagous feeder:** Locusts can **eat a large variety of plants**. A small swarm of the desert locust, which contains about 40 million insects, can eat on average as much food in one day as about 10 elephants, 25 camels or 2,500 people.
- **Migratory:** Adult locust swarms can fly up to 150 km a day with the wind. They migrate long distances in destructive swarms.
- **High breeding:** Under suitable conditions of drought followed by rapid vegetation growth, serotonin in their brains triggers a dramatic set of changes and they start to breed abundantly.
 - Each locust lays about 150 eggs. They multiply in numbers, and they lay eggs only in **moist soil**.
 - They form bands of wingless nymphs which later become swarms of winged adults.
- **Origin:** The swarms usually originate in the **Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa**.
- **Indian locusts:** Only four species of locusts are found in India.
 - Desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) - regarded as the most important in India as well as internationally.
 - Migratory locust (*Locusta migratoria*)
 - Bombay Locust (*Nomadacris succincta*)
 - Tree locust (*Anacridium* sp.)
- **Destroy plants:** The swarms devour leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, bark and growing points, and also destroy plants by their **sheer weight** as they descend on them in massive numbers.
- **Risk:** India is most at risk of a swarm invasion just before the **onset of the monsoon**.
 - This year the extended monsoon provided a favourable environment for the locusts to multiply.
- **Plagued history:** Swarms have devastated crops and been a contributory cause of famines and human migrations since prehistory. The **ancient Egyptians** carved them on their tombs and the insects are mentioned in the **Iliad, the Bible** and the Quran.
- **Locust control:** To control locust swarms, a chemical called **organophosphate** is sprayed in small, concentrated doses.

SAMAGRA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

◎ CONTEXT

- **Union Budget 2018-19** proposed to treat school education holistically without segmentation from pre-nursery to Class 12; called 'Samagra Shiksha'.

◎ ABOUT

- **Samagra Shiksha:** Samagra Shiksha is an **overarching programme for school education sector** extending from pre-school to class 12. It is 'an integrated scheme for school education'.
- **Precedent:** The Samagra Shiksha programme replaced/includes **three former schemes** of Central Government, namely:
 - Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)
 - Teacher Education (TE)

- Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)
- **Implementing agency:** The Scheme will be implemented through a single **State Implementation Society (SIS)** at the State/UT level.
 - At the National level, there would be a **Governing Council** headed by Minister of Human Resource Development and a Project Approval Board (PAB) headed by Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy.
 - The Governing Council will be empowered to modify financial and programmatic norms
- **Aim:** It was prepared with the broader goal of **improving school effectiveness** measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes.
- **Outcomes:** Main outcomes of the Scheme are envisaged as Universal Access, Equity and Quality, promoting Vocationalisation of Education, and strengthening of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs).
- **IMPART:** IMPART is an initiative under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan that was implemented for the first time this year, IMPART focuses on making education more a fun activity rather than a mere textbook learning.

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

- **Samagra Shiksha** is a sector-wide development programme/scheme.
- **Comprehensive:** It provides a comprehensive strategic plan for development of school education at the district level.
- **Harmonise implementation:** It will harmonise the implementation mechanisms and transaction costs at all levels; particularly in using state, district and sub-district level systems and resources.
- **Improving systemic performance and outcomes:** Focus will shift from 'project objectives' to improving 'system level performance' and 'schooling outcomes'.
- **Improving quality:** It will incentivize States towards improving quality of education.
- **School as continuum:** The scheme envisages the 'school' as a continuum from pre-school, primary, upper primary, secondary to Senior Secondary levels.
- **Inclusive and equitable:** The vision of the Scheme is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school to senior secondary stage in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for Education.
- **Two T's:** The main emphasis of the Scheme is on improving the quality of school education by focussing on the two T's – Teacher and Technology
- **In harmony with SDG: SDG4.1** which states that "By 2030, ensure that all boys and girls complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes".
 - **SDG 4.5** states that "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of Education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations".
- **Focus regions for intervention:** It is proposed that preference in the interventions would be given to Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs), LWEs affected districts, Special Focus Districts (SFDs), Border areas and the 117 Aspirational districts.

