



An Institute for Civil Services

Target PT 2020 *in* **100 DAYS**

**Trending
Topics**

DAY 1 - 15

POLITY - 2

GS SCORE

An Institute for Civil Services

IAS PRELIMS 2020

Target PT 2020

COMPLETE REVISION
through
4000⁺ MCQs

BATCH-4 STARTS

27 JANUARY
2020

Test Timings:
9:00 AM to 10:00 AM
Class Timings:
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

45 Concept cum Revision
Classes with Daily Test



15 Prelims Current Affairs
Classes + Tests



Special Classes on
Economic Survey & Budget



CLASSROOM

60 DAYS

ONLINE



Special Classes on
India Year Book & Mapping



Prelims Mock
Test Series



Prelims Study Material

- This programme covers the complete syllabus including - History, Geography, Polity, Economy, Science, Environment and Current Affairs with the correct mix of Fundamental and Advance level of study to cover micro detailing of sub-topics & current developments.
- 45 Concept cum Revision Classes (4-5 Hrs.) for covering basic concepts. In each session there will be a test of 50 questions (based on the topics given in schedule) followed by Class to cover basic aspects of each topic and approach to handle questions.
- The idea behind taking test before classes is that, first students should brainstorm on the given topics through the test to find their strong and weak areas. Then a class on same topics will provide a conceptual clarity that helps to revise the topics twice on the same day.
- 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.
- Current Affairs Classes will also include updates on Indian Year Book (IYB), PIB, Budget and Economic Survey.
- Special Classes on Mapping (World & Indian Geography).
- Prelims Test Series including 20 Mock Test and 8 Current Affairs Tests.
- Complete Prelims Study Material & Prelims Current Affairs Material will also be provided (It will cover Current Affairs of past 2 years).

Office: 1B, 2nd Floor, Pusa Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005 (Adjacent to Karol Bagh Metro Gate No. 8)



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1. CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Context

Parliament passes the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019.

About

- The Bill amends the Citizenship Act, 1955, and seeks to make foreign illegal migrants of certain religious communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan eligible for Indian citizenship.
- The Bill also amends the provisions on registration of Overseas Citizens of India (OCI).
- OCI cardholders are foreigners who are persons of Indian origin. An OCI enjoys benefits such as the right to travel to India without a visa, or to work and study here.
- At present, the government may cancel a person's OCI registration on various grounds specified in the Act.
- In case of a cancellation, an OCI residing in India may be required to leave the country.
- **The Bill adds another ground for cancelling OCI registration — violation of any law notified by the central government.**
- However, the Bill does not provide any guidance on the nature of laws which the central government may notify.

How does the Bill seek to change the criteria for determining citizenship?

- The Bill proposes that the specified class of illegal migrants from the three countries will not be treated as illegal migrants, making them eligible for citizenship.
- On acquiring citizenship, such migrants shall be deemed to be Indian citizens from the date of their entry into India and all legal proceedings regarding their status as illegal migrants or their citizenship will be closed.
- The Act allows a person to apply for citizenship by naturalization, if the person meets certain qualifications.
- One of the qualifications is that the person must have resided in India or been in central government service for the last 12 months and at least 11 years of the preceding 14 years.
- For the specified class of illegal migrants, the number of years of residency has been relaxed from 11 years to five years.

Are the provisions of the Bill applicable across the country?

- The Bill clarifies that the proposed amendments on citizenship to the specified class of illegal migrants will not apply to certain areas.
- These are: (i) **the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, and (ii) the states regulated by the "Inner Line" permit under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations 1873.**

- **These Sixth Schedule tribal areas include Karbi Anglong (in Assam), Garo Hills (in Meghalaya), Chakma District (in Mizoram), and Tripura Tribal Areas District.**
- Further, the Inner Line Permit regulates visit of all persons, including Indian citizens, to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland.

2. GLOBAL DIPLOMACY INDEX 2019

The 2019 Global Diplomacy Index released by the Sydney-based Lowy Institute gives the latest statistics, marking how the world's diplomatic networks are expanding and, in certain cases, shrinking.

About

- The Lowy Institute Global Diplomacy Index visualizes the diplomatic networks of all G20 and OECD nations
- The Index covers 42 nations — the 19 nations that are members of the G20 and the 34 OECD member nations (11 nations are members of both organizations).
- Posts are classified by type: embassy or high commission, consulate-general, consulate, permanent mission or delegation to multilateral organizations, or other representation type, including delegations to countries where there is no formal diplomatic relationship.
- The size of a country's diplomatic network is of course only one indicator of the effectiveness of its diplomacy.
- According to a research over the past six years, around half of the developed nations in the OECD have reduced their diplomatic footprint over the past decade.
- Key highlights of the report
- China now has more diplomatic posts across the world than the US, a marker of its growing international clout and ambition.
- China overtook the US in 2019 with 276 embassies and consulates worldwide, which is three more than the US.
- China's expansion in worldwide diplomatic presence has come partly at the expense of Taiwan, a self-governing democracy.
- The next three spots are occupied by France, Japan, and Russia.
- India is 12th among the 61 countries. India has 123 embassies and high commissions and 54 consulates globally.
- Taiwan saw the biggest drop in diplomatic posts, down from 22 embassies in 2016 to 15 this year.

Nine Tracks of Multi-Track Diplomacy

Track One: Government, Official Diplomacy

Track Two: Nongovernmental/Professional and Peacemaking through Conflict Resolution.

Track Three: Business, or Peacemaking through Commerce

Track Four: Private Citizens or Peacemaking through personal involvement

Track Five: Research, Training, and Education or Peacemaking through learning

Track Six: Activism, or Peacemaking through Advocacy

Track Seven: Religion, or Peacemaking through Faith in Action.

Track Eight: Funding or Peacemaking through Providing Resources

Track Nine: Communication and the Media, or Peacemaking through Information

3. TRANSGENDER PERSONS BILL, 2019

Context

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 was recently introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment. The bill seeks to empower the transgender community by providing them a separate identity.

Key Features

A. Definition of a transgender person

The Bill defines a transgender person as one, who is,

- Neither wholly female nor male; or
- A combination of female and male; or
- Neither female nor male.
- In addition, the person's gender must not match the gender assigned at birth. This will include trans-men, trans-women, persons with intersex variations and gender queers.

B. Certificate of identity for a transgender person

A person recognized as transgender person under the Bill shall have a right to self-perceived gender identity.

- A transgender person has to obtain a Certificate of Identity which will confer rights and be proof of recognition of identity as a transgender person.
- An application for obtaining such a Certificate should be made to the District Magistrate (DM). The DM will refer such an application to a District Screening Committee.
 - ▶ The District Screening Committee will comprise a:
 - ▶ Chief Medical Officer;
 - ▶ District Social Welfare Officer;
 - ▶ Psychologist or psychiatrist;
 - ▶ Representative of the transgender community; and
 - ▶ Government officer
- The DM will issue a Certificate of Identity as 'transgender' based on the recommendation of this Committee.
- The gender of a transgender person will be recorded in all official documents, on the basis of this Certificate.
- If there is any change in gender, the transgender person may apply for a revised certificate by following the same process as that of obtaining a Certificate of Identity.

C. Benefits related to employment, health and education

- The central or state governments shall provide welfare schemes and programmes to facilitate and support livelihood for transgender persons. This will include vocational training and self-employment.
- The central and state governments shall take steps to provide healthcare facilities to transgender persons including:
 - ▶ Separate HIV surveillance centers;
 - ▶ Sex reassignment surgery and hormonal therapy counseling;
 - ▶ Review of medical curriculum; and
 - ▶ A comprehensive insurance scheme.

- Educational institutions shall provide inclusive education and opportunities for sports, recreation and leisure activities to transgender persons.

D. Offences and Penalties

- The Bill specifies the following offences:
 - Compelling transgender persons to beg or do forced or bonded labor (excluding compulsory government service for public purposes);
 - Denial of use of a public place;
 - Denial of residence in household, village or other place of residence; and
 - Physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic abuse.
- These offences will attract imprisonment between six months and two years, and a fine



1. PRESS FREEDOM OF INDIA

Context

Journalists in Kashmir staged a silent demonstration in Srinagar to protest the communication blockade in Kashmir.

About

- After the scrapping of Special Status and re-organisation of Jammu and Kashmir, it is being reported in **certain sections of media that Journalists are facing increased curbs to perform their professional duties.**
- Anuradha Bhasin**, editor of Kashmir Times, local English daily filed a petition in Supreme Court challenging the restrictions on Media in Jammu and Kashmir.
- New Delhi amended Article 370 of the Indian constitution and bifurcated the state into two union territories on August 5. The move stripped J&K of its separate flag and constitution. Fearing reprisals, the authorities imposed strict restrictions and a communication blockade across the Valley. Though restrictions were eased last month, the communication blockade is still in force.

Situation In India

- Facing criticism, the government set up a make-shift media communication centre at a private hotel in Srinagar for journalists.
- The centre has one internet connection and nine terminals where journalists working with international, national and local media houses have to wait in a queue for their turn to send reports and check mails.
- The information department managing the centre has allotted 15 minutes for each journalist to access the internet.
- India has dropped two places on a global press freedom index -2019 to be ranked **140th out of 180** countries brought about by **Reporters Without Borders.**
- The World Press Freedom Index 2019 finds an **increased sense of hostility towards journalists across the world.**
- The violent attacks in India leading to at least six Indian journalists being killed in the line of their work in 2018**
- Violence against journalists including **police violence, attacks by Maoist fighters and reprisals by criminal groups or corrupt politicians** is one of the most striking characteristics of the current state of press freedom in India.
- Indian journalists, especially those working for **non-English-language media outlets in rural areas**, face threats to their lives on daily basis.

Analysis of Reporters Without Border Report

- **South Asia in general features poorly on the index.**
- **Pakistan and Bangladesh rank below India at 142 and 150 respectively.**
- The number of countries regarded as safe, where journalists can work in complete security, continues to decline, while authoritarian regimes continue to tighten their grip on the media, RSF concludes.
- **Norway is ranked first in the 2019 Index** for the third year running **while Finland has taken second place. An increase in cyber-harassment caused Sweden (third) to lose one place.**

2. ARTICLE 35(A)

Context

Union home ministry decided to move in 10,000 additional troops to Kashmir, which has amplified apprehensions on the ground about the removal of the Article 35A and Article 370, the two constitutional provisions that give the state its distinct identity within the Union of India.

About

What is Article 35A?

- It is a Constitutional provision, which strengthened J&K Legislature to decide who all are 'permanent residents' of the State.
- It also confers on them special rights and privileges in public sector jobs, acquisition of property in the State, scholarships and other public aid and welfare.
- Background
- Article 35A was incorporated through a Presidential Order, the Constitution (Application to J&K) Order of 1954. Therefore, it was added without undergoing the procedure for constitutional amendments as laid down in Article 368.
- The Presidential Order was issued in exercise of the power conferred under Article 370 (1) (d) of the Constitution. Whether such power also extends to inserting a new Article in the Constitution is contentious.
- The 'classification' created by this article has to be tested on the principle of equality as it treats non-permanent residents of J&K as 'second-class'
- Such persons are not eligible for employment under the State government and are also debarred from contesting elections.

