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I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

1. The Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill, 2019

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was recently introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister of Labour and Employment which amends the Trade Unions Act, 1926 seeking registration and regulation of trade unions.

Details of the bill:

- It has provisions for recognising central trade unions by various government departments, at both the central and state levels.
- The central or state government may make rules for:
  1. The recognition of such Central or State Trade Unions.
  2. The authority to decide disputes arising out of such recognition, and the manner of deciding such disputes.
  3. Granting statutory recognition to the trade unions.
  4. The present Act provides for only registration of trade unions and there is no provision for recognition.

What is the need of the trade unions in the country?

- In a pluralistic democracy, various pressure groups of workers and employers' organisations co-exist. The government engages with them to determine policies and laws.
- As a member of the International Labour Organisation and having ratified Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 in 1978. This makes India bound to recognise representative trade unions.
- Statutory recognition becomes necessary as employers may not wish to negotiate with a trade union of workers' choice. The recognition is necessary because recognised trade union of an industry or establishment gets bargaining or negotiating rights with the employer.
- In a pluralistic democracy good governance demands consultations with all stakeholders. Thus any legal reform to improve representative processes must be backed by genuine socio-economic intent.
- Currently, the trade unions are not recognised under the Trade Unions Act, originally enacted in 1926. The office of the chief central labour commissioner conducts a verification drive of the membership, based on which the labour and employment ministry gives them the status of central trade unions. However, there is no statutory provision for either the recognition of a trade union in industry, or the establishment or recognition of a union at the central and state level.

Issues related to the amendment:

- Making government to recognise the trade unions is an open-ended discretionary powers as it will enable government to determine which trade union should or should not be recognised and thus prone to be misused.
- The bill fails to lay down comprehensive objective standards for this determination.
- It may become an instrument for violation of Article 23 and Article 43A which prohibits forced labour in the country and ensures participation of workers in the management.
- Most trade unions, however, vehemently opposed the proposed amendments, saying the government was trying to interfere in, and cripple, their functioning.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

2. Voluntary use of Aadhaar ID

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Law Minister recently introduced a bill in the Lok Sabha that will provide legal backing for voluntary seeding of biometric Aadhaar ID with mobile numbers and bank accounts after the Supreme Court barred mandatory use of Aadhaar by private firms.

Background:

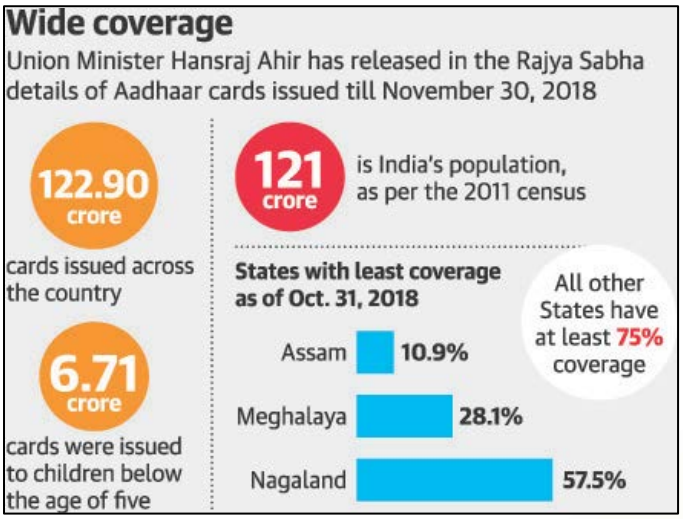
- The Supreme Court in its judgment upheld the validity of Aadhaar with certain restrictions
- It struck down section 57 of the act that allows private entities to use the unique number for verification.
- It also struck down section 33(2), which allowed disclosure of Aadhaar information for national security reasons on the orders of an officer not below Joint Secretary and recommended that the joint secretary should consult a judicial officer and together take a call
- It declared seeking to linking Adhaar with bank accounts and SIM cards as unconstitutional.

About the proposal:

- The proposal for the amendment was prepared by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) according to which, once a child turns 18,

he/she will be given six months to decide if he/she wants to withdraw.

- For realizing the Supreme court's order, the proposal seeks to appoint an adjudicating officer to decide whether a person's Aadhaar-related data need to be disclosed in the interest of national security.



About Aadhaar:

- Aadhaar or Unique Identification Number (UID) is a 12-digit number that serves as a unique identifier for Indian citizens.
- The UIDAI allots a unique identifier (Aadhaar Number) to each citizen and deposits their biometric and demographic data in a Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR).
- Aadhaar's database has the records of over 1.12 billion registered users and is rapidly becoming the government's base for public welfare and citizen services scheme.
- Aadhaar authentication process validates an identity with a 'yes' or 'no', using one of the six demographic fields (name, date of birth, gender, address, mobile or email) along with either biometrics or One Time Password (OTP).
- The process is designed in such a way that neither the purpose of the transaction nor any other context is known to the Aadhaar system in order to ensure the safety of any transaction.

Note: Detailed version of issues related to Adhaar has been mentioned in the earlier weekly magazines

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

3. Assessment of Swacch Bharat

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- According to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development, many toilets constructed under the Swachh Bharat Mission have already become defunct and unusable.
- It slammed the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation for not bothering to find out the scope of the problem, despite an earlier recommendation to conduct a survey.
- New research on the impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission in the rural parts of four northern states shows that while open defecation has fallen and toilet ownership has increased, the percentage of people who owned toilets but continued to defecate in the open has remained unchanged between 2014 and 2018.

About Swacch Bharat Abhiyan:

- It is a campaign which was launched on 2 October 2014, aiming at eradication of open defecation by 2nd october 2019, the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi 2019.
- It is a national campaign and successor of the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan and Total Sanitation Campaign.

Loopholes found in the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan:

- According to the 51st Standing Committee on Rural Development report, the government focused more on construction of individual toilets spent much less of the funds for carrying out information, education and communication activities, which are crucial for bringing about the behavioural change required to popularise use of toilets.
- The committee also found that the sanitation coverage figures seemed to be more on paper but the actual progress at the ground level is very lethargic.
- Large amount of funds under the scheme remained unspent especially in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
- The standing committee has also raised questions over the qualities of the constructed toilets.
- Tampering with the baseline data:
  1. Non functional toilets have also been counted which inflated the data.
  2. CAG in its earlier report found that at many places toilets constructed under the Total Sanitation Campaign/Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan were newly constructed under SBM while other places were toilets were either absent or damaged were neglected.
  3. Many places were given ODF status solely on the basis on number of toilets constructed and not on the basis of actual definition of the ODF status which also includes no visible faces found in the environment and safe technology

options for disposal of faeces by every households.