Objectives of the Scheme

- Provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students.
- Bridging Social and Gender Gaps in School Education.
- Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education.
- Ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions.
- Promoting Vocationalisation of education.

- Support States in implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.
- Strengthening and up-gradation of SCERTs/State Institutes of Education and DIET as nodal agencies for teacher training.

Interventions proposed

- Universal Access including Infrastructure Development and Retention
- Gender and Equity
- Inclusive Education
- Quality
- Financial support for Teacher Salary
- Digital Initiatives
- RTE Entitlements including uniforms, textbooks etc.
- Pre-school Education
- Vocational Education
- Sports and Physical Education
- Strengthening of Teacher Education and Training
- Monitoring
- Programme Management
- National Component.

Funding pattern and implementation

- The Scheme will be implemented as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**.
- **90:10 ratio:** The fund sharing pattern for the scheme between Centre and States is 90:10 for the 8 North-Eastern States and the 3 Himalayan States viz. Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
- **60:40 ratio:** The fund sharing pattern for the scheme between Centre and States is 60:40 ratio for all other States and Union Territories with Legislature.
- **100% for UTs:** It is 100% centrally sponsored for Union Territories without Legislature.
- **Flexibility to states:** The scheme gives flexibility to the States and UTs to plan and prioritize their interventions within the scheme norms and the overall resource envelope given to them.
- **Fund allotment:** Funds will be allocated based on an objective criteria based on enrolment of students, committed liabilities, learning outcomes and various performance indicators.

Benefits

- **Transition rates:** The Scheme will help improve the transition rates across the various levels of school education.
- **Universal access:** It will aid in promoting universal access to children to complete school education.
- **Convergence and linkages:** The integration of Teacher Education would facilitate effective convergence and linkages between different support structures in school education. This will be done through interventions such as:
 - Unified training calendar
 - Innovations in pedagogy
 - Mentoring and monitoring, etc.
- **Need-focused and dynamic:** This single scheme will enable the SCERT to become the nodal agency for conduct and monitoring of all in-service training programmes to make it need-focused and dynamic.

- **Technology:** It would enable reaping the benefits of technology and widening the access of good quality education across all States and UTs and across all sections of the Society.

THE GULF BETWEEN RICH AND POOR, MEN AND WOMEN, GLOBALLY

◎ CONTEXT

- A report published by Oxfam, the international non-profit focussed on the alleviation of global poverty, underlined what has been said repeatedly by governments, research organisations and a range of multilateral bodies over the past decade or more that economic inequality, “is out of control”, with extremes of wealth existing alongside great poverty.

◎ ABOUT

- “This great divide”, “is based on a flawed and sexist economic system” which has “accumulated vast wealth and power into the hands of a rich few, in part by exploiting the labour of women and girls, and systematically violating their rights”.
- The report, titled Time to Care: Unpaid and Underpaid Care Work and the Global Inequality Crisis, released ahead of the 50th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF), also said that India’s richest 1% hold more than four times the wealth held by the 953 million who make up for the bottom 70% of the country’s population.

How wide is the gap between the richest and the rest?

- 2,153 individuals, the number of billionaires in the world in 2019, have more wealth among them than 4.6 billion people.
- 22 of the world’s richest men have a combined wealth that is more than the wealth of all the women of Africa.
- The world’s richest 1% has more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.
- An additional 0.5% tax on the wealth of the richest 1% over the next 10 years can create 117 million jobs in education, health and elderly care, etc.
- From 2011 to 2017, average wages in G7 countries grew 3%, while dividends to wealthy shareholders increased by 31%.

How badly off are girls and women as compared to men?