Arguments in support of 35A

- **Maintains unity of J&K:** This article safeguards the uniqueness of the J&K. Even other states like **Himachal Pradesh** and **Uttarakhand** also have the laws in which no outsider from the state can buy a land.
- **Striking down Article 35A:** It will have various consequences on other constitutional amendments contained in the 1954 Presidential Order. And this can erode the autonomy of J&K.
- **Demography of J&K:** Scrapping Article 35A would allow people from outside J&K to settle in the state and acquire land and property, and the right to vote, thus altering the demography of the state.
- **Other Presidential Orders:** If the article 35A is scrapped, other Presidential orders may then become susceptible to legal challenges.
- **Federalism:** Scrapping Article 35A would violate Article 370 as well as the instrument of accession. The Indian constitution purposefully mandates differential treatments for different units of the Indian Union.
- **North-Eastern states:** The removal of Article 35A would also indirectly impact the special provision bestowed upon Mizoram, Nagaland etc. under Article 371.

Issues Related to Article 35A

- Bypasses Article 368: The parliamentary route of law-making was bypassed under the Article 368 (i) when the President incorporated Article 35A into the Constitution. This article empowers only Parliament to amend the Constitution.
- Against Unity: Article 35 A is against the “very spirit of oneness of India” as it creates a “class within a class of Indian citizens”. As this article restricts citizens from other States from getting employment or buying property within Jammu and Kashmir is a violation of fundamental rights under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution.
- Right to Unity: Article 35A protects certain provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution, which restrict the basic right to property if a native woman marries a man not holding a permanent resident certificate. Her children are denied a permanent resident certificate, thereby considering them illegitimate.
- Deny of opportunity: Meritorious students are denied scholarships and they cannot even seek redress in any court of law.
- Rights of Pakistani Refugees: This article undermines the rights of West Pakistan refugees. Persons who migrated from Pakistan to India in 1947 have been denied the permanent resident status of J&K.
- Promotes Separatism: This article has catalysed in radicalization and ghettoization and aids separatist ideology.
- Human Rights: It grossly undermines the well-being of Pakistani Refugees and Indian Citizens outside of the state. It also undermines their faith in the goodness of India as well as its impartial judicial system.
- Hampers Growth: Article 35A also adversely affects the economic development of the state.

Way Ahead

- This matter requires the active participation of all stakeholders. It is necessary to give confidence to the residents of J&K that any alteration in status quo will not take away their rights but will boost J&K's prosperity as it will open doors for more investment, resulting in new opportunities.
- Political parties should refrain from inflaming popular passions on these sensitive issues.
- There is a need to adopt a humane approach as far as solving the problems of permanent residence certificate faced by West Pakistan refugees.

3. ARTICLE 370

Context

The government has informed Parliament that “no foreign government or organisation has any locus standi” in repealing Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as matters relating to the Constitution of India are internal and only for the Indian Parliament to deal with.

About

Article 370

- According to the Constitution of India, Article 370 provides temporary provisions to the J&K, granting it special autonomy. The article says that the provisions of Article 238, which was omitted from the Constitution in 1956 when Indian states were reorganized, shall not apply to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- When India became independent, the state of J&K was not part of its territory. Following a tribal invasion by (North-West Frontier Province) NWFP raiders on October 22, 1947, Maharaja of J&K Hari Singh asked for troops from India to assist.

- In turn of getting assistance from India, the instrument of accession was signed. However, it was limited to Defence, External Affairs, Communications and some other issues, with respect to which the Indian legislature could make laws for J&K.

Salient features

- Parliament has very limited jurisdiction in case of J&K. Residuary powers rest with J&K. The Parliament has no power to legislate Preventive Detention laws for the state; only the state legislature has the power to do so.
- Centre has no power to declare financial emergency under Article 360 in J&K. It can declare emergency in the state only in case of war or external aggression. The Union government can therefore not declare emergency on grounds of internal disturbance or imminent danger unless it is made at the request or with the concurrence of the state government.
- Part IV (dealing with Directive Principles of the State Policy) and Part IVA (dealing with Fundamental Duties) of the Constitution are not applicable to J&K. In addition to other fundamental rights, Articles 19(1)(f) and 31(2) of the Constitution are still applicable to J&K; i.e., the Fundamental Right to property is still guaranteed in this state.
- The High Court of J&K has limited powers as it can't declare any law unconstitutional. Under Article 226 of the Constitution, it can't issue writs except for enforcement of Fundamental Rights.
- Urdu is the official language of the state
- Certain special rights have been granted to the permanent residents of J&K with regard to employment under the state, acquisition of immovable property in the state, settlement in the state, and scholarship and other forms of aid as the state government may provide.
- J&K citizens have an implicit dual citizenship, I.e., though there is no specific provision of dual citizen, there are certain rights that only an original resident of Kashmir enjoy. Even the voters' lists for State elections and for Parliament elections are not common.

Consequences of Article 370

- It bars the people from outside the state to buy immovable and movable property here, set any industry or manufacturing unit, while no other state bars any state subject of J&K to invest there, acquire land or set business establishment.
- It act as obstacle in attracting the flow of investment from big business houses which are running mega projects and giving employment to thousands of educated youth according to their academic, professional, skilled, and non-skilled capabilities.
- Due to this lack of job avenues to the educated unemployed youth of state is forcing them to move out to other states for finding suitable source of bread earning. If this silent migration of youth continues, it will convert the state into a land of old and aged people in next 15-20 years, which is indeed a very serious matter and need to be taken note of by the government.
- Unemployment in J&K has promoted militancy. A poor youth after completing education with limited resources, after sitting idle for long, gets easily lured by the people who push them into anti-national activities by giving few thousands of rupees.
- It is a source of gender bias in disqualifying women from the State of property rights.
- It was and is about providing space, in matters of governance, to the people of a State who felt deeply vulnerable about their identity and insecure about the future. It was about empowering people, making people feel that they belong, and about increasing the accountability of public institutions and services.
- It is synonymous with decentralization and devolution of power, phrases that have been on the charter of virtually every political party in India.



1. ASTANA DECLARATION: NOT JUST HEALTH, BUT AFFORDABLE HEALTH FOR ALL

Context

In an event that marked 40 years of the historic Alma Ata Declaration, which declared health a human right for all, all the 192 member countries of the United Nations, including India, signed the Astana Declaration.

About

- Aim: This declaration is meant to take the earlier agreement forward, strengthen the primary healthcare (PHC) systems and realise the idea of universal healthcare (UHC).

Key takeaways from the declaration:

- The declaration touches upon the crucial aspect that PHC should not function in vacuum and there has to be cohesion between all tiers of healthcare so that the services given to patients are not limited.
- The declaration also takes into cognizance the growing threat of lifestyle and non-communicable diseases.
- The declaration asks all member states to make “bold political choices” for health across sectors.
- It also seeks a multi-sectoral action that includes technology, scientific and traditional knowledge, along with well-trained and compensated health professionals, and people and community participation is needed to strengthen primary health care and provide quality “health for all”.

Need for this declaration

- **Health not available to all:** Forty years on, almost half the world’s population lacks access to essential health services, and 100 million people are pushed into poverty because of catastrophic health expenditure each year. Primary health care can provide 80-90% of a person’s healthcare needs in their lifetime.
- **Growing cost of healthcare machinery:** While the Alma Ata declaration talked about availability of healthcare for one and all, the Astana declaration goes a step ahead and expresses concern about growing cost of healthcare machinery.
- **Lack of commitment to prevent disease:** We have been too focused on fighting specific disease, too focussed on treatment at the expense of preventing diseases. We must recommit to making primary health care as the foundation of universal healthcare.
- Although, the world is a healthier place for children today than ever before, close to 6 million children die every year before their fifth birthday mostly from preventable causes, and more than 150 million are stunted.

2. MAPPING OF CHILD CARE INSTITUTIONS REPORT

Context

Ministry of Women and Child Development has released full report of the pan-India survey titled 'Mapping and Review Exercise of Child Care Institutions' conducted between December 2015 and March 2017.

The survey was conducted by Childline India Foundation and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

About

- The report highlights the poor safety and security measures, inadequate monitoring and a lack of effort to trace parents of missing children sent to these homes as major lacunas of the existing shelter homes.
- The detailed report shows that only 46.7% of the total homes had adequate number of caregivers per child
- Only 28.7% centres were able to tend to inmates showing signs of hunger or illness and 65.9% of homes were able to actively supervise children under trauma.
- The report also says that the lack of infrastructure facilities is "glaring" and finds that more than 1,000 homes did not have a dormitory for children, raising questions about sleeping arrangements made for them.
- Only 19.3% of CCIs made an effort to trace the biological parents of a rescued child. Similarly, a mere 18.32% of the homes made an effort to file an FIR in case of missing children reported to it.
- Only 37.21% centres maintained records of a child being reunited with his or her family, such as a letter from a parent or a guardian with an identity proof.
- Children of single parents constituted a third of the total number of total children in homes, accounting for 1,20,118 children. This number is largest than any of the categories including orphaned or those surrendered by their parents.
- According to the report many child care institutions (CCIs) recorded a poor rate of producing a child before the CWC, ranging from no such cases in Manipur through 17% in Kerala, 32 % in Uttar Pradesh to 48% in Sikkim and 50% in Uttarakhand.

3. DAMAN INITIATIVE

Context

Odisha has emerged as an inspiration in the global fight against malaria, through its DAMaN initiative.

About

DAMaN Initiative

- In recent years, Odisha has dramatically scaled-up efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat malaria through its Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative, which has produced impressive results in a short span of time.
- DAMaN aims to deliver services to the most inaccessible and hardest hit people of the State. The initiative has in-built innovative strategies to combat asymptomatic malaria. It has been accorded priority in the State's health agenda.
- In 2017, accredited social health activists (ASHAs) helped distribute approximately 11 million bed nets, which was enough to protect all the residents in areas that were at highest risk. This included

residential hostels in schools. As a result of its sustained efforts, Odisha recorded 80% decline in malaria cases and deaths in 2017.

- There is financial commitment for a five-year period to sustain and build on the impact created by the initiative.

Malaria Prevention in India

- The WHO's World Malaria Report of 2018 highlighted India's recent strides against malaria.
- India is the only country among the 11 highest-burden countries that saw substantial progress in reducing disease burden: it saw a 24% decrease in 2017 compared to 2016. This shows that India has assumed a leadership role in advancing global efforts to end malaria.
- The country's success provides hope to the other highest-burden countries to tackle malaria head-on.
- India's progress in fighting malaria is an outcome of concerted efforts to ensure that its malaria programme is country-owned and country-led, even as it is in alignment with globally accepted strategies.
- The turning point in India's fight against malaria came at the East Asia Summit in 2015, when it pledged to eliminate the disease by 2030.
- Following this public declaration, India launched the five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination.
- This marked a shift in focus from malaria "control" to "elimination". The plan provides a roadmap to achieve the target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.