- Many of the households still do not have proper provision of water availability which renders many toilets constructed under SBM unused.
- ODF status has become tantamount to political accomplishments which makes the issue highly politicized.
- There is no remarkable change in the behavior change in the people from 2014 till date.
- After ODF declaration, the financial subsidies under SBM are not available anymore even for the eligible families and, therefore, the funds need to be routed through other schemes.
- While the government maintains that CSR funds will be used to provide the beneficiaries, evidence says that the target is far from being achieved as they are not concentrated and are not directly under government control, making them only a probable solution that may not always be reliable.
- Many toilets already constructed under SBM have become defunct and non-usable due to various reasons pertaining to the quality of construction and scarcity of water.

Other challenges:

- Religious beliefs are one of the main challenges as many people in India view toilets as impure and refrain from installing them within their household premises.
- Most defecate in the open as it is something they have grown accustomed to since their childhood.

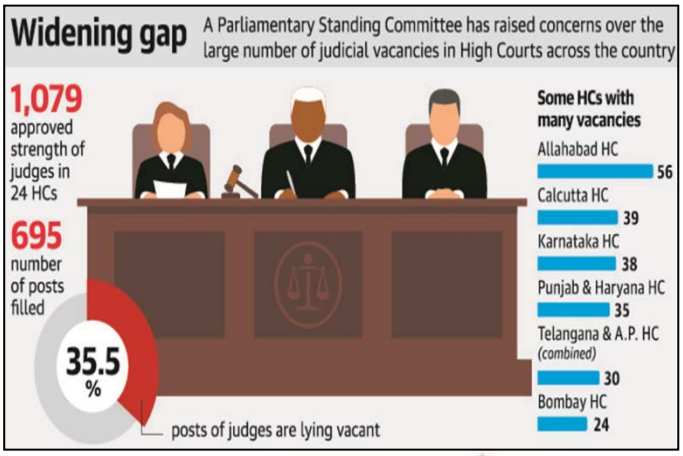
TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

4. Judiciary

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Law Ministry recently denied any proposal to increase the retirement age of Supreme Court judges from 65 to 67 and of High Court judges from 62 to 65.
- It has also stated that no proposal to introduce reservation for women in the appointment of judges in the higher judiciary.
- The government has requested to the chief justices of high courts that while sending proposals for appointment of judges, due consideration be given to suitable candidates belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes, minorities and women.



Proposals of various committees on filling vacancies and eliminating women under representations:

- Parliamentary Standing Committee in its 99th report recommended to increase the retirement age of Supreme Court judges from 65 to 67 and of High Court judges from 62 to 65 for reducing both vacancy and pendency of cases in short run.
- Parliamentary Standing Committee has recommended reservation of women in judiciary in its 84th report as well as 96th report.
- Malimath committee report underscored the low judge-population ratio in India against 50 judges per million population in many parts of the world. The ratio is 19.66 per million people as of 2017.
- 87th Parliamentary standing committee had recommended that Retirement of a particular Judge and appointment against the resultant vacancy should be simultaneously completed.

Women representation in Indian judiciary:

- Since independence, only 6 women Judges have been appointed to the Supreme Court of India.
- Current strength of women in Indian judiciary is only around 11 %.
- What does it infer:
  1. inadequate representation could aggravate biases in the courts.
  2. lack of women in courts lead to questions of the courts' legitimacy as representative of the societies they serve.
  3. presence of women judges signals equality of opportunity for women in the legal profession and an appointments process that is fair, non-discriminatory and based on merit.

Basis for turning down the proposal for women reservation in higher judiciary:

- Judges are appointed in the Supreme Court and High Courts as per Articles 125 and 217 of the Constitution, which did not provide for reservation for any caste, class or gender.

- Any attempt to provide reservation will first of all require amendment in the above articles.
- Other facts which discourage women reservation in Judiciary:
  - There is less number of women practicing law in India. There is nothing in the law of the land to stop women from entering judiciary and become senior lawyers and judges. The profession has to do more with the interest of women than appeasement.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

5. The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Recently, first meeting of a new RERA implementation committee was held were consensus was put forward for amendment in RERA Act to further empower it, similar to what is enjoyed by consumer forums, including the authority to issue arrest warrants.
- Consumer Protection Act, 1986 allows consumer forums to assume the powers of a first class judicial magistrate for the trial of offences under the Act.

The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016:

- The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act 2016 was enacted for bringing transparency and redefining the engagement between various stakeholders in the field of real estate.
- It aims at protecting the interests of consumers and bring in efficiency and transparency in the sale/purchase of real estate.
- One of the frequently cited reasons for the current slowdown in residential sector is the trust deficit between customers and developers.

Key Provisions:

- It establishes state level regulatory authorities called Real Estate Regulatory Authorities (RERA).
- The act requires the developers to register projects with RERA prior to any advertisement and sale.
- It stipulates for an electronic system, maintained on the website of RERA, where developers are expected to update on a quarterly basis the status of their projects, and submit regular audits and architectural reports.
- In case of non-compliance, RERA has the power to order up to three years imprisonment of the promoters of a project.
- It requires developers to maintain separate escrow accounts in relation to each project and deposit 70% of the collections in such an account to ensure that funds collected are utilised only for the specific project.
- It requires real estate brokers and agents to register themselves with the regulator.
- It aims to establish an adjudicatory mechanism for the speedy redress of disputes.
- RERA and the appellate tribunal are expected to decide on complaints within an ambitious period of 60 days.

Issues related to the act:

- Parliament's has gone beyond its jurisdiction to make laws related to real estate as land is in the State List of the Constitution.
- It mandates that 70% of the amount collected from buyers of a project be used only for construction of that project. In certain cases, the cost of construction could be less than 70% and the cost of land more than 30% of the total amount collected. This implies that part of the funds collected could remain unutilized, necessitating some financing from other sources. This could raise the project cost.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

6. Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Union Minister for Electronics and IT has recently informed the Rajya Sabha that the government has finalised the data protection law which would soon be introduced in Parliament.

About the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018:

- It defines personal data as any information which renders an individual identifiable, data 'processing' as any operation, including collection, manipulation, sharing or storage of data, data principal' as the individual whose personal data is being processed, 'data fiduciary' as the entity or individual who decides the means and purposes of processing data, 'data processor' as the entity or individual who processes data on behalf of the fiduciary.
- The Bill governs the processing of personal data by both government and private entities incorporated in India, and entities incorporated overseas, if they systematically deal with data principals within the territory of India. However,

the central government may exempt Indian entities exclusively dealing with data principals outside the territory of India by a notification.

