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VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS I, CULTURE

1. Women entry in Sabarimala

Source: The Hindu

Why in news

- The Supreme Court is hearing oral arguments in Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala, in which rules that bar the entry of women aged between 10 and 50 years into the Sabarimala temple in Kerala have been called into question.

- The case is a clash between a series of apparently conflicting claims:

  (a) The temple's right to decide for itself how its religious affairs ought to be managed.

  (b) The rights of a community of devotees who believe that a bar on women's entry is an essential religious practice.

  (c) The rights of those women seeking to assert not only their freedom to unreservedly enter and pray at the shrine, but also their rights to be recognised as equals under the Constitution.

- The study of the rival contentions shows, the religious freedom clauses in the Constitution are possessed of a special complexity, which the court's own past jurisprudence has turned into a swamp of contradictions.

Freedom of religion:

- The right to freedom of religion of both individuals and groups is recognised as an intrinsic facet of a liberal democracy. The Constitution memorialises these guarantees in Articles 25 and 26.

- Article 26 recognises a right to freedom of conscience and a right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion, subject to common community exceptions of public order, morality, and health, and also, crucially, to the guarantee of other fundamental rights. It also subject to limitations imposed on grounds of public order, morality, and health, accords to every religious denomination the right, among other things, to establish and maintain institutions for religious purposes and to manage their own affairs in matters of religion.

- Article 25(2)(b) creates a further exception to the right. It accords to the state a power to make legislation, in the interests of social welfare and reform, throwing open Hindu religious institutions of public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Conflicting claims:

- The petitioners have argued that the ban enforced on menstruating women from entering the Sabarimala shrine does not constitute a core foundation of the assumed religious denomination.

- The Travancore Devaswom Board has claimed that its deity, Lord Ayyappa, is a "Naisthik Brahmachari," and that allowing young women to enter the temple would affect the idol's "celibacy" and "austerity".

"Essential Religious Practices" Doctrine:

- Traditionally, to resolve tensions of this kind, the Supreme Court has relied on a very particular jurisprudence that it has carved for itself to determine what manners of rituals and beliefs deserve special constitutional protection. This doctrine requires the court to define what constitutes, in its own words, an "essential religious practice". This canon is integral to how the case ought to now be decided.

Way forward:

- For the court to enter into an analysis of these rival claims, by conducting a trial on whether there exists a tradition as claimed that is essential to the practice of religion, would be exceeding the remit of its authority. Therefore, what is needed is a subtler yet more profound inquiry.

- The court must ask itself whether it should yield to the temple's view on an assumption that there does exist a time-honoured custom prohibiting any women aged between 10 and 50 years from praying at the shrine.

- The law favouring the autonomy of the group over the autonomy of the individual tends to have the harmful effect of favouring the view of the association proffered by the powerful over the views proffered by less powerful members of the group that is, traditionally subordinate members such as women, children, and sexual minorities.

- The court should see this as an opportunity not to rationalise religious practices, but to overturn its existing outdated ideas on the subject.

- Given the relationship between religion and public life, it's time the court shattered the conventional divides of the public and the private. If the court can look beyond the essential practices doctrine and see this case for what it really is — a denial to women not only of their individual rights to freedom of religion but also of equal access to public space — it can help set the tone for a radical re-reading of the Constitution. Ultimately, the Constitution must be seen as representing not a hoary conception of boundaries between the

state and the individual, but as a transcendental tool for social revolution.

SC verdict:

- The Supreme Court on Thursday said irrespective of the submissions that Lord Ayyappa of the Sabarimala temple has "celibate character", it could not remain "oblivious" of the fact that the entry of women in the age group of 10-50 was barred on the "physiological ground" of menstruation.

- It stated that if Constitution overrides all other aspects then nobody can exclude a class of women from visiting a temple."

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

2. Amendment in no detention policy in RTE Act

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Lok Sabha has passed a Bill to amend the Right To Education Act (Right of Children To Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009), to relax the absolute prohibition against holding back a student up to class VII.

- Section 16 of the principal Act states that no child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education. 'Elementary education' is defined as education from class one to class eight, as per Section 2(f).

Issues associated with the amendment:

- The proposed change will allow State Boards to declare a student failed and detain her on the basis of an examination, although Section 30(1) of the RTE Act holds out the assurance that no child shall be required to face any Board examination till completion of elementary education.

- Educationists, argue that it would weaken one of the progressive features of the RTE Act, which is to guarantee the continued presence of the child in school during the formative learning phase.

- There are genuine concerns on learning outcomes produced by India's schooling system. But these are determined not only by a student's effort but also by the number and quality of teachers, processes for continuous assessment and, crucially, active engagement of parents and the community in encouraging excellence. It is the lack of attention to some of these determinants that has created a "broken" school education system.

- Detaining already disadvantaged children can only break it further, and render the RTE Act a dead letter.

- In 2016 the NITI Aayog found that bringing back detention in elementary schooling would increase the dropout rate, impacting the poor and Dalits the most as they depended on government institutions.

- When parents are unable to ensure regular attendance of children due to social circumstances, it is inconceivable that detaining them for non-performance will act as an incentive to attend school regularly.

- The move to introduce examinations as filters has not been fully thought through, and may be a hasty response to demands from State governments which want to be seen as acting firmly in favour of quality.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

3. Difference between recommendation of Srikrishna committee and TRAI on Data privacy

Source: Business Line

Applicability of the law

- Both, TRAI and the Srikrishna Committee agree that the country's current data protection framework is inadequate. They also agree that the data protection law should apply to entities regardless of where they are physically located, so long as they process the data of Indian residents/citizens.

What information should be protected under the law?

- TRAI and the Srikrishna Committee have both opined that it is important to specify what information is protected under data protection law and what is not, although they disagree on the specifics.

- They both agree that the law should protect individuals' personal data, but disagree on what personal data actually is.

- Under current Indian law, data which can be used to identify an individual is "personal data" should come under personal data. TRAI is satisfied with this understanding, finding it to be in line with international standards. For the Srikrishna Committee, identifiability or the lack thereof is a false binary in a world of new technologies, and feels that the current approach is unworkable.

Who should be liable under the law?

- TRAI and the Srikrishna Committee both appear to agree that the law needs to clearly spell out who is

Safeguarding data

A look at definitions of personal data and the right to be forgotten as per the draft bill

WHAT IS PERSONAL DATA?

- Data relating to a natural person who is directly or indirectly identifiable, having regard to any characteristic, trait, attribute or any other feature of the identity of such natural person, or any combination of such features, or any combination of such features with any other information

THE RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN

As per the B.N.Srikrishna Committee report on data privacy:

- The right to be forgotten refers to the ability of individuals to limit, delink, delete, or correct the disclosure of personal information on the internet that is misleading, embarrassing, irrelevant, or anachronistic

- Such disclosure may or may not be a consequence of unlawful processing by the data fiduciary. This is because the right flows from the general obligation of data fiduciaries to not only process lawfully, but also in a manner that is fair and reasonable

accountable for breaches of data protection standards, but differ on how this should play out in practice. Specifically, the Srikrishna Committee leans towards holding only data controllers liable, while TRAI has adopted a more hardline stance and feels that data controllers, data processors and any other entity handling the personal data of the user should be made accountable for any unintended harm to users.

User rights and consent

- Both, the telecom regulator and the committee agree that individuals should have core rights including notice and consent — the right to be notified of data collection and the right to consent to data collection. Other rights that both recognise for data subjects include the right to be forgotten and the right to data portability (both, in limited forms).

- The committee, however, has identified certain additional user rights, which are not a part of TRAI's recommendations. These include the right of users to access and rectify personal data, the right to object to and restrict processing (including for direct marketing), and the right against decisions being made only by automated processing.

- On the other hand, on data ownership, TRAI has gone a step beyond the Srikrishna Committee. While the committee has acknowledged the need to ensure that data subjects have "full power" over their data, TRAI has categorically said users own their personal information, whereas entities that control or process user data "are mere custodians" with no primary rights over user data. On consent specifically, TRAI's recommendations go well beyond the Srikrishna Committee's provisional views.

- In a set of recommendations that are likely to have impact across all sectors of the economy,

TRAI has recommended that data controllers mandatorily disclose terms and conditions of use before the sale of devices and that they be barred from using "pre-ticked" boxes to gain consent. Further, the telecom regulator has recommended that a specific consent framework, along the lines of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's (MeitY) Electronic Consent Framework, be notified for the telecom sector.