1. SEMI-PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM

Context

Political crisis in Sri Lanka and all about Semi-presidential system

About

- A semi-presidential system is republican system of governance that combines elements of presidential democracy with parliamentary democracy.
- Typically, the head of state is the president, directly elected by the people with a large degree of power over the government, whilst the head of government is the prime minister nominated by the president but who can be dismissed by the legislature.
- An agreement is reached over which of the two heads (state and government) will have the lead in policy areas.
- For example, in France, a well-known example of semi presidential democracy, the president leads foreign policy and the prime minister leads domestic policy.
- Semi-presidential systems may sometimes experience periods in which the president and the prime minister are from differing political parties. This is called “cohabitation”, a term which originated in France.
- Cohabitation can create an effective system of checks and balances or a period of bitter and tense stonewalling, depending on the attitudes of the two leaders, the ideologies of themselves or their parties, or the demands of their constituencies.

Advantages

- Providing cover for the president, it can shield the president from criticism and the unpopular policies can be blamed on the prime minister as the latter runs the day-to-day operations of the government and carrying out the national policy set forth by the president, who is the head of state that is focusing on being the national leader of a state and in arbitrating the efficiency of government authorities, etc.
- Ability to remove an unpopular prime minister and maintain stability from the president’s fixed term the parliament has power to remove an unpopular prime minister.
- Additional checks and balances, while the president can dismiss the prime minister in many semi-presidential systems, in most of the semi-presidential systems important segments of bureaucracy are taken away from the president.

Disadvantages

- Confusion about accountability, parliamentary systems give voters a relatively clear sense of who is responsible for policy successes and failures; presidential systems make this more difficult, particularly when there is divided government. Semi-presidential systems add another layer of complexity for voters;
- Confusion and inefficiency in legislative process, the capacity of votes of confidence makes the prime minister responsible to the parliament.

2. E-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES FOR ST WELFARE SCHEMES

Context

Tribal affairs ministry launches e-governance website DBT Tribal to track and fulfill welfare schemes.

About

- Ministry of Tribal Affairs has developed online portals namely DBT Tribal and NGO Grants Online Application & Tracking System for bringing in e-Governance in implementation of welfare schemes for Scheduled Tribes (STs) with greater efficiency and transparency.

DBT Tribal portal

- There are 3 main modules for Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship. Data sharing module is mainly meant for sharing beneficiary-data by States.
- In Communication module, the States have facility to upload documents, raise query and DBT data uploaded by States is used for faster release of funds. Monitoring module has facility of MIS reports & Dashboards.
- Ministry has further developed module for verification of students by Universities and Colleges under Fellowship scheme and Grievance Module for all stake holders including beneficiary students in 3 Central Sector schemes and Institutions.

NGO portal

- It has been developed for implementing scheme of Aid to Voluntary Organizations working for the welfare of STs, has been fully revamped & redesigned with simplified Application form, Inspection Report and Fund Processing module.
- The system has been automated and the NGOs simply need to follow specified steps to access grants.
- Other features include online grievance redressal, and it is integrated with NFS (National Fellowship), NOS (National Overseas Scholarship) and NSP (National Scholarship Portal).

Why were these initiatives launched?

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has been facing multiple challenges in its functioning. There is no established mechanism for collecting data from the States or collating it.
- By this initiative, states would provide data in different formats and different mechanisms ranging from printouts to various digital formats, making collation cumbersome and prone to errors and even manipulation.
- This order has helped tribal students to get their own bank accounts. DBT Tribal is expected to address these anomalies.
- The portal is also expected to help States share beneficiary data with the tribal affairs ministry through web services. It will send SMS/email notifications to institutions and States as well as the beneficiaries. The portal also has a provision for the states and the nodal department to upload utilization certificates (of subsidies and other grants) and issue sanctioning orders.

3. THE MAINTENANCE AND WELFARE OF PARENTS AND SENIOR CITIZENS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

Context

The Union Cabinet has approved The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

About

- It seeks to amend The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Bill, 2007.
- **The proposed 'Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Amendment Bill' has the following major salient features:**
 - Definition of "children" and 'parents' has been expanded.
 - Definition of 'maintenance' and 'welfare' has been expanded.
 - Mode of submission of application for maintenance has been enlarged.
 - Ceiling of Rs.10, 000/- as maintenance amount has been removed.
 - Preference to dispose of applications of senior citizens, above eighty years of age, early has been included.
 - Registration of Senior Citizens Care Homes/Homecare Service Agencies etc. have been included.
 - A minimum standard for senior citizen care homes has been included in the Bill.
 - Appointment of Nodal Police Officers for Senior Citizens in every Police Station and District level Special Police Unit for Senior Citizens has been included.
 - Maintenance of Helpline for senior citizens has been included.



1. PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS

Context

Recently, vice-president of India stresses need for parliamentary reforms.

About

- A parliamentary system is a form of democratic governance where the executive derives its legitimacy from its ability to command the confidence of the legislature, typically a parliament, and is also held accountable to that parliament. India has adopted parliamentary democracy.
- There are flaws in the structure as well working of the parliamentary system as we witnessed them since 1947.
- There are flaws in the first past the post system as many candidates win with less than 50 per cent voter support base but there is no better alternative. Similarly, the presidential system of government is not suited to India.
- The debate of replacing parliamentary system with the presidential system has been old and the Swaran Singh committee in 1975 did not permit it.
- There is a need for reorientation on the part of MPs and more so a pressing need for parliamentary reforms to restore the trust of the people in parliamentary institutions.

Why need of Parliamentary Reforms?

The problems in the parliamentary system include

- the declining number of sittings of legislatures,
- persistent disruptions,
- declining quality of debates,
- growing number of legislatures with criminal records,
- high degree of absenteeism,
- inadequate representation of women,
- increase in money and muscle power in elections,
- lack of inner democracy in functioning of the political parties among others.

Naidu's 16-Point Agenda for Parliamentary Reform

Naidu laid out 16-point agenda as the way forward for parliamentary reforms, which includes

- to review anti-defection law to address "grey areas" that led to the expulsion of legislators
- a review of the "Whip System which was stifling reasonable dissent within parties even over non-consequential matters".
- to fix longer tenures for Standing Committees to ensure their effective functioning
- to improve the representation of women,

- stronger rules with regard to attendance,
- regular reports on the performance of legislators,
- the need to make effective interventions with regard to criminality and unethical conduct among legislators,
- the need for simultaneous elections
- the government needs to be responsive to the views and concerns of Opposition while among other interventions.

2. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MPS AND MLAS

Context

Panel to frame code of conduct for MLAs, MPs in 2 months .

About

- Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has formed a committee of Speakers of state legislative bodies to frame a code of conduct over the next two months.
- Lawmakers will soon have to adhere to a code of conduct inside legislatures and Parliament.
- Code of conduct for legislators and parliamentarians is needed that would help in running our Houses more efficiently.
- The code of conduct should include stipulations that the members would not enter the well of the house, nor resort to sloganeering and disruptions or any other unruly behavior such as tearing papers and throwing them in the House.
- A democracy is not a democracy without the voice of opposition. But at the same time sloganeering and entering the well is not an expression of opposition. It is important to maintain decorum in the House.
- A need is felt to improve use of technology and overall efficiency in our legislatures.
- Germany, USA, UK, Canada, Pakistan has a Code of Conduct for members of the Senate.

Key recommendations:

- Prohibiting MPs from misusing the power and immunities they get.
- MP should avoid conflict between a private and a public interest.
- No parliamentarian should be allowed to vote on those questions in the House, in which he has a vested interest.
- Amend the Constitution to ensure a minimum of 110 days of sitting in a legislature having more than 100 members, and 90-50 days of sitting in Houses with less than 100 members depending on the size of the State involved.
- The filing by legislators of a statement of income, assets and liabilities, and an indication of changes in these figures over time.
- Punishment of members by admonition, reprimand, censure or withdrawal from the House in case of violations or breach of the code of conduct.
- Automatic suspension from the House of any member involved in offences of grave misconduct.

3. CABINET SECRETARIAT

Context

The government had appointed outgoing Home Secretary Rajiv Gauba as Cabinet Secretary for tenure of two years.

About

Cabinet Secretariat

- Article 352 defines the term “cabinet” as the Council consisting of the Prime Minister and other Ministers of Cabinet rank under Article 75.
- Cabinet Secretariat is the office which provides secretarial assistance to the Cabinet.
- It functions directly under the Prime Minister.
- The administrative head of the Secretariat is the Cabinet Secretary who is also the ex-officio Chairman of the Civil Services Board.
- The Cabinet Secretariat is responsible for the administration of:
 - The Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961
 - Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961
- Office of Principal Scientific Adviser has been placed administratively under the Cabinet Secretariat in August, 2018.
- **Appointment** – All senior level appointments (including Cabinet Secretary) are done with the approval of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet.
- **Tenure** - While the position is for two years, under the present rules of service, there is an enabling provision of an extension, granting four years of tenure.



1. SIXTH SCHEDULE OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Context

The Union Cabinet approved a constitutional amendment to increase the powers of the autonomous councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the Northeast and plans to introduce the bill in the upcoming budget session.

The Finance Commission will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them.

What it means?

- The cabinet approves landmark amendment to Article 280 and Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. **The amendments will significantly improve the financial resources and powers of the autonomous districts councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.**
- The move would mean that close to 1 crore people in 10 autonomous district councils would have more access to funds for local development.

Who will benefit from the move?

Three districts in Assam-Karbi Anglong, North Kachar Hills Autonomous District Council, Bodo Autonomous District Council, three in Meghalaya; Khasi, Garo and Jaintia Hills, three in Mizoram; Lai, Chakma and Mara, and one in Tripura-Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council will benefit from the move.

2. DATA PROTECTION BILL, 2019

Context

The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 has been introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad, on December 11, 2019.

The Bill seeks to provide for protection of personal data of individuals, and establishes a Data Protection Authority for the same.

About the Bill

- The Personal Data Protection bill, drafted by a panel headed by a former Supreme Court judge and submitted to the government last year, is key for how firms including global tech giants Amazon, Facebook, Alphabet's Google and others process, store and transfer Indian consumers' data.
- Broad guidelines on collection, storage and processing of personal data, consent of individuals, penalties and compensation, code of conduct and an enforcement model is likely to be a part of the law.
- Personal data is data which pertains to characteristics, traits or attributes of identity, which can be used to identify an individual.

- The Bill categorises certain personal data as sensitive personal data. This includes financial data, biometric data, caste, religious or political beliefs, or any other category of data specified by the government, in consultation with the Authority and the concerned sectoral regulator.

