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I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

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

1. Official Secrets Act

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The government has recently announced to invoke the Official Secrets Act against publications that had run reports on the Rafale deal, on the basis of documents which, the government claimed, had been stolen from the Defence Ministry.

What is the Official Secrets Act?

- OSA has its roots in the British colonial era. The original version was The Indian Official Secrets Act (Act XIV), 1889. This was brought in with the main objective of muzzling the voice of a large number of newspapers that had come up in several languages, and were opposing the Raj's policies, building political consciousness and facing police crackdowns and prison terms.
- It was amended and made more stringent in the form of The Indian Official Secrets Act, 1904, during Lord Curzon's tenure as Viceroy of India.
- In 1923, a newer version was notified. The Indian Official Secrets Act (Act No XIX of 1923) was extended to all matters of secrecy and confidentiality in governance in the country.

Ambit of the Act:

- It broadly deals with two aspects — spying or espionage, covered under Section 3, and disclosure of other secret information of the government, under Section 5.
- Secret information can be any official code, password, sketch, plan, model, article, note, document or information. Under Section 5, both the person communicating the information, and the person receiving the information, can be punished.
- For classifying a document, a government Ministry or Department follows the Manual of Departmental Security Instructions, 1994, not under OSA. Also, OSA itself does not say what a "secret" document is.
- It is the government's discretion to decide what falls under the ambit of a "secret" document to be charged under OSA. It has often been argued that the law is in direct conflict with the Right to Information Act, 2005.

Between the RTI Act and OSA, which has primacy?

- Section 22 of the RTI Act provides for its primacy vis-a-vis provisions of other laws, including OSA.
- This gives the RTI Act an overriding effect, notwithstanding anything inconsistent with the provisions of OSA. So if there is any inconsistency in OSA with regard to furnishing of information, it will be superseded by the RTI Act.
- However, under Sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act, the government can refuse information. Effectively, if government classifies a document as "secret" under OSA Clause 6, that document can be kept outside the ambit of the RTI Act, and the government can invoke Sections 8 or 9. Legal experts see this as a loophole.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

2. Mediation in the Political dispute

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court referred the Ayodhya dispute for mediation in a bid to heal minds and hearts and for this, the Chief Justice of India has appointed a panel of mediators.

Scope of mediation in dispute resolution:

- Mediation is an out of the court and informal method of dispute resolution, where a neutral third party assists the parties in dispute to amicably resolve their dispute by using specialized communication and negotiation techniques.
- In mediation, a third party (the mediator) assists the parties to negotiate their own settlement.
- In some cases, mediators may express a view on what might be a fair or reasonable settlement, generally where all the parties agree that the mediator may do so.

Confidential Process:

- Mediation is an informal process, which is not open to the public. Mediation is also confidential in nature, which means that statements made during mediation cannot be disclosed in any court proceedings or elsewhere without the written consent of all parties.
- The decision to settle and decide the terms of settlement in mediation always rest with the parties. This right of self-determination is an essential element of the mediation process.
- The parties also have ultimate control over the outcome of mediation.

- Any party may withdraw from the mediation proceedings at any stage before its termination and without assigning any reason.

Settlement or Verdict:

- Any settlement reached in a case referred for mediation during the course of litigation is required to be reduced to writing, signed by the concerned parties and filed in court for the passing of an appropriate order.
- The concept of mediation received legislative recognition in India for the first time in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. The conciliators appointed under the Act are charged with the duty of mediating in and promoting the settlement of Industrial disputes.
- In 1999, the Indian Parliament passed the Civil Procedure Code Amendment Act of 1999 inserting Section 89 in the Code of Civil Procedure 1908, providing for reference of cases pending in the Courts to mediation.
- Mandatory mediation through courts has now a legal sanction.

TOPIC: GS II, CENTRE AND STATE RELATIONS

3. Regulation for Union Territory

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister has recently approved Promulgation of the Daman and Diu Civil Courts (Amendment) Regulation, 2019 and the Dadra and Nagar Haveli (Civil Courts and Miscellaneous Provisions) Amendment Regulation, 2019 under Article 240 of the Constitution.

About Article 240:

- The Article 240 of the constitution is about the Power of President to make regulations for certain Union territories.
- The President may make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of the Union territory of
 - the Andaman and Nicobar Islands;
 - Lakshadweep;
 - Dadra and Nagar Haveli;
 - Daman and Diu;
 - Pondicherry;
- Provided that when any body is created under Article 239A to function as a Legislature for the Union territories of Pondicherry, the President shall not make any regulation for the peace, progress and good government of that Union

territory with effect from the date appointed for the first meeting of the Legislature;

- Provided further that whenever the body functioning as a Legislature for the Union territory of Pondicherry is dissolved, or the functioning of that body as such Legislature remains suspended on account of any action taken under any such law as is referred to in clause
 1. Article 239A, the President may, during the period of such dissolution or suspension, make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of that Union territory
 2. Any regulation so made may repeal or amend any Act made by Parliament or any other law which is for the time being applicable to the Union territory and, when promulgated by the President, shall have the same force and effect as an Act of Parliament which applies to that territory.

Benefits:

- The move will be helpful in bringing uniformity in Judicial Service.
- It will also help overcome the difficulties being faced by the litigants in travelling to Mumbai for filing appeals due to existing limited pecuniary jurisdiction.
- Enhanced pecuniary jurisdiction will accelerate the justice delivery system, besides making access easier for litigants without having to travel outside the Union Territory.

TOPIC: GS II, SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT IN BORDER AREAS; LINKAGES OF ORGANIZED CRIME WITH TERRORISM

4. National Register of Citizen

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has recently announced that the names have not been deleted from the Assam electoral roll on the basis of their exclusion from the draft National Register of Citizens (NRC), which was published last year.

About National Register of Citizens:

- National Register of Citizens, 1951 is a register prepared after the conduct of the Census of 1951 in respect of each village, showing the houses or holdings in a serial order and indicating against each house or holding the number and names of persons staying therein.
- These registers covered each and every person enumerated during the Census of 1951 and were

kept in the offices of Deputy Commissioners and Sub Divisional Officers according to instructions issued by the Government of India in 1951. Later these registers were transferred to the Police in the early 1960s.

Why is the National Register of Citizens (NRC) being updated in Assam?