Data localization:

- The Srikrishna Committee is of the opinion that data localisation requirements may be considered for certain sensitive sectors, but may not be advisable across the board. For the telecom sector, the committee has noted that requirements to locally store data in India might cause inconvenience to global telecom companies.

- TRAI has restricted itself to a general analysis on the merits and demerits of mandatory data localisation, without issuing concrete recommendations, citing that these issues are pertinent to all sectors of the economy.

Conclusion:

- Whatever are the Srikrishna Committee's final recommendations on the issues mentioned above, it is certain that sectoral regulators including TRAI, RBI, and others, will play a crucial role in shaping India's data protection law in the years to come.

- Although we will have a country-wide data protection law, operationalising it in different sectors will be the responsibility of the respective regulators. Given this, TRAI's recommendations are a useful insight into the regulator's thinking.

Draft personal data protection Bill, 2018:

- The draft personal data protection Bill, 2018, submitted by the Justice B.N. Srikrishna-headed expert panel, has proposed that critical personal data of Indian citizens be processed in centres located within the country.

- It has left it to the government to notify categories of personal data that will be considered critical.

- Other personal data may be transferred outside the territory of India with some riders. However, at least one copy of the data will need to be stored in India.

- The draft Bill, which India hopes will become a model framework for personal data protection for

the world, will apply to processing of personal data within India, including the State.

- For data processors not present in India, the Act will apply to those carrying on business in India or other activities, such as profiling, which could cause privacy harms to data principals in India.

- It also provides for penalties for the data processor as well as compensation to the data principal to be imposed for violations of the data protection law. It has suggested a penalty of Rs. 15 crore, or 4% of the total worldwide turnover of any data collection/processing entity, for violating provisions. Failure to take prompt action on a data security breach can attract up to Rs. 5 crore or 2% of turnover in penalty.

- Personal data, the draft law states, may be processed on the basis of the consent of the data principal, given no later than at the commencement of the processing.

- Processing of sensitive personal data should be on the basis of "explicit consent."

- These laws will not have retrospective application and will come into force in a structured and phased manner.

- A Data Protection Authority be set up to prevent misuse of personal information along with setting up an Appellate Tribunal.

- On right to be forgotten, the draft states that data principal will have the right to restrict or prevent continuing disclosure of personal data by a data processor.

Concerns of Data Protection Bill:

- It has been emphasised that the Bill in its current form should not be introduced in Parliament and further consultations must take place.

- The recommendations made every offence cognisable and non-bailable, which would create more hurdles for businesses and individuals.

- Data localisation is bad for business, users and security.

- This provision is a proxy for enabling surveillance.

- Mandating localisation of all personal data is likely to become a trade barrier in the key markets.

- It is not only regressive but against the fundamental tenets of our liberal economy.

- The requirement that every data fiduciary should store one live, serving copy of personal data in India is against the basic philosophy of the Internet and imposes additional costs on data fiduciaries without a proportional benefit in advancing the cause of data protection.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

4. E-Government Development Index (EGDI)

Source: The Hindu

- It measures countries use of information and communications technologies to deliver public services.

- The index captures the scope and quality of online services, status of telecommunication infrastructure and existing human capacity.

- The UN has been conducting the survey since 2001 to spread digital government throughout the world and to achieve sustainable development goals by 2030.

- It is conducted every 2 years by Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat with the assistance of International Telecommunication Union and Institute for Statistics of UNESCO.

- It is the only global report that assesses the e-government development status of the 193 UN Member States.

India's Ranking:

- With an EGDI index score of 0.5669, India is just above the world average of 0.55.

- The Asian leader in e-government, South Korea, scored 0.9010 (marginally behind world leader Denmark's 0.9150).

- India's score is even below Iran (0.6083).

- Even in the SAARC region, Sri Lanka is ahead of India.

- However India moved up 12 places in the E-Participation Index (EPI), from 27 in 2016 to 15 in 2018.

E-Participation Index (EPI):

- EPI looks at issues like e-information, e-consultation and e-decision making to arrive at a score.

- India's high ranking does signify two things:

  (a) The government is making more information available online.

  (b) More people are in a position to access that information, and also electronically participate in policy formation and decision-making.

World Ranking:

- In a 2018 ranking of countries on e-government development, Denmark has topped with a score of 0.915, followed by Australia, and Republic of Korea

- Somalia has been in last place with a score of 0.0566.

Significance:

- It serves as a tool for countries to learn from each other, identify areas of strength and challenges in e-governance and shape their policies and strategies in this area.

- It is also aimed at facilitating discussions of intergovernmental bodies, including the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, on issues related to e-¬government and development and to the critical role of ICT in development.

- The reason the UN compiles this index and urges member countries to focus on e-government initiatives is that there is a clear link between greater e-governance and easier public access to government services and a reduction in poverty and inequality.

Flawed implementation of Schemes in India:

- One of the biggest reasons our poverty alleviation measures have failed to achieve the desired impact (apart from corruption and leakage) is inefficient targeting, and lack of information with the intended beneficiaries about plans and schemes meant to assist them.

- In areas like public health and land records, the progress has stopped with putting up some downloadable forms online.

- Many government departments still insist on physical forms and signatures, despite the near universalisation of an identity instrument like Aadhaar, which allows simple and foolproof authentication.

- So, talk of pushing the cause of e-governance in India, actual progress has been slow.

Conclusion:

- Knowledge is power, but access to knowledge is another kind of power. This is where digital can be a great disruptor.

- With the India Stack (Aadhaar, UPI, etc. aimed at ensuring presence-less, cashless and paperless service delivery), and the ongoing mobile and broadband revolution, India can become a world leader in e-governance.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

5. Changes in anti-corruption law

Source: The Hindu

- The amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, adopted recently by both Houses of Parliament, are a mixed bag.

- Moves to make changes in this law, aimed at combating corruption in government, were initiated during the UPA's second term in office and largely centred on the misuse of one provision — Section 13 (1)d.

- This section has been criticized under which public servants are culpable for securing a pecuniary advantage for another "without any public interest", for ignoring a foundational principle of criminal law. This resulted in many honest officials being prosecuted even when they gained nothing and merely exercised their power or discretion in favour of someone.

- Insofar as it had a chilling effect on governance and deterred bold decision-making, the amended form may have a liberating effect on honest officials. Besides, it is more concise and restricts criminal misconduct to two offences: misappropriating or converting to one's own use property entrusted to a public servant or is in his control, and amassing unexplained wealth. There was concern initially with the wording, "intentionally enriches himself illicitly during the period of his office", as it raised a doubt whether the 'intention' to amass wealth would also have to be proved. Now an explanation has been added that a person "shall be presumed to have intentionally enriched himself" if he cannot account for his assets through known sources of income.

- By making citizens liable for offering a bribe to a public servant, the anti-corruption law has been brought in line with the UN Convention Against Corruption. The only exception to this rule is when one is forced to give a bribe. This exception kicks in only when the fact that one was forced to pay a bribe is reported to a law enforcement authority within seven days. The penal provision can empower people by allowing them to cite it to refuse to pay a bribe. At the same time, what happens when the police or any other agency refuses to register a complaint? People may be left in the lurch with no redress. Further, it may render them vulnerable to threats from unscrupulous public servants who collect money to speed up public services but do not deliver.

- The most unacceptable change is the introduction of a prior approval norm to start an investigation. When a prior sanction requirement exists in law for prosecution, it is incomprehensible that the legislature should create another layer of protection in the initial stage of a probe. Public servants need to be protected against unfair prosecution, but a genuine drive against corruption needs a package of legislative measures. These should contain penal provisions,

create an ombudsman in the form of a Lokpal or Lokayukta, as well as assure citizens of time-bound services and whistle-blower protection. Laws to fulfil these objectives are either not operational or are yet to materialise.

TOPIC: GS II, ELECTION

6. Removal of 'NOTA' from RS poll

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Supreme Court has reserved for judgment a PIL petition, which won the full support of the Centre, seeking to scrap the 'NOTA' option in Rajya Sabha election.

- It indicated that the court may indeed rule against the two circulars issued by the Election Commission of India on January 24, 2014 and November 12, the subsequent year, giving Rajya Sabha members the option to press the NOTA ('none of the above') button in the Upper House polls.