Applicability

The Bill governs the processing of personal data by:

- government,
- companies incorporated in India, and
- foreign companies dealing with personal data of individuals in India

About the Rights of the individual

The Bill sets out certain rights of the individual (or data principal). These include the right to:

- obtain confirmation from the fiduciary on whether their personal data has been processed,
- seek correction of inaccurate, incomplete, or out-of-date personal data,
- have personal data transferred to any other data fiduciary in certain circumstances, and
- restrict continuing disclosure of their personal data by a fiduciary, if it is no longer necessary or consent is withdrawn.

Why companies are worried?

- The proposed law may have a considerable impact on MNCs operating in India, whether with or without a physical presence, due to its data localisation requirements and cross-border data transfer restrictions.
- The Reserve Bank of India had, in April last year, issued a data localisation directive, mandating all authorised payment system operators and banks to store payment systems data only in India.
- This led to various ambiguities in the requirements as well as industry pushback on the strict requirements imposed, especially by global payment companies.

Grounds for processing personal data-

- The Bill allows processing of data by fiduciaries only if consent is provided by the individual. However, in certain circumstances, personal data can be processed without consent.
- These include: (i) if required by the State for providing benefits to the individual, (ii) legal proceedings, (iii) to respond to a medical emergency.

Conclusion

- The Bill amends the Information Technology Act, 2000 to delete the provisions related to compensation payable by companies for failure to protect personal data. The central government may direct data fiduciaries to provide it with any: (i) non-personal data and (ii) anonymised personal data (where it is not possible to identify data principal) for better targeting of services.

3. ANGLO-INDIANS - NOMINATION QUOTA AND HISTORY

Context

Recently, Parliament passed the Constitution (126th Amendment) Bill, extending reservation for SC/STs but doing away with the provision for nomination of Anglo Indians to Lok Sabha and some state Assemblies.

About

- Article 331 of the Constitution Provides for nomination of two Anglo-Indians to Lok Sabha. It says: "Notwithstanding anything in Article 81, the President may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian

community is not adequately represented in the House of the people, nominate not more than two members of that community to the House of the People.” The 126th Amendment does away with this.

- The idea of such nominations is traced to Frank Anthony, who headed the All India Anglo-Indian Association. Article 331 was added in the Constitution following his suggestion to Jawaharlal Nehru.
- Article 333 deals with representation of the Anglo-Indian community in Legislative Assemblies. It says: “Notwithstanding anything in Article 170, the Governor of a State may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community needs representation in the Legislative Assembly of the State and is not adequately represented therein, [nominate one member of that community to the Assembly].”
- Currently 14 Assemblies have one Anglo-Indian member each: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. The 126th Amendment does away with this as well.
- According to the 10th Schedule of the Constitution, Anglo-Indian members of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies can take the membership of any party within six months of their nomination. But, once they do so, they are bound by their party whip. The Anglo-Indian members enjoy the same powers as others, but they cannot vote in the Presidential election because they are nominated by the President.

Who are Anglo-Indians?

- The Anglo-Indian community in India traces its origins to an official policy of the British East India Company to encourage marriages of its officers with local women.
- The term Anglo-Indian first appeared in the Government of India Act, 1935.
- In the present context, Article 366(2) of the Constitution Of India states: “An Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only...”
- According to 2011 Census there are only 296 people who identified themselves as belonging to the sect Anglo Indian. However, All India Anglo Indian Association contested the data and asserts that there are many more Anglo-Indians in the country.

Conclusion

- The All India Anglo-Indian Association has contested the population figures given by 2011 census.
- 296 number is very low and how come there can be nominated members in Assemblies when the census shows no Anglo-Indians in those states.
- There is urgent need to relook into the issue and find out the actual population of the community.
- There was no need to end the nomination to the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies of Anglo Indians if they were not fairly represented.



1. INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Context

Recently, Indian Delegation Attacks Pakistan for Raising Kashmir Issue at Inter-Parliamentary Union

About

- IPU had its 141 Assembly in October 2019 in Serbia.
- IPU is global inter-parliamentary institution.
- It was established in 1889 and was the first permanent forum for political multilateral negotiations.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Its initial objective was arbitration of conflicts.
- It played important role in setting up Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague.
- Over time, its mission has evolved towards promotion of democracy and inter-parliamentary dialogue.
- It has worked for establishment of institutions at inter-governmental level, including UN.
- Initially, IPU was for individual parliamentarians, but has since transformed into international organization of parliaments of sovereign states.
- The national parliaments of 178 countries are its members and 12 regional parliamentary assemblies are its associate members.
- The IPU has permanent observer status at UNGA.
- **Slogan of IPU is "For democracy. For everyone."**

Structure of IPU

IPU has a four-fold structure:

- Assembly (political organ),
- the Governing Council (governing organ),
- the Executive Committee
- the Secretariat (separated tasks, management organ and executive organ),
- The IPU President (political head of the organization and ex officio President of the Governing Council).

Significance

- The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the world organization of Parliaments. It is the "focal point for worldwide parliamentary dialogue" and works "for peace and co-operation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative institutions".
- Between the two World Wars, the IPU intensified its work in the field of peaceful settlement of international disputes, the reduction of armaments and international security, and the development

of the rules of warfare, but also dealt with support for the League of Nations, the further codification and development of international law, the promotion and improvement of the representative system, the protection of national minorities, colonial problems, economic questions, social and humanitarian policy, and intellectual relations.

2. ATAL BEEMIT VYAKTI KALYAN YOJANA

Context

The total number of Insured Persons covered under Employees' State Insurance (ESI) scheme is 3.49 crores. All Insured Persons (IPs) fulfilling the contributory and other conditions under Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana are eligible for availing relief under this scheme.

About

- Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana is a welfare measure being implemented by the Employee's State Insurance (ESI) Corporation.
- It offers cash compensation to insured persons when they are rendered unemployed.
- The scheme is implemented on pilot basis for a period of two years initially.

Benefits

- The scheme provides relief to the extent of 25% of the average per day earning during the previous four contribution periods to be paid up to maximum 90 days of unemployment once in lifetime of the Insured Person.
- The maximum duration, for which an IP shall be eligible to draw the Relief under the Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana (ABVKY), will be 90 days once in life time after a minimum of two years of Insurable Employment.
- The claim for relief under the Atal Beemit Kalyaan Yojana will be payable after the three months of his/her clear unemployment.
- The relief will be paid for clear month of unemployment.
- No prospective claim will be allowed.
- In case the beneficiary gets gainful employment in between the three months of unemployment for which he was eligible for relief under ABVKY, the relief will be payable for clear month of unemployment between the date of unemployment and date of re-employment.

Eligibility

- Employees covered under Section 2(9) of the ESI Act 1948.
- The Insured Person (IP) should have been rendered unemployed during the period the relief is claimed.
- The Insured Person should have been in insurable employment for a minimum period of two years.
- The Insured Person should have contributed not less than 78 days during each of the preceding four contribution periods.
- The contribution in respect of him should have been paid or payable by the employer.
- The contingency of the unemployment should not have been as a result of any punishment for misconduct or superannuation or voluntary retirement.
- Aadhar and Bank Account of the Insured Person should be linked with insured person database.

Disqualification/Termination of relief under ABVKY

- During lock out.
- Strike resorted to by the employees declared illegal by the competent authority.

- Voluntary abandonment of employment/ voluntary retirement/ premature retirement.
- Less than two years contributory service.
- On attaining the age of superannuation.
- Convicted under the provisions of Section 84 of the ESI Act read with Rule 62 of the ESI (Central) Rule
- On being re-employed elsewhere during the period he/she is in receipt of Relief under ABVKY.
- Dismissal/termination under disciplinary action.
- On death of IP.

3. LADAKH As A Union Territory

Context

Ladakh has been made a Union Territory along with the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution of India.

About

- Ladakh is a mountaneous region which is sandwiched between Karakoram Range in North and Himalyan Range in the South.
- It is composed of two districts:
- **Leh** – It is the 2nd largest district of India and it covers more than half of the area of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Kargil** – It lies near Line of Control. Zaskar Range is a part of Kargil.

Analysis

Negative Implications

- Due to the expected change in demography and commercialisation of the region. Its unique ecological and cultural value may get affected
- Since the region is prone to international disturbances from China and Pakistan, a large portion of pasture land will be occupied by military personnel. This will affect the farmer community
- There is no evidence that coming under direct control of the central government would certainly lead to greater development of the region. For instance, the level of development in Andaman and Nicobar is not very impressive.
- The autonomy of Ladakh's Autonomous Hill Development Council which was already on a decline will further reduce.

Positive Impact

- Currently, there is no medical college, engineering college or a management institution anywhere in Ladakh. Now, new start-ups, businesses and the government will create new infrastructure and boost development along with the creation of new jobs.
- The people of Ladakh will be brought to the mainstream Indian society.
- The increased tourism will bring significant revenue, which could be used to create additional social infrastructure.



1. ONE NATION ONE FASTAG

Context

Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari inaugurated the “One Nation One FASTag” scheme at the Indian Mobile Congress in New Delhi.

The plan aims to integrate the collection of toll digitally and ensure seamless mobility of vehicles across India.

About

- FASTags are stickers that are affixed to the windscreen of vehicles and use RFID technology to enable digital, contactless payment of tolls without having to stop at toll gates.
- The tags are linked to bank accounts and other payment methods.
- As a car crosses a toll plaza, the amount is automatically deducted, and a notification is sent to the registered mobile phone number.
- Sensors are placed on toll barriers, and the barriers open for vehicles having valid FASTags.
- A FASTag is valid for five years and needs to be recharged only as per requirement.
- According to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), these devices will make passing through tolls considerably smoother since drivers will no longer have to carry cash or stop to make a transaction.

Advantages

- FASTag enables one to drive through toll squares nonstop.
- There would be no need to stop for cash transaction.
- By employing Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, it makes toll fares payment possible directly from the prepaid accounts linked to it.
- Long queues of vehicles waiting and honking while cumbersome cash exchanges occurring at the counter can be avoided.
- It also helps in reducing fuel wastage and emanating pollution due to long waiting times at the toll plazas.
- A successful implementation of Electronic Toll Collection system on all the major national highways would help save approximately 87,000 crore INR annually.
- Various options like debit card, credit card, NEFT/ RTGS, and even net banking are available for recharging FASTag online.

Challenges

- **FasTag charge is high for multi-axle vehicles** – Multi-axle vehicle owners are hesitant to opt for FasTag as the toll charges for such vehicles are quite high. A truck requires more than Rs. 2,000 for 10

trips while a car can make 10 trips at a much lower value. This gives people the ideas for deploying car tags in trucks.

