

CONTENTS

S. No.	Topic	Page No.
<u>I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE</u>		
1.	Prison Reforms	1
2.	HECI Bill and issues related to it	1
3.	PPP model in skill development	2
4.	10th Nuclear Energy Conclave	3
5.	Women's Health Challenges, Access and Prevention	4
6.	Anti Defection Law	4
7.	Electoral Bond Scheme	5
8.	Institutional Crisis in CBI	5
9.	Asking for vote on religious ground	6
<u>II. SOCIAL JUSTICE</u>		
10.	Migrant Workers in India	7
11.	Special court for Child Prostitution Racket	7
12.	Health sector in India and its challenges	8
13.	Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration	9
<u>III. ECONOMY</u>		
14.	Invest India	9
15.	Appellate Tribunals against Benami Transactions	10
16.	Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF)	10
17.	Currency Manipulator Tag	11
18.	WTO sets up dispute panel on India-US case on export subsidies	12
19.	India, Japan sign \$75 billion currency swap agreement	12
20.	Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)	13
<u>IV. ENVIRONMENT</u>		
21.	SC order on use and sale of Firecrackers	14
22.	CSIR develops Less Polluting Firecrackers	14
23.	SC bans sale of BS-IV vehicles from 2020	15
24.	Citizen- Science repository of Indian mammals	15
25.	Living Planet Report 2018	16
26.	International Conference on Status and Protection of Coral Reefs (STAPCOR - 2018)	17
27.	11th Global Agriculture Summit & Awards – 2018	17
28.	India's first container movement on inland waterways	18

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

29. U.S. to pull out of Russia Missile pact	19
30. India- China security cooperation agreement	19
31. Refugees in India	20
32. India- Japan Relations	20
33. Political crisis in Sri Lanka	21

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

34. India's first engine-less train 'Train 18'	22
35. Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)	22

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

36. Druzhba-III	22
37. Iron Magic 19	22
38. India's largest Dry Dock at Cochin Shipyard	23
39. INS Tarangini	23
40. WHO's First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health	23
41. Saffron Marigold as the symbol of India's sacrifices in WWI	23
42. Dollu Kunita	24
43. World's Longest Sea Bridge	24
44. Seoul Peace Prize	24
45. National Monitoring Framework on Sustainable Development Goals	24
46. Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony	25
47. Swachh Nyayalaya Project	25
48. Statue of Unity	25
Questions	26

I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

1. Prison Reforms

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Supreme Court has formed a committee on prison reforms headed by former SC judge, Amitava Roy.
- Prison is a State subject under List-II entry 4 of the Seventh Schedule in the Constitution which makes the management and administration of Prisons falls under the domain of the State Government. Thus, States have the prime responsibility and power to change the current prison laws, rules and regulations.

Problems of prisons in India:

In India, in the year 2015, there were nearly 4.2 lakh inmates in 1,401 facilities, with an average occupancy rate of 114% in most. About 67% of total inmates were undertrials. Some of the problems of Indian prisons are:

- Overcrowding.
- Prolonged detention of undertrials.
- Unsatisfactory living conditions.
- Staff shortage and poor training.
- Corruption and extortion.
- Inadequate social reintegration programmes.
- Poor spending on healthcare and welfare.
- Lack of legal aid.
- Custodial violence with the prisoners like blinding and murdering of prisoners.
- All these transforms a simple convict into a hardcore criminal and not as a reformed person.

Previous committees on prison reforms:

- The contemporary prison administration in India is a legacy of the British Rule.
- Mulla committee recommendations (1983):
 1. Making available proper food, clothing, sanitation;
 2. Proper training to prison staffs.
 3. Setting up an All India Service called the Indian Prisons & Correctional Service.
 4. After-care, rehabilitation and probation to be an integral part of prison service.
 5. Allowing the press and public inside prisons so that the public may have first-hand information about the conditions of prisons.

6. Undertrials in jails to be reduced to bare minimum and they be kept away from convicts.

- Krishna Iyer committee on women prisoners (1987) called for induction of more women in the police force for their special role in tackling women and child offenders.

Way forward:

- The emphasis on correctional aspect of prisoners needs to be strengthened through counselling programmes by experts.
- The mindset of the prison staff must change to acknowledge the human rights of prisoners.
- The focus must be on the human rights of prisoners besides improving their amenities.
- It is important to note that the objective of criminal punishment should be one of reform rather than wreaking vengeance on a perpetrator of crime.
- While public officials and social workers agree upon the need to reduce overcrowding but they do not converge with the administration. This mindset has to be changed.
- Prisoners should have the right to vote.
- System of open Jails can be promoted.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

2. HECI Bill and issues related to it

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Members of All India University Employees Federation have strongly opposed the Union government's draft Bill on setting up a Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) and have demanded that the University Grants Commission (UGC) be continued.

Difference between UGC and HECI:

- Several committees like Yash Pal Committee, National Knowledge Commission and the Hari Gautam Committee have recommended a single education regulator to rid higher education of red tape and lethargy.
- UGC remained preoccupied with disbursing funds to institutes and was unable to concentrate on mentoring the institutes, focusing on research to be undertaken etc.

Various committees for reforming the higher education in the country:

1. National Knowledge Commission (2005) headed by Sam Pitroda:

- Opening new universities nationwide to ensure 15% gross enrollment ratio.
- Revision of existing curricula in the existing universities.
- Central Board of Undergraduate Education should be established along with State Boards of Undergraduate Education to set curricula and conduct examinations for undergraduate colleges.
- Formation of independent regulatory authority for higher education to be established by an act of parliament to perform the functions of AICTE, MCI, and BCI and it shall have the power to set and monitor standards, accord degree-granting power to institutions of higher education, license accreditation agencies, and settle disputes.
- UGC to focus on disbursement of grants and maintaining public institutions of higher learning only.

THE CHANGES

UGC ACT

- UGC will have chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, 10 other members
- No provision for govt to remove chairman, vice-chairman, members
- UGC to disburse grants to universities
- Can withhold grants of an institution that doesn't comply with its directions and standards
- Retirement age of chairman, vice-chairman fixed at 65 yrs
- Chairman, vice-chairman, members can accept job offers from higher education institutions run by Centre, state, private bodies
- No provision for online application
- No provision for an advisory council

HECI ACT

- HECI will have chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, 12 other members
- Govt can remove chairman, vice-chairman, members for nine reasons
- HECI not responsible for disbursing grants to universities; this function will be discharged by HRD Ministry
- Can revoke approval of an institution for not complying with its standards
- Retirement age of chairman, vice-chairman fixed at 70 yrs
- Two-year cooling-off period for chairman, vice-chairman, members
- Only online applications for HECI's approval
- Will have an advisory council chaired by HRD Minister

Analysis of the HECI bill:

1. Advantages:

- The idea of bringing certain areas of professional education under the proposed HEC partially echoes the Yash Pal Committee's report.
- Improvement in academic standards and quality of higher education is expected to be achieved as HEC's function will only be to concentrate on the regular administration of the universities.
- HECI will be a more empowered to set and monitor high standards of education as compared to UGC as it has the power to penalise or even shut down an institution if it does not comply with the standards prescribed.

2. Disadvantages:

- Various committees supported reformation in UGC but never recommended for scrapping UGC.
- Academicians are apprehensive that this move will increase the power of the ministry of HRD to curb autonomy and independence of higher education regulator as it will have the financial powers.
- Higher education has faced consistent budget cuts in successive central budget and at the same time emergence of a vast private sector in higher education, with little effective control on its finances can be seen which shows the emergence of neo-liberal economic policy driving the decision-making.
- The present move highlights shrinkage of the public apparatus, tighter financial control which is legitimised by meritocratic distribution and allocation and consequently, the furnishing of wider room for private capital to control the nation's intellectual life and creation of knowledge.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

3. PPP model in skill development

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Centre has decided to set up skill development institutes on government land, in partnership with private players, across the country for providing high-quality skill training, applied research education and a direct and meaningful connection with the industry and these institutes will be called as Indian Institutes of Skills.

Advantages:

- It is expected to help boost the global competitiveness of key industry sectors.

- Greater opportunity to aspiring youth across the country to have access to highly skilled training, and enhance the scope of accountability through its linkage with industries.

Government's steps towards promoting skill development in India:

Skill India Mission:

- It is an initiative of the Government of India, launched in 2015 with an aim to train over 40 crore people in India in different skills by 2022 and tries to create a synergy between education, training and work in order to enable them to build a stronger India.
- For achieving this, government has taken the following initiatives:

1. National Skill Development Mission:

- This mission was launched for creating convergence across various sectors and different states in terms of activities relating to skill training.
- It would expedite decision making across the sectors to achieve quality skilling on a large scale along with consolidating & coordinating skilling efforts.
- It is implemented by Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).

2. National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship:

- It was launched in 2015.
- It aims to create a skilling ecosystem on a large scale and improve employability and productivity among the people.
- It focuses on mitigating the challenges of skilling on a large scale with quality and speed and enabling the people to realize their full potential through the life-long learning process where the competencies are garnered via instruments such as credit accumulations, credible certifications etc.

3. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):

- It is a scheme of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
- It aims at enabling a large number of youth in India to take up skill training that is relevant to specific industry, which would help them in securing a better livelihood.
- The individuals with existing skills would be certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) component.

- It also undertakes monetary rewards to those individuals who have successfully completed the sanctioned training programmes.

- Sector specific skill councils such as agriculture sector skill council, food industry capacity and skill initiative (FICSI), health sector skill council etc are established under the scheme.