- Court observed that NOTA is meant only for universal adult suffrage and direct elections and not polls held by the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote as done in the Rajya Sabha.

Govt.'s support:

- Government has shown its support to the PIL plea that NOTA in indirect elections, such as in the Rajya Sabha, would lead to horse-trading, corruption and using of extra-constitutional methods to defeat a party candidate.

- The petitioner argued that the system of NOTA makes the system of proportional representation by means of single transferable vote nugatory and the Election Commission cannot sanction the use of NOTA by way of mere circulars, which have the effect of overriding the provisions of Article 80(4) — proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote, the provisions of Representation of the People Act 1951 and the Conduct of Election Rules 1961.

- It was argued that the circulars had negated the entire purpose of open voting brought about in 2003 to further party discipline and adherence to party's choice of candidate in the election to the Rajya Sabha.

- However the Election Commission has argued that a person, along with a right to vote, also has the right not to vote.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

7. Tackling HIV

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

A new report from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) bears good news for the global war against HIV.

What does the report say?

- Between 2010 and 2017, several countries made rapid progress in reducing HIV incidence and getting antiretroviral therapy to patients.

- Today, 3 out of 4 people with HIV know their status, and 21.7 million get treatment.

- The largest reduction in incidence came from eastern and southern Africa.

- Asia also made significant progress in terms of reduction in incidence of HIV.

What is the status in India?

- India brought down the number of new cases and deaths by 27% and 56%, respectively, between 2010 and 2017.

- Tuberculosis is the biggest killer of HIV patients across the world. India is now able to treat over 90% of notified TB patients for HIV.

- Social stigma surrounding AIDS-infected people in India is declining slowly.

Critical gaps in India's strategy:

- With 2.1 million cases, India is among the largest burden countries in the world.

- Homosexual men, drug-users and sex workers are at the highest risk of HIV.

- There are troubling patterns in the society with respect to social stigma attached to HIV patients. India must find ways to reach such groups.

- India criminalises several aspects of sex work and Section 377 of the IPC criminalises gay sex. Studies show that fear of prosecution under such laws prevents such groups at high risk of contracting the infection seek screening and treatment. As a result, these groups lag behind average treatment rates.

- Stigma isn't just social, it frequently means that patients end up having to spend much more money for either insurance or medical treatment simply because of their condition. Some places even simply turn away people with HIV or AIDS.

- The UNAIDS report points out that a country's laws can legitimise stigma and give licence to the

harassment of such groups at the highest risk of HIV. India's laws it must do more in removing social stigma.

HIV/AIDS (Prevention and Control) Bill, 2017:

- The Lok Sabha in April 2017 passed the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Bill, 2017.

- The Bill seeks to give a legislative framework to existing norms of non-discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS, most crucially, making it a legally punishable offence to deny such a person health insurance on the ground of the infection.

Way forward:

- Short of changing the law, the Centre can consider targeted interventions.

- Sensitising police personnel and educating female sex workers can greatly reduce arbitrary police raids and arrests.

- The right to health is universal. India must take note of this to ensure that no one is left behind in the fight against HIV.

- India has brought down HIV incidence, but it must do more in removing social stigma.

TOPIC: GS II, SOCIAL JUSTICE

8. WCD Ministry clarifies on the Anti-Human Trafficking Bill

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Women and Child Development Ministry has sought to defend its Anti-Human Trafficking Bill, and asserted that the proposed law did not criminalise consenting adult sex workers and migrants.

- The clarification comes at a time the Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018, is expected to be tabled in the Rajya Sabha after it was passed in the Lok Sabha recently.

- Prominent opposition parties have demanded that the Bill be put through legislative scrutiny and be sent to a Standing Committee.

- The ministry said that the bill is clear in excluding consenting adults from its purview. While it criminalises trafficking for the purpose of pushing a woman into sex work, it does not punish the act itself. At no point is the victim held as a criminal, or detained against his/ her will. The Bill does not criminalise migration per se.

- Ministry stated that the Bill adhered to various international standards such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Model Law against Trafficking in Persons, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking.

Criticism of the Bill:

- The proposed legislation has faced criticism from several quarters, including UN experts, for conflating trafficking with sex work and migration.

- It has been criticised for addressing trafficking through a criminal law perspective instead of complementing it with a human-rights based and victim-centred approach.

- It is said that it promoted "rescue raids" by the police as well as institutionalisation of victims in the name of rehabilitation, and that certain vague provisions would lead to "blanket criminalisation of activities that do not necessarily relate to trafficking."

III. ECONOMY

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

9. Invest India and Business France Sign MoU to Promote Investment

Source: PIB

Why in news:

Invest India and Business France have signed an MoU to promote investment facilitation and cooperation between startups of India and France.

Key points:

- The goal will be to facilitate direct foreign investment by providing practical investment information to enterprises and support the companies pursuing those opportunities which contribute positively to economic growth of the two countries.

- **Invest India** and **Business France** will collaborate to promote business and startup ecosystem cooperation through joint activities and exchange experiences to strengthen institutional knowledge and identify opportunities between businesses in the French and Indian private sector, creating a dedicated support structure to facilitate inbound companies and startups.

- The partnership will strengthen the existing business relations between India and France and provide a seamless facilitation channel for new businesses and innovations from India and France to grow in the French and Indian markets.

Why Invest in India?

- India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world which has not only sustained global downturn of 2008-09 but is also slated to grow at consistently higher rates during next few decades.

- FDI inflows increased by 37% since the launch of Make in India initiative.

- Leading investors ranked India as the most attractive market.

- Largest youth population in the world.

- Huge domestic market.

- Rising economic influence- IOR and INSTC.

- India registered a record improvement on Ease of Doing Business ranking from 142 to 100 between 2014-2017.

About Invest India:

- It is the official Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency of the Government of India, mandated to facilitate investments in the country. It is the first stop for potential global investors in the country. Invest India is set up as a non-profit venture under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Government of India.

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY AND ISSUES RELATING TO PLANNING, MOBILIZATION OF RESOURCES, GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

10. Inter Creditor Agreement

Source: Economic Times

Why in news:

- In a bid to ensure swift resolution of non-performing assets, around 22 public sector banks (including India Post Payments Bank), 19 private lenders and 32 foreign banks recently signed the inter-creditor agreement (ICA) to fast track the resolution of stressed assets.

- The agreement is based on a recommendation by the Sunil Mehta committee that looked into resolution of stressed assets.

Details of the Agreement:

- ICA Framework is part of pro 'Sashakt' plan. Under it, lead lender (having highest exposure) will be authorised to formulate resolution plan for operation turnaround of assets which will be presented to lenders for their approval. It will be applicable to all corporate borrowers who have availed loans and financial assistance for amount of Rs. 50 crore or more under consortium lending or multiple banking arrangements. Each resolution plan will be submitted by lead lender to Overseeing Committee.

- The decision making under ICA framework will be by way of approval of majority lenders i.e. lenders with 66% share in aggregate exposure. Once resolution plan is approved by majority lenders, it will be binding on all lenders that are party to ICA. The plan formulated under ICA will be in compliance with RBI norms and all other applicable laws and guidelines. Banks opposing resolution plan will have option to sell their stressed loans to company at discount or buy out loans to that entity from all other lenders at premium.

Significance of ICA framework:

- The ICA framework aims for faster facilitation of the stressed assets resolution. It gives a bigger say to lead lender in consortium and allows resolution plan to be approved if 66% of the banks in the group agree to it. It authorises lead bank to implement resolution plan in 180 days and leader would then prepare resolution plan. If any lender dissents, the lead lender will have the right but not the obligation to arrange for buy-out of the facilities of the dissenting lenders at a value that is equal to 85 per cent of the lower of liquidation value or resolution value. The dissenting lenders can exercise such right of buy-out in respect of the entire facilities held by other relevant lenders.

Background:

- The non-performing assets (NPAs) or bad loans in the banking sector crossed Rs 9 lakh crore at end-December 2017 and the Reserve Bank of India has warned of further worsening of the situation.

Way forward:

- The biggest obstacle to bad loan resolution is the absence of buyers who can purchase stressed assets from banks, and the unwillingness of banks to sell their loans at a deep discount to their face value. Unless the government can solve this problem, the bad loan problem is likely to remain unresolved for some time to come.