- **FasTag may not be approved** – When there is no amount in the account, no credit is given to the users. Then the user has to pay in cash. Moreover, at times, the RFID scanner goes through technical issues, leaving a FasTag user in a fix to pay the toll amount in cash.
- **FasTag can be stolen or lost** – Since the FasTag comes in a tag form, it can easily be stolen or lost. In such a situation, one should never forget to request the agency to block the FasTag account instantly and process re-issuance.
- **FasTag can be wrongly charged** – Due to technical flaws, at times, a FasTag user may be wrongly charged. And, the user is only left with the option to report the matter as soon as he/she comes to know about it and asking for reimbursement.
- **FasTag may face malfunction or damage** – A user can report about the same and ask for a replacement.
- **FasTag faces the issue of discipline at all most every toll plaza** – Vehicles without the FasTags enter the designated lane while the ones with FasTags wait for their turn, behind these vehicles.
- **Same lane for electronic toll collection (ETC) and very important person (VIP)** – There should be a dedicated ETC lane at every toll plaza. Not having a dedicated ETC lane means the purpose of FasTag fails as it causes a delay in the journey of FasTag users.

2. INTERNATIONAL VISION ZERO CONFERENCE

Context

‘International Vision Zero Conference’ to promote occupational safety and health is being held in Mumbai.

About

- The conference provides a forum for promoting safety and health at work and resolve issues in the manufacturing, construction, mining and transportation sector by exchanging knowledge, practices and experience.
- The Conference has been organized by Directorate General Factory Advice and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI), Ministry of Labour and Employment, German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV), Germany in association with Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay and International Social Security Association – Manufacturing, Construction and Mining.
- The concept of Vision Zero is based on four fundamental principles:
 - ▶ life is non-negotiable,
 - ▶ humans are fallible,
 - ▶ tolerable limits are defined by human physical resistance, and
 - ▶ people are entitled to safe transport and safe workplaces.
- The Vision is based on principles of controlling risks, ensuring safety and health in machines, equipment and workplaces and skill upgradation of workforce.

Significance

- The concept of ‘Vision Zero’ is fast gaining international acceptance and is expected to leverage the efforts of the Government of India to raise the occupational safety and health standards in the country.
- The participants from various sectors across a wide variety of industries will benefit by the common platform provided by the conference through sharing of best practices both nationally and internationally. Also the international community will get an appraisal of the occupational safety and health status in India thereby exposing the Indian industrial occupational safety and health scenario to the international community.

- “Vision Zero” is a transformational approach to prevention that integrates the three dimensions of safety, health and well-being at all levels of work. Safe and healthy working conditions are not only a legal and moral obligation – they also pay off economically. International research on the return on investments in prevention proves that every dollar invested in safety and health generates a potential benefit of more than two dollars in positive economic effects. Healthy working conditions contribute to healthy business.

3. NATIONAL SUPER COMPUTING MISSION

Context

After a delay of more than three years, India, awarded French technology firm Atos a 4,500-crore contract to build 70 supercomputers under the National Supercomputing Mission.

About

- The Mission envisages empowering our national academic and R&D institutions spread over the country by installing a vast supercomputing grid comprising of more than 70 high-performance computing facilities.
- These supercomputers will also be networked on the National Supercomputing grid over the National Knowledge Network (NKN). The NKN is another programme of the government which connects academic institutions and R&D labs over a high speed network. Academic and R&D institutions as well as key user departments/ministries would participate by using these facilities and develop applications of national relevance.
- The Mission also includes development of highly professional High Performance Computing (HPC) aware human resource for meeting challenges of development of these applications.

Objective:

- To make India one of the world leaders in Supercomputing and to enhance India’s capability in solving grand challenge problems of national and global relevance
- To empower our scientists and researchers with state-of-the-art supercomputing facilities and enable them to carry out cutting-edge research in their respective domains
- To minimize redundancies and duplication of efforts, and optimize investments in supercomputing
- To attain global competitiveness and ensure self-reliance in the strategic area of supercomputing technology

Implementing agencies

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



1. JURISDICTION OF HIGH COURT

Context

Bureaucrat-turned-politician Shah Faesal contended that the Delhi High Court has the territorial jurisdiction to hear his habeas corpus plea as he was detained at the IGI Airport and was forcibly taken to Srinagar.

About

Habeas Corpus

- A writ of habeas corpus (which literally means to “produce the body”) is a court order demanding that a public official (such as a warden) deliver an imprisoned individual to the court and show a valid reason for that person’s detention.
- The procedure provides a means for prison inmates, or others acting on their behalf, to dispute the legal basis for confinement.
- The court then examines the cause and legality of detention.
- It would set the detained person free, if the detention is found to be illegal. Thus, this writ is a bulwark of individual liberty against arbitrary detention.
- The writ of habeas corpus can be issued against both public authorities as well as private individuals.
- The writ, on the other hand, is not issued where the
 - ▶ detention is lawful
 - ▶ the proceeding is for contempt of a legislature or a court
 - ▶ detention is by a competent court
 - ▶ **detention is outside the jurisdiction of the court.**

Jurisdiction of High Court

- The High Court is the highest court of appeal in the state. It is the protector of the Fundamental Rights of the citizens. It is vested with the power to interpret the Constitution. Besides, it has supervisory and consultative roles.
- However, the Constitution does not contain detailed provisions with regard to the jurisdiction and powers of a high court.

Writ Jurisdiction of High Court

- Article 226 of the Constitution empowers a high court to issue writs including habeas corpus, mandamus, certiorari, prohibition and quo warranto for the enforcement of the fundamental rights of the citizens and for any other purpose.
- The phrase ‘for any other purpose’ refers to the enforcement of an ordinary legal right.

- The high court can issue writs to any person, authority and government not only within its territorial jurisdiction but also outside its territorial jurisdiction if the cause of action arises within its territorial jurisdiction (15th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1963).
- In the Chandra Kumar case (1997), the Supreme Court ruled that the writ jurisdiction of both the high court and the Supreme Court constitute a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Hence, it cannot be ousted or excluded even by way of an amendment to the Constitution.
- In Shah Faesal's Case, his case is justified because cause of action was happened in Delhi and then he was taken to outside the territory of Delhi.

2. CONTEMPT OF COURT

Context

The Supreme Court has issued notice to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on a contempt petition which alleged that the central bank did not provide information sought about the inspection reports of some banks.

The contempt notice also alleges that information has not been shared regarding irregularities in the case of Sahara Group of companies under the transparency law.

About

More on news

- A bench headed by Justice Nageshwar Rao issued the notice on a petition filed by a Mumbai resident who contended that the RBI had refused to part with the sought information despite apex court rulings on the issue.
- The petitioner has contended that he had sought information under the RTI Act in December 2015 like copies of inspection reports of ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank and SBI.
- The petitioner has also sought files regarding irregularities detected by RBI in the case of Sahara Group of companies 2011.
- The petition recalled the Supreme Court ruling in a case that RBI is clearly not in any fiduciary relationship with any bank. It has no legal duty to maximize the benefit of any public sector or private sector bank and thus there is no relationship of trust between them.
- RBI ought to act with transparency and not hide information that might embarrass individual banks. It is bound to comply with the provisions of the RTI Act and disclose the information.

What is contempt of Court?

- As per the Contempt of Courts Act 1971, contempt refers to the offence of showing disrespect to the dignity or authority of a court. The Act divides contempt into civil and criminal contempt.
- Civil contempt refers to the willful disobedience of an order of any court.
- Criminal contempt includes any act or publication which: (i) 'scandalizes' the court, or (ii) prejudices any judicial proceeding, or (iii) interferes with the administration of justice in any other manner.
- 'Scandalizing the Court' broadly refers to statements or publications which have the effect of undermining public confidence in the judiciary.

What is the source of Contempt?

- The superior courts (Supreme Court and High Courts) derive their contempt powers from the Constitution. The Act only outlines the procedure in relation to investigation and punishment for contempt.
- Therefore, deletion of the offence from the Act will not impact the inherent constitutional powers of the superior courts to punish anyone for its contempt. These powers will continue to remain, independent of the 1971 Act.

- Bar Association vs. Union of India case, the Supreme Court dwelled into the constitutional powers vested in it under Article 129 read with Article 142(2) of the Constitution of India and the power of the High Court under Article 215 of the Constitution to punish for contempt.
- According to Supreme Court, no act of Parliament can take away the inherent jurisdiction of the Court of Record to punish for contempt and the Parliament's power of legislation on the subject cannot, therefore, be so exercised as to stultify the status and dignity of the Supreme Court.

3. OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT

Context

In response to the earlier order of Supreme Court which rejected any independent inquiry in Rafael deal, a fresh petition has been filed to review the court's order.

The fresh petition is based on the evidences collected from the Defense Ministry of India and those evidences/records come under the Official Secrets Act as per governments stand in the SC.

About

More on news

- According to the government, these documents (evidences) were stolen or purloined by former or current officers in the ministry of defense.
- These are privileged documents under the Official Secrets Act (OSA) and even cannot be accessed through Right to Information Act.

What is Official Secrets Act?

- An 'Official Secrets Act' is a generic term that is used to refer to a law designed to keep certain kinds of information confidential, including, but not always limited to, information involving the affairs of state, diplomacy, national security, espionage and other state secrets.
- Across multiple countries, the Official Secrets Acts follow a similar pattern: classifying certain categories of information as "official secrets," and then providing stiff penalties for any sharing, dissemination or publication of such information.

Background

- The First Official Secrets Act was enacted in 1904 under the Viceroy Lord Curzon.
- This was replaced by Official Secrets Act 1923.
- After independence the Act was amended and renamed by Parliament the as Indian Official Secrets (Amendment) Act, 1967, it made the Act much more stringent than it was under British rule.

What are the main features of Indian Official Secrets Act?

- The 1923 Act includes penalties for spying under section 3 of the Act. This section provides for penalties for spying, where if any one approached, inspected, etc. any vicinity or place for making any sketch, plan, model, etc.
- It is liable to be punished under this provision with imprisonment which is maximum 15 years as provided under these provisions.
- The Section 4 of the Act makes the act of communicating or even attempting to communicate with foreign agents, is to be treated as relevant evidence for proving that such person communicating or attempting communication is against the safety or interests of State.
- Section 5 says that, if the person having possession of any secret official code, etc. used such secret stuff in prohibited place or otherwise in the manner which is likely to assist an enemy or otherwise is hazard to sovereignty and integrity of India then such person to be held guilty under this Act.

- Similarly, for all other acts relating to such secret official information which are provided under this provision of Section 5 of the Act are prohibited and if done, then persons doing this are liable to punishment which should include imprisonment and fine.

What is the criticism?

- The primary critique of the Act is that it flips the constitutive logic of a democratic republic, where the state is supposed to be transparent to its citizens.
- While it is nobody's case that all information ought to be made public – for example, troop movements in wartime or confidential trade negotiation positions, to take two examples, obviously need to be secret – there should be a heavy presumption against secrecy.
- Under the OSA, however, the state is given wide powers to place information off-limits to citizens, simply by stipulating that certain documents are secret — and then draconian powers to punish them in case it is made public, regardless of the public interest involved.
- This makes whistle-blowing and investigative journalism a perilous enterprise, no matter how critically important it might be to have the information public.