4. Skill Loan Scheme:

- It has been launched with an intent to support the youth willing to take up skill training programmes in the country.
- It has replaced the earlier Indian Banks Association (IBA) Model Loan Scheme for Vocational Education and Training.
- Any Indian citizen, taking admission in a course offered by ITIs, polytechnics, sector skill councils etc can avail loan under the scheme with the repayment period under the scheme is 3 to 7 years.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

4. 10th Nuclear Energy Conclave

Source: PIB

Why in news:

10th Nuclear Energy Conclave has been recently organized by India.

Steps taken in India's Nuclear power programme:

- Cabinet has given its approval for construction of 10 units of India's indigenous Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR).
- Government has amended sections of the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 through the Atomic Energy (Amendment) Bill, 2015, which would enable Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) to form joint venture with other Indian PSUs to meet the additional funding requirements for further expansion of the nuclear power programme.
- Previously the atomic energy programme was confined mostly in Southern India, but now an atomic plant is in the process of being set up in Gorakhpur, Haryana etc, which indicates the expansion of nuclear programme in other parts of country.
- A Hall of Nuclear Power, India's first permanent exhibition on nuclear power, has been built in New Delhi which will help the students and the younger generation to understand the basics of nuclear energy.

- Kaiga Atomic Power Station has set a new world record among pressurised heavy water reactors with one of its units operating uninterrupted for 895 days.

Non power application of nuclear energy:

1. Agriculture: Improving food sustainability through process like food irradiation, Plant mutation breeding, Sterile Insect Technique,
2. Medicine: Radio therapy like treatment of cancer, sterilization of medical products and supplies such as syringes, gloves, clothing, and instruments.
3. Water purification: Through water desalination.
4. Urban waste management.
5. Food preservation.

Challenges of nuclear energy utilization:

- Huge cost of nuclear energy during the gestation period.
- Presently the share of nuclear energy in India is just 3%, as compared to global average of about 10%.
- Issues related to disposal of waste management.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

5. Women’s Health Challenges, Access and Prevention

Source: PIB

Why in news:

A seminar on “Women’s Health Challenges, Access and Prevention” has been organised by Confederation of Indian Industry.

India’s step towards improving women health:

- India’s MMR in the last few years has declined at an accelerated pace to 130 per one lakh live births in 2014-16 from 167 in 2011-2013.
- Under the National Health Mission a continuum of care approach is employed to ensure the best possible health outcomes for women throughout their reproductive life-cycle. As a result of approaches like this, institutional deliveries have risen to 78.9% and institutional births in public facilities have increased from 18% to 52% under NHM.
- In the rural areas, the out of pocket expenditure for childbirth in public health facilities has also decreased.
- Ministry of Health has launched LaQshya - Labour room Quality improvement Initiative' in 2017 which is a focused and targeted approach to strengthen key processes related to the labour rooms and maternity operation theatres aiming at

improving quality of care around birth and ensuring respectful maternity care.

- The launch of Ayushman Bharat also aims at doubling the efforts to reduce MMR. It also provides screening for many ailments, and women are now being screened for common cancers such as breast, cervical and oral cancers.
- There are other initiatives like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao which is closely related and the rise in institutional deliveries through Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram and Janani Suraksha Yojana.

TOPIC: GS II, CONSTITUTION AND HISTORICAL UNDERPINNINGS

6. Anti Defection Law

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Madras High Court has recently upheld the validity of an order passed by Tamil Nadu assembly speaker disqualifying 18 AIADMK MLAs under the anti-defection by stating that the speaker is the sole and ultimate authority to decide the issue pertaining to disqualification and any mala fide intention cannot be on the basis of inference.

Anti-Defection Law

- Hence, the Anti-Defection Law added as Schedule X by 52nd C.A. Act, 1985 was passed by parliament in 1985 and consequently, to ensure that a party member does not violate the mandate of the party for any personal motives or vested interests.
- Defection is an act by a member of a particular party of disowning his loyalty towards his party and pledging allegiance to another.
- The menace of defection was spreading among political ranks and it became imperative to enact a legislation that could effectively curb this rising tendency because it was creating instability of the government where party members were defecting for personal gains.

Grounds for disqualification under anti defection law:

- If an elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party
- If he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party.
- If any independently elected member joins any political party.
- If any nominated member joins any political party after the expiry of six months.
- The decision on questions are to disqualification on ground of defection is referred to the chairman or the Speaker of such House, and his decision is final,

though can be subjected to Judicial Review as per Kihoto Hollohan Case, 1993.

- All proceedings in relation to disqualification under this Schedule are deemed to be proceedings in Parliament or in the Legislature of a state.

Exceptions in the anti defection law (where the law can't be applied):

- Any person elected as speaker or chairman could resign from his party, and rejoin the party if he demitted that post.
- Speaker or person acting so can use casting vote against his party even it whip is issued.
- A party could be merged into another if at least two-thirds of its party legislators voted for the merger. The law initially permitted splitting of parties, but that has now been outlawed.

Advantages:

- It has enabled the political parties to have stronger grip on their members.
- It provides stability to the government by preventing shifts of party allegiance and ensures that candidates elected with party support and on the basis.

Disadvantages:

- It has resulted into its the curtailing the freedom of speech and expression of personal opinion of MP or member of state legislature which led to the absence of constructive debates on critical policy issues. Legislators have constitutional rights MPs (Article 105), MLAs/MLCs (Article 203) of freedom of speech /expression.

Way forward:

- The Election Commission had recommended that the decisions under the Tenth Schedule should be made by the President/ Governor on the binding advice of the election commission. Following this will preserve the dignity of the office of the speaker.
- Anti defection law should not be applied on each and every issue especially on debates in the parliament over critical policies and its use should be restricted to be used during “no confidence motion” only to save the government of the day.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

7. Electoral Bond Scheme

Source: PIB

Why in news:

Government of India has notified the Electoral Bond Scheme 2018.

About Electoral bond:

- An Electoral Bond is just like a promissory note that will be payable to bearer on demand and free of interest.
- It can be purchased by a person who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India.
- A person being an individual can buy Electoral Bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- Only those political parties which registered under Section 29A of the representation of the people Act, 1951 and which have secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last General Election to the House of the people or the legislative assembly of the state, can be eligible to receive the these bonds.
- It will be valid for fifteen calendar days from the date of issue and no payment shall be made to any payee Political Party if the Electoral Bond is deposited after expiry of the validity period.
- 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 through electoral bonds.

Benefits of an Electoral bond:

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

TOPIC: GS II, VARIOUS REGULATORY AND STATUTORY BODIES

8. Institutional Crisis in CBI

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- India’s premier investigation agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation, is facing its credibility crisis at present due to the internal feud of its top two officers who are engaged in accusing each other of corruption charges which prompted the government to send both the top echelons to go on leave on the advice of Central Vigilance Commission.
- However it is clear that CBI is not insulated from political interference as the acting CBI head transferred many of the officers who were investigating the cases of the one of the belligerent officer.

Role of CVC with respect to CBI:

- CVC is the supervisory body for the efficient functioning of CBI.

- The Ordinance of 1998 conferred statutory status to the CVC and the powers to exercise superintendence over functioning of the Delhi Special Police Establishment, and also to review the progress of the investigations pertaining to alleged offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. This ordinance later became an act.
- The CVC has also been publishing a list of corrupt government officials against which it has recommended punitive action.
- In 2004, CVC became authorized to receive written complaints for disclosure on any allegation of corruption or misuse of office and recommend appropriate action.

What are the Transfer rules?

- Section 4B of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act doesn't allow the government to transfer the CBI Director during the two-year fixed tenure without the previous consent of the high powered committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India, and the Leader of the Opposition (or a member of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).
- Here the argument forwarded by the centre was that sending the CBI head did not mean his transfer. He has been relieved of his duty only to make the issue impartial.

Way forward:

- The current situation of the CBI is another timely reminder that the institutions like CBI must be freed of political parties and integrity must be ensured. Only steps like that are going to save the image of our democratic institutions in the eyes of the people.

TOPIC: GS II, REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLES ACT 1951

9. Asking for vote on religious ground

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

FIR has been launched against a minister in Rajasthan for seeking votes in the name of religion under section 125 (promoting enmity between classes in connection with election) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Representation of Peoples Act 1951:

1. The Representation of People Act 1951 deals with the electoral system in India which was passed in the parliament before the first general elections.
2. Salient Features of the Representation of People Act 1951:- It deals with the following subjects related to the election in India:

- Actual conduct of elections
- Voting
- Administrative machinery for the conduct of elections
- By-elections
- Election offences
- Election disputes
- Registration of political parties
- Terms and qualification/disqualification of the members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and also the state legislatures.

3. Important sections of the RPA 1951:

- The original RPA 1951 contains 13 parts and 171 sections.
- Part 2 of the act deals with qualifications and disqualifications of the members of the parliament and the state legislatures.
- Part 4A deals with the registration of political parties.
- Part 5A deals with the privileges of recognised political parties.
- Part 13A mentions the Chief Electoral Officer.
- Section 8 prevents the criminals from entering the electoral system and representative bodies of the country. Following persons are prevented from entering the legislative bodies under the section:
 - (i). A person convicted under Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967, Prevention of Corruption Act 1988, Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002 shall be disqualified, where the convicted person is sentenced to — (i) only fine, for a period of six years from the date of such conviction; (ii) imprisonment, from the date of such conviction and shall continue to be disqualified for a further period of six years since his release.
 - (ii). A person convicted for hoarding or profiteering, adulteration of food and drugs or under dowry prohibition act, 1961.
 - (iii). A person convicted of any offence and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years and he shall continue to be disqualified for a next six years since his release. Section 8(4) was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013 which allowed the convicted lawmakers to retain their seats if they filed an appeal within 3 months of their conviction.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: GS I, IMPACT OF URBANIZATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

10. Migrant Workers in India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

A large number of migrant workers from north India mainly from UP and Bihar workers have left the State of Gujarat in the wake of recent attacks on migrant labourers after a case of sexual assault on a 14-month-old girl, allegedly by a migrant labourer from Bihar.