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

11. India drops three ranks in AT Kearney FDI Confidence Index

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- India in 2018 has fallen out of the top 10 destinations for FDI in terms of its attractiveness, according to an AT Kearney report.
- The United States (US) topped the index, followed by Canada at 2nd and Germany at the 3rd place.

Performance of India:

- India is ranked 11 in the 2018 AT Kearney FDI Confidence Index, down from 8 in 2017 and 9 in 2016.
- Fall in India's rankings may be due to teething troubles in implementation of goods and services tax (GST) and Government's demonetisation decision in 2016.
- These policies may have deterred investors in the short term as they have disrupted business activity and weighed on economic growth
- Several of India's reforms such as removing Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) and liberalising FDI limits in key sectors such as retail, aviation, and biomedical industries have maintained India's high rankings in terms of FDI attractiveness.

Way ahead:

- The report, added that potential investors are likely to be cautious as they are monitoring political risks such as China abolishing presidential term limits and the upcoming general election in India.
- The sheer size of the Chinese and Indian markets, however, will continue to be a draw for investors, and they remain the highest-ranking emerging markets on the index.

FDI Confidence Index:

- The AT Kearney Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index, created in 1998, is an annual survey of the business executives that ranks countries which are likely to attract the most FDI in the next three years.
- The Index is calculated as a weighted average of the number of low, medium and high responses to questions on the possibility of making a direct investment in a market over the next three years.

TOPIC: GS III, STATUTORY, REGULATORY AND VARIOUS QUASI-JUDICIAL BODIES

12. Domestic Council for Gold

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Centre has decided to set up a Domestic Council for Gold to aid exports of jewellery and to create an ecosystem to harness the true potential for jewellery-making in the country.

Composition of the council:

- The council will represent all the jewellers of India who will be the electoral college. They will form different interest groups and elect those who will sit in the council.

The council would work towards:

- Industry development
- The building of regional clusters
- Strengthening of value chains
- Job creation

IV. ENVIRONMENT

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

13. Pangolin smuggling racket

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Odisha Police has launched a drive to bust an international syndicate that peddles "endangered" pangolin, one of the world's most illegally traded mammals.

MLAT: A process has been initiated to crack the international pangolin smuggling racket, possibly with the help of the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT). MLAT is an agreement between nations to exchange information or provide legal assistance for enforcing laws.

About Pangolin:

- Pangolin is only scaly mammal on the planet. According to Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), it is also the most illegally traded vertebrate within its class (Mammalia).
- Of the eight species of pangolin worldwide, two are found in India. They are Chinese pangolin, mostly found in northeast India and Indian pangolin.
- Protection Status: Chinese pangolin has been listed as "critically endangered" by UN affiliated

International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List. Indian pangolin (Manis crassicaudata) has been listed as "endangered" in IUCN Red List. It is also a Schedule I category protected animal, under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972).

Illegal market:

- Pangolins is smuggled for its scales as it believed that they possess magic or charms and have medicinal properties. The scales serve as base component for indigenous (traditional) psychotropic substances. China is main illicit hub (market) for smuggled scales of Pangolins, where they have huge demand for medicinal and magical purposes.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

14. Ganga Vriksharopan Abhiyan

Source: PIB

Why in news:

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) is running "Ganga Vriksharopan Abhiyan" in five main stem Ganga basin states – Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. State Forest Departments of these states have been made the nodal agencies for the smooth and effective execution of the campaign.

About Ganga Vriksharopan Abhiyan:

- The campaign has been initiated as part of the Forest Interventions in Ganga (FIG) component of Namami Gange programme.

- It aims to bring greater awareness among people and other stakeholders regarding the importance of afforestation for the task of Ganga Rejuvenation.

- A number of schools, colleges and departments have been requested to "Adopt a Plant" for turning this campaign into a people's movement. Various seminars, workshops, lectures, drawing and painting competitions etc. are being organised.

- Plantation activities are being carried out with great enthusiasm all along the banks of the River Ganga with participation of local people.

Why is Afforestation in Ganga Basin important?

- Forests cause higher rainfall and raise water level in the rivers. Through their foliage, craggy bark and abundant leaf litter, trees and forests decrease the speed of water dispersion and favour slow but greater infiltration of rainwater to ensure smooth functioning of the hydrological cycle.

- Moreover, presence of healthy forest cover along the river provides self-cleaning ability to the river.

Thus, afforestation and augmentation of existing forest along the Ganga holds the promise to strengthen the riparian ecosystem thereby contributing to the overarching cause of Ganga Rejuvenation.

About National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG):

- The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) is the implementation wing of National Ganga Council which was set up in October 2016 under the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities order 2016. The order dissolved National Ganga River Basin Authority.

- NMCG has a two tier management structure and comprises of Governing Council and Executive Committee. Both of them are headed by Director General, NMCG. Executive Committee has been authorized to accord approval for all projects up to Rs.1000 crore.

- The order envisages five tier structure at national, state and district level to take measures for prevention, control and abatement of environmental pollution in river Ganga and to ensure continuous adequate flow of water so as to rejuvenate the river Ganga as below:

  o National Ganga Council under chairmanship of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.

  o Empowered Task Force (ETF) on river Ganga under chairmanship of Hon'ble Union Minister of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

  o National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).

  o State Ganga Committees.

  o District Ganga Committees in every specified district abutting river Ganga and its tributaries in the states.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

15. Green Mahanadi Mission

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Why in news:

Odisha Government has launched 'Green Mahanadi Mission', a plantation drive under which 2 crore saplings will be planted along Mahanadi river and its tributaries.

Key points about the mission:

- The Green Mahanadi Mission envisages rejuvenating Mahanadi river and its tributaries Tel and Ib by increasing recharging capacity and checking soil erosion through massive plantation.

- Under the mission, a green belt with width of 1 km will be created on both sides of the river beginning from the place, where the river enters Odisha to Paradip, where it merges with the Bay of Bengal.

- The plantation will be undertaken over 75,760 hectares government land besides 47,470 hectares private land.

- Primarily, several fruit bearing trees including jackfruit, mango and jamun will be planted.

Mahanadi:

- Mahanadi is Major River in East Central India. It drains an area of around 141,600 square kilometres and has total course of 858 kilometres. It flows through Chhattisgarh and Odisha. It originates from highlands of Chhattisgarh through collection of array of streams and reaches Bay of Bengal. Its main tributaries are the Seonath, the Jonk, the Hasdeo, the Mand, the Ib, the Ong and the Tel. Mahanadi valley is known for its fertile soil and flourishing agriculture. Hirakud Dam across the river is longest major earthen dam in India.

> **TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION**

16. 2018 Earth Overshoot Day to fall on August 1

Source: overshootday.org

Why the news:

2018 Earth Overshoot Day will fall on August 1, the earliest date since ecological overshoot began in early 1970s. This year the overshoot day falls two days earlier than the last year's.

About Earth Overshoot Day:

- Earth Overshoot Day marks the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year.

- We maintain this deficit by liquidating stocks of ecological resources and accumulating waste, primarily carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

- Earth Overshoot Day is hosted and calculated by Global Footprint Network, an international think tank that coordinates research, develops methodological standards and provides decision-makers with a menu of tools to help the human economy operate within Earth's ecological limits.

Earth Overshoot Day 1969-2018

Source: Global Footprint Network National Footprint Accounts 2018
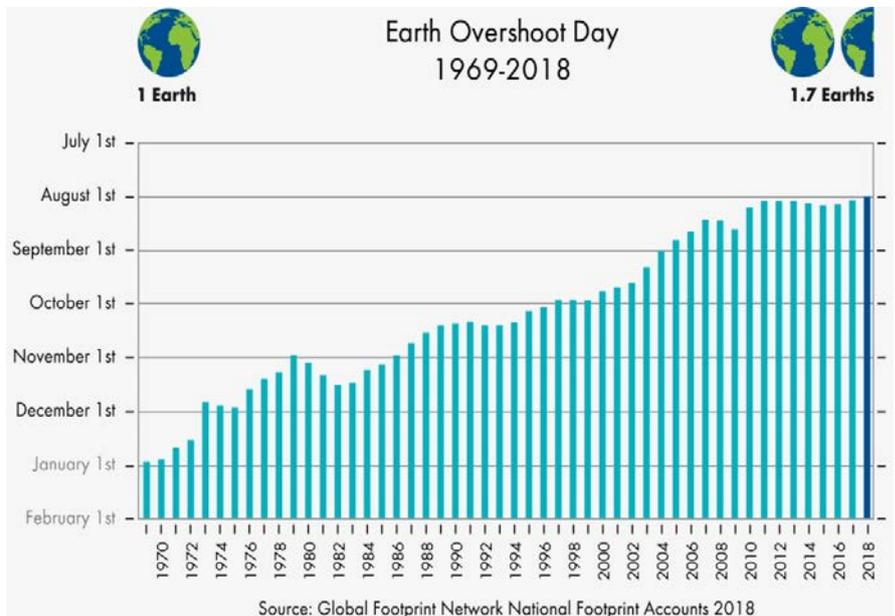
- To determine the date of Earth Overshoot Day for each year, Global Footprint Network calculates the number of days of that year that Earth's biocapacity suffices to provide for humanity's Ecological Footprint. The remainder of the year corresponds to global overshoot.