1. ACCESSIBLE INDIA CAMPAIGN

Context

The Accessible India Campaign also known as the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan was launched in 2015 by Prime Minister.

The project that aimed to make the country accessible for people with disabilities is yet to meet its target.

The government has announced that deadline of Accessible India campaign has been extended.

About

- Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) is a nation-wide Campaign launched by Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment to provide universal accessibility to persons with disabilities.
- The campaign aims at providing equal opportunity to persons with disabilities to participate in all the aspects of life and live independently. The Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan focuses on developing accessible physical environment, transportation system and Information & communication ecosystem.
- The Government of India with firm commitment towards socio-economic transformation of the persons with disabilities is making efforts to create mass awareness for universal accessibility.
- India is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Components of Accessible India Campaign

- Built Environment Accessibility
- Transportation System Accessibility
- Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility

2. SERIOUS FRAUD INVESTIGATION OFFICE

Context

In a bid to prevent big economic offenders like Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi from fleeing the country, the government has empowered PSU banks to request Lookout Circulars (LOCs) against wilful defaulters and fraudsters.

The Home Ministry has also authorised the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), a statutory corporate fraud investigation agency, to request LOCs if it feels the suspect may escape from India.

About

Serious Fraud Investigation Office

- It is not a statutory body, as it was established through an executive resolution, which inter alia stated the responsibilities and functions of the SFIO.
- It is under the ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- The SFIO makes investigations under the provisions of the Companies Act, 1956 and also forwards the investigated reports on violations of the provisions of other acts to the concerned agencies for prosecution/appropriate action.
- The SFIO is a multi-disciplinary organisation consisting of experts in the field of accountancy, forensic auditing, law, information technology, investigation, company law, capital market and taxation for detecting and prosecuting or recommending for prosecution white collar crimes/frauds.
- The SFIO normally take up only such cases for investigation, which are characterized by:
 - complexity and having inter-departmental and multi- disciplinary ramifications;
 - substantial involvement of public interest to be judged by size, either in terms of monetary;
 - the possibility of investigation leading to or contributing towards a clear improvement in systems, laws or procedures.
- SFIO may also take up cases on its own; it investigates serious cases of fraud received from Department of Company Affairs.
- Whether an investigation should be taken up or not, is decided by the Director SFIO, who will be expected to record the reasons in writing. This decision is further subject to review by a coordination committee.
- It was set up in 2003, on the recommendation of Naresh Chandra Committee, and in the backdrop of stock market scams resulting in huge financial loss to the public.

3. E-SAHAJ PORTAL

Context

Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has recently launched *e-Sahaj portal* to facilitate individuals and private companies in seeking security clearance for setting up businesses in certain sensitive sectors.

About

- e-Sahaj: On the portal, applicants can submit their applications and view its status online from time to time. This will bring greater transparency in according security clearances to business proposals relating to sensitive sectors and geographical locations.
- Security Clearance: The objective of national security clearance is to evaluate potential security threats, including economic threats and provide risk assessment before clearing investment and project proposals in key sectors. Thus, it is essential for maintaining healthy balance between ensuring national security and facilitating ease of doing business.
- MHA: It is the nodal authority for granting security clearances in certain sensitive sectors before licence, permit, permission, contract etc. is issued to companies, bidders, individuals by respective administrative ministry.

Significance

- With its introduction, the process has now become standardised, making the process faster, transparent and easier to monitor.
- It will thus help in facilitating ease of doing business and promoting investment in the country.



1. FOOD SAFETY MITRA SCHEME

Context

Recently, the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare launched the Food Safety Mitra (FSM) scheme at the occasion of World Food Day.

About

- The apex food regulator **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** launched Food Safety Mitra (FSM) scheme.
- **FSM Scheme aims to support small and medium-scale food businesses as to comply with the food safety laws** and will facilitate them with the licensing and registration process, hygiene ratings and training programme.
- The scheme will also **improve ease of doing business by creating a transparent and organized ecosystem** supporting food businesses wherein food businesses will be able to get trained service providers at fair prices - lowering the costs of compliance.
- **A Food Safety Mitra is an individual professional certified by FSSAI who assists in compliances related to FSS Act.**
- The **FSMs would undergo training and certification** that will be conducted by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), in order to get paid by food businesses for their services.
- The **scheme would also create new employment opportunities for youth** (particularly with food and nutrition background).
- FSSAI has **partnered with the Domestic Workers Sector Skill Council (DWSSC) under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to launch a training course** for domestic workers and homemakers across the country.

Significance

- FSM opens a new dimension to food safety administration by augmenting government capacity and providing services to food businesses, particularly small and medium food businesses in the area of registration and licensing, training and hygiene rating. Through FSM, FSSAI plans to engage motivated individuals with the food safety ecosystem at ground level.
- The use of technology would bring in the efficiency, professionalism, and transparency in food safety administration.
- The FSMs would undergo training and certification by FSSAI to do their work and get paid by food businesses for their services.

2. NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SOWA RIGPA

Context

It has been decided by the Government of India to promote Sowa-Rigpa system of medicine by establishing a National Institute of Sowa-Rigpa (NISR) at Leh, Union Territory of Ladakh at an estimated cost of Rs.47.25 crore.

About

- Sowa-Rigpa is a Traditional Medical system of the Himalayan belt in India. It has been popularly practiced in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling (West Bengal), Himachal Pradesh, Union Territory of Ladakh and now all over India.
- The Institute will be an autonomous National Institute under Ministry of AYUSH with the mandate to undertake interdisciplinary education and research programmes in Sowa-Rigpa in collaboration with premier national and international Institutes and facilitate integration of different systems of medicine.
- This will facilitate quality education, scientific validation, quality control & standardization and safety evaluation of Sowa-Rigpa products, standardized Sowa-Rigpa based tertiary health delivery and to promote interdisciplinary research & education of Sowa-Rigpa at undergraduate, postgraduate and postdoctoral levels.
- The National Institute of Sowa Rigpa would identify the best Sowa-Rigpa treatment – including their standard procedures-within the framework of traditional Sowa-Rigpa principle and possible correlation with bio-molecular western medicine in providing health care facilities to the general public.

The basic theory of Sowa-Rigpa may be adumbrated in terms of the following five points:

- The body in disease as the locus of treatment;
- Antidote, i.e., the treatment;
- The method of treatment through antidote;
- Medicine that cures the disease;
- Materia Medica, Pharmacy & Pharmacology

Infrastructures of SOWA-RIGPA in India

- In most of Himalayan regions Sowa-Rigpa is practiced in traditional way with community support with an Amchi in every village. But since the last two decades this scenario has been changing, adopting some of the administrative elements of modern hospital system in educational Institutions, dispensaries, hospitals and pharmacies etc.
- Nevertheless, still there are all together around 1000 practitioners of Sowa-Rigpa in India catering health care in harsh Himalayan regions and other places.
- Dharamshala in Himanchal Pradesh and Ladakh region of J&K are the main Centers for Sowa-Rigpa Institutions in India.
- There is Central Council for Tibetan Medicine in Dharamshala to regulate the practice of Sowa-Rigpa in India; it looks after the registration of practitioners, standard of colleges and other mechanism to regulate Sowa-Rigpa.

3. PRAKASH PORTAL

Context

Government launches Prakash portal to improve coal supply to power plants.

About

- Prakash stands for 'Power Rail Koyla Availability through Supply Harmony'.
- The Portal aims at bringing better coordination for coal supplies among all stakeholders viz - Ministry of Power, Ministry of Coal, Coal India, Railways and power utilities.
- This is an important step in ensuring adequate availability and optimum utilization of coal at thermal power plants

The Portal is designed to help in mapping and monitoring entire coal supply chain for power plants

- Coal Stock at supply end (mines),
- Coal quantities/ rakes planned,
- Coal quantity in transit and
- Coal availability at power generating station.

Benefits of Portal to the Stakeholders

- Coal company will be able to track stocks and the coal requirement at power stations for effective production planning
- Indian Railways will plan to place the rakes as per actual coal available at siding and stock available at power stations.
- Power stations can plan future schedule by knowing rakes in pipe line and expected time to reach.
- Stock at power generating station
- Ministry of Power /Ministry of Coal/ CEA/ POSOCO can review overall availability of coal at thermal power plants in different regions



1. PERMANENT STATUS TO FINANCE COMMISSION

Context

Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das called for a permanent status to Finance Commission and a robust expenditure planning without compromising on fiscal consolidation as fiscal federalism gathers momentum in the era of uniform goods and services tax (GST).

About

Background:

- Over past several decades, Finance Commissions have adopted different approaches with regard to principles of tax devolution, grants to be given to states and fiscal consolidation issues.
- While at one level, there has to be a framework for fresh and innovative thinking by every Finance Commission; at another level, there is a need to ensure broad consistency between Finance Commissions so that there is some degree of certainty in the flow of funds, especially to the states.
- This has become even more critical in the post GST scenario and there has been a demand to bring in continuity as well as change between Finance Commissions.

How this permanent status accord intends to boost local governance:

- The principle of decentralisation works better when powers and functions are delegated based on which tier of governance is best suited to fulfil that responsibility.
- State Finance Commissions are constituted every five years as per the mandate in Article 243I of the Constitution.
- Although the provision under Article 243I is identical to the provision under Article 280, its implementation has fallen short.

What could be the model (to be replicated) by FC if given Permanent status?

Co-operative federalism has opened new chapters in co-operation between Centre and States. The GST Council is functioning on the principle of shared sovereignty.

- The sacrifice of fiscal autonomy at both levels of government in favour of the Council needs to be seen as a 'trade-off' so as to reap the benefits of tax harmonisation.
- Indian model of GST preserves the essence of Indian federalism.

How would the FC work (Post availing the status of Permanency) :

- The **Commission can function as a leaner entity** in the intervening period till the next Finance Commission is set up in a full-fledged manner.
- This would be similar to the role of Lok Sabha Speaker who otherwise does not resign from the post and continues to discharge positional functions till the newly constituted Lok Sabha meets for the first time.

- During the intervening period, the FC can also address issues arising from implementation of the recommendations of the Finance Commissions.
- This will also help add knowledge and capacities and boost Fiscal prudence. The upcoming FC will be able to get a clear hearing on the challenges and rate of effectiveness of its likely recommendations.
- If the Union Finance Commission gets permanent status, it will boost the dismal conditions of various State Finance Commissions. In their effectiveness, lies the efficiency and effectiveness of the state, PRI and Municipalities' financial health.
- **To reciprocate, the government can mull over equating FC with that of Election Commission of India.**

2. EC POWERS TO REDUCE/REMOVE DISQUALIFICATION OF MLAS AND MPS UNDER RPA

Context

Election Commission cuts short disqualification term for Sikkim Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang.