Issues related to migrant workers:

- Industrial States like Gujarat, Maharashtra etc receive migrant workers on a large scale who work in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in a wide range of activities such as in agriculture, factories, textiles and embroidery etc.
- Employers send contractors to distant unexplored places to gather labour at the lowest possible wage rate like Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh etc.
- Most of the migrant workers are unskilled and thus do not have any chance of engaging in high paid jobs.
- Governments of most of the prosperous industrial states have no data on/estimates of migrant workers coming to their states.
- These migrant workers are subjected to many types of exploitation by their employers and face many problems like:
 - (a) Work for very long hours without any overtime benefits.
 - (b) Low wages without any leave or social protection.
 - (c) Pathetic conditions at workplace as well as provisional house like huts slums etc which are not served by municipalities.
 - (d) They are the biggest victims of issues related to Insider versus Outsider which makes them to live under constant fear.
 - (e) These states are indifferent to the well being of migrant workers and their rights.

Impact of exodus of workers:

- The exodus will impact the state's growth due to resentment among factory owners and other employers.
- This would exacerbate the level of unemployment in the migrants home States.

Labour laws in India and issues associated with it:

- Under the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act for unorganised workers, the migrant workers are

legally entitled to all their basic labour rights which include:

- (a) Minimum wages, regular wage payment, regular working hours and overtime payment.
- (b) Decent working and living conditions which include taking care of the health and education of their children.

- This act obliges the state governments of migrant workers to issue licences to contractors, register the workers and monitor their working and living conditions in other States. However, the state governments remain indifferent to these laws.
- Need for protecting the legal rights of migrant workers is never emphasized by the political parties.

Way forward:

- First of all, political patronage to the sponsors of such attacks on migrants must be stopped because events like this raises question on the integrity of the nation, and they are blot on the freedom to settle in any part of the country enshrined in article 19 of the constitution.
- Enforcement of all relevant labour laws for migrant workers is the need of the hour so that segmentation of the labour market becomes weak, and workers get a fair and equal deal in the labour market.
- There is need to eliminate the unfair competition between local and migrant labour and enable migrant workers either to settle down in the place of destination or to go back home and make a good living there.

TOPIC: GS II, SOCIAL JUSTICE

11. Special court for Child Prostitution Racket

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Hyderabad High Court has suggested for constitution of a Special Court and a Special Investigation Team to go into the Yadadri child prostitution racket and cases of similar nature.

Human trafficking:

- Human trafficking is the practice of illegally transporting people from one country or area to another, typically for the purposes of forced labour or sexual exploitation.

Human Trafficking in India:

- According to the data of NCRB, the number of cases of human trafficking has increased over the years in India. The victims of human trafficking are

put to sexual exploitation, begging, forced labour as servants etc.

- As per official estimates, 15 children go missing every hour in India and 8 are never found.
- It affects 20 to 65 million women and girls who are trafficked within the country for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced marriage especially in those areas where the sex ratio is highly skewed in favour of men.
- According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh are top two states in India in terms of Human trafficking in India.

Challenges in curbing human trafficking in India:

- The lack of data about the victims.
- Lack of coordination among NGOs, police & other institutions involved in rescuing.
- Political protection for the people engaged in trafficking as many a times political leaders & powerful people are also involved in human trafficking.
- Lack of trust of the victims on NGOs & police as there are many cases of their involvement in human trafficking under the garb of running a shelter homes.
- After rescuing, rehabilitation remains challenge as states capacity is not adequate and NGO are already over numbered with such people.

Way forward:

- The issue of shelter-homes where proper food, education, recreation facilities should be available.
- National registry for recording data of the cases of human trafficking should be maintained.
- State should ensure proper security, health & educational benefits to the victims in the shelter-homes.
- Collaboration of civil societies, NGOs & government should be encouraged but in a transparent manner.
- Government's rehabilitation policy should be implemented properly.

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

12. Health sector in India and its challenges

Source: The Hindu

Condition of health sector in India:

- The poor condition of healthcare is endemic in the country especially in rural areas where infrastructure is in a dilapidated state.

- Government hospitals often fail to provide necessary health services to the poor, with private hospitals being out of the reach of most people.
- The country's growing population and lack of resources has made matters worse. United Nations has estimated that by 2025, India would be the most populated nation in the world.
- India is ranked low in the Healthcare index at a rank of 154 out of 194 countries. But despite this, the budget allotment on healthcare services is as low as less than 2% of its GDP.

Challenges to Ayushman Bharat:

- The allocation of just Rs. 2,000 crore during the current year to the PMJAY (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana) cannot provide the promised cover to the large population sought to be included.
- All the states are not in a position to raise their own share and some states have not even joined the scheme.
- Without adequate budgetary commitments, the implications of pooling the financial risk for such a large segment of the population of India through insurers or state-run trusts or societies make the outcomes uncertain.
- Costs are a contested area between the care-providers and the Centre, and many for-profit hospitals see the government's proposals as unviable.
- Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act which seeks to prevent the hospitals specially private hospitals from indulging into any unethical practices has not been implemented properly despite being passed in 2010.
- Ayushman Bharat offers some key treatments through public sector institutions only but these public facilities often suffer from shortage of drugs and treatments.

NOTE: National Health Protection mission or Ayushman Bharat has been explained in the previous weekly magazines

Way forward:

- It is important to note that the Ayushman Bharat should be:
 1. Inclusive.
 2. Make health-care providers accountable for cost and quality
 3. Achieve a reduction in disease burden, and
 4. Eliminate catastrophic health expenditures for the consumer.
- It is essential to reduce the pressure on secondary and tertiary hospitals for expensive treatments by

investing in preventive and primary care facilities which can play a valuable role in making National Health Protection Mission a success.

- Priority should be given to continuous upgradation of the public sector infrastructure to eliminate issues related to shortages of staffs as well as drugs in public hospitals.
- Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act should be implemented as soon as possible by states to curb unethical practices by the private health care institutions which can misuse the insurance facilities under the Ayushman Bharat.
- All the efforts towards improving health sector in India should be aimed towards Universal Health coverage.

TOPIC: GS II, EDUCATION

13. Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Union Human Resource Development ministry has launched Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC).

About SPARC:

- It aims at improving the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions and the best institutions in the world.
- Under this Scheme, 600 joint research proposals will be awarded for 2 years to facilitate strong research collaboration between Indian research groups with the renowned research groups in the leading universities of the world.
- Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur is the National Coordinating Institute to implement the SPARC programme.

Features:

1. A set of 5 thrust areas namely fundamental research, emergent areas etc in each thrust area has been identified for collaboration under SPARC based on its importance for the nation.
2. Each thrust area will have a section chair to review shortlist and recommend the potential joint-proposals submitted under SPARC scheme.
3. It proposes to enable productive academic cooperation by supporting the following critical components like visits and long-term stay of top international faculty etc.

Significance:

- This scheme will improve research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian Institutions
- This Scheme is expected to have a major impact by:
 1. Providing the best international expertise to address major national problems.
 2. Exposing Indian academicians to the best collaborators abroad.
 3. Enabling international faculty to stay in India for a longer duration.
 4. Providing Indian students an opportunity to work in the world class laboratories.
 5. Developing strong bilateral relationships in research.
 6. Improving the international ranking of Indian Institutes.

III. ECONOMY

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

14. Invest India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Invest India, the country's investment promotion body, has won UN Award for excellence in promoting investments in sustainable development.

- Invest India received this award for excellence in servicing and supporting major global wind turbines company in establishment of blade manufacturing plant in India while committing to train local staff and produce 1 gigawatt (GW) of renewable energy. Implementation of this project is expected to reduce India's wind energy cost significantly.

UN Investment Promotion Award:

The awards are given annually by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) since 2002 as part of its investment promotion and facilitation programme.

- It honours investment promotion agencies (IPAs) and their governments for their achievements.
- It also seeks to showcase best practices in attracting investment into Sustainable Development Goals -related projects that can inspire investment promotion practitioners in developing and developed countries.

About Invest India:

- As the national investment promotion and facilitation agency, Invest India focuses on sector-specific investor targeting and development of new partnerships to enable sustainable investments in India.
- In addition to a core team that focuses on sustainable investments, Invest India also partners with substantial investment promotion agencies and multilateral organisations.
- Invest India also actively works with several Indian states to build capacity as well as bring in global best practices in investment targeting, promotion and facilitation areas.
- Invest India is set up as a non-profit venture under the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.
- Operationalized in early 2010, Invest India is set up as a joint venture company between the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce & Industry (35% equity), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) (51% equity), and State Governments of India (0.5% each).

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

15. Appellate Tribunals against Benami Transactions

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The government has approved setting up of Appellate Tribunal and Adjudicating Authority for speedy disposal of cases related to benami transactions.

Background:

- Earlier the cabinet had notified Sessions courts in 34 states and Union Territories, which will act as special courts for trial of offences under the benami transaction law. The rules and all the provisions of the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act came into force on November 1, 2016. After coming into effect, the existing Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988, was renamed as the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act, 1988.

What is Benami transaction?

- Benami transaction refers transactions made in a fictitious name, or the owner is not aware of the ownership of the property, or the person paying for the property is not traceable.

Salient Features:

- Under the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act of 1998, the government will appoint Adjudicating Authority and Appellate Tribunal.
- The officials will come from the existing posts at the same level from the Income Tax Department and the Central Board of Direct Taxes.
- The Adjudicating Authority and Appellate Tribunal will be based in the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD).
- Benches of Adjudicating Authority may sit in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai, and the necessary notification in this regard will be issued after consultation with the Chairperson of the proposed Adjudicating Authority.