- Earth Overshoot Day is computed by dividing the planet's biocapacity (the amount of ecological resources Earth is able to generate that year), by humanity's Ecological Footprint (humanity's demand for that year), and multiplying by 365, the number of days in a year.

Key facts:

- Currently, humankind is using 170% of the world's natural output. That means we are using up the equivalent of 1.7 Earths. And, according to the Global Footprint Network, we're on track to be using two Earths by the end of the 21st Century.

- In 1963, we used 78% of the Earth's biocapacity. However by the early 1970s we began to consume more energy than the planet could produce. By 10 years ago, we were using 144% of the Earth's biocapacity.

Reasons for this and what can be done?

- The two greatest contributing factors to humanity's Ecological Footprint are carbon emissions, which accounts for 60%, and food, 26%.

- If we cut our carbon emissions by half, according to the Global Footprint Network, Earth Overshoot Day would come 89 days later in the year.

- If we cut food waste in half worldwide, we could move the date back 11 days. By eating less protein-intensive food, we could move it back 31 days.

Comments:

The four key areas we need to focus are:

1. CITIES: How we design and manage cities?
2. ENERGY: How we power ourselves?
3. FOOD: How we produce, distribute, and consume food?
4. POPULATION: How many of us there are?

While our planet is finite, human possibilities are not. The transformation to a sustainable, carbon-neutral world will succeed if we apply humanity's greatest strengths: foresight, innovation, and care for each other. The good news is that this transformation is not only technologically possible, it is also economically beneficial and our best chance for a prosperous future.

> **TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION**

17. Fish Will Start Losing Sense of Smell as Carbon Dioxide Levels Rise: Study

Source: India Today

Why the news:

According to recent study, fish are losing their sense of smell as rising carbon emissions is turning water they live more acidic. CO2 is absorbed by seawater forming carbonic acid. Due of ocean acidification, fish will lose some of their smelling sense, making it more difficult to survive.

- The sense of smell plays an important role in the survival of fish. They not only use it to find food but also to find places suitable to reproduce in the ocean. It also helps them to recognize each other and sniff the dangers to avoid running into predators.

- Since the 19th century AD, carbon dioxide levels in the ocean have risen by 43 per cent. By the end of the century we are living in, the CO2 levels are predicted to grow more than double the current levels.

- As the atmospheric carbon dioxide dissolves in water, it increases ocean acidity -- a phenomenon that is already known to:
  - damage nervous systems of fish
  - disrupt the processing of information in their brains
  - erode their hearing ability -- making them unable to hear predators
  - and dissolve the hard counter coatings of shellfish

With this recent study, carbon emissions are coming out as much more dangerous for marine life than previously thought.

> **TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION**

18. International Tiger Day: 29 July

Source: Indian Express

Why in news:

Every year, July 29 is celebrated as the 'Global Tiger Day' or' International Tiger Day' to raise awareness about the endangered big cats.

Background:

- At the St. Petersburg Tiger Summit in 2010, leaders of 13 tiger range countries resolved to do more for the tiger and embarked on efforts to double its number in the wild, with a popular slogan 'T X 2'. The Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) program of the World Bank, using its presence and convening ability, brought global partners together to strengthen the tiger agenda.

- Over the years, the initiative has institutionalised itself as a separate entity in the form of the Global Tiger Initiative Council (GTIC), with its two arms – the Global Tiger Forum and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program.

Status of Tigers in India:

- As per the assessment of the Status of Tigers, Co-predators and Prey (2014), the number of tigers in India is estimated at 2,226 as compared to the 2010 estimate of 1,706.

- While the number is something to be proud of, experts believe issues such as poaching, receding forest areas and development projects infringing on tiger habitat need to be tackled.

- Some controversial projects:
  - Highways and railway lines are being expanded in the corridor connecting Kanha and Pench tiger reserves.
  - A railway line is being constructed through Melghat tiger reserve.
  - Ken-Betwa river linking project will submerge over 100 square kilometres of the Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh.)

Gains at home:

India is in a leadership position on the tiger front globally. As the custodian of maximum tigers and tiger bearing habitats, India deserves all praise for its milestones. The Project Tiger, launched way back in 1973, has grown to more than 50 reserves amounting to almost 2.2% of the country's geographical area. The highlights of India's initiative include:

- Enabling provisions for tiger in the national legislation
- Creation of National Tiger Conservation Authority
- Stepping up allocation for the tiger
- Increase in Project Tiger coverage
- Laying down normative standards with SOPs
- Modern protocol for field monitoring (M-STrIPES)
- Year-round monitoring of tiger and prey
- Bilateral pacts with neighbours
- Founder member of GTF and ongoing collaboration
- Online database of tiger crime
- Peer reviewed modern technique for Tiger Assessment
- Support for tiger/prey reintroduction
- Strict adherence to guidelines for responsible ecotourism in tiger reserves

Looking ahead:

- The battle is far from won and lot more needs to happen to achieve 'T X 2'. The momentum generated through national actions and global support must sustain in the face of economic growth agenda of the tiger range countries. The Key Performance Indicators of the ongoing Global Tiger Recovery Program need adequate resources and more commitment. Donors with green mission need to support regional projects for reducing the threat of trafficking, and addressing resource dependency of locals through gainful portfolios.

- The centrality of tiger agenda is an ecological necessity for the sustainability of our environment. An umbrella species, the tiger signifies the health of the ecosystem services which support life on the planet. The carbon locked up in tiger forests provide a great adaptation to the threats of climate change.

> **TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION**

19. Rajasthan first State to implement biofuel policy

Sources: The Hindu, PIB, India Today

Why in news:

Rajasthan has become the first State in the country to implement the national policy on biofuels unveiled by the Centre in May this year.

- The desert State will lay emphasis on increasing production of oilseeds and establish a Centre for Excellence in Udaipur to promote research in the fields of alternative fuels and energy resources.

- A biodiesel plant of the capacity of 8 tonnes a day had already been installed in the State with the financial assistance of the Indian Railways.

- The State government would promote marketing of biofuels and generate awareness about them.

What is Biodiesel?

- Biodiesel is an alternative fuel which can be used in place of fossil fuels. It is manufactured from vegetable oils, recycled grease, algae, and animal fat.

Uses of Biodiesel:

- It can be used in diesel-powered cars, trucks, tractors, boats, shipping equipment, irrigation systems, mining equipment, electrical generators and all those applications where diesel is typically used.

Classification of Biofuels:

- 1st generation biofuels are also called conventional biofuels. They are made from things like sugar, starch, or vegetable oil. Note that these are all food products. Any biofuel made from a feedstock that can also be consumed as a human food is considered a first generation biofuel.

- 2nd generation biofuels are produced from sustainable feedstock. The sustainability of a feedstock is defined by its availability, its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, its impact on land use, and by its potential to threaten the food supply. No second generation biofuel is also a food crop, though certain food products can become second generation fuels when they are no longer useful for consumption. Second generation biofuels are often called "advanced biofuels."

- 3rd generation biofuels are biofuel derived from algae. These biofuels are given their own separate class because of their unique production mechanism and their potential to mitigate most of the drawbacks of 1st and 2nd generation biofuels.