- Globally, extreme poverty rates are 4% higher for women than men; this gap rises to 22% during women’s peak productive and reproductive ages; that is, 122 women aged 25-34 for every 100 men of the same age group live in extremely poor households, largely due to childcare responsibilities.
- \$10.8 trillion is the estimated minimum annual monetary value of the unpaid care work by women aged 15 and above globally — this is three times the size of the world’s tech industry.
- Women do 12.5 billion hours of unpaid care work every day, equivalent to 1.5 billion people working 8 hours a day with no remuneration.
- Globally, 42% of working age women are outside the paid labour force, compared with 6% of men, due to unpaid care responsibilities.
- 80% of the estimated 67 million domestic workers worldwide are women.
- An estimated 90% of domestic workers have no access to social security such as maternity protection and benefits.
- Worldwide, girls aged 5-9 and 10-14 spend on average 30% and 50% more of their time respectively on unpaid care work than boys of similar ages.

THE PULSE POLIO PROGRAMME

◎ CONTEXT

- The Union health ministry has launched ‘the Pulse Polio Programme’ campaign to check the disease that affects children at a young age.

The Pulse Polio Programme:

- India launched the **Pulse Polio immunisation programme** in 1995 after a resolution for a global initiative of polio eradication was adopted by the **World Health Assembly (WHA) in 1988**.
- Children in the age group of 0-5 years are administered polio drops during national and sub-national immunisation rounds (in high-risk areas) every year.
- According to the Ministry of Health, the **last polio case** in the country was reported from Howrah district of West Bengal in January 2011.
- Under the Pulse Polio Programme, all states and Union Territories have developed **Rapid Response Teams (RRT)** to respond to any polio outbreak in the country.
- **Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans (EPRP)** have also been developed by states, indicating steps to be undertaken in case of detection of a polio case.

What is Polio?

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** defines polio or poliomyelitis as “a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children.
- The virus is transmitted by person-to-person, spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.
- There are three wild-types of poliovirus that cause the disease:
 - Wild Poliovirus 1 (WP1)
 - Wild Poliovirus 2 (WP2)
 - Wild Poliovirus 3 (WP3)
- Out of the three, WPV-2 was interrupted successfully more than a decade ago.
- The two remaining viruses, now seen in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria, are WPV-1 and WPV-3.
- **Symptoms:** Initial symptoms of polio include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs.
- **Effect:** In a small proportion of cases, the disease causes paralysis, which is often permanent. There is no cure for polio, it can only be prevented by immunization.”

Treatment of Polio:

- There are two vaccines available to fight polio:
 - **Inactivated poliovirus (IPV):** IPV consists of a series of injections that start 2 months after birth and continue until the child is 4 to 6 years old. This version of the vaccine is provided to most children in the U.S. The vaccine is made from inactive poliovirus. It is very safe and effective and cannot cause polio.
 - **Oral polio vaccine (OPV):** OPV is created from a weakened form of poliovirus. This version is the vaccine of choice in many countries because it is a low cost, easy to administer, and gives an excellent level of immunity. However, in very rare cases, OPV has been known to revert to a dangerous form of poliovirus, which is able to cause paralysis.

- Polio vaccinations, or boosters, are highly recommended for anyone who is not vaccinated or is unsure whether they are.

Is India Polio free?

- The WHO on February 24, 2012, removed India from the list of countries with active endemic wild poliovirus transmission.
- Two years later, the South-East Asia Region of the WHO, of which India is a part, was certified as polio-free.
- The Regional Certification Commission (RCC) on March 27, 2014, stated: "The Commission concludes, from the evidence provided by the National Certificate Committees of the 11 Member States, that the transmission of indigenous wild poliovirus has been interrupted in all the countries of the Region."
- To prevent the virus from coming to India, the government has since March 2014 made the **Oral Polio Vaccination (OPV)** mandatory for those travelling between India and polio-affected countries, such as Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Syria and Cameroon.

Why India still runs it?