- National Register of Citizens (NRC) updation basically means the process of enlisting the names of those persons (or their descendants) whose names appear in any of the Electoral Rolls up to 1971, 1951 NRC or any of the admissible documents stipulated.
- The demands to update the NRC of 1951 were first raised by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and Assam Gana Parishad more than three decades ago. The organisations had submitted a memorandum to the Centre on January 18, 1980, two months after launching the anti-illegal foreigners Assam Movement.
- On November 17, 1999, at an official-level tripartite meeting to review the implementation of the Assam Accord, a decision was taken that the NRC would be updated and the Centre sanctioned Rs 20 lakh for the purpose and released Rs 5 lakh of it to start the exercise. Later, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh led government took the final decision to update NRC on May 5, 2005. Thereafter, the government created a directorate for updating the NRC and the process of computerisation of the voters' list up to 1971 and the NRC of 1951 began.

How will it impact the illegal immigrants – The Assam accord?

- The Assam accord was signed between the leaders of AASU-AAGSP and the Government of India in 1985 marking an end to a six-year-long agitation.
- The parties agreed that all foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and 1961 would be given full citizenship. However, those who entered the state after 1971 will be deported.

Current Issue:

- Filed a PIL in SC alleging that several categories of persons were deprived of voting rights ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.
- One category included persons whose names figured in the draft NRC but not in the voter list.
- In Second category, persons whose names were deleted from the voter list appeared in the draft NRC published on July 30, 2018. The petition claimed these people had voted in the last Lok Sabha election in 2014.

- The plea also submitted that there were people whose names were not included in the complete draft NRC, but they subsequently filed claims for inclusion. They had voted in the earlier Lok Sabha election and were waiting for inclusion of their names.
- The third category of people were those declared foreigners by the foreigners' tribunal as well as by the Guwahati High Court; the court order was stayed by the Supreme Court.
- The petition said the fourth category comprised those already declared foreigners by the tribunal; this was set aside by the Supreme Court. However, their names had been deleted from the voters list pursuant to the order of the tribunal.
- In the fifth category were those whose names had not been included in the draft NRC, but their family members were included; these had filed a claim for the inclusion of their names.

**TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT
POLICIES AND INTERVENTION**

5. Women in Armed Force

Source: The Hindu

Current status of women in Police force:

- Women constitute about 7% of the police strength in India which is expected to rise, with many States and Union Territories providing for 30% (and more) reservation for women in the police in specific ranks. However, this is not enough.
- The discourse on mainstreaming women in the police by making policing inclusive, non-discriminatory and efficient in India is missing in policy circles.

Increasing numbers of women in the workforce:

- Women in Independent India have evolved with the flow of history, but it has only been over the last 35 years that they have experienced the post-industrial revolution and subsequent positives of globalisation. These developments have radically transformed their gender relations at home, the workplace, with peers, and possibly in society at large.
- This revolution was specifically linked to the proliferation of higher education and income levels of nuclear families going up throughout the country. The Indian woman ever since has come a long way in being part of the active workforce and has possibly broken all barriers in most professional fields, including that of donning the uniform of the police and the para-military.

- Following the 1970s, a combination of societal changes and progressive legislations paved the way for women to enter law enforcement.
- The chronicle of women in Indian police started in the early 70s when its first woman joined the uniformed force. She entered the profession at the top of the tier of an extremely hierarchical formation and put in a good three decades of exemplary work.
- During those decades, thousands of women joined the force from the ranks of constable all the way across the spectrum.
- In 2010, the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D) estimated that there are around 30,000 women in various Indian police forces. However, despite these “achievements,” even a decade-old figure by the 7th UN Survey on the percentage of women police in 13 Asian countries reflects a very low percentage of women in India’s police force.
- The Police in India recruited a decent number of women over the last twenty years, but acceptability and assimilation as “equal partners” to men within the professional core has left much to be desired.

Need for Policy:

- One way to mainstream women in the police is to develop a model policy that will challenge the deep-rooted patriarchy in the institution.
- Unfortunately, till now, not a single State police department has attempted to even draft such a policy. Thus, neither the Central nor State governments can get very far by merely adopting reservation to increase gender diversity without considering the need for policymaking.

Salient features of the Model Policy:

A model policy, while laying the foundation for equal opportunities for women in every aspect of policing, should also strive to create a safe and enabling work environment. Without this, all other efforts will remain piecemeal.

A. Increase the Numbers

- One of the first steps to ensure a level playing field for women in the police is to increase their numbers.
- Merely providing reservation is not enough; police departments should develop an action plan to achieve the target of 30% or more in a time-bound manner. This also applies to States that have not provided a quota as yet.

- Departments should also undertake special recruitment drives in every district to ensure geographical diversity.
- To achieve the target, the police should reach out to the media and educational institutions to spread awareness about opportunities for women in the police.
- Current data reveal that most women in the police are concentrated in the lower ranks. Efforts should be made to change this. The impulse to create women-only battalions for the sake of augmenting numbers should be eliminated.

B. Gender Stereotypes

- The model policy should strive to ensure that decisions on deployment of women are free of gender stereotyping to facilitate bringing women into leading operational positions.
- At present, there appears to be a tendency to sideline women, or give them policing tasks that are physically less demanding, or relegate them to desk duty, or make them work on crimes against women alone.
- Women police officers should be encouraged to take on public order and investigative crimes of all types, and should be given duties beyond the minimum mandated by special laws. Desk work too must be allocated evenly among men and women.

C. Women specific needs

- A major burden of family and childcare responsibilities falls on women. Yet, police departments still lack proper internal childcare support systems.
- Departments need to be mindful of this social reality and exercise sensitivity in making decisions on transfers and posting of women personnel. As far as possible, women should be posted in their home districts in consultation with supervising officers.
- Most State police departments have received funds under the Modernisation of State Police Forces Scheme for providing separate toilets and changing rooms for women, and for constructing separate accommodation for women with attached toilets in all police stations and units. Police departments must ensure the best use of this fund.

D. Preventing Sexual Harassment

- Police departments must also ensure safe working spaces for women and adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination and harassment, in order to make policing a viable career option for women.
- Departments are legally bound to set up Internal Complaints Committees to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace. Departments must

operationalise the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013.

Conclusion:

- Some of these suggestions have already been made by the National Conference of Women in Police. However, Central and State governments have not yet developed or adopted a comprehensive framework towards achieving substantive gender equality.
- By and large, lack of requisite social attitudes and work culture in the Indian society at large, and, in particular, government and its workplace, are squarely responsible for the gender bias in the profession.
- Broad social changes in developing countries such as India have resulted in the increased representation of women officers. The philosophy governing their integration into the police is that they should be treated equally to men and they should be provided with the same opportunities to undertake the same tasks.

