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I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS II, WELFARE SCHEMES FOR VULNERABLE SECTIONS OF THE POPULATION BY THE CENTRE AND STATES AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THESE SCHEMES

1. FAME-India Scheme

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The government has recently announced an outlay of ₹10,000 crore for Phase 2 of the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME 2 scheme) to boost electric mobility and increase the number of electric vehicles in commercial fleets.

What are the salient features of FAME 2 Scheme?

- The outlay of ₹10,000 crore has been made for three years till 2022 for FAME 2 scheme. The centre has sanctioned ₹8,596 crore for incentives, of which ₹1,000 crore has been earmarked for setting up charging stations for electric vehicles in India.
- The government will offer the incentives for electric buses, three-wheelers and four-wheelers to be used for commercial purposes.
- Plug-in hybrid vehicles and those with a sizeable lithium-ion battery and electric motor will also be included in the scheme and fiscal support offered depending on the size of the battery.

How will FAME 2 scheme help improve charging infrastructure?

- The centre will invest in setting up charging stations, with the active participation of public sector units and private players. It has also been proposed to provide one slow-charging unit for every electric bus and one fast-charging station for 10 electric buses.
- Projects for charging infrastructure will include those needed to extend electrification for running vehicles such as pantograph charging and flash charging, says a notification by the heavy industries ministry.
- FAME 2 will also encourage interlinking of renewable energy sources with charging infrastructure.

How will the incentives be offered?

- The centre plans to roll out an incentive of ₹10,000 per kilowatt (kW) for two-, three- and four-wheelers, based on the size of their batteries. To encourage state transport units (STUs) to buy more electric buses, ₹20,000 per kW will be offered as incentive.

- The incentives may further be subject to bidding by original equipment manufacturers.
- A committee will review the incentives after a certain period.
- Electric buses will be offered incentives on the basis of the operational expenditure model adopted by STUs.

What steps are being taken to make electric vehicles more affordable?

- FAME 2 will offer incentives to manufacturers, who invest in developing electric vehicles and its components, including lithium-ion batteries and electric motors.
- The centre has asked states to frame their EV policy and provide additional fiscal and non-fiscal incentives to manufacturers and buyers.
- Only buses priced up to ₹2 crore, strong and plug-in hybrids under ₹15 lakh, three-wheelers under ₹5 lakh and two-wheelers under ₹1.5 lakh will be eligible for incentives.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN VARIOUS SECTORS AND ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THEIR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

2. International Arbitration Centre Ordinance

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister has recently approved promulgation of ordinance for establishing the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) for the purpose of creating an independent and autonomous regime for institutionalised arbitration.

Background:

- The New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Bill, 2019, could not be taken up for consideration and passing by the Rajya Sabha in the recently concluded 248th Session.
- Further the Parliament has been adjourned sine die on 13th February, 2019.
- As per the provisions of Article 107(5) of the Constitution of India, a Bill, which has been passed by the Lok Sabha but is still pending in the Rajya Sabha, shall lapse on dissolution of the Lok Sabha, which is likely to take place in near future.
- Therefore, the Government in view of the urgency to make India a hub of institutionalised arbitration and promote 'ease of doing business' has decided to

promulgate an Ordinance namely "The New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Ordinance, 2019".

- In order to facilitate the setting up of NDIAC, the Ordinance envisages the transfer and vesting of the undertakings of the ICADR in the Central Government. The Central Government will subsequently vest the undertakings in NDIAC.

Benefits:

- The benefits of institutionalized arbitration will accrue to Government and its agency and to the parties to a dispute.
- This shall be to the advantage of the public and the public institutions in terms of quality of expertise and costs incurred and will facilitate India becoming a hub for Institutional Arbitration.

Objective:

The NDAIC shall be established with an aim to:-

- to bring targeted reforms to develop itself as a flagship institution for conducting international and domestic arbitration
- provide facilities and administrative assistance for conciliation mediation and arbitral proceedings;
- maintain panels of accredited arbitrators, conciliators and mediators both at national and international level or specialists such as surveyors and investigators;
- facilitate conducting of international and domestic arbitrations and conciliation in the most professional manner;
- provide cost effective and timely services for the conduct of arbitrations and conciliations at Domestic and International level;
- promote studies in the field of alternative dispute resolution and related matters, and to promote reforms in the system of settlement of disputes; and
- co-operate with other societies, institutions and organisations, national or international for promoting alternative dispute resolution.

Salient Features:

- New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) will be headed by a chairperson who has been a Judge of the Supreme Court or a Judge of a High Court or an eminent person, having special knowledge and experience in the conduct or administration of arbitration law or management, to be appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India.
- There will be two Full time or Part time Members from amongst eminent persons having substantial knowledge and experience in institutional arbitration, both domestic and international.

- Also, one representative of a recognised body of commerce and industry shall be chosen on rotational basis as Part time Member.
- Secretary, Department of Legal Affairs, Financial Adviser nominated by the Department of Expenditure and Chief Executive Officer, NDIAC shall be ex-officio Members.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN VARIOUS SECTORS AND ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THEIR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

3. Issues surrounding Right to Privacy

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Centre told the Supreme Court on that its December 20, 2018 notification allowing 10 central agencies to snoop on people is in fact a measure to protect citizens' privacy responding to a PIL filed challenging the notification as a violation of the fundamental right to privacy.

Details of the notification:

- The order allowed central agencies, from the Intelligence Bureau to the Central Board of Direct Taxes to the Cabinet Secretariat (RAW) to the Commissioner of Delhi Police, to intercept, monitor and de-crypt "any information" generated, transmitted, received or stored in "any computer resource".
- The order is based on Section 69 (1) of the Information Technology Act of 2000 and Rule 4 of the Information Technology 2009 Rules (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules, 2009.

Argument in support of the snooping:

- It said the very purpose of the order is to ensure that surveillance is done as per due process of law
 1. Any interception, monitoring, decryption of computer resource is done only by authorised agencies and with approval of competent authority.
 2. To prevent unauthorised use of these powers by any agency, individual or intermediary so that the right to privacy of citizen is not violated.
- Surveillance is necessary in the modern world where modern tools of information communication, including encryption, is used. Surveillance is done only in the defence of India, to maintain public order, etc.
- According to the government, there is no blanket permission to any agency. Permission for

surveillance needs to be got from the Union Home Secretary. Besides, the law mandates the Centre and States to constitute a review committee with the Cabinet Secretary.