- Bill allows data processing by fiduciaries if consent is provided by the individual. However, in certain circumstances, processing of data may be permitted without the consent of the individual. They include:
  1. Any function of Parliament or state legislature for providing benefits to the individual.
  2. If it is required under law or for compliance with any court judgment.
  3. to respond to a medical emergency, or a breakdown of public order
  4. purposes related to employment, such as recruitment
  5. for reasonable purposes specified by the Data Protection Authority with regard to activities such as fraud detection, debt recovery, credit scoring, and whistle blowing.
- It has defined the sensitive personal data which include passwords, financial data, biometric and genetic data, caste, religious or political beliefs and specifies more stringent grounds for processing of sensitive personal data, such as seeking explicit consent of an individual prior to processing.
- The individual has several rights with respect to their data such as seeking correction or seeking access to their data which is stored with the private entities.
- It sets certain obligations on the private entities towards the individual while processing their data, such as notifying them of the nature and purposes of data processing and to ensure that data is processed 'in a fair and reasonable manner that respects the privacy of the individual'
- It allows exemptions for certain kinds of data processing, such as processing in the interest of national security, for legal proceedings, or for journalistic purposes.
- It requires that a serving copy of personal data be stored within the territory of India. Certain critical personal data must be stored solely within the country. However on the order of the government or the DPA it can be transferred outside the country.
- A national-level Data Protection Authority (DPA) is to be set up under the bill. It is empowered to draft specific regulations for all data fiduciaries, supervise and monitor data fiduciaries, assess compliance with the bill and initiate enforcement actions. Orders of the DPA can be appealed to an appellate tribunal set up by the central government, and appeals from the tribunal will go to the Supreme Court.
- Disclosure, transfers, sale personal and sensitive personal data is punishable with imprisonment ranging up to five years, or a fine of up to three lakh rupees.

What are the issues associated with the bill?

- While the bill places the obligation of ensuring that data of the individual has been processed in fair and reasonable manner, it does not specify any principles or guidelines for what constitutes a 'fair and reasonable' manner of personal data processing. In the absence of any guidelines, it may be unreasonable to expect the fiduciary to demonstrate compliance.
- The Bill states that the fiduciary shall inform the DPA in the event of a data breach only if such a breach is likely to cause harm to any data principal. It will give discretion to the fiduciary to determine whether a data breach needs to be reported to the DPA. It may also give rise to conflict of interest while determining whether a breach is to be reported, as the fiduciary is regulated by the DPA.
- The Bill allows an exemption for the disclosure of personal data for legal proceedings but it can be questioned whether asking for personal information without a court order becomes permissible per this exemption.
- The Bill allows for processing of an individual's personal data without their consent if it is necessary for any function of the Parliament or state legislature. It is unclear what functions of the Parliament would necessitate such processing of data without the consent of the individual.
- The data fiduciary needs to inform the DPA of a data breach if it is likely to harm the individual. There may be a conflict of interest while assessing whether a breach is to be reported, as the fiduciary is regulated and evaluated by the DPA on several parameters, including instances of data breaches.
- The Bill allows exemptions for purposes such as journalism, research, or legal proceedings. It is ambiguous if these meet the standards of necessity and proportionality required for infringements to an individual's right to privacy.
- The state is not required to seek the individual's consent while providing benefits or services. It is unclear why this exemption is not limited only to welfare services as proposed in the Justice Srikrishna Committee Report.
- The Bill mandates storage of a copy of personal data within India to expedite law enforcement's

access to data. This purpose may not be served in some cases, such as when the fiduciary is registered as an entity in a foreign country.

Data protection in India:

- Currently, the transfer of personal data is currently governed by the SPD Rules (Sensitive Personal Data and information, 2011) which has increasingly proved to be inadequate.
- Privacy laws in India offer little protection against misuse of personal information.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

7. Relation between CBI and federal polity in India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

CBI's credibility has been recently put to question when its top officers engaged in maligning each other's image and many states withdrew their general consent" to the CBI for investigating cases there.

What is General Consent?

- The CBI is governed by the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act. This act makes consent of a state government mandatory for conducting investigation in that state.
- There are two kinds of consent: case-specific and general.
- Given that the CBI has jurisdiction only over central government departments and employees, it can investigate a case involving state government employees or a violent crime in a given state only after that state government gives its consent.
- General consent is normally given to help the CBI seamlessly conduct its investigation into cases of corruption against central government employees in the concerned state.
- Almost all states have given such consent. Otherwise, the CBI would require consent in every case.
- Ground for withdrawing general consent:
  1. Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act says, nothing contained in Section 5 shall be deemed to enable any member of the Delhi Special Police Establishment to exercise powers and jurisdiction in any area in a state, not being a Union Territory or Railway, area, without the consent of the Government of that State.
  2. In exercise of power conferred by Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946 (Central Act No 25 of 1946), the government can withdraw the general consent to exercise the powers and jurisdiction as law and order are the state's subject.

What does withdrawal mean?

- CBI will not be able to register any fresh case involving a central government official or a private person stationed in these two states without getting case-specific consent from the local government.
- It will not impact the ongoing CBI investigations in the withdrawing states.
- However, the judiciary recommends for CBI enquiry in any case in the states which have withdrawn general consent, the states can't stop the CBI from going ahead.

Impact of withdrawal of general consent:

- Since the decisions of withdrawing from central agencies from working in the states are most of the time politically motivated, it will weaken the federal polity of the country.
- As many emerging crimes like terrorism, money laundering etc require joint cooperation from the states, such decisions weaken the institutions from effectively combating these problems.
- Other agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate, the National Investigation Agency (NIA), etc. may find it hard to smoothly carry out their operations in the withdrawing states because CBI's cooperation is most of the time becomes important for them to decipher several complexities related to the cases.
- The centre may claim its jurisdiction over its departments located in states, such as railway property, and on matters like terrorism, sedition, counterfeit currency, etc. Even in these cases the central agencies cannot discharge their duties without active cooperation from the state government concerned.
- Such act impact on the aspirations of the civil society or the general public by restricting them to depend on the state investigative agencies whose competency and neutrality are many a times put to question.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

8. Regulation of online sale of drugs

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Madras High Court recently stayed the earlier order of sweeping ban on online sale of medicines stating that

since the centre was yet to notify statutory rules for regulating such sales, imposing a sudden ban would cause grave hardship and health issues to patients relying on e-pharmacies.

E pharmacies in India:

- E-pharmacy in India has the potential to capture a 5-15% share of approximately INR 1000 billion value of Indian pharma retail market.
- Factors for rise in e- pharmacy in India: Ease of accessing drugs online, Rise in internet users(from 0.5% 2000 to 34% in 2016), increase in the cases on chronic diseases and daily lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes etc.
- Steps taken for regulation of this sector:
  1. India does not have any special or specific legal regime which governs E-pharmacy.
  2. In 2015, IIPA (Indian Internet Pharmacy Association) was formed by 11 initial start up E-pharmacy companies like 1 MG, Netmeds, Bookmeds, Medlife etc for assuring an ethical set of rules and regulations with strict adherence to existing legal framework of the nation which was also supported by the Indian government which promotes Digital India seeing e-pharmacy as a strong part of it.
  3. Currently E-Pharmacies in India adheres to the Drug and Cosmetics Act 1940 and Information Technology Act, 2000.
  4. In September 2018, the health ministry came out with the draft rules on sale of drugs by e-pharmacies with an aim to regulate online sale of medicines across India. These are as follows:
     (a) No sell, stock or exhibition without registration.
     (b) Mandatory licensing for the online sellers under Central Licensing Authority.
     (c) Compliance with provisions of Information Technology Act, 2000
     (d) Sale of tranquillisers, psychotropic drugs, narcotics and habit forming drugs have been prohibited through these portals.
     (e) Premises from where the e-pharmacy business is conducted shall be inspected, every two years