Facts you should know:

- Biodiesel can be used in diesel engines with little or no modification

- It is a renewable fuel

- It can be produced locally

- It is produced through a chemical process called transesterification, in which glycerine is separated from the fat or vegetable oil

- The process of transesterification leaves behind two products --methyl esters and glycerine--

which can be sold for the preparation of soaps and other products

- It is biodegradable

- It is non-toxic

- While burning, it emits 60 per cent less carbon dioxide

- The energy biodiesel produces is approximately 90 per cent of that of energy produced by petroleum/ diesel

- It is also used in non-engine applications such as to remove paint etc.

National Policy on Biofuels - 2018

Salient Features:

1. The Policy categorises biofuels as "Basic Biofuels" viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and "Advanced Biofuels" - Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.

2. The Policy expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava, Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.

3. Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, the Policy allows use of surplus food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.

4. With a thrust on Advanced Biofuels, the Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of Rs.5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.

5. The Policy encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.

6. Roles and responsibilities of all the concerned Ministries/Departments with respect to biofuels has been captured in the Policy document to synergise efforts.

Expected Benefits:

- Reduce Import Dependency: One crore lit of E10 saves Rs.28 crore of forex at current rates. The ethanol supply year 2017-18 is likely to see a supply of around 150 crore litres of ethanol which will result in savings of over Rs.4000 crore of forex.

- Cleaner Environment: One crore lit of E-10 saves around 20,000 ton of CO_2 emissions. For the ethanol supply year 2017-18, there will be lesser emissions of CO_2 to the tune of 30 lakh ton. By reducing crop burning & conversion of agricultural residues/wastes to biofuels there will be further reduction in Green House Gas emissions.

- Health benefits: Prolonged reuse of Cooking Oil for preparing food, particularly in deep-frying is a potential health hazard and can lead to many diseases. Used Cooking Oil is a potential feedstock for biodiesel and its use for making biodiesel will prevent diversion of used cooking oil in the food industry.

- MSW Management: It is estimated that, annually 62 MMT of Municipal Solid Waste gets generated in India. There are technologies available which can convert waste/plastic, MSW to drop in fuels. One ton of such waste has the potential to provide around 20% of drop in fuels.

- Infrastructural Investment in Rural Areas: It is estimated that, one 100klpd bio refinery will require around Rs.800 crore capital investment. At present Oil Marketing Companies are in the process of setting up twelve 2G bio refineries with an investment of around Rs.10,000 crore. Further addition of 2G bio refineries across the Country will spur infrastructural investment in the rural areas.

- Employment Generation: One 100klpd 2G bio refinery can contribute 1200 jobs in Plant Operations, Village Level Entrepreneurs and Supply Chain Management.

- Additional Income to Farmers: By adopting 2G technologies, agricultural residues/waste which otherwise are burnt by the farmers can be converted to ethanol and can fetch a price for these waste if a market is developed for the same. Also, farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Thus conversion of surplus grains and agricultural biomass can help in price stabilization.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION

20. Naturalized species

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

An international team — including scientists from India — have collated information on alien plant species from several sources, ranging from online plant lists to old compilations of India's national and regional flora. They found that as many as 471 plant species that are

alien or exotic — not native to India — are 'naturalised,' for they can thrive in the country's wildernesses by forming stable populations.

What are naturalised species?

- An intentionally or unintentionally introduced species that has adapted to and reproduces successfully in its new environment.

- Naturalised species reproduce naturally in the environments they colonise. Invasive species do this so prolifically that they alter the workings of the natural ecosystems they colonise or invade.

Key points of the report:

- Scientists have developed the first lists of naturalised plants for each State; these lists reveal that 110 alien plants now naturally occur in more than 31 States in India.

- At 332, Tamil Nadu has the highest number of naturalised exotics, followed by Kerala (290), while Lakshadweep has the least (17).

- The distribution across Indian States of over 20 of these naturalised species (in the list of 471) is unknown.

- A majority of these naturalised plants are herbs such as the invasive Siam weed Chromolaena odorata, native to south and central America.

- The new list shows that many exotic species are now part of our natural flora.

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC: GS III, INFRASTRUCTURE-WATERWAYS

21. National Waterways Projects in the North East

Source: PIB, PRS

Twenty National Waterways out of 111 are in North Eastern Region (NER). NW-2 (river Brahmaputra) from Dhubri to Sadiya (891 km) is operational for transport and cruise ad cargo vessels are moving on it.

The National Waterways Act, 2015:

- Under Entry 24 of the Union List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the central government can make laws on shipping and navigation on inland waterways which are classified as national waterways by Parliament by law.

- The Bill identifies additional 101 waterways as national waterways. The Schedule of the Bill also specifies the extent of development to be undertaken on each waterway.

- The Bill repeals the five Acts that declare the existing national waterways. These five national waterways are now covered under the Bill.

- The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill states that while inland waterways are recognised as a fuel efficient, cost effective and environment friendly mode of transport, it has received lesser investment as compared to roads and railways. Since inland waterways are lagging behind other modes of transport, the central government has evolved a policy for integrated development of inland waterways.

PROPOSED NATIONAL WATERWAYS IN NORTH-EASTERN STATES

S. No.	Name of the Waterways	States	Length of the Waterway (km)
1	SUBANSIRI RIVER (NW-95)	Assam	111
2	DHANSIRI / CHATHE RIVER (NW-31)	Assam	110
3	TIZU - ZUNGKI RIVERS (NW-101)	Nagaland	42
4	LOHIT RIVER (NW-62)	Assam & Arunachal Pradesh	100
5	AAI RIVER (NW-6)	Assam	71
6	BEKI RIVER (NW-18)	Assam	73
7	DEHING RIVER (NW-30)	Assam	114
8	DIKHU RIVER (NW-32)	Assam	63
9	DOYANS RIVER (NW-33)	Assam	61

10	KOPILI RIVER (NW-57)	Assam	46
11	PUTHIMARI RIVER (NW-82)	Assam	72
12	TLWANG (DHALESWARI) RIVER (NW-102)	Assam & Mizoram	86
13	GANGADHAR RIVER (NW-38)	Assam & West Bengal	62
14	JINJIRAM RIVER (NW-50)	Assam & Meghalaya	43
15	GANOL RIVER (NW-39)	Meghalaya	49
16	UMNGOT (DAWKI) RIVER (NW-106)	Meghalaya	20
17	SIMSANG RIVER (NW-93)	Meghalaya	62
18	KYNSHI RIVER (NW-61)	Meghalaya	28
TOTAL			**1213km**

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

22. India to give flash-flood warning to Asian nations

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

India has been designated as a nodal centre for preparing flash-flood forecasts by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) which means that India will have to develop a customised model that can issue advance warning of floods in Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.

Weather model:

- The IMD would be working to customise a weather model, developed by the United States and donated to the WMO, to warn of flash floods at least six hours in advance.

- Using a combination of satellite mapping and ground-based observation, this system — called the Flash Flood Guidance System — aims to provide forecasts six hours in advance.

Significance:

- Like India, several southeast Asian countries depend on the monsoon and are prone to its vagaries.

- The WMO says flash floods account for 85% of flooding incidents across the world, causing some 5,000 deaths each year.

- The proposed model would provide forecasts by computing the likelihood of rainfall and the soil moisture levels to warn of possible floods.

Concerns:

- Though Pakistan was among the list of countries that would benefit from the forecast, it has refused to participate in the scheme.

- While the science to warn of floods could be developed, India was yet to work out how exactly it would warn countries of potential inundation.

Central Water Commission:

- India currently has a warning system for tsunamis that also doubles up as a warning system for several Asian countries. The Central Water Commission, which monitors India's dams, warns of rising water levels in the reservoirs, which are usually taken to be signs of imminent floods.

- It has recently tied up with Google to develop a software application to visualise rising water levels during heavy rains.

About WMO:

- The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is an intergovernmental organization with a membership of 191 Member States and Territories. It originated from the International Meteorological Organization (IMO), which was founded in 1873. Established by the ratification of the WMO Convention on 23 March 1950, WMO became the specialised agency of the United Nations for meteorology (weather and climate), operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences a year later. The Secretariat, headquartered in Geneva, is headed by the Secretary-General. Its supreme body is the World Meteorological Congress.

TOPIC: GS II, IMPACT OF POLICIES IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ON INDIA

23. Parliamentary panel to probe U.K.-India relations

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- A British parliamentary committee is looking into relations between Britain and India including the impact of Britain's visa regime as part of a wider examination of the future of "Global Britain". It comes at a time when tensions between the two countries have heightened amid Indian concerns about the U.K.'s reluctance to ease visa norms for students and professionals.