Significance:

- The approval will result in effective and better administration of cases referred to the Adjudicating Authority and speedy disposal of appeals filed against the order of the Adjudicating Authority before the Appellate Tribunal.
- It would provide first stage review of administrative action under the PBPT Act. Establishment of the proposed Appellate Tribunal would provide an appellate mechanism for the order passed by the Adjudicating Authority under the PBPT Act.

TOPIC: GS III, TECHNOLOGY MISSIONS; ECONOMICS OF ANIMAL-REARING

16. Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The government has given its approval for creation of special Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF).

- The approval entails an estimated fund size of Rs.7,522 crore, comprising Rs.5,266.40 crore to be raised by the Nodal Loaning Entities (NLEs), Rs. 1,316.6 crore beneficiaries contribution and Rs.939.48 crore budgetary support from the Government of India.
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Cooperatives Development Corporation (NCDC) and all scheduled Banks (hereinafter referred as Banks) shall be the nodal Loaning Entities.

About FIDF:

- FIDF would provide concessional finance to State Governments / UTs and State entities, cooperatives, individuals and entrepreneurs etc., for taking up of the identified investment activities of fisheries development. Under FIDF, loan lending will be over a period of five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23 and maximum repayment will be over a period of 12 years inclusive of moratorium of two years on repayment of principal.

Benefits:

- Creation of fisheries infrastructure facilities both in marine and Inland fisheries sectors.
- Employment opportunities to over 9.40 lakh fishers/fishermen/fisherfolk and other entrepreneurs in fishing and allied activities.
- Attracting private investment in creation and management of fisheries infrastructure facilities.
- Adoption of new technologies.
- Augmenting fish production to achieve its target of 15 million tonne by 2020 set under the Blue Revolution; and achieving a sustainable growth of 8% -9% thereafter to reach the fish production to the level of about 20 MMT by 2022-23.

TOPIC: GS II, EFFECT OF POLICIES AND POLITICS OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON INDIA'S INTERESTS, INDIAN DIASPORA

17. Currency manipulator tag

Source: Livemint

What is currency manipulation and who determines it?

The US Department of the Treasury publishes a semi-annual report in which the developments in global economic and exchange rate policies are reviewed. If a US trade partner meets three assessment criteria, the US labels it a currency manipulator. The US then tries to solve it via bilateral talks.

Implications:

- The October report of the Treasury says that it continues to press major trading partners that have maintained large, persistent external surpluses to support stronger and more balanced global growth by facilitating domestic demand growth as the primary engine for economic expansion.

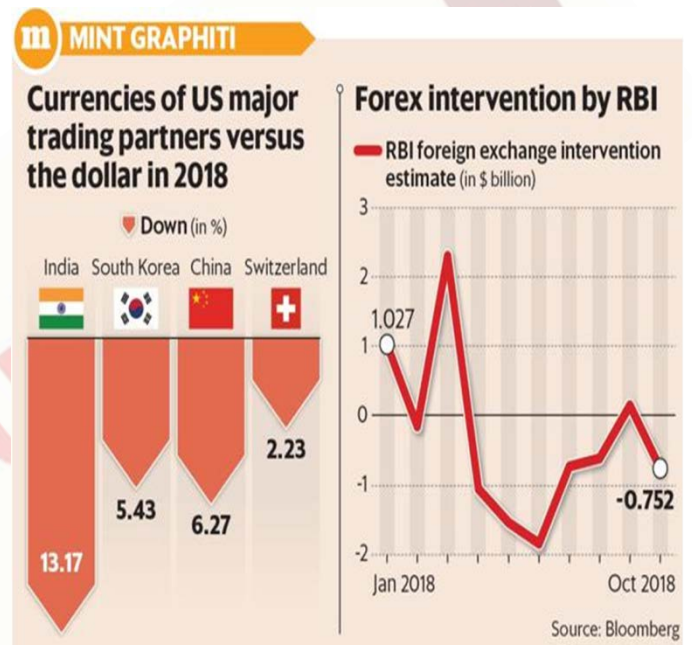
How are countries identified for the currency manipulation list?

- The US Treasury has established thresholds for the three criteria. First, a significant bilateral trade surplus with the US is one that is at least \$20

billion; second, a material current account surplus is one that is at least 3% of GDP; and third, persistent, one-sided intervention reflected in repeated net purchases of foreign currency and total at least 2% of an economy's GDP over a year. The Treasury's goal is to focus attention on those nations whose bilateral trade is most significant to the US economy and whose policies are the most material for the global economy.

How are currencies on the watch list faring in 2018?

- Such currencies have been falling against the dollar. Japan's yen fell 0.13%, South Korea's won slipped 5.13%, Switzerland's Swiss Franc fell 2.3% and China's yuan dropped 6.3%.



Does India feature on the currency manipulation list?

- The US Treasury, in its report, said no major trading partner met the criteria to be designated as manipulating its currency. It has kept India, China, Japan, South Korea, Germany and Switzerland on the monitoring list. It said that India's circumstances have shifted markedly, as the central bank's net sales of forex over the first six months of 2018 led net purchases over the four quarters through June 2018 to fall to \$4 billion, or 0.2% of GDP. The rupee has depreciated by 13.05% this fiscal.

Do policymakers in India need to worry?

- Economists say India doesn't need to worry as it only meets one of the three criteria. If this remains the case at the time of its next report, Treasury would remove India from the Monitoring List. India being on the watch list was not important. If we were to be labelled as manipulators, there would have been pressure on India to reduce tariffs.

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

18. WTO sets up dispute panel on India-US case on export subsidies

Source: The Hindu

Why the news:

The World Trade Organisation's dispute settlement body has set up a panel to examine the US complaint against certain export-subsidy measures by India as both the sides failed to resolve the issue at consultation level.

Background:

- In March, the US dragged India to the global trade body's dispute settlement mechanism over export subsidies, saying that these incentives were harming the American companies. The US has challenged India's export subsidy programmes such as Merchandise Exports from India Scheme in the WTO, asserting that these initiatives harm its companies by creating an uneven playing field. They have stated that all WTO members, including India, are required to provide subsidies consistent with provisions of the WTO's Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, including refraining from providing subsidies contingent upon export performance.
- During the consultation process, the U.S. had alleged that India was continuing to grant these export-contingent subsidies and even expanded the scope and scale of the subsidies.
- During the consultations, India provided a detailed understanding of the schemes implemented under its Foreign Trade Policy by answering all the questions raised by the U.S. India has also said that the schemes identified by the U.S. do not violate India's WTO obligations and are in conformity with all the elements of the agreement.
- India's exports to the U.S. stood at \$47.9 billion in 2017-18, while imports aggregated at \$26.7 billion during the same fiscal.

Dispute Settlement Body:

Seeking consultation under the aegis of the WTO is the first step of dispute settlement process. If the two nations are not able to reach a mutually agreed solution through consultation, the complainant can request for a WTO dispute settlement panel to review the matter.

- The General Council convenes as the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to deal with disputes between WTO members. Such disputes may arise

with respect to any agreement contained in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round that is subject to the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU).

- The DSB has authority to establish dispute settlement panels, refer matters to arbitration, adopt panel, Appellate Body and arbitration reports, maintain surveillance over the implementation of recommendations and rulings contained in such reports, and authorize suspension of concessions in the event of non-compliance with those recommendations and rulings.

About MEIS:

- Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) under Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20) is one of the two schemes introduced in Foreign Trade Policy of India 2015-20, as a part of Exports from India Scheme.
- Objective of Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) as per Indian Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 (FTP 2015-20) is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods/products, which are produced/manufactured in India, especially those having high export intensity, employment potential and thereby enhancing India's export competitiveness.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD- RELATIONS

19. India, Japan sign \$75 billion currency swap agreement

Sources: The Hindu, Economic Times

Why the news:

Japan and India have entered into a \$75-billion currency swap arrangement that will bolster the country's firepower as it battles a steep drop in the rupee's value.

What is currency swap agreement?

- A bilateral currency swap is an open-ended credit line from one country to another at a fixed exchange rate. The country which avails itself of this loan pays interest to the country which provides it, at a benchmark interest rate such as the **Libor** (London Inter-bank rate).
- This is an arrangement, between two friendly countries, which have regular, substantial or increasing trade, to basically involve in trading in their own local currencies, where both pay for import and export trade, at the pre-determined

rates of exchange, without bringing in third country currency like the US Dollar.

- In such arrangements no third country currency is involved, thereby eliminating the need to worry about exchange variations.

Key points:

- This currency swap arrangement will allow the Indian central bank to draw up to \$75 billion worth of yen or dollars as a loan from the Japanese government whenever it needs this money.
- The RBI can either sell these dollars (or yen) to importers to settle their bills or to borrowers to pay off their foreign loans. The RBI can even hang on to the money to shore up its own foreign exchange reserves and defend in the rupee.
- The Agreement shall aid in bringing greater stability to foreign exchange & capital markets in India. The facility will serve as a second line of defence for the rupee after the \$393.5 billion of foreign exchange reserves that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has at its disposal.
- Under the arrangement, India can acquire dollars from Japan in exchange for rupees. Conversely, Japan can also seek dollars from India in exchange for yen.
- The arrangement will be used only when required, and will help meet short-term liquidity mismatches.

Why is it important?

- In recent times, the rupee has been falling against the dollar because of its widening current account deficit (the difference between imports and exports of goods and services). This leads to importers upping their demand for dollars far beyond what exporters bring into the country.
- A swap arrangement with Japan provides considerable comfort to India, because Japan is the second largest holder of dollar reserves in the world after China and is sitting on fat coffers of over \$1,250 billion. Therefore, while Japan is quite unlikely to ask India for a dollar loan, India can make use of such a loan at rock-bottom interest rates.
- Japan may see this deal as quid pro quo for lucrative investment deals that help Japanese companies set up shop in India.
- China and Japan also use bilateral currency swaps as instruments to fight the hegemony of the dollar, as it coaxes more countries to use their currency to settle their bills.