Issues and concerns related to the e pharmacy in India:

- Although the e- pharmacy adheres to the Drug and Cosmetics Act 1940 however the law does not distinguish between the conventional and over the internet sale/ distribution of drugs.
- In case of online sale of medicines, it is very difficult to ensure that the medicine or drug is being delivered/sold from a licensed premise, as the consumer is not physically present to verify this.
- The e-pharmacies are not trustworthy as it does not have chemists physically present to ensure that the prescription is correct or there is no spurious sale of medicines.
- Absence of checks or control on cross border sales.
- There is a possibility of pilferage, loss of potency and degradation of drugs and medicines during transportation to the consumer's house, especially if they are being transported over long distances or are of certain specification that requires safe handling, cold storage etc.
- Given the absence of any physical interface between the consumer and a pharmacist, concerns arise as to the compliance with the obligation of the provisions of laws dealing with the sale of drugs.
- Several websites are selling lakhs of medicines on the basis on photos of the prescription and even in the absence of prescriptions.
- There are 19 lakh pharmacies in the country and 50 lakh families are dependent on the people who work in these shops and online pharmacy is harmful for their existence given the prospects of further increase in the number of internet users in the country.
- It is prone to be misused by the children or drug abusers.

Advantages of e- pharmacy:

- Pharmacy retail stores in the country are able to meet only 60 per cent of total domestic demand. There is need of e- pharmacy to fulfill the rest of the demands in the country.
- Traditional retail pharmacies are responsible for 99 per cent of the pharmaceutical sales annually, with online pharmacy contributing to only 1 per cent of the total sales. Hence it is not a threat to those dependents on traditional pharmacies.
- There are many who cannot go to the physical stores to make a purchase like senior citizens, physically disabled people etc. The home delivery service will help them.
- Trusted companies do ask for age proof before delivering the medicines, so there is no scope that children will misuse these platforms.
- Traditional medical shops are notorious for not giving bills but bills are definitely given in an online purchase of medicine which enables the customer to claim and file a case, as well as keep it as a proof for future.

- The GST number and Doctor Licence number is also verified on trusted websites, and if it turns out to be fake the services won't be provided to them.
- Online companies provide massive discounts which are not present in the traditional retail pharmacies.
- It is a major source for FDI in India.

Way forward:

- Regulation not ban of the e- pharmacies is the need of the hour.
- There is need to prohibit those models of e pharmacies like unregistered companies who often violate the ethics and code of conduct related to medicines from selling drugs.
- Several countries have recently taken action to regulate and monitor online pharmacies like China, Portugal etc.
- Draft Pharmaceutical Policy 2017 should be effectively implemented which has recommended that E-pharmacies should be encouraged in the interest of consumers. It has also provided detailed guidelines for E-pharmacies and potential for foreign direct investment in this sector.

III. ECONOMY

TOPIC: GS III, EFFECTS OF LIBERALIZATION ON THE ECONOMY, CHANGES IN INDUSTRIAL POLICY

9. Fugitive Economic Offender

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Absconding liquor baron Vijay Mallya has become the first person to be declared a fugitive offender under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (FEOA). The order was passed under Section 2F of FEOA against Mallya by the PMLA court.

- The investigative agency can now confiscate properties of Mallya which are not directly related to the cases against him.
- The decision comes against an application by the Enforcement Directorate before the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court to classify Mallya as a fugitive economic offender.

Background:

- Mr. Mallya, who left the country in March 2016, was arrested by the U.K. Metropolitan Police's extradition unit on April 18, 2017. On December 10, 2018, a U.K. court ordered that Mr. Mallya could be extradited.

About the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (FEOA):

- The FEOA, which became a law on July 31, 2018, allows for declaring a person as an offender after an arrest warrant has been issued against the individual and the value of offences exceeds ₹100 crore.
- Another condition for declaring a person a fugitive economic offender (FEO) is when the individual refuses to return to the country to face prosecution in the specified cases.
- As per the new law, a special FEOA court can order the confiscation of a FEO's properties, including those which are benami, and the proceeds of crime in and outside India. Once properties are confiscated, the Union government has the right over them, and it can dispose them after 90 days.

The procedure:

- The investigating agencies have to file an application in a Special Court under the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002 containing details of the properties to be confiscated, and any information about the person's whereabouts.
- The Special Court will issue a notice for the person to appear at a specified place and date at least six weeks from the issue of notice.
- Proceedings will be terminated if the person appears. If not the person would be declared as a Fugitive Economic Offender based on the evidence filed by the investigating agencies.
- The person who is declared as a Fugitive Economic Offender can challenge the proclamation in the High Court within 30 days of such declaration according to the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY

10. Survey on Retail Payment Habits of Individuals (SRPHi)

Source: Livemint

Why in news:

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched Survey on Retail Payment Habits of Individuals (SRPHi). The survey will capture payment habits of individuals in six cities, including four metropolitan towns.

Key points:

- The survey will cover a sample of 6,000 individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds across six cities — Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Guwahati.
- The survey seeks qualitative responses from individuals on their payment habits.

- The findings may provide some idea about awareness and usage habits of digital payment products.
- Sigma Research & Consulting Pvt Ltd has been engaged to conduct the fieldwork of the survey on behalf of the RBI.
- Those not approached by the agency can also participate in the survey by sending their responses in a prescribed format available on the RBI's website.

TOPIC: GS III, INFRASTRUCTURE-ROADWAYS

11. Bharatmala Pariyojana

Source: Livemint

Why in news:

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) plans to raise Rs10,000 crore through Bharatmala Taxable Bonds in the ongoing financial year.

- As per the internal and extra budgetary resources approved for 2018-19 by the government, a sum of Rs62,000 crore is to be raised by NHAI through various instruments/sources including Bharatmala bonds.
- The amount is being raised accordingly and till date a sum of Rs. 41,170 crore has been raised by NHAI.

About Bharatmala Pariyojana:

- Bharatmala Pariyojana is a umbrella program for the highways sector that focuses on optimizing efficiency of freight and passenger movement across the country by bridging critical infrastructure gaps through effective interventions like development of Economic Corridors, Inter Corridors and Feeder Routes, National Corridor Efficiency Improvement, Border and International connectivity roads, Coastal and Port connectivity roads and Green-field expressways.
- Under the phase 1 of Bharatmala Pariyojana, the government has approved implementation of 24,800 km highways and 10,000 km balance NHDP projects over a period of five years from 2017-18 to 2021-22.

About NHAI:

- The National Highways Authority of India was constituted by an act of Parliament, the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988.
- It is responsible for the development, maintenance and management of National Highways entrusted to it and for matters connected or incidental thereto. T
- The Authority was operationalised in Feb, 1995.