TOPIC: GS II, ELECTORAL REFORMS

6. Electoral Bonds

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Government has recently stated in the Supreme Court that the Electoral bonds have been introduced to promote transparency in funding and donation received by political parties.
- The government was responding to a petition filed to strike down the 'Electoral Bond Scheme 2018' and amendments in the Finance Act, 2017, which allow for "unlimited donations from individuals and foreign companies to political parties without any record of the sources of funding.

What is Electoral Bond?

- Electoral Bond is a bearer Banking Instrument to be used for funding eligible Political Parties.
- An eligible Political Party is the one registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (43 of 1951) and 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.

Who can purchase Electoral Bonds?

- The Electoral Bonds under this Scheme may be purchased by a Person, who is a Citizen of India or Incorporated or Established in India. The definition of "Person" includes-

1. an Individual;
2. a Hindu Undivided Family
3. a Company
4. a Firm
5. an Association of Persons or a Body of Individuals, whether incorporated or not
6. every Artificial Juridical Person, not falling within any of the preceding sub-clauses
7. any Agency, Office or Branch owned or controlled by such person.

How it works?

- The bonds will be issued in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore and will be available at specified branches of State Bank of India.
- They can be bought by the donor with a KYC-compliant account.
- Donors can donate the bonds to their party of choice which can then be cashed in via the party's verified account within 15 days.
- They can be encashed by an eligible political party only through their accounts with authorised banks.
- The bonds do not have the name of the donor or the receiving political party and only carry unique hidden alphanumeric serial numbers as an in-built security feature.

TOPIC: GS II, ELECTORAL REFORMS

7. Representation of the People Act, 1951

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- In view of the current Lok Sabha Elections, the Election Commission has given one-time relaxation and has reduced the notice period from 30 days to 7 days for the parties who have published their public notice till the date of announcement of the election.
- If anybody has any objection with regard to the registration of any political party who have published their public notice by 10th March 2019 may file their objection against that party by 17th March 2019.

Background:

- As per existing guidelines, the applicant association (Political Party) is inter-alia asked to publish proposed Name of the party in two national daily newspapers and two local daily newspapers, on two days in same newspapers, for inviting objections, if any, with regard to the proposed registration of the party before the Commission within 30 days from such publication.

Registration of political parties:

- Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission of India in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

What are the eligibility criteria for a political party to be registered as a 'National Political Party of India'?

- If it secures at least six per cent of the valid votes polled in any four or more states, at a general election to the House of the People or, to the State Legislative Assembly; and in addition, it wins at least four seats in the House of the People from any State or States.
- Or, It wins at least two per cent seats in the House of the People (11 seats) from at least three different States.
- Or, a party gets recognition as State Party in four or more States.

What are the eligibility criteria for a political party to be registered as a 'State Political Party of India'?

- If it secures at least six per cent of the valid votes polled in the State at a general election either to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned; and in addition, it wins at least two seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned.
- Or, it wins at least three per cent (3%) of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State, or at least three seats in the Assembly, whichever is more.

What are the benefits of a National/State political party?

- If a party is recognised as a State Party', it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it in the State in which it is so recognised, and if a party is recognised as a 'National Party' it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it throughout India.
- 'State' and 'National' parties need only one proposer for filing the nomination and are also entitled for two sets of electoral rolls free of cost at the time of revision of rolls and their candidates get one copy of electoral roll free of cost during General Elections.

- Further, they get broadcast/telecast facilities over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.
- Political parties are entitled to nominate "Star Campaigners" during General Elections.
- A recognised National or State party can have a maximum of 40 "Star campaigners" and a registered un-recognised party can nominate a maximum of 20 'Star Campaigners'".
- The travel expenses of star campaigners are not to be accounted for in the election expense accounts of candidates of their party.
- Both national and state parties have to fulfil these conditions for all subsequent Lok Sabha or State elections. Else, they lose their status.

Conclusion:

- Any Indian citizen who is more than 25 years old and is registered as a voter can contest elections even without forming a party. Similarly, associations can also contest elections without getting registered by the Election Commission. They, however, will not be identified as political parties and hence will not be eligible for availing of benefits under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951.

II. ECONOMY

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

8. International Finance Corporation (IFC)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) signed a Cooperation Agreement with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to further build the capacity of the Insolvency Professionals, and Insolvency Professional Agencies for the purposes of the effective implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 among others.

About the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016:

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (Code) provides for re-organisation and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals in a time bound manner for maximization of the value of assets of such persons, to promote entrepreneurship, availability of credit and balance the interests of all the stakeholders.
- For this purpose, has established an institutional infrastructure comprising of Adjudicating Authorities, the IBBI, insolvency professionals,

insolvency professional agencies and information utilities.

- The IBBI exercises regulatory oversight over the Insolvency Professionals, Insolvency Professional Agencies and Information Utilities. It writes and enforces rules for processes, namely, corporate insolvency resolution, corporate liquidation, individual insolvency resolution and individual bankruptcy under the Code.
- The insolvency resolution for companies will be adjudicated by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT). The Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) will adjudicate insolvency resolution for individuals.

About the International Finance Corporation (IFC):

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) is an international financial institution that offers investment, advisory, and asset management services to encourage private sector development in developing countries.

- It is a member of the World Bank Group and is headquartered in Washington, D.C., United States.
- It was established in 1956 as the private sector arm of the World Bank Group to advance economic development by investing in strictly for-profit and commercial projects that purport to reduce poverty and promote development.
- The IFC is owned and governed by its member countries, but has its own executive leadership and staff that conduct its normal business operations.
- It is a corporation whose shareholders are member governments that provide paid-in capital and which have the right to vote on its matters.
- It offers an array of debt and equity financing services and helps companies face their risk exposures, while refraining from participating in a management capacity.
- The corporation also offers advice to companies on making decisions, evaluating their impact on the environment and society, and being responsible.
- It advises governments on building infrastructure and partnerships to further support private sector development.

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

9. Regional Air Connectivity- UDAN

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has given its approval for extension of time and scope for revival and development of un-served and under-served

air strips of State Governments, Airports Authority of India (AAI), Civil enclaves, CPSUs, helipads and water aerodromes at the total cost of Rs.4500 crore with the budgetary support of Government of India.

- The revival of these un-served and under-served air strips will be carried out under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) – UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik).
- As an outcome, small cities/towns shall be connected on commencement of operation of flights to under-served/un-served airports and it will further boost the economic development in these as well as surrounding areas in terms of job creation and related infrastructure development.

Background:

- During RCS-UDAN version 1.0 & 2.0, 66 airports were identified and 31 heliports (28 unserved heliports and 3 unserved airports). During UDAN version 3.0, to increase the tourism potential at the coastal areas, Tourism routes in coordination with Ministry of Tourism and Seaplanes for connecting Water Aerodromes were included.