- There are grave threats to the country from terrorism, radicalisation, cross border terrorism, cyber crime, drug cartels, and these cannot be ignored or under-stated. There is a need for “speedy collection of actionable intelligence” to counter threat to national interests.
- “It is therefore imperative that requests for lawful interception or monitoring must be dealt with by the executive authority to maintain speed in taking decisions. A well laid down procedure for oversight by a panel headed by the Cabinet secretary doubtlessly ensures that provisions of law, rules and SOP are adhered to.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIAN CONSTITUTION- HISTORICAL UNDERPINNINGS, EVOLUTION, FEATURES, AMENDMENTS, SIGNIFICANT PROVISIONS AND BASIC STRUCTURE

4. Reservation Politics in India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- A public interest litigation petition has been recently filed in the Rajasthan High Court challenging the quota bill on grounds of an “untenable basis” of proportionality of population.
- Earlier, the Rajasthan government had decided to provide 5% reservation to Gujjars and four other nomadic communities in jobs and education in Rajasthan, citing them as being an extremely backward class.

Background:

- The Assembly had unanimously passed the Rajasthan Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions in the State and of Appointments and Posts in Services under the State) amendment Bill in February.
- The four other nomadic communities, which have been accorded the quota benefit along with the Gujjars, are Banjara, Gadia-Lohar, Raika and Gadariya.
- Although, the state government had contended that the reservation was aimed at addressing the pressing need to uplift certain communities, the actual compelling circumstance was the Gujjar agitation, which had held the entire state to ransom.
- Before the notification for enforcing the new quota Bill was issued, Gujjars were eligible for 1%

reservation in the “most backward” category, in addition to the Other Backward Class (OBC) quota, within the 50% ceiling laid down by the Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney judgment. Previous State governments had tried thrice to provide 5% reservation to the Gujjars and the four other nomadic communities, who were earlier grouped as a Special Backward Class.

- The legislation, however, had been struck down in every one of the past three attempts by the Rajasthan High Court, which had ruled that the quota not only exceeded the 50% limit, but was also not supported by quantifiable data to prove backwardness.

What are the concerns?

- Multiple commissions appointed by State governments have recommended the implementation of the 5% quota on the basis of the community’s “extreme” or “most” backward nature.
- But the lack of adequate data in the absence of a proper socio-economic caste census to prove this has led to the policy’s undoing in judicial orders.
- Also, the repeated agitations reveal the shortfall in adequate, gainful and secure job opportunities in States such as Rajasthan.

Constitutional Provisions that allows Reservation:

- The Preamble of the Indian Constitution aims at securing ‘Justice, social, economic and political’ and Reservation to weaker section of the society is an instrument of social justice.
- Article 14 incorporates within itself “equal protection of the laws” besides ‘equality before law’. This means that a state must treat all individuals equally in similar conditions and circumstances.
- Article 15(4) enunciates that the State can make any special provision for the advancement of any Socially or Educationally Backward Classes of citizens (SEBCs) or for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- Article 15(5) empowers the state to make any special provision, by law, in relation to the admission to educational institutions for the advancement of any SEBCs or for any SCs/STs.
- Article 16(4) empowers the State to make special provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which in the opinion of the State are not adequately represented in the services under the State.
- Article 46 directs the State to promote with special care the educational and economic

interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the SCs/STs.

Conclusion:

- The reservation policy in India has achieved permanence. It has become an identifying feature of Indian society, though it was initiated as a temporary provision.

TOPIC: GS II, ELECTORAL REFORM

5. Amendment in Form 26

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Law Ministry made it mandatory for election candidates to reveal their income-tax returns of the last five years, as well as the details of their offshore assets.
- This was done by amending Form 26, after the Election Commission of India wrote to the Law Ministry.

What is Form 26?

- A candidate in an election is required to file an affidavit called Form 26 that furnishes information on his/her assets, liabilities, educational qualifications, criminal antecedents (convictions and all pending cases) and public dues, if any.
- The affidavit has to be filed along with the nomination papers and should be sworn before an Oath Commissioner or Magistrate of the First Class or before a Notary Public.

What has changed?

- Earlier, a candidate had to only declare the last I-T return (for self, spouse and dependents). Details of foreign assets were not sought.
- Offshore assets, as per the notification, means “details of all deposits or investments in foreign banks and any other body or institution abroad and details of all assets and liabilities in foreign countries”.
- It is now mandatory for candidates to reveal their own income-tax returns of the last five years rather than only one, and the details of offshore assets, as well as the same details for their spouse, members of the Hindu Undivided Family and dependents.

Objective:

- The objective behind introducing Form 26 was that it would help voters make an informed decision.
- The affidavit would make them aware of the criminal activities of a candidate, which could help

prevent people with questionable backgrounds from being elected to an Assembly or Parliament.

- With the recent amendment, voters will know the extent to which a serving MP’s income grew during his five years in power.

What happens if a candidate lies in an affidavit?

- A candidate is expected to file a complete affidavit. Leaving a few columns blank can render the affidavit “nugatory”.
- It is the responsibility of the Returning Officer (RO) to check whether Form 26 has been completed; the nomination paper can be rejected if the candidate fails to fill it in full.
- If it is alleged that a candidate has suppressed information or lied in her affidavit, the complainant can seek an inquiry through an election petition.
- If the court finds the affidavit false, the candidate’s election can be declared void.
- The current penalty for lying in an affidavit is imprisonment up to six months, or fine, or both.
- In May 2018, the EC had asked the government to make the filing of a false affidavit a “corrupt practice” under the election law, which would make the candidate liable for disqualification for up to six years. But nothing has been done by the government on this front.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

6. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Anganwadi services have a poor reach among key beneficiaries – the poorest of the poor and uneducated mothers – according to a paper published in a WHO bulletin recently.

About the Findings:

- The study analyses the findings of the National Family Health Survey 2005-2006 and 2015-2016 to compare the coverage of ICDS over a 10-year period.
- During this time, the average respondents benefiting from these services increased from 9.6% to 37.9% for supplementary food, 3.2% to 21% for health and nutrition education, 4.5% to 28% for health check-ups and 10.4% to 24.2% for child-specific services over a period of 10 years.
- At the same time, the poorest of the poor or quintile 1, who were the largest beneficiaries in

2006, got left behind quintile 2 and quintile 3 by 2016 for all four indicators such as supplementary food, counselling on nutrition, health check-ups and early childhood services

- For example, supply of food supplements in 2006 was the highest for the poorest quintile (11.7%). However, by 2016, they accounted for 34.8% of the respondents, behind quintile 2 (41.7%), 3 (45.5%) and 4 (39.7%).
- The study also said that mothers without any schooling were the lowest beneficiaries as compared to those with primary and secondary schooling in 2006, and they continued to be so in 2016.

About ICDS:

- Launched on 2nd October, 1975, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is one of the flagship programmes of the Government of India and represents one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care and development.
- The beneficiaries under the Scheme are children in the age group of 0-6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Objectives of the Scheme:

- Improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age-group 0-6 years;
- To lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child.
- To reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout.
- To achieve effective co-ordination of policy and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development.
- To enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education.