- The committee will look at the issue of bilateral trade as well as the impact of Britain's visa policy, and cooperation on regional security, counterterrorism, technology, innovation and multilateral institutions.

- The committee said the relationship is as an important "test case" for the government's "Global Britain" strategy, and pointed to a number of questions. These include: how strong is the bilateral relationship; how should Britain balance political, strategic and trade issues in determining its relationship; and, does the U.K.'s visa regime facilitate the type of relationship the government seeks with India?

- Parliamentarians in both houses have sought to scrutinise the changing world in which Britain is seeking to strengthen relations outside the EU.

Issue Areas between India-Britain:

- Recently, Britain's former High Commissioner to India, told a meeting of the Indo-British All Party Parliamentary Group that a "lack of trust" permeated bilateral relation and warned that Britain did not have a strategy. He also said that London's approach was based on "random" and "inevitably ineffective" interventions by members of the government.

- He also said there were also concerns that Britain was not doing enough to facilitate the return of those India sought to extradite, including high net worth individuals.

Issue of overstayers:

- India pulled out of signing an agreement on the return of illegal migrants because of the 15-day period that would have been stipulated in the agreement for documents to be verified, which India viewed as unrealistic. However Britain linked the decision not to include Indian students in a relaxation of visa requirements to the non-signing of the agreement and the issue of Indians overstaying their visa.

TOPIC: GS II, IMPACT OF POLICIES OF DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ON INDIA

24. U.S. eases export controls on India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- In a major boost to India, the U.S. eased export controls on high-technology product sales to India by designating it as a Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 country.

- This comes after the U.S. recognised India as a "Major Defence Partner" in 2016, a designation that allows India to buy more advanced and sensitive technologies from the U.S.

Benefits of STA:

- STA-1 provides India greater supply chain efficiency, both for defence and for other high-tech products, that will increase activity with US systems, the interoperability of the systems, and it will reduce time and resources needed to get licensing approved.

- It acknowledges the US-India security and economic relationship.

- It comes under the Export Administration Rules, and it authorises the export, re-export and in-country transfer of specific items to destinations that the US regards as low risk.

TOPIC: GS II, IMPORTANT BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL GROUPINGS

25. BRICS 10th summit: Johannesburg Declaration

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

BRICS, the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has produced a 102-paragraph-long Johannesburg Declaration which implies that this important multilateral grouping has a lot to say about the state of the world.

Significance:

- BRICS has grown in influence, expanded the arc of its interests, and established new institutions and partnerships in its first decade.

- It has created for its members the habits of working together. Intra-BRICS cooperation is on a rising trajectory.

BRICS is still far from achieving its initial goals:

- Reform of global financial governance.

- Democratisation of the United Nations.

- Expansion of the Security Council — partially because two of its members (China and Russia) do not want the other three members (India, South Africa and Brazil) to obtain parity in the global pecking order.

Highlights of the Summit:

- The 10th summit, framed its deliberations against U.S's unconventional approach on world affairs, particularly the looming trade wars. BRICS leaders, stressed "the centrality of the rules-based, transparent, non-discriminatory, open and inclusive multilateral trading", based on the World Trade Organisation.

- They expressed their broader commitment to cooperate for strengthening multilateralism, the rule of law and an equitable international order.

- The other big idea emanating from the summit is to help nations to prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

- Articulating the need for

   (a) New strategy on employment.

   (b) Education

   (c) Skill development as the digital revolution unfolds.

- It should engage with the private sector and young innovators working at the cutting edge of technology today.

- The summit saw further consolidation of the business pillar. The BRICS Business Council has been actively enhancing trade and economic cooperation in diverse sectors ranging from manufacturing and energy to financial services and regional aviation.

- Besides, the leaders renewed their commitment to an inclusive and "people-centred approach" on development. The steady progress in interactions through sports, films, education, culture and tourism has been commendable.

Convergence over divergence:

- As a partnership that represents over 40% of the world's population and accounts for 22% of global GDP, BRICS will continue to be an influential voice as long as its convergences prevail over its divergences.

- Changing power equations within BRICS are being watched closely. China's dominance is a reality even as the grouping asserts the sovereign equality of all members.

- China-Russia proximity has been a continuing factor. Given its political and economic issues, Brazil played a low-profile role.

- To India's satisfaction, four paragraphs in the summit declaration were devoted to the problem of international terrorism.

- The India-South Africa partnership helped to ensure that the Johannesburg Declaration was balanced and well-rounded in its orientation.

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, INDIGENIZATION OF TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPING NEW TECHNOLOGY

26. 'Rent-a-lab' policy to bring revenues to institutions

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The government has proposed a new policy that could transform scientific instruments in government labs into lucrative assets generating a steady rental income. The policy is called the Scientific Research Infrastructure Management and Networks (SRIMAN).

Key Points:

- Under the policy, the government plans to hire out to researchers all lab equipment that cost more than ₹10 lakh. This would also reduce the amount of time such expensive instruments remain idle.

- The new system, according to the policy, envisages institutions declaring on a website how often their instruments would be available for use by those outside the department or university. Those who would like to use, for example, a DNA-sequencing machine, would have to pay a fee and specify the purpose and time they would want it for.

Rationale behind the policy:

- Currently, the practice of researchers bidding for time-slots to use lab instruments is typically seen more with very expensive equipment, such as radio telescopes and particle-accelerators, which cost crores of rupees.

- Therefore, it was "common" to find in Indian laboratories, expensive equipment lying idle. A "large number" are not shared and are plagued by issues such as maintenance and availability of

spares. This adds to the burden of research infrastructure costs.

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

27. Remote Sensing Toolkit by NASA

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has launched the 'Remote Sensing Toolkit' to promote commercial use of satellite data.

Remote Sensing Toolkit:

- It is an online toolkit launched with an aim to make it easier for users to find, analyse and utilise the relevant satellite data for their research, business projects or conservation efforts. The toolkit provides a simple system that quickly identifies relevant sources based on user input. It aims to spark innovation among entrepreneurial community and lead to further commercialisation of NASA technology.

Background:

- Through its constellation of Earth observation satellites, NASA collects petabytes of data each year. The variety of open source tools created to access, analyse and utilise the data from these satellites is familiar to millions of science users, but accessing and utilising this data remains daunting for many potential commercial users.

- This prompted the NASA to introduce the Remote Sensing Toolkit. The Toolkit will help grow the number of users who put NASA"s free and open data archive to work for people.

NASA's Technology Transfer program:

- It is managed by the NASA's Space Technology Mission Directorate. The program ensures technologies developed for missions in exploration and discovery are broadly available to the public, maximising the benefit to the nation.

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN THE FIELDS OF IT, SPACE, COMPUTERS, ROBOTICS, NANO-TECHNOLOGY

28. World's fastest man-made spinning object developed

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Scientists have developed the fastest man-made rotor in the world, which they believe will help them study quantum mechanics.

Key points:

- At more than 60 billion revolutions per minute, this machine is more than 100,000 times faster than a high-speed dental drill.

- The team synthesised a tiny dumbbell from silica and levitated it in high vacuum using a laser. The laser can work in a straight line or in a circle – when it is linear, the dumbbell vibrates, and when it is circular, the dumbbell spins. A spinning dumbbell functions as a rotor, and a vibrating dumbbell functions like an instrument for measuring tiny forces and torques, known as a torsion balance.

Potential Applications:

- With this, scientists will be able to study things like quantum mechanics and the properties of vacuum. Understanding these mechanisms is an essential goal for the modern generation of physics.

TOPIC: GS III, ACHIEVEMENTS OF INDIANS IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

29. India to expand polar research to Arctic

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Three decades after its first mission to Antarctica, the government is refocusing priorities to the other pole — the Arctic—because of opportunities and challenges posed by climate change.

Key points:

- The government has renamed the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) — since 1998, charged with conducting expeditions to India's base stations to the continent — as the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research.

- It's also in talks with Canada and Russia, key countries with presence in the Arctic Circle, to establish new observation systems, according to a source.

Background:

- Climate change was a decisive factor in India re-thinking priorities. Sea ice at the Arctic has been melting rapidly — the fastest in this century. That means several spots, rich in hydrocarbon reserves, will be more accessible through the year via alternative shipping routes.