- The Indian policy-makers continue to focus on polio, though the Southeast Asian region, including India, became polio-free in 2014.
- This is because the threat of resurgence is real and can happen in two ways.
- As of today, two countries — Pakistan and Afghanistan — still have circulating polio. And the poliovirus can cross borders easily through adults who show no symptoms.
- In 2011, 10 years after becoming polio-free, China's Xinjiang province saw 21 cases of paralytic polio and two deaths.
- Once we stop the remaining two viruses (WPV-1 and WPV-3) in their tracks, OPV will be phased out and replaced globally with IPV.

MISCELLANEOUS

CURRENT AFFAIRS

CHINA & MYANMAR

- Myanmar and China on Saturday signed 33 bilateral agreements that will bind the south-east Asian country closer to its giant neighbour, including rail and deep-sea port projects along an economic corridor linking China's south-western interior to the Indian Ocean.
- The accords include those to construct a rail link and a deep-sea port – part of a China-Myanmar-Economic Corridor – that runs from China's south-western region to the Bay of Bengal.
- This will give a significant push to China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative to which Myanmar had signed onto in 2018 amid lack of investments from western countries.
- China is also Myanmar's biggest trading partner and one of its largest sources of inward investment.
- A Myanmar military campaign in 2017-18 caused some 730,000 Rohingyas from Rakhine state to flee to Bangladesh.
- Through the construction of the Kyaukpyu port, China will be making its presence felt on India's eastern flank.
- The Kyaukpyu port would give China direct access to the Indian Ocean, allowing it to bypass the Strait of Malacca.
- Around 80 percent of China's oil imports pass through the narrow strait between Malaysia and Indonesia, leaving it vulnerable to blockades or unrest over the disputed South China Sea.
- The port, coupled with a planned railway from Kyaukpyu to China's Yunnan province would not only bypass the strait but also be more direct.

Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b

- India has successfully achieved the complete phase-out of hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-141 b, according to the ministry of environment, forest and climate change.
- HCFC- 141 b is a chemical used by foam manufacturers as a blowing agent in the production of rigid polyurethane (PU) foams.
- It is one of the most potent ozone-depleting chemicals after Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).
- The complete phase-out of HCFC 141 b from the country in the foam sector is among the first at this scale in **Article 5 parties** (developing countries) under the **Montreal Protocol**.

NATIONAL MISSION OF CLEAN GANGA (NMCG)

- The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under its 'Namami Gange' program has taken up an initiative to conserve the wetlands in Ganga River Basin.
- The difference in the Namami Gange Project is primarily to rejuvenate the river through increasing the base flow and aquifers recharge and conservation of wetlands because that forms the part of one of our 'Aviral Dhara' which is to maintain the environmental flow in the river.
- So, in a first step the programme is aimed at conserving wetlands in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal.
- The NMCG in collaboration with the State Wetland Authorities will help in identifying and preparing Integrated Management Plans for management and conservation in the Ganga basin.
- The program is also aimed at involving the community in the wetland conservation process through the Wildlife Institute of India. Apart from the government's efforts, NMCG has also appointed a team to educate the people in contributing to the rejuvenation of these water bodies.
- Ecosystem-based and community-led models of rejuvenation of wetlands for enhancing 'Aviralta' and 'Nirmalta' of the river and water conservation in the Ganga basin are being integrated into the Namami Gange Programme.

NATIONAL STARTUP ADVISORY COUNCIL

- The Union Government has notified the structure of the National Startup Advisory Council to advise on measures needed to build a strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation and startups in the country.
- The Council will be chaired by Minister for Commerce & Industry.
- It will consist of the non-official members, to be nominated by Central Government, from various categories like founders of successful startups, veterans and persons capable of representing interests of incubators and accelerators etc.

VYOM MITRA

- Before orbiting astronauts on India's first manned mission to space in December 2021, the Indian Space Research Organisation will send 'Vyom Mitra', a 'lady robot' in the unmanned Gaganyaan spacecraft.
- Vyom Mitra will be used for an unmanned flight of ISRO's GSLV III rocket in December 2020, which, along with a second unmanned flight in July 2021.
- The lady robot, equipped with a head, two arms and a torso, is built to mimic crew activity inside the crew module of Gaganyaan.
- It is capable of conversing with astronauts, recognising them, and responding to their queries.