Services under ICDS:

The ICDS Scheme offers a package of six services,

- Supplementary Nutrition
- Pre-school non-formal education
- Nutrition & health education
- Immunization
- Health check-up
- Referral services

The last three services are related to health and are provided by Ministry/Department of Health and Family Welfare through NRHM & Health system.

III. ECONOMY

TOPIC: GS III, IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES AND FORA, THEIR STRUCTURE, MANDATE

7. Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT)

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express

Why in news:

Half a dozen public and private sector banks have been slapped with monetary penalties by the Reserve Bank of India for non-compliance of directions in the Swift (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) messaging system used by banks worldwide for foreign currency transfers.

Background:

- RBI had started inspection of banks' Swift transactions post the PNB fraud last year brought out misuse of the system.
- The central bank imposed penalties on ICICI Bank, Yes Bank and Allahabad Bank on Tuesday for non-compliance with its directions on Swift system.
- It has fined Karnataka Bank, United Bank of India and Karur Vysya Bank for violations of the same recently.

About SWIFT:

- The SWIFT is a global member-owned cooperative that is headquartered in Brussels, Belgium.
- It was founded in 1973 by a group of 239 banks from 15 countries which formed a co-operative utility to develop a secure electronic messaging service and common standards to facilitate cross-border payments.
- It is a messaging network that financial institutions use to securely transmit information and instructions through a standardized system of codes. Under SWIFT, each financial organization has a unique code which is used to send and receive payments.
- SWIFT does not facilitate funds transfer: rather, it sends payment orders, which must be settled by correspondent accounts that the institutions have with each other.
- The SWIFT is a secure financial message carrier — in other words, it transports messages from one bank to its intended bank recipient.
- Its core role is to provide a secure transmission channel so that Bank A knows that its message to Bank B goes to Bank B and no one else. Bank B, in

turn, knows that Bank A, and no one other than Bank A, sent, read or altered the message en route. Banks, of course, need to have checks in place before actually sending messages.

SWIFT India:

- SWIFT India is a joint venture of top Indian public and private sector banks and SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication). The company was created to deliver high quality domestic financial messaging services to the Indian financial community. It has a huge potential to contribute significantly to the financial community in many domains.

Significance of SWIFT:

- Messages sent by SWIFT's customers are authenticated using its specialised security and identification technology.
- Encryption is added as the messages leave the customer environment and enter the SWIFT Environment.
- Messages remain in the protected SWIFT environment, subject to all its confidentiality and integrity commitments, throughout the transmission process while they are transmitted to the operating centres (OPCs) where they are processed — until they are safely delivered to the receiver.

TOPIC: GS III, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN VARIOUS SECTORS AND ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THEIR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

8. Special Economic Zones Act, 2005

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Union Cabinet has approved promulgation of an Ordinance to amend the definition of “person”, as defined in sub-section (v) of section 2 of the Special Economic Zones Act, 2005:

- To include a trust.
- To enable the setting up of a unit in a Special Economic Zone by a trust.
- To provide flexibility to the Central Government to include in this definition of a person, any entity that the Central Government may notify from time to time.

Impact:

- The present provision of the SEZs Act, 2005 do not permit 'trusts' to set up units in SEZs. The amendment will enable a trust to be considered for grant of permission to set up a unit in SEZs.

The amendment will also provide flexibility to the Central Government to include in this definition of a person, any entity that the Central Government may notify from time to time. This will facilitate investments in Special Economic Zones.

About Special Economic Zones (SEZs):

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are geographically delineated ‘enclaves’ in which regulations and practices related to business and trade differ from the rest of the country and therefore all the units therein enjoy special privileges.

- The basic idea of SEZs emerges from the fact that, while it might be very difficult to dramatically improve infrastructure and business environment of the overall economy ‘overnight’, SEZs can be built in a much shorter time, and they can work as efficient enclaves to solve these problems.
- The SEZ Act, 2005, provides the legal framework for establishment of SEZs and also for units operating in such zones.

TOPIC: GS III, INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND ISSUES ARISING FROM IT

9. National Housing Bank

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Cabinet has approved payment of the face value of the subscribed share capital of Rs.1450 crore in National Housing Bank (NHB) to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) consequent to amendments made to the NHB Act, 1987 in 2018.

- Up till now, the authorized capital of NHB stands at Rs. 2,000 crore of which Rs. 1,450 crore has been subscribed by RBI. Currently, the capital is fully subscribed by RBI. Subsequent to the payment of this amount to RBI, the subscribed capital of NHB shall stand transferred to and vested in the Central Government.

Impact:

- The wholesale financing role of NHB will get strengthened with the transfer of ownership to Government, thereby making possible augmented funding support to housing finance companies.
- The change in ownership from RBI to GoI will also segregate RBI's role as banking regulator and as owner of NHB.

About NHB:

- NHB is an All India Financial Institution (AIFI), set up in 1988, under the National Housing Bank Act, 1987.
- It is an apex agency established to operate as a principal agency to promote housing finance

institutions both at local and regional levels and to provide financial and other support incidental to such institutions and for matters connected therewith.

TOPIC: GS III, ISSUES RELATED TO DIRECT AND INDIRECT FARM SUBSIDIES AND MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICES

10. Scheme for Transport and Marketing Assistance (TMA) for specified agriculture products

Source: PIB

Why in news:

Department of Commerce of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry has notified a scheme for Transport and Marketing Assistance (TMA) for Specified Agriculture Products.

Highlights:

- **Objective:** The scheme aims to provide assistance for the international component of freight and marketing of agricultural produce.
- The scheme would be suitably included in the Foreign Trade Policy (2015-20).
- **Applicability:** The Scheme would be applicable for a period as specified from time to time. Presently the Scheme would be available for exports effected from 1.3.2019 to 31.03.2020
- **Eligibility:** All exporters, duly registered with relevant Export Promotion Council as per Foreign Trade Policy, of eligible agriculture products shall be covered under this scheme.
- **Exceptions:** The assistance is available for most agricultural product exports with some exceptions such as live animals, products of animal origin, milk, cream, curd, butter, buttermilk, whey, rice, wheat, tobacco and garlic.
- The assistance, at notified rates, will be available for export of eligible agriculture products to the permissible countries, as specified from time to time. The assistance shall be admissible only if payments for the exports are received in Free Foreign Exchange through normal banking channels.
- Assistance under TMA would be provided in cash through direct bank transfer as part reimbursement of freight paid. FOB supplies where no freight is paid by Indian exporters are not covered under this scheme.
- The scheme shall be admissible for exports made through EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) ports only.
- The scheme covers freight and marketing assistance for export by air as well as by sea.

Significance:

- This scheme is likely to mitigate the disadvantage of higher cost of transportation of export of specified agriculture products due to trans-shipment and to promote brand recognition for Indian agricultural products in the specified overseas markets.