Significance of Water Aerodromes:

- India has a vast coastline of approximately 7500 km and is dotted with numerous water bodies which can be exploited for establishment of Water Aerodrome. A network of Water Aerodromes along with land based airports will improve air connectivity and be particularly useful for localized short-distance travelling. Therefore, it was decided to develop/operate Water Aerodromes in India with aviation expertise of AAI and cooperation of State Government.

About UDAN:

- UDAN, launched in April 2017, is a flagship scheme of the Union Government to enable air operations on unserved routes, connecting regional areas, to promote balanced regional growth and to make flying affordable for masses.
- The UDAN Scheme is a key component of the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) which was launched in June 2016.
- Objectives of the scheme: The primary objective of RCS is to facilitate / stimulate regional air connectivity by making it cheap and affordable. Promoting affordability of regional air connectivity is envisioned under RCS by supporting airline operators through: Concessions and Financial (viability gap funding or VGF) support.
- Significance: The scheme gives India's aviation sector a boost by giving a chance to small and first-time operators to be a part of the rapid growth in passenger traffic.

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

10. Guidelines for White Label ATMs

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has come up with new guidelines for operations of White Label ATMs (WLAs) in the country.

As per the new guidelines, it has been decided to allow:

- The WLA Operators to buy wholesale cash, above a threshold of 1 lakh pieces (and in multiples thereof) of any denomination, directly from the Reserve Bank (Issue Offices) and Currency Chests against full payment.
- The operators to source cash from any scheduled bank, including Cooperative Banks and Regional Rural Banks.
- The operators to offer bill payment and Interoperable Cash Deposit services, subject to technical feasibility and certification by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- The display advertisements pertaining to non-financial products / services anywhere within the WLA premises, including the WLA screen, except the main signboard. However, it shall be ensured that the advertisements running on the screen disappear once the customer commences a transaction.
- Banks to issue co-branded ATM cards in partnership with the authorised WLA Operators and may extend the benefit of 'on-us' transactions to their WLAs as well.
- All guidelines, safeguards, standards and control measures applicable to banks relating to currency handling, and cyber-security framework for ATMs, shall also be applicable to the WLA Operators.

About White label-ATM:

- Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) set up, owned and operated by non-bank entities are called "White Label ATMs" (WLAs). They provide the banking services to the customers of banks in India, based on the cards (debit/credit/prepaid) issued by banks.

Need for setting up of WLAs:

- Keeping the fact in view that banks won't be able to provide their ATM facilities in each and every place, non-bank entities were allowed by the RBI to set up White Label ATMs. This was done to increase the geographical spread of ATMs and enhance the customer service.

Key Points:

- Non-bank entities shall commence setting up and operating WLAs only after it has been authorised to do so by the RBI under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- Taking over of ATMs operated by banks would not be permitted. Entities may ensure to draw a strategic plan for installation of such WLAs based on the criteria set during authorization. White Label ATM Operators (WLAO) may also indicate the value added services it proposes to offer at the WLA while seeking authorisation.
- WLAO is permitted to have more than one Sponsor Bank. All the transactions of WLAs serviced by this Sponsor Bank would be settled through it.
- Cash Management at the WLAs will be the responsibility of the Sponsor Bank, who may if required, make necessary arrangements with other banks for servicing cash requirements at various places.
- WLAO may establish connectivity with any of the authorised ATM Network Operators/ Card Payment Network Operators and ensure that the settlement of all the transactions at the WLAs shall be done only in the books of the Sponsor Bank through the ATM Network Operators/ Card Payment Network Operators with whom the WLAO has established connectivity.
- Maintenance and servicing of the WLAs shall be the sole responsibility of the WLAO.

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

11. World Gold Council (WGC)

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

World Gold Council (WGC) has released a report on gold holdings of various countries.

Highlights of the Report:

- India, which is the world's largest consumer of gold, has the 11th largest gold reserve, with the current holding pegged at 607 tonnes.
- International Monetary Fund (IMF) is third on the list with total gold reserves of 2,814 tonnes.
- The number one slot is occupied by the U.S., which boasts of gold reserves of 8,133.5 tonnes, followed by Germany with 3,369.7 tonnes.

- Among Asian countries, China and Japan have more reserves of the precious metal when compared to India.
- Pakistan, with its gold reserves of 64.6 tonnes, occupies the 45th position.

About World Gold Council:

- The World Gold Council is the market development organisation for the gold industry. It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold.
- The World Gold Council is an association whose members comprise the world's leading gold mining companies. It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard.
- Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

TOPIC: GS III, ISSUES RELATING TO INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

12. Cabinet Approves Proposal to Align with Global Trademark System

Source: PIB

Why in news:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for accession of India to
- The Nice Agreement concerning the International classification of Goods and Services for the purposes of registration of marks,
- The Vienna Agreement establishing an International Classification of the figurative elements of marks, and
- The Locarno Agreement establishing an International classification for industrial designs.

Significance:

- Accession to the Nice, Vienna and Locarno Agreements will help the Intellectual Property Office in India to harmonise the classification systems for examination of trademark and design applications, in line with the classification systems followed globally.
- It would give an opportunity to include Indian designs, figurative elements and goods in the international classification systems.
- The accession is expected to instill confidence in foreign investors in relation to protection of IPs in India.
- The accession would also facilitate in exercising rights in decision making processes regarding

review and revision of the classifications under the agreement.

III. ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

13. Sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO) Report

Sources: UN Environment, The Hindu

Why in news:

Global Environment Outlook report has been released. The report is the sixth and is the UN's most comprehensive report on the state of the global environment since the fifth edition in 2012.

Key Observations:

- The report notes that a quarter of all premature deaths and diseases worldwide are due to manmade pollution and environmental damage.
- The report highlights that deadly emissions, chemicals polluting drinking water, and the accelerating destruction of ecosystems crucial to the livelihoods of billions of people are driving a worldwide epidemic that hampers the global economy.
- There is a growing divide between rich and poor countries due to rampant overconsumption, pollution and food waste in the developed world leads to hunger, poverty and disease elsewhere.
- As greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise amid a preponderance of droughts, floods and super storms made worse by climbing sea levels, there is a growing political consensus that climate change poses a future risk to billions.
- But the health impacts of pollution, deforestation and the mechanised food-chain are less well understood. Nor is there any international agreement for the environment close to covering what the 2015 Paris accord does for climate.
- Poor environmental conditions "cause approximately 25% of global disease and mortality" — around 9 million deaths in 2015 alone.
- Lacking access to clean drinking supplies, 1.4 million people die each year from preventable diseases such as diarrhoea and parasites linked to pathogen-riddled water and poor sanitation.
- Chemicals pumped into the seas cause "potentially multi-generational" adverse health effects, and land degradation through mega-farming and deforestation occurs in areas of Earth home to 3.2 billion people.