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

20. Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The 19th meeting of Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) was held in New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

About Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC):

- FSDC is super regulatory body for regulating financial sector which is vital for bringing healthy and efficient financial system in economy of the country. It was set up in 2010 by then Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee
- Mandate: To strengthen and institutionalise mechanism of maintaining financial stability, financial sector development, inter-regulatory coordination along with monitoring macro-prudential regulation of economy and promoting financial sector development.
- Composition: Union Finance Minister is chairman of FSDC. Its members are heads of all financial sector regulatory authorities (i.e, RBI, SEBI, IRDA, PFRDA), Chairman of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board, Finance Secretary and Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs; Secretary, Department of Financial Services and Chief Economic Adviser.
- In May, the government through a gazette notification, had included ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) secretary in the FSDC in view of the increased focus of the government on digital economy.

What it does?

- The Council deals, inter-alia, with issues relating to financial stability, financial sector development, inter-regulatory coordination, financial literacy, financial inclusion and macro prudential supervision of the economy including the functioning of large financial conglomerates. No funds are separately allocated to the Council for undertaking its activities.

IV. ENVIRONMENT

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

21. SC order on use and sale of firecrackers

Source: Indian Express

Key points:

- Firecrackers will be allowed to be burst for 2 hours, 8pm to 10pm on Diwali. For New Year and Christmas, the time allotted is 11.45 pm to 12.30 am.
- The Supreme Court has restrained E-commerce websites like Flipkart and Amazon from selling firecrackers which are beyond the permissible limit. Websites will attract contempt of court charges if they don't adhere to court's direction.
- Station house officers of police stations concerned will be held liable if banned firecrackers are sold in their areas.
- The apex court has also directed Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization (PESO) to review the chemical composition of fireworks, particularly reducing Aluminium content.

Background:

- Three children, aged between three and four, were among the petitioners who sought blanket ban on the sale, use and transportation of firecrackers citing concerns of air pollution. On October 9 last year, the Supreme Court had suspended the use of firecrackers till November 1 in Delhi-NCR to test whether and how much, firecrackers contribute to the air quality.
- The apex court had said there is a need to take into account all aspects, including the fundamental right of livelihood of firecracker manufacturers and the right to health of over 1.3 billion people in the country, while considering a plea for the ban.

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

22. CSIR develops Less Polluting Firecrackers

Source: PIB

Why the news:

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) scientists have developed less polluting green firecrackers named – safe water releaser (SWAS), safe minimal aluminium (SAFAL) and safe thermite cracker (STAR).

- Green crackers are so named because they do not contain harmful chemicals that would cause air pollution. These Firecrackers are not only environment friendly but 15-20 % cheaper than the conventional ones.

Technical Details:

- These crackers have unique property of releasing water vapour and /or air as dust suppressant and diluent for gaseous emissions and matching performance in sound with conventional crackers.
- SWAS crackers eliminates usage of (KNO₃) Potassium nitrate and Sulphur with consequent reduction in particulate matter (30-35%) SO₂ and NO_x. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 105-110 dBA. SWAS has been tested for shelf life upto 3 weeks with consistent performance.
- STAR eliminates usage of KNO₃ and S with consequent reduction in particulate matter (35-40%), SO₂ and NO_x. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 105-110 dBA.
- SAFAL has minimal usage of aluminium (only in flash powder for initiation) with consequent significant reduction in particulate matter (35-40 %) compared to commercial crackers. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 110-115 dBA.

Significance:

- Indian Fireworks industry is over 6000-crore worth of annual turnover and provides employment opportunities to over 5 lakh families directly or indirectly. This endeavour of CSIR aims at addressing the pollution concerns at the same time protecting the livelihoods of those involved in this trade.
- The Supreme Court has ordered a partial ban on the sale and use of firecrackers, ahead of Diwali. Hearing a bunch of petitions seeking a blanket ban on firecrackers to help curb air pollution, the court has allowed the use of "safer" firecrackers for a limited time period during festivals.
- Refusing a complete ban, Supreme court has permitted the use and sale of "greener" firecrackers which have low emission. Firecrackers with permissible decibel sound limits will be allowed to be sold in the market.

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

23. SC bans sale of BS-IV vehicles from 2020

Source: The Hindu

Why the news:

The Supreme Court has banned the sale and registration of motor vehicles conforming to the emission standard Bharat Stage-IV in the entire country from April 1, 2020.

Background:

- The country will have to shift to the cleaner Bharat- VI fuel from April 1, 2020. The BS-IV norms have been enforced across the country since April 2017. In 2016, the Centre had announced the country would skip the BS-V norms altogether and adopt BS-VI norms by 2020.

What are BS norms?

- Bharat Stage (BS) emission norms are standards instituted by the government to regulate output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles. India has been following the European (Euro) emission norms, though with a time-lag of five years.

Difference between BS-IV and the new BS-VI:

- The major difference in standards between the existing BS-IV and the new BS-VI auto fuel norms is the presence of sulphur. The newly introduced fuel is estimated to reduce the amount of sulphur released by 80 per cent, from 50 parts per million to 10 ppm. As per the analysts, the emission of NOx (nitrogen oxides) from diesel cars is also expected to reduce by nearly 70 per cent and 25 per cent from cars with petrol engines.

Significance of upgradation:

- Upgrading to stricter fuel standards helps tackle air pollution. Global automakers are betting big on India as vehicle penetration is still low here, when compared to developed countries. At the same time, cities such as Delhi are already being listed among those with the poorest air quality in the world.
- With other developing countries such as China having already upgraded to the equivalent of Euro V emission norms a while ago, India has been lagging behind. The experience of countries such as China and Malaysia shows that poor air quality can be bad for business. Therefore, these reforms can put India ahead in the race for investments too.

The government could face two key challenges in implementing the decision:

- First, there are questions about the ability of oil marketing companies to quickly upgrade fuel quality from BS-III and BS-IV standards to BS-VI, which is likely to cost upwards of Rs 40,000 crore.
- Second, and more challenging, is the task of getting auto firms to make the leap. Automakers have clearly said that going to BS-VI directly would leave them with not enough time to design changes in their vehicles, considering that two critical components — diesel particulate filter and selective catalytic reduction module — would have to be adapted to India's peculiar conditions, where running speeds are much lower than in Europe or the US.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

24. Citizen- Science repository of Indian mammals

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Scientists and researchers from the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in Bangalore have come up with a new citizen-science repository on Indian mammals, called Mammals of India (MaOI), which is an online, peer- reviewed, freely-accessible portal that was launched late September 2018. By October 25, as many as 768 images, of 161 species of mammals, were uploaded.

Key points:

- The website, www.mammalsofindia.org, aims to develop individual species pages for all Indian mammals with information on identification, variation, distribution, breeding and non-breeding ecology and species conservation.
- The website provides an opportunity to any person to upload geotagged photographic observations about mammals with information on habitat age of the observed individual. Over time, these observations will be reviewed by subject experts and uploaded on the website.

Background:

- Organisers behind the initiative said that MaOI is a part of the Biodiversity Atlas (India project), which is an initiative of Krushnamegh Kunte, associate professor at NCBS. Under the project, a popular citizen-science website on butterflies of India www.ifoundbutterflies.org had got to 55,000 reference images in eight years. Under the same

project websites dedicated Moths of India, Cicacds of India, Odonatas of India (dragonflies and damselflies), Reptiles of India, Amphibians of India and Birds of India are operational.

- As per current estimates, 426 species of mammals are found in India; of them 47 species are endemic to the Indian subcontinent. Along with well known species, the mammals of 100 species of rats and 126 species of bats and 24 species of whales of dolphins.

Significance of MaOI:

- These photographic records will help researchers in having distribution map of mammals in the country. The photographs will not only help gather information on the distribution of the various species but also interactions between different species of mammals, like predation and mutualism.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

25. Living Planet Report 2018

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The biennial Living Planet Report 2018 has been released by the World Wide Fund for Nature. The Report tracked more than 4,000 species of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians.

- A key aspect of this year's report is the threat to soil biodiversity and pollinators. Global Soil Biodiversity Atlas prepared by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) was also released.

Highlights of report:

- Global wildlife population shrank by 60% between 1970 and 2014.
- Declines are worst in the tropics, according to the data, as South and Central America saw an 89% decrease. Also, freshwater species saw an 83% drop, threatened by factors including overfishing, pollution and climate change.
- The report estimates that only a quarter of the world's land is untouched by humans, who are increasing food production and use of natural resources.
- Since 1960, the global ecological footprint has increased by more than 190%. Globally, the extent of wetlands was estimated to have declined by 87% since 1970.
- The two key drivers of biodiversity loss were the over exploitation of natural resources and agriculture.

- **Soil Biodiversity:** It encompasses presence of micro-organisms, micro-fauna (nematodes and tardigrades for example), and macro-fauna (ants, termites and earthworms).
 - Millions of microbial and animal species live and make up soils, from bacteria and fungi to mites, beetles and earthworms. Soil biodiversity, thus is total community from genes to species, and varies depending on environment.
 - The immense diversity in soil allows for great variety of ecosystem services that benefit species that inhabit it, the species that use it and its surrounding environment.
 - WWF's 'risk index' for globe: It indicated threats from loss of above-ground diversity, pollution and nutrient over-loading, over-grazing, intensive agriculture, fire, soil erosion, desertification and climate change.
 - India was coloured red on atlas and is among countries whose soil biodiversity faces the highest level of risk. Other countries in this category include Pakistan, China, several countries in Africa and Europe, and most of North America.
- India's per capita ecological footprint: It was less than 1.75 hectares/person (it is in lowest band among countries surveyed). India's high population made it vulnerable to ecological crisis, even if per-capita consumption remained at current levels.
- Pollinators: 150 million bee colonies were needed to meet the pollination requirements of about 50 million hectares of agricultural land in India, only 1.2 million colonies were present.