IV. ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN VARIOUS SECTORS AND ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THEIR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

11. Hazardous Waste (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016

Sources: PIB, The Hindu

Why in news:

In order to strengthen the implementation of environmentally sound management of hazardous waste in the country, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has amended the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016.

- The amendment has been done keeping into consideration the “Ease of Doing Business” and boosting “Make in India” initiative by simplifying the procedures under the Rules, while at the same time upholding the principles of sustainable development and ensuring minimal impact on the environment.

Salient features of the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Amendment Rules, 2019:

- Solid plastic waste has been prohibited from import into the country including in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and by Export Oriented Units (EOU).
- Exporters of silk waste have now been given exemption from requiring permission from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Electrical and electronic assemblies and components manufactured in and exported from India, if found defective can now be imported back into the country, within a year of export, without obtaining permission from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Industries which do not require consent under Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974 and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1981, are now exempted from requiring

authorization also under the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016, provided that hazardous and other wastes generated by such industries are handed over to the authorized actual users, waste collectors or disposal facilities.

Plastic pollution in India:

- In spite of having a significant plastic pollution load of its own, and a ban on plastic waste imports, imported PET bottles from abroad for processing SEZ. The influx of PET bottles was quadrupled from 2017 to 2018.
- Indian firms are importing plastic scrap from China, Italy, Japan and Malawi for recycling.
- India consumes about 13 million tonnes of plastic and recycles only about 4 million tonnes.
- To incentivise domestic plastic recycling units, the government had banned the import of plastic waste, particularly PET bottles, in 2015. In 2016, an amendment allowed such imports as long as they were carried out by agencies situated in SEZs.
- The lack of an efficient waste collection and segregation system is the root cause for much of the plastic not making its way to recycling centres.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN VARIOUS SECTORS

12. Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the “Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN (Jai Indhan-Vatavaran Anukool fasal awashesh Nivaran) Yojana”.

Details:

- The scheme will provide financial support to Integrated Bioethanol Projects using lignocellulosic biomass and other renewable feedstock.
- Under this Yojana, 12 Commercial Scale and 10 demonstration scale Second Generation (2G) ethanol Projects will be provided a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) support in two phases:
 - (a) Phase-I (2018-19 to 2022-23): wherein six commercial projects and five demonstration projects will be supported.
 - (b) Phase-II (2020-21 to 2023-24): wherein remaining six commercial projects and five demonstration projects will be supported.
- The scheme focuses to incentivise 2G Ethanol sector and support this nascent industry by creating a suitable ecosystem for setting up

commercial projects and increasing Research & Development in this area.

- The ethanol produced by the scheme beneficiaries will be mandatorily supplied to Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to further enhance the blending percentage under EBP Programme.
- Centre for High Technology (CHT), a technical body under the aegis of MoP&NG, will be the implementation Agency for the scheme.

Apart from supplementing the targets envisaged by the Government under EBP programme, the scheme will also have the following benefits:

- Meeting Government of India vision of reducing import dependence by way of substituting fossil fuels with Biofuels.
- Achieving the GHG emissions reduction targets through progressive blending/substitution of fossil fuels.
- Addressing environment concerns caused due to burning of biomass/ crop residues & improve health of citizens.
- Improving farmer income by providing them remunerative income for their otherwise waste agriculture residues.
- Creating rural & urban employment opportunities in 2G Ethanol projects and Biomass supply chain.
- Contributing to Swachh Bharat Mission by supporting the aggregation of non-food biofuel feedstocks such as waste biomass and urban waste.
- Indigenizing of Second Generation Biomass to Ethanol technologies.

Background:

- Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas has targeted to achieve 10% blending percentage of Ethanol in petrol by 2022. Despite efforts of the Government such as higher ethanol prices and simplification of ethanol purchase system, the highest ever ethanol procurement stands around 150 crore litres during Ethanol supply year 2017-18 which is sufficient for around 4.22% blending on Pan India basis.
- Therefore, an alternate route viz. Second Generation (2G) Ethanol from biomass and other wastes is being explored by MoP&NG to bridge the supply gap for EBP programme. In this direction, “Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana” is being launched as a tool to create 2G Ethanol capacity in the country and attract investments in this new sector.

Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme:

- Government of India launched Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme in 2003 for undertaking blending of ethanol in Petrol to address

environmental concerns due to fossil fuel burning, provide remuneration to farmers, subsidize crude imports and achieve forex savings.

- Presently, EBP is being run in 21 States and 4 UTs of the country. Under EBP programme, OMCs are to blend upto 10% of ethanol in Petrol. The present policy allows procurement of ethanol produced from molasses and non-food feed stock like celluloses and lignocelluloses material including petrochemical route.

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

13. World Air Quality Report 2018

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The IQ Air Visual 2018 World Air Quality Report was recently published in collaboration with Greenpeace.

- The main objective behind the report was to measure the presence of fine particulate matter known as Particulate Matter (PM) 2.5, which has been recorded in real-time in 2018.

Rank	City	2017 AVG	2018 AVG
1	 Gurugram, India	145.6	135.8
2	 Ghaziabad, India	144.6	135.2
3	 Faisalabad, Pakistan	-	130.4
4	 Faridabad, India	123	129.1
5	 Bhiwadi, India	-	125.4
6	 Noida, India	134	123.6
7	 Patna, India	118.5	119.7
8	 Hotan, China	91.9	116
9	 Lucknow, India	119.2	115.7
10	 Lahore, Pakistan	133.2	114.9

Highlights of the report:

- The report, based on a study of 3000 cities, said that 64 percent of the cities exceeded the World Health Organisation’s annual exposure guideline for PM 2.5. In South Asia itself, 99 percent of the

cities exceeded the WHO’s safe standard exposure of 10 micrograms/cubic metre annually.

- Of the 10 cities with highest pollution, seven are in India, while one is in China and two are in Pakistan.
- India’s Gurugram led the list of most polluted cities in the world in 2018, followed by Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Noida, and Bhiwadi in the top six worst-affected cities.
- Delhi is ranked at number 11 on the pollution chart.
- Among the top 30 most polluted cities, India makes up for 22 with five in China, two in Pakistan and one in Bangladesh.
- Faisalabad in Pakistan, Hotan in China and Lahore were the only three non-Indian cities in the top 10.
- Delhi was ranked as the most polluted capital in the world, with Dhaka at second and Kabul at third position.
- China made a remarkable improvement since 2013 as the country’s pollution levels have gone down by 40 percent. In 2013, Beijing topped the pollution charts. Beijing ranks now as the 122nd most polluted city in the world in 2018.
- In South Asia, out of 20 most polluted cities in the world, 18 are in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- In Southeast Asia, Jakarta and Hanoi are the most polluted cities.