About

- **Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang was barred by law from contesting elections for six years in 2016 for graft charges.**
- He had been sentenced to one year imprisonment for misappropriation of funds in the procurement of cows when he was state Animal Husbandry Minister under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. However, the section under which he was convicted had been omitted in an amendment in 2018. He completed the one-year sentence on August 10, 2018.
- After completing his one-year prison term in 2018 his disqualification was sharply **reduced to just a year and a month by the Election Commission of India (ECI) recently.**
- EC cited **Section 11 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951** which empowers it to remove/reduce the period of disqualification prescribed by statutory rule for reasons to be recorded.
- The EC justified its decision on the ground that **Tamang was convicted of an offence committed in 1996-97, when a minimum punishment of two years was warranted under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988**, for attracting the six-year disqualification. Tamang was imprisoned for a year. The EC also noted that he had already served his sentence, and hence, his case merited a disqualification waiver.

Criticism

- It is not conducive in controlling criminalisation of politics. The issue of Mr. Tamang not contesting elections and the ECI citing socio-economic-political factors were not relevant to the issue.
- Morally, it is wrong of parties to give ticket to those convicted of crimes or to appoint someone convicted. Today, we have 43% of the people sitting in the Lok Sabha with pending criminal cases.

3. GOOD GOVERNANCE INDEX

Context

Centre releases Good Governance Index ranking States and UTs in 10 sectors.

About

- The rankings were launched by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, and the Centre for Good Governance.

- The GGI takes into consideration ten sectors:
 - ▶ Agriculture and Allied Sectors,
 - ▶ Commerce & Industries,
 - ▶ Human Resource Development,
 - ▶ Public Health,
 - ▶ Public Infrastructure & Utilities,
 - ▶ Economic Governance,
 - ▶ Social Welfare & Development,
 - ▶ Judicial & Public Security,
 - ▶ Environment and
 - ▶ Citizen-Centric Governance.
- ▶ These ten Governance Sectors are measured on total 50 indicators.
- ▶ The Good Governance Day is observed on the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
- ▶ Good Governance Index has been scientifically designed on various parameters of governance.

Outcomes of the report

- Tamil Nadu topped the Good Governance Index. Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh followed among the 'Big States'.
- Among the 'Big States', the poor performers are Odisha, Bihar, Goa, and Uttar Pradesh with Jharkhand coming last.
- The States and UTs are divided into three groups — Big States, North-East and Hill States, and Union Territories.
- Puducherry is the best governed Union Territory followed by Chandigarh and Delhi. Lakshwadeep is the worst performing UT.
- In the agriculture and allied ranking, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram and Daman and Diu are the best performing States in their groups.
- While assessing the performance of commerce and industries across States, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Delhi top the lists of their groups.



1. ZONAL COUNCILS

Context

Union Minister for Home Affairs, Amit Shah chaired the 29th meeting of the Northern Zonal Council held at Chandigarh.

What are Zonal councils?

- **The Zonal Councils are the statutory (and not the constitutional) bodies.** They are established by an Act of the Parliament, that is, States Reorganisation Act of 1956.
- The act divided the country **into five zones (Northern, Central, Eastern, Western and Southern)** and provided a zonal council for each zone.
- **North-Eastern Council:**
 - ▶ In addition to the above Zonal Councils, a North-Eastern Council was created by a separate North-Eastern Council Act of 1971.
 - ▶ **Its members include Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunchal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim.**

The factors that have been taken into account during formation of Zonal Councils:

- The natural divisions of the country.
- The river systems and means of communication.
- The cultural and linguistic affinity.
- The requirements of economic development, security and law and order.

Members of the Zonal council:

- Home minister of Central government.
- Chief Ministers of all the States in the zone.
- Two other ministers from each state in the zone.
- Administrator of each union territory in the zone.
- **The home minister of Central government is the common chairman of the five zonal councils.**
- **Each chief minister acts as a vice-chairman of the council by rotation, holding office for a period of one year at a time.**
- **Advisers** - One person nominated by the Planning Commission for each of the Zonal Councils, Chief Secretaries and another officer/Development Commissioner nominated by each of the States included in the Zone.
- Union Ministers are also invited to participate in the meetings of Zonal Councils depending upon necessity.

What makes Zonal Councils different from institutions like the National Development Council, Inter State Council?

- Zonal Councils are regional fora of cooperative endeavour for States linked with each other economically, politically and culturally.
- Being compact high level bodies, specially meant for looking after the interests of respective zones, they are capable of focusing attention on specific issues taking into account regional factors, while keeping the national perspective in view.
- The Zonal Councils provide an excellent forum where irritants between Centre and States and amongst States can be resolved through free and frank discussions and consultations.

Objectives of Zonal Councils:

- Bringing out national integration.
- Arresting the growth of acute State consciousness, regionalism, linguism and particularistic tendencies.
- Enabling the Centre and the States to co-operate and exchange ideas and experiences.
- Establishing a climate of co-operation amongst the States for successful and speedy execution of development projects.

Functions of the Zonal Councils:

- Each Zonal Council is an advisory body and may discuss any matter in which some or all of the States represented in that Council, or the Union and one or more of the States represented in that Council, have a common interest and advise the Central Government and the Government of each State concerned as to the action to be taken on any such matter.
- In particular, a Zonal Council may discuss, and make recommendations with regard to:
- Any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning.
- Any matter concerning border disputes, linguistic minorities or inter-State transport.
- Any matter connected with or arising out of, the re-organization of the States under the States Reorganisation Act.

2. GST COUNCIL

Context

- The 31st meeting of Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council was held in the national capital.
- The GST Council reduced tax rate on 23 goods and services, including movie tickets, TV/monitor screens and power banks. It also exempted frozen and preserved vegetables from the levy.

About

What is GST Council?

- It is a constitutional body for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to Goods and Service Tax.
- It is chaired by the Union Finance Minister and other members are the Union State Minister of Revenue or Finance and Ministers in-charge of Finance or Taxation of all the States.

How is it composed?

- As per Article 279A of the amended Constitution, the GST Council which will be a joint forum of the Centre and the States, shall consist of the following members: -
- Union Finance Minister - Chairperson;

- Union Minister of State in charge of Revenue or Finance - Member;
- Minister in charge of Finance or Taxation or any other
- Minister nominated by each State Government - Members.

What is the mandate of GST Council?

- It shall make recommendations to the Union and the States on—
- the taxes, cesses and surcharges levied by the Union, the States and the local bodies which may be subsumed in the goods and services tax;
- the goods and services that may be subjected to, or exempted from the goods and services tax;
- model Goods and Services Tax Laws, principles of levy, apportionment of Goods and Services Tax levied on supplies in the course of inter-State trade or commerce under article 269A and the principles that govern the place of supply;
- the threshold limit of turnover below which goods and services may be exempted from goods and services tax;
- the rates including floor rates with bands of goods and services tax;
- any special rate or rates for a specified period, to raise additional resources during any natural calamity or disaster;
- special provision with respect to the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand; and any other matter relating to the goods and services tax, as the Council may decide.
- It shall recommend the date on which the goods and services tax be levied on petroleum crude, high speed diesel, motor spirit (commonly known as petrol), natural gas and aviation turbine fuel.
- While discharging the functions conferred by this article, the Goods and Services Tax Council shall be guided by the need for a harmonized structure of goods and services tax and for the development of a harmonized national market for goods and services.
- One-half of the total number of Members of the Goods and Services Tax Council shall constitute the quorum at its meetings.
- The Goods and Services Tax Council shall determine the procedure in the performance of its functions.

How the council do takes a decision on any tax issue?

Every decision of the Goods and Services Tax Council shall be taken at a meeting, by a majority of not less than three-fourths of the weighted votes of the members present and voting, in accordance with the following principles-

- The vote of the Central Government shall have a weightage of one third of the total votes cast, and
- The votes of all the State Governments taken together shall have a weightage of two-thirds of the total votes cast, in that meeting.

Will absenteeism of any state or vacancy/ies halt the decision of the council?

No act or proceedings of the Goods and Services Tax Council shall be invalid merely by reason of—

- any vacancy in, or any defect in, the constitution of the Council; or
- any defect in the appointment of a person as a Member of the Council; or
- any procedural irregularity of the Council not affecting the merits of the case.

Is there any provision for resolving the issues arising among the different parties of the council?

The Goods and Services Tax Council shall establish a mechanism to adjudicate any dispute —

- between the Government of India and one or more States; or
- between the Government of India and any State or States on one side and one or more other States on the other side; or

- between two or more States, arising out of the recommendations of the Council or implementation thereof.

3. INDIA OBSERVER AT ARCTIC COUNCIL

Context

Recently, at the Arctic Council ministerial meeting at Rovaniemi, Finland, India was re-elected as an Observer to the Arctic Council.

About

- India was first granted the Observer status in 2013, along with five other nations.
- As an Observer, India will not be allowed to take part in the active meetings but will participate in side events.
- China, South Korea, Singapore, Italy and Japan also have Observer status at the Council.
- At the meeting, chairmanship of the Council was passed from Finland to Iceland.

Arctic Council

- Established through the **Ottawa Declaration of 1996**, it is an informal intergovernmental forum to promote cooperation in regulating the activities in the Arctic region.
- It consists of
 - Member nations: Eight nations that have territories in the Arctic, namely, Russia, the United States, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and Finland.
 - Permanent Participants: Six organisations representing the indigenous people of the Arctic region.
 - Observers: Observer status in the Arctic Council is open to non-arctic states, inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary organizations, global and regional, and non-governmental organizations.



1. 'NAGPUR RESOLUTION: A HOLISTIC APPROACH FOR EMPOWERING CITIZENS'

Context

The 'Nagpur Resolution- A holistic approach for empowering citizens' was adopted during the Valedictory session of the two-day Regional Conference on 'Improving Public Service Delivery – Role of Governments'.

About

- The conference was organised by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, in collaboration with the Government of Maharashtra and the Maharashtra State Commission for Right to Public Services.
- Positive approach, transparency, corruption-free system, fast track decision making and social sensitivity are essential to good governance.
- Performance audit of public servants should be done at regular intervals.
- The Conference also resolved to adopt a holistic approach of systemic public grievance reforms through improved mapping, formulation of monitoring matrix, data collection and evaluation in quality of grievance redressal, and to provide an enabling environment for States and Ministries/ Departments of the Government of India for creating web portals and to adopt a holistic approach for improved service delivery through digital platforms.
- The Resolution focuses on dynamic policy making and strategic decisions, monitoring of implementation, appointment of key personnel, coordination and evaluation, and achieving a sense of common identity by exchange of technical expertise in the areas of Improved Service Delivery between paired States under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat Program.