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

- Species extinction rates also continue to increase at a pace that could compromise Earth's ability to meet human needs, the report says.
- The report states that air pollution causes 6-7 million early deaths annually.
- The report also notes lack of any international agreement for the environment close to covering what the 2015 Paris accord does for the climate.

India's Scenario:

- India could save at least \$3 trillion (₹210 trillion approx.) in healthcare costs if it implemented policy initiatives consistent with ensuring that the globe didn't heat up beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius by the turn of the century.
- India's stated commitment is to lower emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35% compared to 2005 levels by 2030; increase total cumulative electricity generation from fossil free energy sources to 40% by 2030, and create additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tons through additional forest and tree cover.
- India is on track to achieve two of these goals — of emissions intensity and electricity generation — according to independent climate-watch site Climate Tracker.
- However these actions are only enough — and provided other countries to live up to their commitments — to limit temperature rise to 2°.

Way forward:

- The report called for a root-and-branch detoxifying of human behaviour while insisting that the situation is not unassailable. The report advises adopting less-meat intensive diets, and reducing food waste in both developed and developing countries, would reduce the need to increase food production by 50% to feed the projected 9-10 billion people on the planet in 2050. At present, 33% of global edible food is wasted, and 56% of waste happens in industrialised countries.
- It also called for a rapid drawdown in greenhouse gas emissions and pesticide use to improve air and water quality.

About GEO Report:

- The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is often referred to as UN Environment's flagship environmental assessment.
- The first publication was in 1997 and was originally requested by Member States.
- It is a flagship report because it fulfills the core functions of the organization, which date back to the UN General Assembly resolution that established the UN Environment Programme in 1972.

14. Global Chemical Outlook II

Source: UN Environment

Why in news:

- The second edition of the Global Chemicals Outlook has been released.
- The Global Chemicals Outlook II – From Legacies to Innovative Solutions: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, mandated by the UN Environment Assembly in 2016, seeks to alert policymakers and other stakeholders to the critical role of the sound management of chemicals and waste in sustainable development.
- It takes stock of global trends as well as progress made and gaps in achieving the global goal to minimize the adverse impacts from chemicals and waste by 2020.

Key Highlights:

- Countries will not meet the internationally agreed goal to minimize the adverse impacts of chemicals and waste by 2020, which means that urgent action is required to reduce further damage to human health and economies.
- The current chemical production capacity of 2.3 billion tonnes, valued at US\$5 trillion annually, is projected to double by 2030.
- Despite commitments to maximize the benefits and minimize the impacts of this industry, hazardous chemicals continue to be released to the environment in large quantities. They are ubiquitous in air, water and soil, food and humans. The world must take advantage of the many solutions that already exist and are highlighted in the report.
- While international treaties and voluntary instruments have reduced the risks of some chemicals and wastes, progress has been uneven and implementation gaps remain. For example, as of 2018, more than 120 countries had not implemented the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals.
- The World Health Organization estimated the burden of disease from selected chemicals at 1.6 million lives in 2016, which is likely an underestimate. Chemical pollution also threatens a range of ecosystem services.
- From pharmaceuticals to plant protection, chemicals play an important role in modern

society and in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- Driven by economic development, population dynamics and other global megatrends, the chemicals market across a range of industry sectors is growing. For example, the chemicals market in the construction sector is expected to grow by 6.2 per cent annually, between 2018 and 2023.
- Meanwhile, chemical production and consumption is shifting to emerging economies, in particular China.
- Pesticides have been found to negatively impact pollinators, excess use of phosphorous and nitrogen in agriculture continues to contribute to ocean dead zone and chemicals used in sunscreens put pressure on coral reef ecosystems. Studies also indicate that releases of some antimicrobials, heavy metals and disinfectants contribute to antimicrobial resistance.

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

15. India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change released the India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) recently.

Significance:

- India is one of the first countries in the world to develop a comprehensive Cooling Action plan which has a long term vision to address the cooling requirement across sectors and lists out actions which can help reduce the cooling demand.
- The overarching goal is to provide sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all while securing environmental and socio-economic benefits for the society.
- This will also help in reducing both direct and indirect emissions.
- ICAP provides an integrated vision towards cooling across sectors encompassing inter alia reduction of cooling demand, refrigerant transition, enhancing energy efficiency and better technology options with a 20 year time horizon.

The India Cooling Action seeks to:

- Reduce cooling demand across sectors by 20% to 25% by 2037-38,
- Reduce refrigerant demand by 25% to 30% by 2037-38,

- Reduce cooling energy requirements by 25% to 40% by 2037-38,
- Recognize “cooling and related areas” as a thrust area of research under national S&T Programme,
- Training and certification of 100,000 servicing sector technicians by 2022-23, synergizing with Skill India Mission.

The broad objectives of the India Cooling Action Plan include:

- Assessment of cooling requirements across sectors in next 20 years and the associated refrigerant demand and energy use.
- Map the technologies available to cater the cooling requirement including passive interventions, refrigerant-based technologies and alternative technologies such as not-in-kind technologies.
- Suggest interventions in each sector to provide for sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all.
- Focus on skilling of RAC service technicians.
- Develop an R&D innovation ecosystem for indigenous development of alternative technologies.

The following benefits would accrue to society over and above the environmental benefits:

- Thermal comfort for all – provision for cooling for EWS and LIG housing.
- Sustainable cooling – low GHG emissions related to cooling.
- Doubling Farmers Income – better cold chain infrastructure – better value of products to farmers, less wastage of produce.
- Skilled workforce for better livelihoods and environmental protection.
- Make in India – domestic manufacturing of air-conditioning and related cooling equipment’s.
- Robust R&D on alternative cooling technologies – to provide the push to innovation in a cooling sector.

Comment:

- Cooling is also linked to human health and productivity. Linkages of cooling with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are well acknowledged. The cross-sectoral nature of cooling and its use in development of the economy makes provision for cooling an important developmental necessity. The development of ICAP has been a multi-stakeholder inclusive process encompassing different Government Ministries/ Departments/ Organizations, Industry and Industry Associations, Think tanks, Academic and R&D institutions.