Some Facts:

- India is already an observer at the Arctic Council — a forum of countries that decides on managing the region's resources and popular livelihood.

- In July 2014, Indian scientists successfully deployed IndARC, the country's first multi-sensor moored observatory in the Kongsfjorden fjord of the Arctic, roughly half way between Norway and the North Pole.

TOPIC: GS III, ISSUES RELATING TO INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

30. India unveils Geographical Indication logo, Tagline

Source: Times of India

Why the news:

- India recently unveiled a peppy tagline and a tricolour logo for geographical indication (GI) certified products.

- "Invaluable Treasures of Incredible India" is the tagline, printed below a GI logo in tricolour.

Key facts:

- A total of 320 products have been conferred the GI status in India so far.

- Karnataka comes first with 38 GI products, followed by Maharashtra which has 32 products.

- Tamil Nadu comes third with 25 GI products.

About Geographical Indication tag:

What is it?

- A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory. The registration of GI is valid for 10 years after which it needs to be renewed.

- **Significance:** Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

- **Security:** Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.

Provisions in this regard:

- GI is covered as element of intellectual property rights (IPRs) under Paris Convention for Protection of Industrial Property.

- At international level, GI is governed by WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

- In India, Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999 governs it.

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

31. Innovate India Platform

Source: PIB

Why in news:

Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog & MyGov (a citizen centric platform of the Government of India) have launched "Innovate India Platform".

About InnovateIndia portal:

- It aims to serve as the common point for all the innovation happening across the nation.

- It creates the much-needed innovations platform for registering both grassroots and deep-tech innovators at a national level. Those searching for a critical innovation can leverage the portal advantageously for the benefit of the economy as well as national social needs.

Some of the features of this platform are:

1. The platform is open to all Indian citizens.

2. The users can View, comment, share, and rate the innovations crowdsourced on the #InnovateIndia platform.

3. View the leaderboard which is calculated based on the votes on each innovation.

4. Citizens can share their/organizations/someone else's innovation on the platform by login to the MyGov website.

5. These innovations can also be shared on various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter.

Significance of the portal:

- India has been a very innovation-oriented society, but our challenge has been a structured approach to innovation, capturing them and building an ecosystem to take them global.

- The new initiative to capture and support innovation from ground up, is aimed at creating a structured ecosystem to encourage, enhance and develop India's innovative character.

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

32. Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Central govt. has drawn up a five-year, ₹8,000 crore plan named 'Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)' to explore the deep recesses of the ocean. The Union Earth

Sciences Ministry is tasked with coordinating the exercise.

Key Points:

- The mission proposes to explore the deep ocean similar to the space exploration started by ISRO about 35 years ago.

- The focus will be on technologies for deep-sea mining, underwater vehicles, underwater robotics and ocean climate change advisory services, among other aspects.

- Among the key deliverables to achieve these goals are an offshore desalination plant that will work with tidal energy, and developing a submersible vehicle that can go to a depth of at least 6,000 metres with three people on board.

Significance of the Mission:

- The 'Deep Ocean Mission' plan will enable India to develop capabilities to exploit resources in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB).

- India has been allotted 75,000 square kilometres in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) by UN International Sea Bed Authority for exploration of poly-metallic nodules. These are rocks scattered on the seabed containing iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt.

Potential:

- It is envisaged that 10% of recovery of that large reserve can meet the energy requirement of India for the next 100 years. It has been estimated that 380 million metric tonnes of polymetallic nodules are available at the bottom of the seas in the Central Indian Ocean.

- India's Exclusive Economic Zone spreads over 2.2 million square kilometres and in the deep sea, lies "unexplored and unutilised."

What are Polymetallic nodules (PMN)?

- Polymetallic nodules (also known as manganese nodules) are potato-shaped, largely porous nodules found in abundance carpeting the sea floor of world oceans in deep sea. Besides manganese and iron, they contain nickel, copper, cobalt, lead, molybdenum, cadmium, vanadium, titanium, of which nickel, cobalt and copper are considered to be of economic and strategic importance.

International Seabed Authority (ISA)

- ISA is a UN body set up to regulate the exploration and exploitation of marine non-living resources of oceans in international waters. India actively contributes to the work of International Seabed Authority.

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN THE FIELDS OF IT, SPACE, COMPUTERS, ROBOTICS, NANO-TECHNOLOGY, BIO-TECHNOLOGY

33. Scutoid: Scientists discover new shape after studying human cells

Source: Times of India

Why in news:

Scientists have discovered a new shape called scutoid while studying nature's way of moulding tissue to form the skin, cavity linings and the building blocks of organs.

What is Scutoid?

- A scutoid is a solid geometric shape, like a cube or a pyramid, which had not been described until now. The epithelial cells adopt this form when the tissue curves, giving it a more stable structure. It could be said that they look like 'twisted prisms'.

- The shape has five sides on one end and six on the other and a triangular surface on one of its longer edges.

- Epithelial tissue, one of the four kinds of tissue that forms the human body, is composed of epithelial cells packed together in a particular formation that has been given a nifty name: scutoid.

- The name is a reference to its similarity to the scutellum, the lowest most segment of an insect's thorax, the midsection. The resemblance is striking if one looks at the posterior of a Protaetia speciosa beetle of the Cetoniinae sub-family.

About Epithelial cells:

Epithelial cells are the key cells during embryonic development and are the building blocks of tissues and organs. Epithelial tissue doesn't just form complex 3D shapes and the outer skin layer but also the inner lining of blood vessels.

- The epithelial cells form structures with multiple functions like forming a barrier against infections or absorbing nutrients.

- During the development of an embryo, it changes from a simple structure formed from only a handful of cells to an animal with very complex organs. This process doesn't only occur because of the growth of the organism, but also because the epithelial cells start 'moving and joining together' to organise themselves correctly and give the organs their final shape.

Significance:

- Apart from the novelty of the finding, it is significant for the understanding of epithelial organs and will contribute to the field of tissue engineering specifically development of artificial organs.

- This study opens the door to understanding how organs are formed during their development and what might be missing in some diseases in which this process is altered.

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

34. West Bengal renames itself as 'Bangla'

Why in news:

- The West Bengal Assembly on Thursday passed a resolution to change the name of the State as 'Bangla' in three languages — Bengali, English and Hindi.

- The proposal has been pending since August 2016, when the Assembly passed a resolution to change the name to 'Bengal' in English, 'Bangla' in Bengali and 'Bangal' in Hindi.

- The Centre, however, turned it down in 2017, objecting to having three names in three languages.

- Name of a state can be changed by the Parliament under Article 3.

35. Indian firms flouting norms to import Chinese goods

- Companies in India are side-stepping the anti-dumping measures imposed by the government by deliberately misclassifying items imported from China, according to a report tabled by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce.

- The report also notes that the government has been reluctant to review the effectiveness of its anti-dumping measures.

- "This mis-declaration while importing the goods which otherwise have been put under anti-dumping measures nullify the whole effort to

protect the domestic industry from unfair trade practices," the report added.

- The Standing Committee named the steel industry as one of the major offenders in this regard, saying that there have been complaints from the domestic steel industry that Chinese non-alloy steel is being imported by being declared as alloy steel.

- The committee noted that though nearly 75-80% of Chinese steel imports are covered under the anti-dumping duty, the import of such steel products have increased 8%.

36. Mission Satyanishtha

Why in news:

- The Indian Railways organized a programme on Ethics in Public Governance and Launched **"Mission Satyanishtha"**.

- It aims at sensitizing all railway employees about the need to adhere to good ethics and to maintain high standards of integrity at work.

- The objectives of the Mission are:

(i). To train every employee to understand the need and value of ethics in Personal and Public life.

(ii). To deal with ethical dilemmas in life and Public Governance.

(iii). To help understand the policies of Indian Railways on ethics and integrity and the employee's role in upholding the same.

(iv). To develop inner governance through tapping inner resources.

37. Bill to seek death for lynching

Why in news:

- The Centre is considering to bring a Bill proposing death penalty for the crime of lynching . It is in the wake of the incident in which five members of the Nathjogi community, a Nomadic Tribe (NT), from Solapur district were lynched by a mob in Dhule district in north Maharashtra on suspicion of being "child lifters"

- The proposed Bill will be on the lines of a legislation seeking death penalty to those convicted of raping girls below the age of 12 years.