IV. ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

12. Cinereous Vulture

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Bird watchers and researchers recently sighted Cinereous vulture in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.

Background:

- It is usually during the winter that a distinctly dark large bird – the Cinereous vulture, with a blacked-tipped pink beak – migrates from the mountainous regions of Europe and Asia to warmer places, including India. While earlier records of this migratory bird have revealed that it comes to northern parts of India up to Rajasthan, bird watchers and researchers were baffled to find it in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.
- India is home to nine species of vultures and with the population of these birds dwindling, the country has launched a species-recovery plan through conservation breeding centres in different parts of the country.

About Cinereous Vulture:

- Cinereous vulture (Aegypius monachus) draws its name from "monachus", which means hooded (like a monk) in Latin.
- It is also known as the black vulture, monk vulture, or Eurasian black vulture.
- It is classified as Near Threatened under the IUCN Red List.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

13. Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2019

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The 2019 edition of the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) has been released.

About CCPI:

- Since its first release in 2005, the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) has tracked countries' efforts to combat climate change.
- On the basis of standardised criteria, the index evaluates and compares the climate protection

performance of 56 countries and the European Union, which are together responsible for more than 90% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

- The CCPI has been an important tool in contributing to a clearer understanding of national and international climate policy. As we approach the year 2020, when countries need to submit their amended national climate targets (revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the CCPI aims to inform the process of raising climate ambition.
- The CCPI is annually published by German watch, the New Climate Institute and the Climate Action Network.
- The ranking results are defined by a country's aggregated performance regarding 14 indicators within the four categories "GHG Emissions", "Renewable Energy" and "Energy Use", as well as on "Climate Policy", in a globally unique policy section of the index.

About CCPI-2019:

- No country performed well enough to reach the ranking very good in this year's index, meaning that no country has yet made it to one of the top three places in the rankings.
- In this year's index, Sweden leads the ranking, followed by Morocco and Lithuania.
- The bottom five in this year's CCPI are Saudi Arabia, the United States, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Korea and Chinese Taipei, scoring low or very low across almost all categories.
- India ranks 11th in this year's CCPI, improving its standing by three places compared to the previous edition.

TOPIC: GS III, E-TECHNOLOGY IN THE AID OF FARMERS

14. GEF assisted Green – Ag Project to transform Indian Agriculture

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Government has launched the "Green – Ag: Transforming Indian Agriculture for global environmental benefits and the conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes" in association with Global Environment Facility (GEF).

About the Project:

- The project would be implemented in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in high-conservation-value landscapes of five States namely, (i) Madhya Pradesh: Chambal Landscape, (ii) Mizoram: Dampa Landscape, (iii) Odisha: Similipal Landscape, (iv) Rajasthan: Desert National Park Landscape and v) Uttarakhand: Corbett-Rajaji Landscape.
- The Green-Ag project seeks to integrate biodiversity, climate change and sustainable land management objectives and practices into Indian agriculture.
- The project aims to catalyze a transformative change of India's agricultural sector to support the achievement of national and global environmental benefits and conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes.
- The project supports harmonization between India's agricultural and environmental sector priorities and investments to realise the national and global environmental benefits without compromising on India's ability to strengthen rural livelihoods and meet its food and nutrition security.

About GEF:

- The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.
- Today, GEF is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues.
- GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.
- GEF support is provided to government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector companies, research institutions, among the broad diversity of potential partners, to implement projects and programs in recipient countries.
- The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund.

TOPIC: GS III, DIFFERENT TYPES OF IRRIGATION AND IRRIGATION SYSTEMS STORAGE

15. Andhra Pradesh gets CBIP award for Polavaram Project

Source: The Hindu

What's the news?

The Andhra Pradesh government was conferred the Central Board of Irrigation and Power (CBIP) award for speedy execution of Polavaram multipurpose project.

- Andhra Pradesh received the award in the category of "Best Implementation of Water

Resources Project" for better planning, implementation and monitoring.

About the Polavaram project:

- Polavaram Project is a multi-purpose irrigation project. The dam across the Godavari River is under construction located in West Godavari District and East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh state and its reservoir spreads in parts of Chhattisgarh and Orissa States also.
- The project is for development of Irrigation, Hydropower and drinking water facilities to East Godavari, Vishakhapatnam, West Godavari and Krishna districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- The Polavaram project was accorded national status in 2014 in the Andhra Pradesh Bifurcation Act and its design was changed.

About CBIP:

- Central Board of Irrigation and Power (CBIP) is a Premier Institution of Indian government rendering dedicated services to the professional organization, engineers and individuals in the country related to Power, Water Resources and Renewable Energy Sectors for the last 90 years. CBIP was established in the year 1927.

TOPIC: GS III, DIFFERENT TYPES OF IRRIGATION AND IRRIGATION SYSTEMS STORAGE

16. Mandal Dam Project

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has laid the foundation stone for completion of the remaining part of North Koel Reservoir which is also known as Mandal Dam project in Palamu district of Jharkhand.

About the Mandal Dam Project:

- The Mandal Dam project will help around one lakh eleven thousand hectares of agricultural land in Jharkhand and Bihar to get irrigation facilities.
- Funding: 60% of the project cost would be financed by the central government as a grant from Long-Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF) under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY). Remaining 40% will be borne by the States through loan financed by NABARD.

Why the project was stalled?

- The construction of the Mandal Dam began in 1972 and continued till 1993. Later it was stalled over the concerns raised by the Bihar Forest Department.
- The project threatens to submerge the portions of the Palamau Tiger Reserve and Betla National Park. The central government has now approved the 'in principle' for diversion of forest under Palamu Tiger Reserve (PTR) for the construction of Mandal Dam. The Central Government has set some conditions in this regard.

About North Koel River:

- North Koel River originates on Ranchi plateau in Jharkhand and joins the Sone River, a few miles north-west of Haidarnagar in Jharkhand. The river meanders through the northern part of Betla National Park. The principal tributaries of the North Koel River are Auranga and the Amanat.

TOPIC: GS I, DISTRIBUTION OF KEY NATURAL RESOURCES ACROSS THE WORLD

17. Establishing Gas Trading Hub/Exchange in the country

Source: PIB

Why in news:

It has been agreed to establish the gas trading hub(s)/exchange(s) in the country wherein the natural gas can be freely traded and supplied through a market mechanism.

Development of Natural Gas Grid:

- In order to develop the natural gas grid, Government has taken a decision to provide a capital grant of Rs. 5176 crore (i.e. 40% of the estimated capital cost of Rs. 12,940 Crore) to GAIL for development of a 2655 Km long Jaddishpur-Haldia/Bokaro-Dhamra Gas Pipeline (JHBDPL) project.
- This pipeline will transport Natural Gas to the industrial, commercial, domestic and transport sectors in the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

An Integrated Refinery-cum-Petrochemical Complex:

- Oil Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) namely Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) have decided to set up an integrated refinery-cum-petrochemical complex with a refining capacity of 60 MMTPA (Million Metric Tonnes Per Annum) at Babulwadi, Taluka Rajapur in Ratnagiri District in the state of Maharashtra.