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

16. Energy efficiency ratings

Source: Times of India

Why in news:

The power ministry has announced that two more electrical appliances microwave ovens and washing machines will now be assigned star ratings based on their energy efficiency metrics.

- The programme of star rating of Microwave Ovens and Washing Machines will be implemented on a voluntary basis and will be valid up to December 31, 2020.
- The criteria approved for the washing machines also include water efficiency in addition to energy performance for grant of star rating.
- The star rating of Microwave Ovens and Washing Machines encourage the transition towards energy efficient equipment.

About BEE Star Rating:

Star ratings are provided to all the major kind of appliances in the form of labels. These star ratings are given out of 5 and they provide a basic sense of how energy efficient each product is, just in a single glance.

- The manufacturers are officially required to put these labels as per the Standards and Labelling Program introduced in 2006.
- The prime importance of these Star Ratings is to educate and inform consumers about how energy efficient each product is. This also makes the manufacturer responsible for creating products which are highly energy efficient as consumers may eventually prefer better rated products.
- One of the most common myths about the BEE Star Rating is that it is solely based on the appliance's power consumption. A lot of factors contribute into formulating the final star rating on the product.
- Although the manufacturers rate and label the product, BEE sets all the standards and norms which need to be followed while rating an appliance. While some category of appliances necessarily have to be given a star rating, for others it's optional.
- Appliances which need to have an energy rating label mandatorily: Frost-free refrigerator, Tubular Fluorescent Lamps, Room Air-Conditioners, Distribution Transformer, Colour TV, CST AC, Direct Cool Refrigerator and Electric Geyser.

- The appliances with the lowest energy consumption in a product category are given the most stars and those with the highest energy consumption are given the least.

About Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE):

- Bureau of Energy Efficiency is a statutory body set up under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
- The Bureau of Energy Efficiency assists the government in developing policies and strategies with a thrust on self-regulation and market principles with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy within the overall framework of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

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

17. UNNATEE (Unlocking National Energy Efficiency Potential)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) has developed a national strategy document- UNNATEE (Unlocking National Energy Efficiency potential)– for accelerating energy efficiency in India.

Key Points:

- The strategy document titled UNNATEE (Unlocking National Energy Efficiency potential) describes a plain framework and implementation strategy to establish a clear linkage between energy supply-demand scenarios and energy efficiency opportunities.
- The document offers a comprehensive roadmap to address India's environmental and climate change mitigation action through energy efficiency measures. The document has now been released for larger public consultation and seeking comments/ valuable inputs from all the stakeholders.
- This exercise is first of its kind, clearly delineating the energy efficiency targets for the respective demand sectors upto the state levels. Developing India's blueprint of effective energy efficiency strategy is a leap towards stimulating energy efficiency ecosystem and enabling reduction of the pressure on demand.
- The consultation paper was developed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency in association with PwC India.

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

18. Framework for Assessment of Climate Change Vulnerability

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs)-Guwahati and Mandi and Indian Institute of Science Bengaluru have collaborated to develop a 'Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment for the Indian Himalayan Region Using a Common Framework.'
- The assessment exercise is being undertaken to cover all the 12 Indian Himalayan region (IHR) states using a common framework.
- They have developed an index based on socio-economic factors, demographic and health status, sensitivity of agricultural production, forest-dependent livelihoods and access to information, services and infrastructure.
- The assessment has been done jointly by experts from Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) at Guwahati and Mandi, in collaboration with Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore with support from the Department of Science and Technology and the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) which is implementing the Indian Himalayas Climate Adaptation Program (IHCAP).

Key findings:

- The assessment shows that the vulnerability index is the highest for Assam (0.72) and Mizoram (0.71).
- Sikkim is the least vulnerable state with the index being 0.42. Districts within a state face different degrees of vulnerability based on difference in geographic, climatic, socio-economic and demographic conditions.
- Assam is highly vulnerable to climate change because of factors like low per capita income, deforestation, large number of marginal farmers, least area under irrigation, lack of alternative sources of income and high rates of poverty.

Significance:

- Receding apple lines, changing cropping patterns, more disasters like landslides and floods, drying springs in hills, spread of vector-borne diseases etc — are being felt all over the Himalayan region, which is one of the most sensitive climate zones globally. However, the vulnerability to climate change varies from state to state and even district

to district within a state. It also depends on various socio-economic factors.

- Climate adaptation is a collaborative effort between appropriate use of technology, vision that produces policies, change at ground level and engagement of local communities. These vulnerability maps will play a crucial role in this effort.
- The vulnerability assessments will be useful for officials, decision makers, funding agencies and experts to have a common understanding on vulnerability and enable them to plan for adaptation.

IV. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC: GS II, INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS, INTERNATIONAL RELATION

19. Global Trade Mark System Agreements

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister of India has recently approved the proposal for accession of India to Nice Agreement, Vienna Agreement, Locarno Agreement.

Nice Agreement:

- The Nice Agreement concerning the International classification of Goods and Services for the purposes of registering trademarks and service marks.
- The Agreement is open to States party to the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property (1883). Instruments of ratification or accession must be deposited with the Director General of WIPO.

Vienna Agreement:

- The Vienna Agreement establishing an International Classification of the figurative elements of marks. The Vienna Agreement concluded in Vienna in 1973 and amended in 1985.

Locarno Agreement:

- The Locarno Agreement establishing an International classification for industrial designs. The Locarno Agreement concluded at Locarno in 1968 and amended in 1979.

Significance and benefits for India:

- Accession to the Nice, Vienna and Locarno Agreements will help the Intellectual Property Office in India to harmonise the classification systems for examination of trademark and design applications, in line with the classification systems followed globally.

- It would give an opportunity to include Indian designs, figurative elements and goods in the international classification systems.
- The accession is expected to instill confidence in foreign investors in relation to protection of IPs in India.
- The accession would also facilitate in exercising rights in decision making processes regarding review and revision of the classifications under the agreement.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

20. Indo-Pakistan Relation

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Relation between India and Pakistan have once again become tense due to various events which took place in the wake of terrorist attack in Phulwama.
- India and Pakistan narrowly escaped a full-fledged conflict, the extent of which can never really be predicted amid social media propaganda, fake videos, domestic pressures and ugly jingoism on both sides.

Analysis of the recent developments between the two countries:

- It has been opined that the decision taken by the Government of India to go ahead with the Kartarpur talks days after tensions were at the peak, and after withdrawing the Most Favoured Nation status to Pakistan, is bizarre, however it does well to project India as being reasonable before the international community.