WHAT IS THE YADA YADA VIRUS?

- Team of researchers extracted RNA from a large number of mosquitoes in Australia's Victoria state; they found a new alphavirus, which belonged to a group that includes other alphaviruses such as chikungunya virus and the astern equine encephalitis.
- The virus poses no threat to human beings, because it is a part of a group of viruses that only infect mosquitoes.
- Other viruses in the same group include the Tai forest alphavirus and the Agua Salud alphavirus.
- It implies a reference to something that is synonymous with "etcetera, etcetera" or "blah blah".

WHAT IS XENOBOT?

- Scientists in the United States have created the world's first "**living machines**" — tiny robots built from the cells of the **African clawed frog**, that can move around on their own.
- The species of aquatic frog was found across sub-Saharan Africa from Nigeria and Sudan to South Africa, *Xenopus laevis*.
- The living machines are less than a millimetre (0.04 inches) wide-small enough to travel inside human bodies.
- They can walk and swim, survive for weeks without food, and work together in groups.

WINGS INDIA 2020

- Indian aviation and technology leaders gathered in Bengaluru for industry meet ahead of "Wings India 2020", Asia's largest civil aviation event.
- Over the last decade, India has witnessed a robust civil aviation market, and through this event we aim to provide a congenial forum that will cater to the rapidly changing dynamics of the sector, focusing on new business acquisition, investments, policy formation and regional connectivity.

- Wings India 2020, a flagship event of the Indian Civil Aviation industry will be held at Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad from 12-15 March 2020. It is organized by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Govt. of India, AAI and FICCI.
- 'Wings India 2020'- a four-day event themed: "Flying for All" is an international platform focused on the new business acquisition, investments, policy formation and regional connectivity in the civil aviation industry.

WORLD GOLD COUNCIL (WGC) REPORT

- After a bumper year in 2019, gold will continue to shine in 2020, says the World Gold Council (WGC). The interplay between market risk and economic growth will drive demand, according to its recent 'Gold Outlook 2020' report.
- The council released a report on total gold holdings by global central banks recently. It was based on data provided by them on gold buying to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) bought 7.5 tonnes of gold in October 2019 for adding to its foreign exchange reserves, which swelled to \$461 billion, including \$28 billion gold.
- The RBI now holds 625.2 tonnes of gold or 6.6 per cent of its forex reserves.
- In terms of total gold bought in 2019, it is the sixth largest buyer with 25.2 tonnes purchases in the first 10 months of 2019.
- China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Poland bought more gold than India in 2019. Total gold purchased by central banks from January to November 2019 was 570 tonnes.
- WGC said in its latest data analysed for ETFs that, "Gold-backed ETF inflows alongside central bank purchases were a large driver of global gold demand in 2019."
- Tax cuts have to be introduced as a credible incentive to spur economic growth, the report said, highlighting that higher taxes are exacerbating the impact of the record high local gold price on consumption.
- The immediate trigger for gold prices is the escalating tensions in the Middle East.
- While the introduction of mandatory hallmarking for gold jewellery at the beginning of the year may enhance consumer trust, this potential initial disruption should not be ignored, WGC has said.
- A 'spot exchange' — when it becomes a reality — is expected to usher in transparency and thereby benefit consumers and small jewellers. Indications are that the gold consumption in India slipped in 2019 as against the level in previous year.

Z-MORH TUNNEL

- In order to accelerate the pace of infrastructural development in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, the Central Government has approved construction of 6.5 kilometres long **Z-Morh tunnel** on **Srinagar -Leh National Highway**.
- Z-Morh Tunnel would provide all-weather road connectivity to Sonamarg tourist spot in Jammu and Kashmir which mostly remains closed during the winters due to heavy snowfall in Gaganger area.