Background:

- The establishment of a hub is an attempt to meet operators' demands for the adoption of a market-based gas-pricing regime. But India faces challenges in making the dream a reality, amid concerns over third-party access and competition.

- The gas hub plan ties in with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to boost the share of natural gas in India's energy mix to 15% by 2030, from just over 6% now.
- Domestic supply is also increasing. ONGC, India's largest producer, supplied 23.5bn cubic meters of gas in the 2017-18 financial year and plans to almost double this within the next four years.
- The Indian authorities, are considering overhauling the policy of fixed domestic gas prices, currently based on a formula derived from prices in the US, Canada, UK and Russia. Delhi sees itself as a potential candidate for Asia's largest LNG trading hub, in a region that lacks accurate benchmarks reflecting Asian gas fundamentals.

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

18. Indo- Bhutan Relation

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The newly elected Prime Minister of Bhutan recently paid visit to India which was his first foreign visit after assuming the office showing the importance of India for the country.
- Both the country has recently celebrated the golden jubilee for completion of 50 years of establishment of their formal relations.
- India has announced that it will contribute Rs 4,500 crore to Bhutan's 12th Five-Year Plan.

Importance of the visit:

Topics to be discussed by the Bhutanese PM in his visit:

1. An upgraded tariff for the 720 MW bilateral Mangdechhu project. It is constructed on river Torsha. Lion's share of 4500 crore project funding is from India in the form of 30% as grant and 70% loan. It is estimated to generate 2,923GWh of green electricity while contributing 2.2 million ton of CO^2 offset per year from atmosphere.
2. Expediting the 2,560 MW Sunkosh Reservoir project.
3. To seek support of India's for Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan (FYP).
4. Issues related to GST which are hampering trade between the country.

Current problems of Bhutan:

- Economic growth of Bhutan has shrunk from 7% in 2017 to 5.8%in 2018.
- External debt of the country has escalated at $2.6 billion which is 115% of its estimated GDP and most of it owed to India.
- Unemployment rate has soared at 13.2% from 10.7% in last few years.
- Bhutan's total dependence on hydropower which has become vulnerable due to many factors like climate, India becoming net exporter of electricity.
- Delays in hydropower construction that could lower exports and revenue.
- Climate shocks to the hydropower and agriculture sector.

Strategic importance of both the countries for each other:

- Bhutan is central to India's 'Neighborhood First Policy given its strategic location between India and China.
- India's budgetary grants have been critical for Bhutan's five-year plans.
- Bhutan's focus on hydropower for the past five decades has been mainly because of Indian support and its assurances to buy back the electricity generated.
- Ground station of ISRO is being built in Bhutan which is expected benefit the country in weather information, telemedicine and disaster relief in many inaccessible parts of the country.

Current issues between the two countries:

- Bhutanese products have become more expensive for Indian importers after the implementation of GST which has badly hurt the exporters of the country.
- Bhutan is at the risk of debt distress as India remains Bhutan's largest creditor with 73.53% of overall external debt.
- Issue related to Bhutan's sovereignty and independence is gradually becoming a bone of contention between the two countries especially after 2017 Doklam standoff between Indian and Chinese troops over the region disputed by China and Bhutan. India is responsible for Bhutan's

security in case of any external threat as per the 2007 treaty of friendship between the two countries. Many in Bhutan are not happy with this provision.

- Bhutan withdrew from the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Motor Vehicle Agreement which was sponsored by India due to the reason that it would adversely affect its environment and sovereignty.
- India's subsidized exports to Bhutan consists of most of the essential goods have badly hurt the growth of domestic sectors within Bhutan while helping India exercise its hold on Bhutanese market.
- China is beleaguered to enter in Bhutan and some of the leaders of Bhutan are in favour of this which is a major threat for India.

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

19. NASA New Horizons

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- On January 1, NASA's New Horizons spacecraft became the first explorer to fly past Ultima Thule (pronounced as TOO-lee).
- This is a historic flyby of the farthest, and quite possibly the oldest, cosmic body ever explored by humankind.

About Ultima Thule:

Ultima Thule- which means "beyond the known world"- is located in the Kuiper belt in the outermost regions of the Solar System, beyond the orbit of Neptune.

- Ultima Thule is 4 billion miles (6.4 billion kilometres) from Earth.
- It measures approximately 30 km in diameter, and is irregularly shaped.
- Ultima Thule has a reddish color, probably caused by exposure of hydrocarbons to sunlight over billions of years.
- Ultima Thule belongs to a class of Kuiper belt objects called the "cold classicals", which have nearly circular orbits with low inclinations to the solar plane.

About New Horizon Mission:

New Horizon Mission is an interplanetary space probe part of NASA's New Frontiers programme. The New Horizon was launched in 2006.

- The primary mission to perform a flyby study of the Pluto system in 2015.
- The secondary mission to fly by and study one or more other Kuiper belt objects.

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

20. Space Activities Bill, 2017

Sources: The Hindu, Business Standard

Why in news:

The government is likely to introduce the Space Activities Bill, 2017, which will allow commercial use of space, in the budget session of 2019.

- The bill had received responses from the public, Indian aerospace industry, related start-ups, space law experts, scholars, satcom companies and scientists. The government is in the process to address the concerns expressed by the stakeholders.

Features of Space activities bill 2017:

It is a proposed Bill to promote and regulate the space activities of India. The new Bill encourages the participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities in India under the guidance and authorisation of the government through the Department of Space.

- The provisions of this Act shall apply to every citizen of India and to all sectors engaged in any space activity in India or outside India.
- A non-transferable licence shall be provided by the Central Government to any person carrying out commercial space activity.
- The Central Government will formulate the appropriate mechanism for licensing, eligibility criteria, and fees for licence.
- The government will maintain a register of all space objects (any object launched or intended to be launched around the earth) and develop more space activity plans for the country.
- It will provide professional and technical support for commercial space activity and regulate the procedures for conduct and operation of space activity.
- It will ensure safety requirements and supervise the conduct of every space activity of India and investigate any incident or accident in connection with the operation of a space activity.
- It will share details about the pricing of products created by space activity and technology with any person or any agency in a prescribed manner.
- If any person undertakes any commercial space activity without authorisation they shall be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years or fined more than ₹1 crore or both.

Significance of legislation on outer space:

- There is a need for national space legislation for supporting the overall growth of the space activities in India. This would encourage enhanced participation of non-governmental/private sector agencies in space activities in India, in compliance with international treaty obligations, which is becoming very relevant today.

Problems with the bill:

- The bill falls short in addressing the space-based activities separately.
- The bill tries to cover large swaths of the space value chain in one go. This would make the regulatory environment clumsy.
- The definition of space activity is ambiguous. The current definition puts every space object under its ambit; even hardware that carries GPS receivers could require a license.
- The bill will adversely affect the navigation services provided by companies such as Google Maps, Ola and Uber.