Measures to improve air quality:

- Improving public transport.
- Limiting the number of polluting vehicles on the road.
- Using electric vehicles.
- Introducing less polluting fuel (Bharat VI).
- Strict emission regulations.
- Improved efficiency for thermal power plants and industries.
- Moving from diesel generators to rooftop solar.
- Increased use of clean renewable energy.
- Removing dust from roads.
- Regulating construction activities.
- Stopping biomass burning, etc.

Way forward:

- Delhi’s air quality has been making headlines for years now. Yet, measures to mitigate emissions have not moved into crisis mode: the launch this year of the National Clean Air Programme for 102 cities and towns, including the capital, talks only of long-term benefits of mitigation programmes beyond 2024, and not a dramatic reduction in

near-term pollution. This has to change, and an annual target for reduction be set to make governments accountable. Achieving a reduction within a short window is not impossible if there is the political will to reform key sectors: transport, biomass and construction.

- The Delhi government, which has done well to decide on inducting 1,000 electric buses, should speed up the plan and turn its entire fleet green. A transition to electric vehicles for all commercial applications, with funding from the Centre's programme for adoption of EVs, should be a priority in cities. Cutting nitrogen and sulphur emissions from industrial processes needs a time-bound programme supervised by the Environment Ministry. These are priority measures to get urban India out of the red zone.

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

14. The New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

India, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia have signed the New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019 declaration for the conservation and protection of the species at the recently held Second Asian Rhino Range Countries meeting.

Key Points:

- 2nd Asian Rhino Range Countries meeting was held at New Delhi and organised by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Government of India in collaboration with the IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group, WWF- India and Aaranyak.
- India will collaborate with Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia to increase the population of three species of Asian rhinos, including the Greater one-horned rhinoceros found in the Indian sub-continent.
- The declaration was signed to conserve and review the population of the Greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran rhinos every four years to reassess the need for joint actions to secure their future.
- The declaration includes undertaking studies on health issues of the rhinos, their potential diseases and taking necessary steps; collaborating and strengthening wildlife forensics for the purpose of investigation and strengthening of transboundary collaboration among India, Nepal and Bhutan for

the conservation and protection of the Greater one-horned rhino.

The 12 point strategic actions outlined the following actions:

1. To collaborate to strengthen protection regimes, strategic information gathering, and real time sharing of actionable information on rhino crime and its horn trade to secure the rhino population within and between range countries.
2. To initiate research on various habitat parameters including invasive species threatening the suitable habitats of Asian rhinos and take appropriate steps to optimally manage the habitats.
3. To explore possibilities of expanding rhino ranges within country or between rhino range countries for optimal population management.
4. To strengthen transboundary collaboration among India, Nepal, and Bhutan for the greater one-horned rhino conservation and protection.
5. To identify connectivity and corridors across international boundaries and keep them functional, safe and secure for free movement of Asian rhinos and other wildlife.
6. To increase the engagement of the local communities as stewards to secure the future of rhinos in range countries.
7. To initiate proactive monitoring on potential adverse impacts of climate change on rhino health and their habitats in range countries.
8. To undertake studies on Rhino health issues & potential diseases and take necessary steps for management intervention.
9. To regularly organize exposure visits for managers and frontline staffs of the rhino range countries and to document the best practices for wider dissemination.
10. To collaborate and strengthen wildlife forensics for the purpose of investigation.
11. To accelerate natural and conservation breeding of critically endangered Sumatran rhino including best use of all available individuals and technologies.
12. To call to the attention of all countries that possible opening of international trade of rhino horn and other derivatives will have a severe detrimental impact on rhino populations in Asian rhino range countries.

About Rhinoceros:

- The greater one-horned rhinoceros is the largest of the three Asian rhinos and, together with African white rhinos, is the largest of all rhino species. With at least half of the total population,

India's Kaziranga National Park remains the key reserve for this species.

IUCN Red list status:

- Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros: Vulnerable
- Javan Rhinoceros: Critically Endangered
- Sumatran Rhinoceros: Critically Endangered

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD RELATIONS

15. Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

In continuation of the process of engaging the global strategic community in an annual review of India's opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, the second edition of Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) - 2019 is scheduled to take place.

Key Points:

Dialogue will build upon the foundation laid by the inaugural edition and will examine five fresh themes:

- Practical solutions for achieving cohesion in the region through maritime connectivity;
- measures to attain and maintain a free-and-open Indo-Pacific;
- a regional approach to the region's transition from a 'Brown' to a 'Blue' economy;
- opportunities and challenges arising from the maritime impact of 'Industry 4.0'; and
- how the twin conceptualisations of 'SAGAR' and 'SAGARMALA' might best be made mutually-reinforcing on a regional level.

These themes would be addressed in five sessions spread over two days, with three of the sessions being steered as panel-discussions, which would encourage a freer flow of ideas and views and ensure greater audience-interaction.

DIALOGUE:

- The response to this year's dialogue has been highly encouraging and IPRD-2019 is likely to witness active participation of globally-renowned domain experts and policy-makers from thirteen countries of the Indo-Pacific — Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Seychelles, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.
- Through this annual dialogue, the Indian Navy and the National Maritime Foundation aim to provide a platform for substantive and insightful

discussions pertaining to the geopolitical developments affecting the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific, and provide policy-relevant inputs to the policy-makers and the public at large.

About IPRD:

- The idea of an Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) was first conceptualised and conducted in 2018, as the apex level conference of the Indian Navy, organised by the National Maritime Foundation as the Navy's Knowledge Partner.
- The permanent theme of this annual dialogue is a review of India's opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The aim is to focus attention on the Indo-Pacific, as a maritime geographical-entity, while deliberating aspects of great relevance to regional geopolitics.
- The 2018 edition of the IPRD sought to highlight the opportunities that lay before India's maritime policy-shapers, policy-makers, and, the practitioners of the country's maritime policies.
- This first edition dwelt upon four basic themes:
 - I. The growth, opportunities and vulnerabilities of maritime merchandise trade, including associated infrastructure such as ports and multi-modal connectivity, as seen from the very different perspectives of large and small littoral and island nations;
 - II. Regional connectivity-models;
 - III. Pan-regional challenges such as sustaining persistent surveillance at sea, the increasing digitisation of the maritime space, the dangers of cyber-malevolence that are already afflicting the maritime domain, etc.;
 - IV. The role of Indian industry within both, the private and the public sectors, in enhancing holistic maritime-security. The 2018 Dialogue was a resounding success, with 15 analytical papers presented by renowned strategists and analysts from across the globe, in five sessions, spread over two days.