What needs to be done?

- To address these challenges, the WWF suggests three necessary steps: "clearly specifying a goal for biodiversity recovery; developing a set of measurable and relevant indicators of progress; and agreeing on a suite of actions that can collectively achieve the goal in the required time frame."
- The WWF has called for an international treaty, modelled on the Paris climate agreement, to be drafted to protect wildlife and reverse human impacts on nature.

About World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF):

- It is international non-governmental organization working field of the wilderness preservation and reduction of human impact on the environment.
- It was formerly named World Wildlife Fund.
- It is world's largest conservation organization with over five million supporters worldwide, working in

more than 100 countries, supporting around 1,300 conservation and environmental projects.

- It founded in 1961 and is headquartered in Gland, Switzerland.
- WWF aims to stop degradation of planet's natural environment and build future in which humans live in harmony with nature.
- Currently, its work is organized around these six areas: food, climate, freshwater, wildlife, forests, and oceans.
- It publishes Living Planet Report every two years since 1998 and it is based on Living Planet Index and ecological footprint calculation.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

26. International Conference on Status and Protection of Coral Reefs (STAPCOR – 2018)

Source: PIB

Why the news:

The International Conference on Status and Protection of Coral Reefs (STAPCOR – 2018) is being held at Bangaram coral Island of Territory of Lakshadweep.

- The theme of the conference was "Reef for Life".
- It was inaugurated by Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Dr. Harsh Vardhan.
- It was jointly organized by Department of Environment and Forest, Union Territory of Lakshadweep Administration with the technical support of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and in association with Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Environmental Information System (ENVIS) in consonance with declaration of year 2018 as 3rd decadal International year of Reefs.

About STAPCOR:

- The effect of climate change and global warming along with El-Nino on the corals has led to heavy bleaching internationally during the year 1998. This led to the foundation of STAPCOR with a decision to have a international conference in every 10 years to review the status and progress of coral reefs all over the world.

International Year of the Reef:

- International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) has declared year 2018 as International Year of the Reef (IYOR 2018). It is designed to raise awareness

about the threats to coral reefs and the associated ecosystem.

The goals of the 3rd IYOR – 2018 are to:

- Strengthen awareness about ecological, economic, social and cultural value of coral reefs and associated ecosystems.
- Improve understanding of the critical threats to reefs and generate both practical and innovative solutions to reduce these threats.
- Generate urgent action to develop and implement effective management strategies for conservation and sustainable use of these ecosystems.

Background:

- The first IYOR was designated in 1997 in response to the increasing threats on coral reefs and associated ecosystems. The hope was to increase awareness of the value of and threats to coral reefs, and to promote conservation, research and management efforts on a global scale.

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

27. 11th Global Agriculture Summit & Awards - 2018

Source: PIB

Why in news:

- Since 2008, the Global Agriculture Leadership Summit & Awards are organised by Indian Council of Food and Agriculture (ICFA) with support of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare; Ministry of Food Processing Industries and Ministry of Commerce.

Outcomes of the 2018 summit:

- 11th Global Leadership Awards were announced and the Agriculture Year Book 2018 was launched.
- Leveraging upon its past experiencing, ICFA has launched 1st World Agriculture Prize and MS Swaminathan Global Dialogue on Climate Change and Food Security to come up with blue print for sustained agriculture growth in changing face of climate and weather extremes.

Global Agriculture Summit:

- Global Agriculture Summit is an annual event organized by Indian Council of Food and Agriculture to discuss the broad scenario and trends in agriculture sector, trade, technology, investments and the need for appropriate policy initiatives on the part of the Government by bringing together eminent personalities of Indian and global agriculture on one platform.

- The summit aims to discuss the broad issues in agriculture and agribusiness, and measures to empower farmers and unleash the potential of India's agriculture sector by deliberating upon national and global challenges for farmers, agribusinesses and startups, the issue of employment and agriculture development and bring out a road map for the same.

Global Leadership Awards- 2018:

- Prof. Rudy Rabbinge, who has received International Leadership Award is Special Envoy – Food Security, Government of Netherlands. He has been awarded for his contribution in the field of food security and rural development.
- Andhra Pradesh CM N. Chandrababu Naidu was awarded the Policy Leadership Award for his proactive policies for uplifting the farming community by focusing on irrigation, investment, global partnerships, marketing initiatives and zero budget natural farming.
- Best States in Various Fields: The best fisheries State Award was given Jharkhand for efforts in augmenting the production potential of the state in fisheries segment. Further, Bihar is Best Animal Husbandry State, Nagaland is best Horticultural state, Gujarat is Best Agriculture State and Haryana has been conferred with Program Leadership Award.

About ICFA:

- Indian Council of Food and Agriculture is an apex think tank for addressing policy issues concerning farmers, food and agro industries. ICFA is serving as global platform for trade facilitation, partnerships, technology, investments and agribusiness services.

First World Agriculture Prize:

- The event witnessed bestowing of Prof. M.S. Swaminathan with the first World Agriculture Prize. This prize instituted by the Indian Council of Food and Agriculture (ICFA) was presented by Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu at Vigyan Bhawan at a special session, named Swaminathan Global Dialogue on Climate Change and Food Security organised by the Indian Council of Food and Agriculture.
- The ICFA's World Agricultural Prize carries a cash component of \$1,00,000 and will recognise individuals who have served humanity through agriculture. It will be an annual prize and would be presented to any individual or institution, importantly from Asian, African or Latin American countries who have played a seminal role in transforming agriculture globally and saving humanity from the curse of hunger.

Prof. M S Swaminathan

- Prof. Swaminathan is known as Father of Green Revolution in India and is renowned worldwide for his basic and applied research in genetics, cytogenetics, radiation and chemical mutagenesis, food and biodiversity conservation. The United Nations Environment Programme has hailed him as 'The Father of Economic Ecology' owing to his commitment towards the ever-green revolution movement in agriculture. He also received the First World Food Prize, 1972.

TOPIC: GS III, INFRASTRUCTURE- WATERWAYS

28. India's first container movement on inland waterways

Source: PIB

Why the news:

Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) will transport container cargo belonging to the food and beverage giant PepsiCo (India) from Kolkata to Varanasi on river Ganga (National Waterway-1).

- This would be the country's first container movement on inland vessel post-independence.

Key points:

- PepsiCo (India) will move 16 containers – equivalent to 16 truckloads- filled with food and snacks in the vessel MV RN Tagore which will reach Varanasi in 9-10 days. MV RN Tagore will make its return journey with fertilizers belonging to IFFCO that will be procured from its Phulpur plant near Allahabad.
- The government is developing NW-1 (River Ganga) under Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) from Haldia to Varanasi (1390 Km) with the technical and financial assistance of the World Bank at an estimated cost of Rs 5369 crore. The project would enable commercial navigation of vessels with capacity of 1500-2,000 DWT.
- States covered under NW-1: States: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal.

Benefits of container movement on inland waterways:

- Container cargo transport comes with several inherent advantages. Even as it reduces the handling cost, allows easier modal shift, reduces pilferages and damage, it also enables cargo owners to reduce their carbon footprints.

About IWAI:

- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is the statutory authority in charge of the waterways in India.

- Its headquarters is located in Noida, UP.
- It does the function of building the necessary infrastructure in these waterways, surveying the economic feasibility of new projects and also administration.

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC: GS II, IMPACT OF POLICIES ABROAD ON INDIA

29. U.S. to pull out of Russia missile pact

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

U.S. has decided to pull out of the Intermediate-range Nuclear force treaty with Russia in the wake of alleged development and deployment of the Novator 9M729 missile by Russia.

What is Intermediate-range Nuclear force treaty?

- It is crucial cold war-era treaty signed in 1987 for banning the development, testing and possession of short and medium-range ground-launched nuclear missiles with a range of 500-5,000 km and played key role in ending the arms race between the two superpowers, and their allies.

Background:

- U.S. has been alleging Russia of testing a ground-launched cruise missile since 2014.
- Russia's alleged development and deployment of the Novator 9M729 missile, also known as the SSC-8, that could strike Europe at short notice has exacerbated the issue.
- Thus USA has announced to pull back from the agreement because Russia is violating the treaty.
- However, Russia has continuously denied the allegations and raised counter-allegations of the U.S. installing missile defence systems in Europe.

Impact of withdrawal:

- This withdrawal would considerably enrich U.S. capabilities in a potential clash over Taiwan or other contentious strategic issue.
- As China has a variety of cruise missiles that can be launched from land, air, sea, and sub-surface platforms, returning to intermediate-range systems would equip American forces with the capability to strike targets that are highly difficult to penetrate for conventional weapons at present.
- It can also lead to enhancement of political relations particularly with those that are economically and politically affiliated to China for deeper engagement on the field of security and all this will further disturb the region especially the Asia Pacific.

- It could also mark the beginning of a new arms race between the U.S. and Russia.

Impact on India:

- 2+2 Dialogue of US is aimed at forging a possible containment of China strategy with India thus this act can be an extension of 2+2 dialogue and US's changing the name of Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

30. India- China security cooperation agreement

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- India and China have recently signed a first-ever agreement on security cooperation which will strengthen and consolidate assistance in counter-terrorism, organised crimes, drug control, human trafficking and exchange of information marking a new beginning between the two countries.
- This will be the first such agreement between the authorities of India and China which look after internal security of the respective countries.