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY – DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS AND EFFECTS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

21. ISRO launches Samwad with Students on New Year Day

Source: PIB

What's the news?

As part of the enhanced outreach programme of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), a new platform named "Samwad with Students" (SwS) was launched in Bengaluru.

- The first SwS event saw 40 wards and 10 teachers from select schools interact with ISRO Chairman Dr K Sivan at the Anthariksh Bhavan.
- Further, ISRO will be organising guided tours thrice in a year, especially during summer and Christmas holidays for students of class 11 and class 12. The students would be taken to Isro facilities in Thiruvananthapuram and Bengaluru and the launch centre at Sriharikota. Students would also be taken to space laboratories and would be allowed to make small satellites.

About the SwS Initiative:

- ISRO aims to engage youngsters across India to capture their scientific temperament.
- The new conversation mission will inspire students cutting across schools and colleges.

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

22. Chang'e-4 Mission

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

China's Chang'e- 4 probe spacecraft has become the first spacecraft to land on the far side of the moon. The rover and lander are carrying instruments to analyse the unexplored region's geology. China has named the rover as Yutu 2.

- China launched the Chang'e-4 probe in December, 2018 by a Long March-3B rocket.

Von Kármán crater and the far side of Moon:

- Von Kármán crater is located within the oldest and largest impact feature on the Moon – the South Pole-Aitken Basin, which was formed by a giant asteroid impact billions of years ago.
- The Moon is tidally locked to Earth, rotating at the same rate that it orbits our planet, so the far side is never visible from Earth. The probe, the Chang'e-4, made the first-ever soft landing on the far side of the Moon. Previous spacecraft have seen the far side of the Moon, but none has landed on it.
- The far side of the moon known as 'South Pole-Aitken Basin' still remains a mystery among space scientists and by sending a probe there, China will outdo the historical achievements of the US and USSR.

About the Chang'e- 4 mission:

- Chang'e -4 is the fourth mission in the country's lunar mission series which is being named after the Chinese moon goddess.
- The tasks of the Chang'e-4 probe include low-frequency radio astronomical observation, surveying the terrain and landforms, detecting the mineral composition, and measuring the neutron radiation and neutral atoms to study the environment on the far side of the moon.

China's lunar exploration programmes:

- China began their lunar exploration program in 2007 by launching a simple lunar orbiter named 'Chang'e-1'. The second mission in the program named 'Chang'e-2' was launched in 2010, and it was later followed by the third mission 'Chang'e-3'. 'Chang'e- 3' made headlines all around the world as it marked the first soft moon landing since 1976.
- The first and second Chang'e missions were aimed at gathering data from orbit. The third and fourth missions concentrated on surface operations. The fifth and sixth are sample return missions, delivering lunar rock and soil to laboratories on Earth.

TOPIC: GS III, DISASTER AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

23. Cyclone Pabuk

Source: Indian Express

Why in news:

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has sounded a yellow alert for the cyclone Pabuk.

Key points:

- Cyclone Pabuk originated over the Gulf of Thailand and neighbourhood.
- The IMD predicted that Pabuk would move west-north-westwards and emerge into the Andaman Sea. Then it would move north-westwards and cross the Andaman Islands. Then reserve north-eastwards towards Myanmar coast and weaken gradually.

Four Stage Warning:

- The cyclone warnings are issued to state government officials in four stages.
- The First Stage warning known as "PRE CYCLONE WATCH" issued 72 hours in advance contains early warning about the development of a cyclonic disturbance in the north Indian Ocean, its likely intensification into a tropical cyclone and the coastal belt likely to experience adverse weather. This early warning bulletin is issued by the Director General of Meteorology himself and is addressed to the Cabinet Secretary and other senior officers of the Government of India including the Chief Secretaries of concerned maritime states.
- The Second Stage warning known as "CYCLONE ALERT" is issued at least 48 hrs. in advance of the expected commencement of adverse weather over the coastal areas. It contains information on the location and intensity of the storm likely direction of its movement, intensification, coastal districts likely to experience adverse weather and advice to fishermen, general public, media and disaster managers. This is issued by the concerned ACWCs/CWCs and CWD at HQ.
- The Third Stage warning known as "CYCLONE WARNING" issued at least 24 hours in advance of the expected commencement of adverse weather over the coastal areas. Landfall point is forecast at this stage. These warnings are issued by ACWCs/CWCs/and CWD at HQ at 3 hourly interval giving the latest position of cyclone and its intensity, likely point and time of landfall, associated heavy rainfall, strong wind and storm surge along with their impact and advice to general public, media, fishermen and disaster managers.
- The Fourth Stage of warning known as "POST LANDFALL OUTLOOK" is issued by the concerned ACWCs/CWCs/and CWD at HQ at least 12 hours in advance of expected time of landfall. It gives likely direction of movement of the cyclone after its landfall and adverse weather likely to be experienced in the interior areas.
- Different colour codes as mentioned below are being used since post monsoon season of 2006 the different stages of the cyclone warning bulletins as desired by the National Disaster Management.

Stage of warning	Colour code
Cyclone Alert	Yellow.
Cyclone Warning	Orange.
Post-landfall outlook	Red.

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

24. International Solar Alliance

- According to a year-end review of the government's policies, the establishment of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) by India ranked amongst its biggest successes, as it is the first multilateral organisation with as many as 71 member countries already signed on.

About International Solar Alliance (ISA):

- It is an alliance dedicated to collectively work for efficient exploitation of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil based fuels.
- It was launched in United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in November 2015.
- It does not impose any targets or legal obligations on member-countries.
- It aims to mobilize investment of around US billion $1000 by 2030 for the massive deployment of affordable solar energy and pave the way for future solar generation and storage.
- Its headquarter is located in Gurugram which was laid jointly by India and France.
- Previously its membership was open for countries falling between tropic of cancer and tropic of Capricorn however in the first assembly of the ISA in 2018 the membership was extended to all the countries of the world.
- 71 countries have signed but not ratified and 48 countries have both signed and ratified the agreement.
- It has a two-tier structure – the Assembly and the Secretariat.

- Each member-country is represented on the Assembly, which meets annually on the basis of one member one vote.
- Initiatives: - With World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Climate Parliament of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), ISA has signed and issued joint declarations for the promotion and cooperation of solar energy.

25. Adopt a Heritage' Project

- An MoU has been recently signed between government and M/s Resbird Technologies under Adopt a Heritage" project for development of a mobile Audio Guide App for five iconic sites.
- These sites are Amer Fort (Rajasthan), Kaziranga (Assam), Colva Beach (Goa), Kumarakom (Kerala) and Mahabodhi Temple (Bihar).