Major Objectives

- To empower the citizens by policy interventions for better service delivery through timely updation of citizens charters, implementation of enactments and benchmarking standards for continuous improvement;
- To empower citizens by adopting a bottom-up approach to bring massive improvements in quality of grievance redressal and reduction in timelines of grievance redressal;
- To adopt a holistic approach of systemic public grievance reforms through improved mapping, formulation of monitoring matrix, data collection and evaluation in quality of grievance redressal ;
- To provide an enabling environment for States and Ministries/ Departments of the Government of India for creating web portals and to adopt a holistic approach for improved service delivery through digital platforms;
- To focus on dynamic policy making and strategic decisions, monitoring of implementation, appointment of key personnel, coordination and evaluation;

- To achieve a sense of common identity by exchange of technical expertise in the areas of Improved Service Delivery between the paired States under the Ek Bharat – Shresht Bharat Program;
- To work towards long-term engagements in the areas of Improved Service Delivery for Empowering Citizens through greater cooperation between the DARPG and the participating States and,
- To ensure timely publication of Good Governance Index to identify the quality of governance in 10 sectors especially those pertaining to welfare and infrastructure at the Union, State and District levels.

2. KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION (KVIC)

Context

To commemorate 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and to support the weaker section of the society in Agartala, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) organized a distribution of 1000 Bee Boxes, 100 Pottery Wheels and 100 Advanced Leather Tool kits 100 Farmers, 100 Potters and 100 Leather Artisans recently.

About

- This mega equipment distribution and Capacity Building drive will create a livelihood and will provide employment to 700 people.
- The programs like Honey Mission, Empowerment of Leather Artisans and Kumhar Sashaktikaran Mission will not only instill self-confidence but give a much required boost to strengthen the weaker section of the society.
- Tripura has a lot of potential of Bee Keeping and Pottery because of large scale cultivation of rubber plants and use of traditional terracotta products in their households.

About KVIC

- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is a statutory body formed by the Government of India, under the Act of Parliament, 'Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act of 1956'.
- It is an apex organisation under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with regard to khadi and village industries within India.
- It seeks to - "plan, promote, facilitate, organise and assist in the establishment and development of khadi and village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- The KVIC may also undertake directly or through other agencies studies concerning the problems of Khadi and/or village industries besides research or establishing pilot projects for the development of Khadi and village industries.
- The KVIC is authorized to establish and maintain separate organisations for the purpose of carrying out any or all of the above matters besides carrying out any other matters incidental to its activities.
- The broad objectives that the KVIC has set before it are:
 - The social objective of providing employment.
 - The economic objective of producing saleable articles.
 - The wider objective of creating self-reliance amongst the poor and building up of a strong rural community spirit.

3. INDIA-SAUDI ARABIA CONSTITUTE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

Context

PM Modi announced the formation of the India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council that will be led by the leaderships of both countries.

The announcement was made in the Saudi capital Riyadh where PM Modi paid a visit.

About

- A key takeaway of the PM visit to Saudi Arabia is the Strategic Partnership Council.
- 12 MoUs on issues such as preventing narcotics trafficking, renewable energy, training of diplomats, defence industry production, security collaboration, Haj related cooperation, Atal Innovation Mission, bilateral air services and the use of RuPay cards in Saudi Arabia were inked.
- Apart from defence, the two sides are keen to enhance maritime security cooperation and are considering joint naval exercises in 2020
- India and Saudi Arabia firmed their strategic partnership by signing an agreement to form a council headed by Prime Minister Modi and King Salman.
- It would enable regular monitoring of the progress of the strategic partnership.
- The council will have two parallel mechanisms under it — one to look at political and diplomatic ties and the second to supervise commercial and energy ties.
- This is a major development since Saudi Arabia is now only the fourth country with whom India has an inter-governmental mechanism headed by the prime minister. Germany, Russia and Japan are the other three.

Recent Developments:

- Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi was the Chief Guest of the 2017 Republic Day of India.
- India was designated as the Guest of Honour country at Abu Dhabi Music and Art festival 2018.
- India and UAE signed an MOU for cooperation in Africa.
- India UAE had their first bilateral Naval exercise in March 2018 named 'Gulf Star 1', which took place off the coast of Abu Dhabi.
- India UAE signed a currency swap agreement in December last year which will boost trade and economic relationships between two countries and reduce India's dependence on the US dollars.
- Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) has signed an agreement to explore storing Crude oil in the Indian Strategic Reserve in Padur.
- ADNOC also filled up 1.5 million tonnes of crude oil in Mangalore strategic reserve, the only foreign and private player so far to have invested in storing in Indian strategic reserve.
- Abu Dhabi government allotted land for the construction of the first Hindu Temple in Abu Dhabi. There are two Hindu temples in the UAE, both in Dubai.
- UAE and India signed an MOU in the field of manpower exploring the possibility of linking their respective e-platforms for the benefit and welfare of Indian workers going to UAE.
- India and UAE are fast-tracking food corridor.
- This will entail investment by UAE in the Indian agriculture sector benefiting farmers and creating additional jobs in food processing logistics etc.
- It will also help in food security for the UAE.
- The UAE is one of the biggest overseas markets for Indian cinema apart from the UK and the USA.

India-Saudi Arabia Relations:

- Trade and cultural links between ancient India and Arabia dating back to the third millennium BC.
- By 1000 AD, the trade relations between southern India and Arabia flourished and became the backbone of the Arabian economy.
- Arab traders held a monopoly over the spice trade between India and Europe until the rise of European imperialist empires.
- India was one of the first nations to establish ties with the Third Saudi State.
- During the 1930s, India heavily funded Nejd through financial subsidies.



1. AIR SPACE RESTRICTION

Context

Pakistan has extended the ban on use of its airspace till June 15.

A notice to airmen (NOTAM) informed airlines about the extension of the ban.

About

- In the wake of escalating tension following an airstrike by Indian Air Force in Balakot in February 2019, Pakistan had restricted its airspace for airlines to and from India.
- Several Central Asian airlines as well as those providing connectivity to Europe and the United States from Southeast Asia were forced to cancel their flights due to the ban.
- The ban is contributing to financial losses owing to longer routes, demand of passengers on these routes, increased crew presence and increased fuel costs.
- In a case of Air space violation, a Delhi-bound Georgian aircraft that took off from Karachi was recently intercepted over Gujarat.
- However, on the up side, recently, India granted permission for Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi's aircraft to fly over the country for his visit to Male and Colombo. Pakistan too exempted External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to fly directly through Pakistani airspace to attend the SCO meet in Bishkek.

Airspace: In international law, the space above a particular nation's territory is owned by the government controlling the territory.

- The upper limit of national airspace is not defined by international law. However, under the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, airspace ends where outer space begins, as outer space is declared to be free and not subject to national appropriation
- The treaty, however, did not define the altitude at which outer space begins and airspace ends.

Air sovereignty: It is the fundamental right of a sovereign state to regulate the use of its airspace and enforce its own aviation law. State controls the entry of foreign aircraft into its territory and that person within its territory are subject to its laws

- The principle of airspace sovereignty is established through the Paris Convention on the Regulation of Aerial Navigation (1919) and subsequently by other multilateral treaties.
- Commercial air transport is divided into scheduled air services and nonscheduled flights. Charter flights fall mostly, but not invariably, into the latter category.
- Under the 1994 Chicago Convention, contracting states agree to permit aircraft registered in the other contracting states and engaged in commercial nonscheduled flights to fly into their territory without prior diplomatic permission and, moreover, to pick up and discharge passengers, cargo, and mail, but in practice this provision has become a dead letter.

Prohibited airspace: It refers to an area of airspace within which flight of aircraft is not allowed, usually due to security concerns. It is one of many types of special use airspace designations and is depicted on aeronautical charts with the letter "P" followed by a serial number.

Restricted airspace: Different from prohibited airspace, in it the entry is typically forbidden at all times from all aircraft and is not subject to clearance from ATC or the airspace's controlling body.

How closure of Airspace affects airlines?

- Globally, commercial airlines generally fly from east to west. All airlines seek to fly a straight route so as to save fuel. This is possible only when the airspace over a country, which is the sovereign right of that country, is open and be safe to fly over.

Every country marks out several entry and exit points for various airlines to use. When these entry and exit points are shut, airlines need to consider alternative routes, which involve flying longer or stopping at an intermediate point before reaching their final destinations.

2. India an Observer in CTBTO

Context

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) has invited India to become an "Observer" with access to International Monitoring System data, so it can take an informed decision on ratifying a much-debated nuclear disarmament treaty.

About

- Stating its reservations with the treaty, India has not signed CTBT till date.
- With changing nature of the organization, renewed efforts are made to get India onboard.

Benefits of being an observer:

- **Informed decision:** It will allow India to attend CTBTO meeting, observe how the organization works, and accordingly take the time needed to make the decision.
- **Access to information:** The CTBTO runs the International Monitoring System (IMS), which can detect nuclear tests anywhere across the world. Being an observer, India would get access to data from the IMS. When complete,
- IMS will consist of 337 facilities (321 monitoring stations and 16 radionuclide labs) located in 89 countries.
- It can detect even small nuclear explosions using seismology, hydroacoustics, infrasound and radionuclide technology.
- The IMS also helps in warning of earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic ash, and identifies plane crash sites.
- **Symbolism:** Being an observer will not change India's status with respect to the CTBT. It only gives the advantage of following what's happening, learning what China is doing in the organization, and where the US comes in. Among the non-signatory, Pakistan too is an observer.

India's apprehensions with CTBT

- **Discrimination:** India claims that the CTBT is discriminatory because it favours "five nuclear weapon states" - the United States, United Kingdom, China, France and Russia - when it comes to fulfilling obligations for eliminating nuclear weapons.
- India wants the CTBT to have a clause on complete nuclear disarmament in a time-bound manner because there are technological differences between the 'have' and 'have not' countries.
- India is concerned about the likelihood of those already possessing nuclear weapons upgrading their arsenals through sub-critical and laboratory simulated testing.

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)

- It was founded in 1996 to promote the Treaty so that it can enter into force.

- It also establishes a verification regime to monitor adherence to the Treaty.
- The CTBT verification includes
 - ▶ International Monitoring System (IMS),
 - ▶ International Data Centre (IDC)
 - ▶ On-site inspections (OSI).
- It constantly monitors the planet for nuclear explosions and shares its findings with Member States.

3. India Elected to INCB

Context

- India's Jagjit Pavadia was re-elected to the UN's International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) with the highest margin.

About

- Pavadia has been a member of the INCB since 2015. With current re-election, she will remain a member till 2025.
- Her win provides more global space, hence more clout.

International Narcotics Control Board

- It is the independent and quasi-judicial monitoring body for the implementation of the United Nations international drug control conventions.
- It was established in 1968 in accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961.
- It consists of 13 members who are elected by the ECOSOC.
- Each of the 13 members is elected for a five-year term and serves in their personal capacity, not as government representatives.
- It is headquartered in Vienna.
- It ensures adequate supplies of narcotics are available for medical and scientific purposes. It also publishes an annual report providing a comprehensive survey of the drug control situation in various parts of the world to ECOSOC through the Commission.