Why internal security agreement with China:

- At present India has neither any agreement for exchange of convicted prisoners nor extradition treaty with China. This agreement can be the springboard for such agreements in future.
- Agreements like this will be beneficial for India for stop China for playing any foul game with India. China's anti Indian activities are well established like supporting and arming the Maoists, and insurgencies in our northeast giving shelter to ULFA leader Paresh Barua, supporting Pakistan in carrying out its anti Indian activities.
- China is continuously expanding its intelligence base in India as there are news of Chinese nationals learning India's different languages for a pan Indian intelligence purpose.

India's strategic edge:

- Presence of Arunachal Pradesh's MP in the Indian side has shown India's strategic edge over China as till now the leaders from this state were not included in any delegation dealing with China as China claims this part of India as South Tibet thus a part of China.

Why Arunachal Pradesh is important for China?

- In 1951, China became India's neighbour by annexing Tibet.

- Arunachal Pradesh is internationally recognized as a state belongs to India. It is influenced by Tibetan, Burmese and Bhutanese culture.
- China lays its claim on Arunachal Pradesh on the basis of its cultural similarity with Tibet by citing birth of 6th Dalai Lama in Tawang District in 17th century as historical prove.
- Earlier, it only staked its claim over Tawang but since 2000 it has been claiming entire Arunachal Pradesh because it is motivated by its desire to curb Tibetan nationalism which it believes is fueled by support from India.
- Arunachal Pradesh is also strategically located at the confluence of the international borders of India, China, Myanmar and Bhutan.
- This extension of territorial claims and increasing aggressions in Arunachal Pradesh, East and South-China sea Islands, indicates a concerted strategy of widening of China's sphere of influence and control.

TOPIC: GS II, IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

31. Refugees in India

Source: The Hindu

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and 1951 Refugee Convention:

- The 1951 Refugee Convention defines the term 'refugee' and outlines the rights of the displaced, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them. It has been ratified by 145 states.
- The core principle is non-refoulement, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) serves as the 'guardian' of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. According to the legislation, states are expected to cooperate in ensuring that the rights of refugees are respected and protected.

Refugees in India, domestic issues arising out of this and rules governing them:

- Currently, India hosts over 2,00,000 refugees from countries like Tibet, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc some of them like Tibetans who arrived between 1959 and 1962 are given adequate refuge with all privileges provided to an Indian citizen.
- Chakma and Hajong tribes:

- I. The Chakmas (Buddhists) and the Hajongs (Hindus) are originally inhabitants of the chittagong hill tracts of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who were systematically forced out of that country by first getting displaced from their original land because of the Kaptai hydroelectric dam on the Karnaphuli river in the early 1960s, and later being subjected to religious persecution.
 - II. It has created problems related to their resettlement in Arunachal Pradesh despite India granting them citizenship under Section 5(i)(a) of the Citizenship Act because of resistance from indigenous habitants of the state who are apprehensive of its adverse affect on its demography, and limited resources.
- India is a non-signatory to 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, which defines the legal obligation of states to protect refugees.
 - Refugees in India are governed by the Foreigners Act (1946) and the Registration of Foreigners Act (1939).
 - Refugees have been accorded constitutional protection by the judiciary as the Supreme Court of India has held that the right to equality and right to life and personal liberty extends to refugees.

Way forward:

- India should ratify the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and frame its own refugee law because a well-defined asylum law would establish a formal refuge granting process with suitable exclusions.

TOPIC: GS II, BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL GROUPINGS

32. India- Japan Relations

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

India and Japan completed their 13th annual summit recently in Japan.

Highlights of the summit:

- Enhanced strategic and defence cooperation dominated the talks.
- Both the countries outlined a vision statement for strengthened bilateral relations which revolved around Japan's policy of "free and open Indo-Pacific" received a central place in the vision statement with both sides stressing their commitment to it."

- Free and open Indo Pacific is usually seen as a response to China's growing dominance in the region.
- Both the countries stressed on upholding the rule of law and democratic values.

Recent steps taken by India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region:

1. Port and other infrastructure development projects:

- Bangladesh has cancelled a port that China proposed to build at Sonadia, on the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, which if completed would have brought the Chinese presence close to India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands and chosen Japan's Martabali port project. Besides, it has indicated its support for India to develop the Pyra project.
- Trincomalee port project in Sri Lanka involves joint cooperation between India and Japan which, if completed will reduce importance of China's Hambantota port.
- Chabahar port project in Iran can mitigate the importance of the Chinese Gwadar port in Pakistan.
- The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), a result of Indo-Japanese cooperation, will also counter China's growing influence in Africa.
- India has secured access to Duqm port in Oman for military use and develop the Agalega Island in Mauritius. The Indian Navy has secured a logistics facility in Singapore that will allow it to refuel and rearm and has similar facilities in Vietnam. Moreover, India's recent logistics agreement with France, allows it to access France's military bases across the Indo-Pacific.
- India and Indonesia are considering the development of a port at Sabang close to the Malacca Strait after the Indonesian minister for maritime affairs offered the port to India for military use.

2. Bilateral and multilateral exercises:

- The Malabar naval exercises with the US and Japan are the largest and the most complex series of naval exercises that India engages in, developing interoperability with two of the most powerful navies in the Indo-Pacific.
- The Quad, while not being given a military dimension yet, will be the most important grouping in the Indo-Pacific. It will have to set an economic programme to help smaller countries of the region. India will continue to expand its military exercises and develop bilateral and multilateral groups as Indi stated at Shangri La.



TOPIC: GS II, INDIA'S NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

33. Political crisis in Sri Lanka

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Recently, Sri Lanka's President sacked prime minister and appointed his political rival as the new prime minister. Since the ex PM enjoys majority in the parliament, he is not ready to step down. This constitutional coup has pushed Sri Lanka into an unprecedented constitutional crisis as the country is run by a three powered authority.

Analysis of the issue:

- Section 42(4) of the Sri Lankan Constitution merely enables the President to appoint a PM. The President has taken the position that since he is the appointing authority he also has the implicit power to sack the PM. However, it is a constitutional office with protection from the executive.
- The ex PM pointed out that only Parliament has the constitutionally sanctioned authority to decide whether he could continue in office as PM or not and since there is no no-confidence motion passed in Parliament against him and the cabinet, his position as PM cannot be invalidated by the President at his will.
- 19th Amendment to Sri Lanka's Constitution 2015 curtailed powers of the President which took away the President's powers over the PM. It made the PM's position secure from the arbitrary actions of the President. Thus, the office of the PM falls vacant only under limited circumstances which are only:
 1. Death
 2. voluntary resignation
 3. loss of support in Parliament,
 4. rejection by Parliament of the budget

- All these make the legitimacy of the actions of the President less than clear.
- These immature actions are setting a bad precedence for future constitutional governance in Sri Lanka.

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS AND EFFECTS IN EVERYDAY LIFE ACHIEVEMENTS OF INDIANS IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

34. India's first engine-less train 'Train 18'

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Train 18, India's first engine-less train for inter-city travel is set to hit the tracks for trials.

About Train 18:

- Train 18 is a flagship train set; the first prototype has been built by the Integral Coach Factory, Chennai, in a record time of 20 months.
- Train 18 doesn't require an engine to run as it will be self-propelled on electric traction like the metro trains. It will replace existing intercity express trains including Shatabdis.
- The most prominent feature is that all coaches are inter-connected by fully sealed gangways to enable passenger movement from one coach to another along with a GPS-based Passenger Information System.
- The train is a 100% 'Make in India' project and is claimed to be built at half the cost of a similar train set that is imported.
- T-18 is a self-propelled engine-less train (similar to the Metro trains) and is energy-efficient as its coaches will be fitted with LED lights. Coaches will have automatic doors and retractable footsteps,
- The full AC train is equipped to run at a speed of up to 160 kmph as against Shatabdi's 130 kmph which will cut down travel time by 15%.
- The train will be equipped with modular toilets with a bio-vacuum system and there will be accessible toilets for persons with disability.

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

35. Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has accorded

approval for the Mid Life Upgrade of 17 Dornier Aircraft of Indian Coast Guard (ICG) at an approximate cost of Rs. 950 crore. The upgrades will be carried out by M/s Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the aircraft manufacturer of India.

Background:

- ICG is responsible for protecting the national interests in maritime zones of India which entails surveillance of sea areas of approximately 2.01 million square kilometres of India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- ICG is also the nodal agency in India for maritime pollution response. The Coast Guard has a fleet of Dornier aircraft which play a pivotal role in maritime surveillance. In order to enhance the capabilities of the fleet, DAC accorded approval for upgradation of these aircraft with state-of-the-art technology, spares, Special Maintenance Tools (SMT) and Special Test Equipment (STE).

About Defence Acquisition Council (DAC):

- To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC.
- It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans. It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

36. Druzhba-III

- It is a joint bilateral military exercise between Pakistan and Russian Special Forces. The 2018 edition is being held in Pakistan.
- Druzhba military exercise between Russia and Pakistan was started in 2016. "Druzhba" is Russian word, which means "friendship".

37. Iron Magic 19

- It is joint military exercise between United Arab Emirates (UAE) and United States (US). The latest edition is being held in Dubai.

38. India's largest Dry Dock at Cochin Shipyard

- India's largest Dry Dock will be built at Cochin Shipyard. With this Cochin Shipyard will be able to build specialized and technologically advanced large vessels.
- The Dry Dock will give an impetus to "Make in India" initiative under Sagarmala and raise India's share in global shipbuilding to 2%. India currently occupies 0.66% share in global shipbuilding market.
- The dock will be designed to handle both ship building and repairs, and bear a load up to 600 T/m. It will be equipped with international safety standards. The dock will also have a water treatment plant and Green Belt Development. Equipped with this Dry Dock, Cochin Shipyard will be able to build specialized and technologically advanced large vessels like LNG Carriers, drill ships, jack up rigs, large dredgers, aircraft carriers for Indian Navy and high end research vessels. It will also help make Cochin a one stop maritime hub for all repair needs in South East Asia.
- The project is expected to be completed by May 2021 and generate employment opportunities for about 2000 people.