TOPIC: GS II, IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES AND FORA, THEIR STRUCTURE, MANDATE

16. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

Source: The Hindu

Why in News:

- The Ministers from the 16 RCEP Participating Countries (RPCs) attended the 7th RCEP

Intersessional Ministerial Meeting held recently in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

- The Meeting reviewed the developments since the 2nd RCEP Summit on 14 November 2018 in Singapore, particularly the outcomes of the 2nd Special TNC Meeting and the 25th RCEP Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) Meeting and Related Meetings.



Key Facts:

- The Ministers recalled the Leaders' determination to conclude a modern, comprehensive, high quality, and mutually beneficial RCEP in 2019, and resolved to exert utmost effort to achieve this target.
- They commended the RCEP Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) for the good progress made to date on both market access and text-based negotiations but at the same time recognized that more work still needs to be done to advance both aspects of the negotiations.
- The Ministers urged all RPCs to address specific sensitivities while working towards achieving commercially meaningful outcomes.
- The Ministers remained confident that with collective commitment and pragmatism, the chapters and annexes that would comprise the RCEP Agreement can be concluded soon.
- The Ministers reiterated that it is the collective responsibility of all RPCs to ensure progress by overcoming negotiation challenges and finding resolution to the remaining issues through constructive engagement.

Importance of RCEP for India:

- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) provides an opportunity for the success of India's Act East policy and will also influence the economic stature of India among the other South Asian countries.

- Also in comparison with the TPP & TTIP groups of countries, India's trade with the RCEP group of countries as a percentage of its total trade has increased over the past decade. This shows the importance of RCEP to India.

Current domestic issues related to India's signing of RCEP:

- Trade Deficit with China: India has a trade deficit with ASEAN as well as the partner countries of RCEP. China alone accounts for 60% of the trade deficit. India's trade with China is much skewed and lowering tariffs could lead to unrestricted imports into India with very limited access for Indian exports into the Chinese market.
- Impact on Agriculture and allied Activities: Under RCEP, if tariff cuts cover 92-80% of products, there will be adverse impact due to heating up of competition for Indian farmers. Also the New Zealand's export-oriented dairy products will negatively impact India's growing dairy sector, which is largely small-scale.
- Impact on Manufacturing: There are concerns that RCEP will have adverse impact on Indian manufacturing sector while competing with cheaper products from ASEAN and China
- Issues related to Intellectual Property Rights and Health Sector: it could adversely affect the generic medicine sector in India, by undermining provisions in Indian Patents Act
- Impact on E-commerce: The e-commerce rules in RCEP impose binding rules that will mandate India to give away data to large multinational companies. This would have privacy and security issues for not only individuals but also the government. Further, It will threaten local products developed by SMEs and domestic job creation in those segments
- Demand for labour movement: RCEP countries like Australia and Singapore have been unwilling to accommodate India's demands to liberalise their services regime and allow freer mobility of Indian workers.

TOPIC: GS II, IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES AND FORA, THEIR STRUCTURE, MANDATE

17. United Nations Reform

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

India is working to build a broad consensus among UN member states beyond the Security Council on the issue of international terror, including blacklisting of

Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, under Security Council Resolution 1267 ahead of the March 13 deadline and has received support from Australia and Bangladesh in its endeavour.

About UNSC 1267 Committee:

- The UNSC 1267 Committee was established as a result of resolution 1267 in 1999.
- It is also known as the Al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee.
- The Committee comprises all 15 members of the UNSC and decides unanimously and secretly.
- It was established for the purpose of overseeing the implementation of sanctions measures imposed on Taliban-controlled Afghanistan for its support of Osama bin Laden.
- Eventually it has been modified and strengthened by subsequent resolutions.

Now, if an individual or an organisation is included in the list, it helps in restricting their movement, financial penalties and assets freeze among others.

India's call for Reform:

- India has been calling for the reform of the UN Security Council along with Brazil, Germany and Japan for long, emphasising that it rightly deserves a place at the UN high table as a permanent member.

Member:

- India was among the founding members of United Nations.
- It is the second largest and a one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions.
- Today, India has over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN's five big powers combined.
- India, since long time, has been demanding expansion of UNSC and its inclusion as permanent member in it. It has been a member of UNSC for 7 terms and a member of G-77 and G-4, so permanent membership is a logical extension.

About UNSC:

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the

authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

• Member:-

- The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body's five permanent members.
- These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.
- The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Proposed reforms:

- Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encompasses five key issues: categories of membership, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and the Security Council-General Assembly relationship.
- There is also a proposal to admit more permanent members.

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

18. Collaboration between ISRO and CNES

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

National space agency ISRO and its French counterpart CNES have agreed to collaborate on the following avenues:

Maritime Surveillance:

- ISRO and CNES have sealed an agreement to set up a joint maritime surveillance system in the country in May.
- The agreement intends to supply an operational system for detecting, identifying and tracking ships in the Indian Ocean, provides for a maritime surveillance centre to be set up in India, sharing of capacity to process existing satellite data and joint development of associated algorithms.
- The two nations will explore putting up a constellation of low-Earth orbiting satellites that will identify and track movement of ships globally – and in particular those moving in the Indian Ocean region where France has its Reunion Islands.

Training for Gaganyaan project:

- ISRO and CNES have signed an agreement to train Indian Scientists for the 'Gaganyaan' project at the Toulouse Space Centre in France. Indian Scientists will also be trained at CADMOS, the centre for development of microgravity applications and space operations, and the MEDES Space Clinic in France.

Note: Besides France, India has signed an agreement with Russia for its ambitious human space mission project 'Gaganyaan' under which three Indians will travel to space by 2022.

Facts for prelims:

- The two agencies have put up two climate and ocean weather monitoring satellites Megha-Tropiques (of 2011) and SARAL-AltiKa (2013) that are considered a model.
- This fleet will be augmented with the launch of Oceansat-3-Argos mission in 2020 and a future joint infrared Earth-observation satellite under.

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENTS

19. Google launches Bolo to tutor children to read Hindi and English

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Google has unveiled a new app 'Bolo' that aims to help children in primary school learn to read in Hindi and English.

- Google has already piloted the Bolo App in about 200 villages in Uttar Pradesh. Google cites the early results as encouraging with 64 per cent of children showing an improvement in reading proficiency in just three months. Google is now planning to collaborate with non-profit groups to enhance the reach of the app.

About Bolo App:

- It is free to use app and can be accessed through the Google Play Store.
- The app uses Google's speech recognition and text-to-speech technology.
- The app features an animated character 'Diya', who encourages children to read stories aloud and helps if the child is unable to pronounce a word. It also lauds the reader when he/she completes the reading.
- The app also works offline. Once downloaded the user will have access to 100 stories in Hindi and English that the children can read out loud and improve their reading skills.