About Adopt a Heritage project:

- Launched by ministry of tourism on World Tourism Day (27th September) in 2017 in collaboration with ministry of culture and Archeological Survey of India (ASI), to develop the heritage sites / monuments and making them tourist-friendly and enhancing their tourism potential along with their cultural importance.
- For the development of tourist amenities, the project will entrust heritage sites/monuments and other tourist sites to private sector companies, public sector companies and individuals. They will be called as Monument Mitras.
- The advantage of this project is that it allows private players to build, "tourist-friendly" and "world class amenities at these sites using their CSR funds which will boost domestic and international tourism.

26. Electoral bonds

- Recently, seventh tranche of electoral bonds sale took place by the authorized branches of SBI.

About Electoral bonds:

- Electoral bonds are alternative to cash donations made to political parties as part of efforts to bring transparency in political funding.
- The scheme was announced in Union Budget 2017.
- It is just like a promissory note that will be payable to bearer on demand and free of interest. It can be purchased by a citizen of India or anybody incorporated in India.
- A party registered under the Representation of People's act, 1951 and securing not less than one percent of the votes polled in the preceding election is entitled to receive the electoral bonds.
- The bonds can only be encashed by an eligible political party only through a bank account with the authorized bank.
- They are valid for fifteen calendar days from the date of issue.
- The bonds are issued in multiples of 1000, 10000, 1lakh, 10 lakh, 1 crore.
- The cash donation has been capped at Rs. 2000 and beyond that donations are via electoral bonds.
- Donations will be tax deductible, and the benefitting political party will get a tax exemption for the amount received.

Advantages:

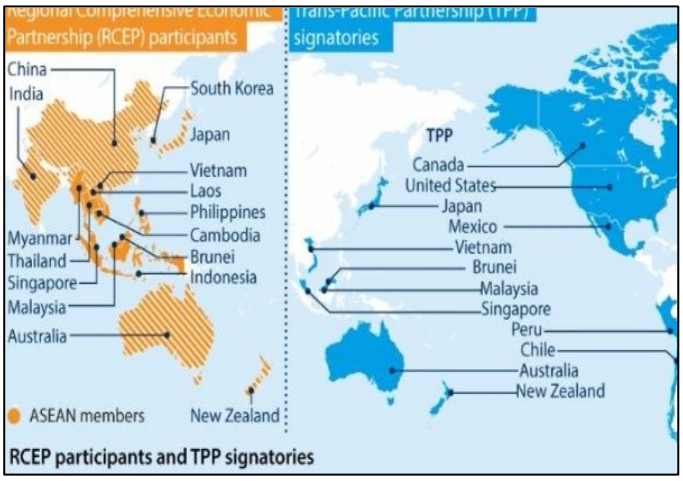
- Transparent political funding.
- Protecting donors from harassment.
- No disclosure of information to third parties.
- Achieving Digital India vision.
- Bringing donations under tax preview.

27. RCEP Agreement

- Recently, the ministry of commerce reported about the significance of the regional comprehensive economic partnership.

Details of the report:

- Greater market access for India's goods and services exports.
- Greater investments and technology into India.
- Facilitating India's MSMEs to effectively integrate into the regional value and supply chains.



About Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership:

- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a proposed free trade agreement between ten ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member states and their six free trade agreement

partners namely India, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea.

- It was conceptualized in 2011 and formally floated in 2012.
- The 16 RCEP member states accounted for population of 3.4 billion people with total GDP (in terms of PPP) of $49.5 trillion, approximately 38% of the world's GDP (combined GDPs of China and India makes up more than half that amount) and 29% of world trade.
- Includes: trade in goods, trade in services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property, competition, dispute settlement, e-commerce, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and other issues.
- RCEP is viewed as alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed trade agreement that includes several Asian and American nations but excludes India and China.

28. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway

- Recently, the ministry of road and transport has stated the progress on the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway in the Parliament.

About India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway:

- The 1360 kms long India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is an initiative pertaining to India, Myanmar and Thailand under India's act east policy.
- The highway is expected to boost trade and commerce in ASEAN–India free trade area, as well as with rest of Southeast Asia.
- It will connect Moreh in India with Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar.
- India has also proposed extending the highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

29. Mission Indradhanush

- The ministry of health and family welfare has recently stated in the Parliament that Mission Indradhanush' has been selected as one of the 12 best practices globally.

About Mission Indradhanush:

- Mission Indradhanush was launched in December 2014 with the aim to fully immunize more than 90% of children under age of 2 years, as well as all pregnant women, against seven vaccine preventable diseases.
- These diseases are diphtheria, whooping cough, poliomyelitis, tetanus, tuberculosis, measles and Hepatitis B. In addition to this, vaccines for Japanese Encephalitis and Haemophilus influenzae type B are also being provided Rubella, Injectable Polio Vaccine Bivalent and Rotavirus are also provided in selected states.
- In 2018, the intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) was launched to accelerate full immunization coverage which aims at reducing maternal and child mortality by reaching out to each and every child under two years of age and all pregnant women who have been left uncovered under routine immunisation programme.

30. Swachh Sundar Shauchalaya

- In an effort to promote ownership and sustained usage of toilets and also provide a facelift to the crores of toilets built under the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched a month-long campaign, Swachh Sundar Shauchalaya.
- The campaign comprises a unique contest, under which, households are being mobilised to paint and decorate their toilets.
- It will be spearheaded by Gram Panchayats and coordinated by district administrations.
- The campaign will involve rural communities in the 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats across the country. Individual households, gram panchayats and districts will be awarded on the basis of number of toilets painted and the quality and creativity of their work.

31. Phuti Masjid

- It is a mosque in the city of Kumarpur, India which was built by Nawab Sarfaraz Khan in 1740 AD.
- It is said to have been built by Nawab Sarfaraz Khan in a single night, however it is said that the Nawab hired the masons for several months where the mater role was called one day.

- As the builder died soon after construction began, the mosque was never completed. Only two of its five planned domes were completed and so it got its name as Phuti Masjid, or broken mosque.

Question:

1. Highlighting the key provisions of the Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill, 2019 discuss its significance. Discuss the key issues associated with the bill.
2. Although, the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan is considered to be a landmark cleanliness scheme yet it's aim to achieve its target is not certain. Do you agree?
3. Highlighting the recommendations of various committees discuss the need to enhance women representation in the Indian judiciary. Do you think that providing reservations to women in the Judiciary is the only solution for this problem? What are the valid grounds for not providing reservations in the Indian Judiciary.
4. Highlighting the key provisions of Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018 show that it is a landmark step towards protecting individual privacy. Critically analyse various issues associated with the bill.
5. Excessive politicisation of the institutions weakens the federal polity of the country. Discuss in light of the recent withdrawal of general consent of the states against CBI.
6. Critically analyse the advantages and disadvantages of e- pharmacy in India. Do you think that regulation of e- pharmacies in place of banning them should be preferred?
7. Highlighting the strategic importance of both India and Bhutan for each other discuss the current contention between these two countries. Do you think that Bhutan's economy is mostly dependent on India?