39. INS Tarangini

- The sail training ship of Indian Navy, INS Tarangini based at Kochi, has returned after a seven month long sailing across the world to a grand reception at naval base, Kochi.
- The Voyage named "Lokayan 18" was flagged off on 10 Apr 18 from Kochi. During the voyage, the ship travelled across 15 ports in 13 countries.
- The ship sailed across the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Suez Canal, Mediterranean Sea, Strait of Gibraltar, North Atlantic Ocean, Bay of Biscay, English Channel and North Sea, right up to Norway.

40. WHO's First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health

- The first Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health will be held at WHO Headquarters in Geneva.
- The conference is being held in collaboration with UN Environment, World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (CCAC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

- Participants will include Ministers of Health and Environment and other national government representatives; representatives of intergovernmental agencies, health professionals, other sectors (e.g. transport, energy, etc.), as well as from research, academia and civil society.
- The conference responds to a World Health Assembly mandate to combat one of the world's most significant causes of premature death, causing some 7 million deaths annually. Air pollution in most cities exceeds recommended WHO Air Quality levels and household air pollution is a leading killer in poor rural and urban homes. Up to 1/3 of deaths from stroke, lung cancer and heart disease are due to air pollution.

41. Saffron Marigold as the symbol of India's sacrifices in WWI

- Marigold has been chosen as the symbol of India's sacrifices at the centenary of the end of the First World War on November 11.
- The symbol has been proposed by the India Remembers' project.

What is India Remembers' project?

- India Remembers project is a joint endeavour of the USI (United service institution of India) and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and a part of the 'India and the Great War' Centenary Commemoration project initiated by the USI in 2014 with the support of the Ministry of External Affairs and in close association with the British High Commission.

What is the relevance of Marigold flower?

- The marigold was chosen because it is easily and widely available and also because saffron is often seen as a colour of sacrifice.
- The proposal was put up in 2016 and since then, the marigold has been widely promoted in all India-related commemorative events around the world.
- The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge laid a marigold wreath at India Gate during their visit in April 2016. Since then, the marigold has also been used across the United Kingdom, along with the poppy, as part of community engagement projects to highlight India's contribution in the First World War.
- The Indian War Memorial which is to be inaugurated at Villers-Guislain in France, has a bronze marigold wreath as an integral part of its design.
- The First World War ended with the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918. Since then, poppy was adopted as the symbol of remembrance as it

grew widely in the Flanders fields in Europe where some of the major battles were fought.

India's role in the World War I:

- India made a huge contribution to United Kingdom's efforts in World War I by sending around 1.5 million of volunteers to fight on behalf of the allied forces. They were primarily from regions such as Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Bihar.
- The British not only raised men but also money from India, as well as large supplies of food, cash and in return, the British promised to deliver progressive self-rule to India at the end of the war. At that time, India's only demand was 'dominion status'.
- However, instead of self-government, the British government imposed the Rowlett Act, which vested the Viceroy's government with extraordinary powers to quell "sedition" against the Empire by silencing and censoring the press, detaining political activists without trial, and arresting without a warrant any individuals suspected of treason against the Empire.

42. Dollu Kunitha

- Dollu Kunitha is a dynamic folk art of Karnataka.
- It is usually confined to males with good physique.
- It is a religious and cultural ritual and is performed mostly by Kurubas, devotees of Beere Devaru (Beereshwara or Beeralingeswara).
- The dancers stand in a circle and move as they start beating the drum, tied to their waists.
- Every time worship is made, there's instantaneous beating of the Dollu accompanied by swift and supple dancing.
- The dance requires immense upper body strength, muscle power and endurance.
- The men stand in a semi-circle and move to the beat of the cymbal played by the leader of the group.
- The rhythms alternate between fast and slow, and the men perform some really quick and intricately woven dance moves.

43. World's longest sea bridge

- China has recently inaugurated a 55-km bridge in the integrated Greater Bay Area (GBA) that will deepen the integration of Hong Kong and Macao with the rest of China.
- It is the world's longest sea-crossing bridge covering 11 major neighbouring cities, which

include Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

- The bridge has been built to withstand super-typhoons, a magnitude 8 earthquake, as well as hits by super-sized cargo ships. A 6.7 km underground sea tunnel to allow uninterrupted flow of shipping above, along the super-busy Pearl River.
- Delta, is also part of the bridge's design.
- It will cut the travel time between the three cities from three hours to just 30 minutes.

44. Seoul Peace Prize

- Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi has been recommended for the Seoul Peace Prize 2018 in recognition of his dedication to improving international cooperation, raising global economic growth, accelerating the Human Development of the people of India by fostering economic growth in the world's fastest growing large economy and furthering the development of democracy through anti-corruption and social integration efforts.

Seoul Peace Prize:

- The Seoul Peace Prize was established in 1990 to commemorate the success of the 24th Olympic Games held in Seoul, Republic of Korea creating harmony and friendship and a worldwide atmosphere of peace and reconciliation.
- It aims to crystallize the Korean people's yearning for peace on the Korean Peninsula and in the rest of the world.
- It is awarded biennially to those individuals who have made their mark through contributions to the harmony of mankind, reconciliation between nations and to world peace.

45. National Monitoring Framework on Sustainable Development Goals

- The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister has approved the constitution of a High Level Steering Committee for periodically reviewing and refining the National Indicator Framework (NIF) for monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with associated targets.
- This committee will be chaired by Chief Statistician of India and Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

Targets:

- Measures to mainstream SDGs into on-going national policies, programmes and strategic action plans to address the developmental challenges.

- Monitoring of SDGs at the national and state level and to scientifically measure the outcomes of the policies to achieve the targets under different SDGs.
- To bring out national reports on implementation of SDGs and facilitate assessment of progress, identify challenges and give recommendations for follow up at the national level.

SDG and NIF:

- SDGs integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. It intends to eradicate poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.
- SDGs with 17 Goals and 169 Targets intend for promotion of sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.
- NIF will help in outcome-based monitoring & reporting on progress on SDGs at National level.

46. Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony

- The Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony for the years 2014, 2015 & 2016 has been conferred recently.

About Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony

- It is an annual award instituted by the Government of India during the commemoration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.
- It was established in 2011 and it is given for outstanding achievement for boosting harmony, universalism and values of cultural harmony especially in conflict or extreme situations through innovative methods which have a transformational impact.
- The first Tagore Award was conferred on Pt. Ravi Shankar in 2012.

- The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation in a scroll, a plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/ handloom item.
- The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.

47. Swachh Nyayalaya Project

- With a view to extend Swachh Bharat campaign to courts, the Supreme Court of India is set to launch the Swachh Nyayalaya project.
- It would be undertaken by NITI Aayog and the Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation along with the Department of Justice.
- The Supreme Court will oversee the implementation of this project.
- The project involves a clean-up of all court rooms and buildings and facilitation of amenities like house-keeping, which will take care of cleanliness, white-washing, renovations etc.
- Construction of toilets for both male and female lawyers and litigants, a facility that many courts sorely lack is also being planned. These toilets will be equipped with vending machines that will dispense sanitary napkins, toilet paper, band-aids, etc.

48. Statue of Unity

- Statue of Unity' has been inaugurated and dedicated to the nation by the Prime minister of the country.
- It is 182 metres tall statue of Sardar Vallabh bhai patel located on a river island near Sardar Sarovar Dam in Kevadiya village in Narmada District of Gujarat.
- It is the World's tallest statue.
- The statue has been made from scrap metal collected from around the country and is clad in bronze.
- All types of impacts of natural events like strong winds, magnitude of possible earthquake has been taken under consideration during the construction of this statue.

Question:

1. Discuss various problems related to prison reforms in India. Describe recommendations of various committees for prison reforms. Suggest measures for expedition of prison reforms in India.
2. Critically analyse various committees recommendations for improving the higher education in India. Do you think that Higher Education Commission of India bill is a step towards realization of these committee recommendations?
3. Although the anti defection law has ensured the stability of the government but it has also gave birth to some new problems which have plagued the Indian democracy and the parliament. Do you agree?
4. Explain the concept of electoral bonds. What are the major advantages of electoral bonds? Do you think that it will reform Indian electoral system comprehensively?
5. Institutional integrity is not only necessary for ensuring the integrity of the Indian democracy but also for ensuring public faith in these institutions. Discuss.
6. Do you think that inter state migrant workers in India are also one of the vulnerable sections of the country? What steps have been taken by the government for protecting the interests of the migrant workers?
Suggest measures for empowering this section of the society.
7. Despite taking various steps by the government, the menace of human trafficking is rampant in India. Critically analyse various challenges obstructing the elimination of human trafficking in India. Do you think that the steps taken for eliminating this problem are enough?
8. Critically analyse various issues related to health sector in India. What are the challenges in front of Ayushman Bharat in its effective implementation at grassroot level. Do you think that Ayushman Bharat is a step towards Universal health coverage in India.
9. Asia pacific is going to be the next arena for power games by major powers of the world. Do you agree? Critically analyse the impact on India of tussel. How can India secure its national interests in such an uncertain scenario?
10. The Sino Indian security agreement is related to maintaing the internal security of India. Elaborate.
11. Despite not being a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, India has fulfilled its responsibility related to refugees. Do you agree?
12. Critically analyse the changing nature of Indo Japan relations in the Indo pacific region. Do you think that this cooperation is China centric?