The Vajpayee years and afterwards:

- The India-Pakistan nuclear 'deterrent' was first put to test during the Kargil incursion months after Pakistan went publicly nuclear in response to the Indian nuclear tests in 1998.
- As India began clearing the Kargil heights of the Pakistani troops and terrorists, there was enormous pressure on Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to use the Indian Air Force across the Line of Control after the loss of two MiG aircraft. However, Vajpayee held firm against both public and IAF pressure.
- Importantly, Pakistan's conduct during Kargil exposed the state as irresponsible and led to numerous international calls for respecting the LoC.
- During the Kargil war in 1999, after the Parliament attack in 2001, and post the Mumbai attack in 2008, two Prime Ministers of India had the option

of retaliation, but they did not exercise it. Instead, India's patience projected the responsible nature of the state, which was in stark opposition to Pakistan's tattered credibility.

- Some experts opine that whatever Pakistan is doing to rein in the JeM and LeT is being dictated by the threat of sanctions from the Financial Action Task Force, and not by Indian pressure.
- These actions will vanish if the threat of sanctions dissipates.

Way Forward:

- A conventional response to terrorist groups can demonstrate intent, but does very little to whittle down their abilities.
- Experts opine that covert capabilities coupled with deft and persistent diplomacy is the only way forward in such difficult circumstances.
- Critics allege that the government's inability to reach out to Kashmiris and its actions against the Hurriyat leadership at a time when the separatists have lost control of the public mood underline an uncaring attitude. They further point out that this has also created a fertile ground for Kashmiri youth to join terrorist ranks.
- In conclusion, Indian state responses cannot be reactive to the agenda of terrorist groups, howsoever brutal their actions are.
- A calm, mature, informed and long-term strategy with aggressive diplomacy at its core, one that leverages India's economic strength, remains the country's best bet to deal with the terrorist threat from Pakistani soil.

TOPIC: GS II, INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS, INTERNATIONAL RELATION
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21. United Nations 'Transports Internationaux Routiers' (TIR) Convention

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The first shipment under the United Nations 'Transports Internationaux Routiers' (TIR) convention has recently arrived in India from Afghanistan through Iran's Chabahar Port.

About TIR Convention:

- The Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention) was drafted in 1975.
- It replaces the original Transport Internationaux Routier (TIR) Convention from 1959 and came into force on 20 March 1978.

- The TIR Convention facilitates the international carriage of goods from one or more customs offices of departure to one or more customs offices of destination (up to a total of four customs offices departure and destination) and through as many countries as necessary.
- As a rule, the vehicle remains sealed throughout the TIR transport and, thus, goods are generally not inspected at border crossings. However, customs authorities remain entitled to perform inspections whenever they suspect irregularities or randomly.
- The Convention applies to transports with road vehicles, combinations of vehicles as well as containers and allows for the use of the TIR Carnet for all modes of transport, provided that some portion of the journey is made by road.
- Reciprocal recognition of customs controls is at the heart of the Convention. This enables a facilitative and non-intrusive environment for multi-modal transport of goods through several countries.
- To cover the customs duties and taxes at risk throughout the journey, the Convention has established an international guaranteeing chain which is managed by the International Road Transport Union (IRU).
- IRU is also responsible for the printing and distribution of the so-called TIR Carnet, which serves both as international Customs document and proof of guarantee.
- The overall supervision of the TIR Convention and its application in all Contracting Parties falls under the responsibility of the TIR Administrative Committee, an inter-governmental body comprising all Contracting Parties and its TIR Executive Board (TIRExB), composed of nine elected members, each from a different Contracting Party.
- India had joined the TIR Convention (the United Nations Customs Convention on International Transport of Goods under cover of TIR Carnets) on June 15, 2017.

Objective:

- The objective of the TIR Convention is to facilitate international transit through a simplified Customs transit procedures and an international guarantee system.
- The underpinning of the so-called TIR system are a common customs document, the TIR carnet, a common guarantee system, the mutual recognition of customs controls and secured vehicle containers.
- Usage of the TIR system is limited to authorized operators.

Benefits:

- An international transit operation under the TIR system does not require national customs documents and a national guarantee. Because of the securisation of the containers, the goods are also not subject to physical inspection.
- As a consequence the advantages are- less delays at border crossings and for the overall transit operation.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD- RELATIONS

22. Indo Bangladesh Relations

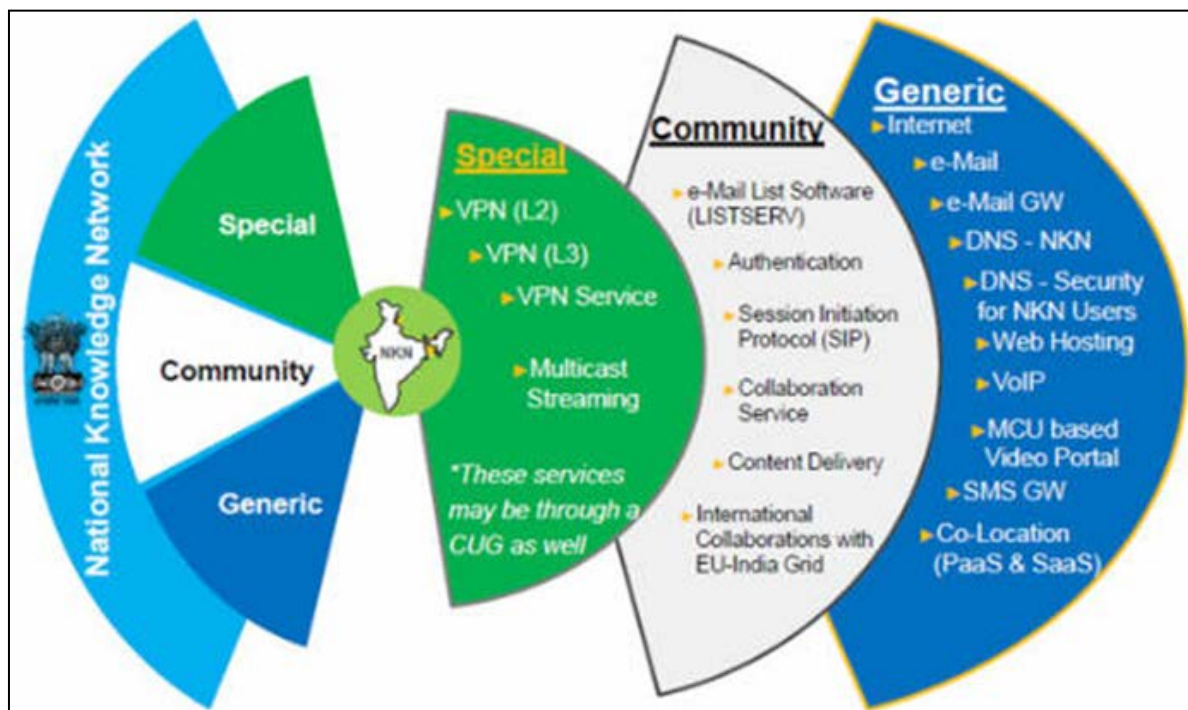
Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

India has decided to extend its National Knowledge Network to Bangladesh. It will connect scholars and research institutes in Bangladesh, to India and the world.