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

20. Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize

- Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize for Science and Technology was instituted in the year 1957, in the memory of late Dr (Sir) Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, the founder director of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).
- It is the most coveted national recognition bestowed upon young scientists and engineers to honour their research and developmental work in India.
- The prize is awarded each year on the National Science Day by the by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) for conspicuously important and outstanding contributions to human knowledge and progress, made through work done primarily in India during the five years.
- SSB Prizes, each of the value of Rs 5,00,000 (Rupees five lakh only), are awarded annually for notable and outstanding research, applied or fundamental, in the following disciplines: (i) Biological Sciences, (ii) Chemical Sciences, (iii) Earth, Atmosphere, Ocean and Planetary Sciences, (iv) Engineering Sciences, (v) Mathematical Sciences, (vi) Medical Sciences and (vii) Physical Sciences.

Eligibility:

- Any citizen of India engaged in research in any field of science and technology up to the age of 45 years. Overseas citizen of India (OCI) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) working in India are also eligible.
- The Prize is bestowed on a person who, in the opinion of CSIR, has made conspicuously important and outstanding contributions to human knowledge and progress – fundamental and applied – in the particular field of endeavour, which is his/her specialization.
- The Prize is awarded on the basis of contributions made through work done primarily in India during the five years proceeding the year of the Prize.

21. Arun-3 Hydro Electric Project

- Cabinet has approved investment proposal for transmission component of Arun-3 Hydro Electric Project (Nepal portion) by Sutlej Jal Vikas Nigam (SJVN) Limited.
- The project will provide surplus power to India strengthening economic linkages with Nepal. The power from the project shall be exported from Dhalkebar in Nepal to Muzaffarpur in India.
- The Arun-3 Hydro Electric project (900 MW) is located on Arun River in Sankhuwasabha District of Eastern Nepal.

22. IRCTC Launches Payment Aggregator iPay

- Taking a step forward to promote government's Digital India initiative, the official e-ticketing arm of Indian Railways, Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), has introduced its own payment aggregator system called the IRCTC iPay.
- The exclusive digital payment gateway will provide better digital experience and improved online digital payment convenience to rail passengers availing online travel-related services through the website.
- With the launch of IRCTC iPay, the passengers will not need any third-party platforms.

23. Mainamati Maitree Exercise 2019

- Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) recently concluded a three-day 'Mainamati Maitree Exercise 2019' as a part of 'Confidence Building Measures' between the two border guards.
- The exercise was named after Mainamati hill range situated 8 km west of Comilla Township in Bangladesh, which is home to an ancient Buddhist archaeological site in the region.
- The objective of Mainamati Maitree Exercise 2019 was to plan and conduct anti-smuggling and anti-criminal activity related operations with an aim to achieve better joint operational efficiency and border management in the area.

24. World Wildlife Day 2019

- World Wildlife Day was celebrated on March 3rd.
- Theme for 2019: 'Life below Water: for People and Planet'.
- Goal 14 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG14) aims to "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development." The theme of World Wildlife Day 2019 closely aligns with this goal, with a specific focus on the conservation and sustainable use of marine wildlife.
- On 20 December 2013, at its 68th session, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 3 March, the day of signature of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), as UN World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness of the world's wild animals and plants.

25. April 2019-March 2020 to be observed as Construction-Technology Year

- Prime Minister has declared 'April 2019-March 2020' as Construction-Technology year at the Construction Technology India-2019 Expo-cum-conference in New Delhi.
- Construction-Technology year emphasises the role of advanced technology to meet the increasing demand for housing in the country caused by rapid.
- The declaration of Construction year aims to give the housing sector a new pace by using the latest technologies available in the world.
- The integration of modern technology to the housing sector would make the sector more dynamic and vibrant.

26. Usha Thorat Panel on offshore rupee markets

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted a panel under the former deputy governor Usha Thorat to examine issues related to offshore rupee markets and recommend policy measures to ensure the stability of the external value of the domestic currency.

Mandate for the Panel:

- Study the causes behind the development of the offshore rupee market and examine the effects of the offshore markets on the rupee exchange rate and market liquidity in the domestic market.
- Recommend measures to address concerns, if any, arising out of offshore rupee trading besides proposing measures to generate incentives for non-residents to access the domestic market.
- Recommend measures to generate incentives for non-residents to access the domestic market and examine the role if any, International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) can play in addressing these concerns.

27. Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities sets World Record

- The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) has set its seventh Guinness world record with 260 people in Gujarat's Bharuch getting 'Modern Artificial Limbs (Legs)' implanted within eight hours.

Key Highlights:

- The DEPwD under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had previously set six Guinness world records in other categories.
- The Indian Sign Language Research and Training Center (ISLRTC) under the DEPwD has recently prepared a dictionary comprising 6,000 words for the hearing impaired and that more than 1,700 visually impaired children have been treated with cochlear implant surgery.
- The DEPwD has also provided 'motorized tricycles' to the physically challenged across the country.
- So far, 28 states have provided universal ID cards to around 13 lakh differently abled people.

28. Sampriti - 2019

- As part of the ongoing India Bangladesh defence cooperation, a joint military exercise Sampriti-2019 is being conducted at Tangail, Bangladesh.

AIM:

- The aim of the exercise is to increase mutual cooperation, bonhomie and camaraderie between the two armies through interoperability and joint tactical exercises.
- A company group from Bangladesh Army and an equal number from Indian Army are taking part in the two-week long exercise that will see them hone their tactical and technical skills in countering insurgency, counter terrorism and aid to civil authorities for disaster management in an UN peace keeping scenario involving a combined deployment at a battalion level.
- In this eighth edition of the exercise which started way back in 2009 as a platoon level exercise and graduated to company level exercise in 2015 onwards, both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well developed tactical drills for neutralisation of likely threats that may be encountered during simulated UN peace keeping operations.
- The experts from both the sides will also hold discussions to share each other's experiences in varied topics for mutual benefits.

29. BOLD-QIT project

- Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique (BOLD-QIT) under CIBMS (Comprehensive Integrated Border Management system) on India-Bangladesh border in Dhubri District of Assam has been recently inaugurated.

Background:

- Border Security Force is responsible for safeguarding of 4,096 Km long International

Border with Bangladesh. At various places, it is not possible to erect Border Fence due to the geographical barriers.

- The 61 kms of Border area in District Dhubri, Assam where River Brahmaputra enters into Bangladesh is consisting of vast char lands and innumerable river channels thus making border guarding in this area, a daunting task especially during rainy season.
- To overcome this problem, in the year 2017, Ministry of Home Affairs decided to go for technological solution besides the physical presence of manpower of BSF.

About BOLD-QIT:

- Information and Technology Wing of BSF undertook the project BOLD-QIT (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique) and completed it in record time in 2018, with the technical support of various manufacturers and suppliers.
- BOLD-QIT is the project to install technical systems under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), which enables BSF to equip Indo-Bangla borders with different kind of sensors in unfenced riverine area of Brahmaputra and its tributaries.
- Now, the entire span of River Brahmaputra has been covered with data network generated by Microwave communication, OFC Cables, DMR Communication, day and night surveillance Cameras and intrusion detection system.
- These modern gadgets provide feeds to BSF Control Rooms on the Border and enable BSF Quick Reaction Teams to thwart any possibility of Illegal Cross Border Crossing/ Crimes.
- The implementation of this project will not only help BSF to curb all type of cross border crimes but also provide respite to the troops from round the clock human surveillance.

30. Azaadi Ke Diwane' Museum

- The Minister of State for Culture (Independent charge) has recently inaugurated 'Azaadi ke Diwane' museum at Red Fort, Delhi, created by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Key Facts:

- The museum within the Red Fort complex pays homage to all the unsung heroes of freedom struggle of the nation, who would have otherwise been merged away in forgetfulness.
- Museum talks about the sacrifices of great freedom fighters. It pays tribute to the selfless

sacrifices of the revolutionaries, brave female freedom fighters and valiant children.

Other museums at Red fort:

The Yaad-e-Jallian Museum:

- It provides an authentic account of Jallianwala Bagh massacre that happened on April 13th, 1919. The museum also showcases heroism, valour and sacrifices made by Indian soldiers during World War-I.

The Museum on 1857:

- India's first war of Independence portrays the historical narrative of 1857 war of independence, showcasing the valour and sacrifices made by Indians during the period.

The Drishyakala- Museum on Indian Art:

- The Drishyakala- Museum on Indian Art showcases Indian art works from 16th century till India's independence.

31. The National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) 2018-19

- The National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) 2018-19, conducted by an Independent Verification Agency (IVA) under the World Bank support project to the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G), has found that 96.5% of the households in rural India who have access to a toilet use it.
- The NARSS also re-confirmed the Open Defecation Free (ODF) status of 90.7% of villages which were previously declared and verified as ODF by various districts/States.

The key findings of NARSS 2018-19 are as follows:

- 93.1% of households were found to have access to toilets during the survey period (the corresponding figure as per the SBMG MIS in November 2018 was 96%).
- 96.5% of the people who had access to toilets used them.
- 90.7% of villages which were previously declared and verified as ODF were confirmed to be ODF. The remaining villages also had sanitation coverage of about 93%.
- 95.4% of the villages surveyed found to have a minimal litter and minimal stagnant water.

32. AL NAGAH 2019

- Exercise Al Nagah III, third in the series of bilateral joint exercise between India and Oman is scheduled to be held from 12 to 25 March 2019 at Jabel Al Akhdar Mountains in Oman.

- The exercise will see both the armies exchanging expertise and experience in tactics, weapon handling and firing, with an aim to enhance interoperability in counterterrorist operations in semi-urban mountainous terrain.
- Exercise Al Nagah III follows the first two joint exercises that were held in Oman in January 2015 and India in March 2017 respectively.

33. Jan Aushadi Diwas

- Govt has decided to celebrate 7th March 2019 as 'Jan Aushadhi Diwas' across India for providing further impetus & creating awareness about use of generic medicines.

Background:

- The branded (Generic) medicines are sold at significantly higher prices than their unbranded generic equivalents, though are identical in the therapeutic value. Given the widespread poverty across the country, making available reasonably priced quality generic medicines in the market would benefit everyone.

About Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP):

- Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses.
- PMBJP stores have been set up to provide generic drugs, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.
- It was launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals in November 2008 under the name Jan Aushadi Campaign. Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India (BPPI) is the implementation agency for PMBJP.

Vision:

- To bring down the healthcare budget of every citizen of India through providing Quality generic Medicines at Affordable Prices.

Mission:

- Create awareness among the public regarding generic medicines.
- Create demand for generic medicines through medical practitioners.
- Create awareness through education and awareness program that high price need not be synonymous with high quality.
- Provide all the commonly used generic medicines covering all the therapeutic groups.

- Provide all the related health care products too under the scheme.

Objective:

- Making quality medicines available at affordable prices for all, particularly the poor and disadvantaged, through exclusive outlets “Jan Aushadhi Medical Store”, so as to reduce out of pocket expenses in healthcare.

34. National Centre of good Governance

- The National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) and Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA) have signed an MoU
- The objective of the MoU that IICA will support NCGG for utilization of infrastructure facilities during the training programme of NCGG at Delhi and for academic & intellectual interactions for 5 years.

About National Centre of good Governance:

- National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) has been set up by the Government of India (GoI) under the aegis of Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. It aims to promote good governance through Capacity Building on Public Policy and Governance both at National and International Level and carrying out studies/ action research on issues relating to governance

About Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs:

- Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA), under Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India as a society registered on 12th September, 2008 with the primary objective of establishing, managing, maintaining and running a world class institute. The vision is to function as a holistic, Capacity building Institution and think-bank for

corporate regulations and reform, though synergised knowledge creation and management, global partnership for real time solutions.

35. Dictionary of Martyrs of India's Freedom Struggle (1857-1947)

- The Prime Minister released the Dictionary of Martyrs of India's Freedom Struggle.

About the Dictionary:

- The project for compilation of “Dictionary of Martyrs” of India's Freedom Struggle was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture, to the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) to commemorate the 150th anniversary of uprising of 1857.
- A martyr has been defined, in this dictionary, as a person who died or who was killed in action or in detention, or was awarded capital punishment while participating in the national movement for emancipation of India.
- It includes ex-INA or ex-military personnel who died fighting the British.
- It includes the martyrs of 1857 Uprising, Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919), Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34), Quit India Movement (1942-44), Revolutionary Movements (1915-34), Kissan Movements, Tribal Movements, Agitation for Responsible Government in the Princely States (Prajamandal), Indian National Army (INA, 1943-45), Royal Indian Navy Upsurge (RIN, 1946), etc. Information of about 13,500 martyrs has been recorded in these volumes.

Question:

1. How the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME 2 scheme) will boost electric mobility and increase the number of electric vehicles in commercial fleets. Discuss its salient feature.
2. Discuss the role and significance of New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC) for the purpose of creating an independent and autonomous regime for institutionalised arbitration.
3. Critically analyze whether India's laws on surveillance are a threat to privacy?
4. Discuss the significance of recent amendment in Form 26. How it will act as an important tool to fight with corrupt practices in the Indian election?
5. Explain the integrated child development scheme and highlight the issues associated with it.
6. Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) - 2019 is likely to witness active participation of globally-renowned domain experts and policy-makers from thirteen countries of the Indo-Pacific. Discuss its significance.
7. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership provides an opportunity for the success of India's Act East policy and will also influence the economic stature of India among the other South Asian countries; however it is not free from issues. Discuss.
8. Considering the role and significance of UNSC, discuss the need for its reforms. Do you think India should be given permanent membership?