Overview:

- National Knowledge Network (NKN) project is aimed at establishing a strong and robust Indian network which will be capable of providing secure and reliable connectivity. Globally, frontier research and innovation are shifting towards multidisciplinary and collaborative paradigm and require substantial communication and computational power.
- In India, NKN with its multi-gigabit capability aims to connect all universities, research institutions, libraries, laboratories, healthcare and agricultural institutions across the country to address such paradigm shift.
- The leading mission oriented agencies in the fields of nuclear, space and defence research are also part of NKN.
- By facilitating the flow of information and knowledge, the network addresses the critical issue of access and creates a new paradigm of collaboration to enrich the research efforts in the country.
- The network design is based on a proactive approach that takes into account the future requirements and new possibilities that this infrastructure may unfold, both in terms of usage and perceived benefits.
- This will bring about a knowledge revolution that will be instrumental in transforming society and promoting inclusive growth.



Background:

- In order to improve access to knowledge, a need has been long felt in the country to establish a National Knowledge Network (NKN) inter-connecting all knowledge and research institutions in the country through a high bandwidth network.
- Globally, research & development activities and innovations are increasingly becoming multidisciplinary and collaborative, and require substantial communication/computational power.
- For India to emerge as a significant R&D hub, it has to become a part of this wave of collaboration and co-creation.

- Facilitating advanced distance education in specialized fields like engineering, science, medicine etc.
- Facilitating an ultra-high speed e-governance backbone.
- Facilitating connection between different sectoral networks in the field of research.

V. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

23. ISRO's AstroSat

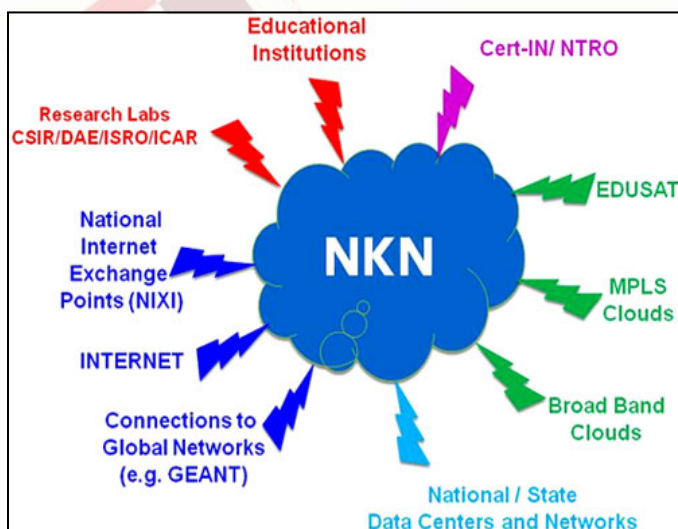
Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Astronomers from Thiruvananthapuram and Mumbai have identified a new population of ultraviolet stars in the globular cluster NGC 2808 using the Indian multi-wavelength space observatory AstroSat, launched in September 2015.

About globular clusters:

- Globular clusters are collections of thousands to millions of stars, moving as one unit. These stars are tightly held together by gravity of the cluster itself, and are believed to have formed together at roughly the same time. Some globular clusters could be among the oldest objects in our Milky Way, which hosts over 150 of them.
- The globular cluster contains stars with a variety of masses but with similar chemical composition.
- NGC 2808 is one of the massive globular clusters and is located at a distance of 47,000 light years from us.



Role of NKN:

- Establishing a high-speed backbone connectivity which will enable knowledge and information sharing amongst NKN connected institutes.
- Enabling collaborative research, development and innovation amongst NKN connected institutes.

- Recent studies have shown that many globular clusters may well host more than one population of stars contrary to popular belief that all stars in such clusters are of the same age. Observations suggest that NGC2808 may have at least five different populations of stars.

About ASTROSAT:

- ASTROSAT is India's first dedicated multi-wavelength space observatory. This scientific satellite mission endeavours for a more detailed understanding of our universe.
- ASTROSAT is designed to observe the universe in the Visible, Ultraviolet, low and high energy X-ray regions of the electromagnetic spectrum simultaneously with the help of its five payloads.
- Astrosat aims at understanding the high energy processes in binary star systems containing neutron stars and black holes, to estimate magnetic fields of neutron stars, to study star birth regions and high energy processes in star systems lying beyond the Milky Way galaxy.
- This mission has put ISRO in a very exclusive club of nations that have space-based observatories. Only the United States, European Space Agency, Japan and Russia have such observatories in space.

TOPIC: GS III, INDIGENIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

24. Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

In a major boost for Army, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully test fired indigenously developed, low weight, fire and forget Man Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM).

About MPATGM:

- MPATGM is third-generation anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) indigenously developed by DRDO.
- MPATGM is incorporated with advanced features including state-of-the-art Imaging Infrared Radar (IIR) Seeker with integrated avionics.
- It has strike range of 2.5 km. It weighs around 14.5 kg to maintain man portability.
- It is capable of being fired from shoulder and can be used during day and night. It has minimum lateral centre and gravity offset.
- MPATGM is fitted with high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead.

- It works on fire and forget principle and is known for its top attack capabilities. It is effective against both stationary and moving targets. It will be deployed in infantry and parachute battalions of Indian Army.
- MPATGM are being developed to replace the French origin anti-tank guided missile Milan and Soviet semi-automatic wire-guided missile Konkur in service with Indian Army. The test trail at Rajasthan was the fourth overall development trial of the MPATGM.

VI. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

25. Idukki's Marayoor Jaggery gets GI tag

- The Marayoor Jaggery, the traditional and handmade product from Idukki district of Kerala, has received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the Central Government.

Key Points:

- The Jaggery is produced in Marayoor, a town in Idukki district of Kerala.
- It is made from sugarcane and no chemicals are added during the manufacturing process.
- It is not produced in modern factories or using modern equipment. It is prepared in sheds located on the sugarcane farm.
- It is dark brown in colour, high in sweetness and iron, with less sodium content and insoluble impurities.

26. Arecanut gets its first GI tag for 'Sirsi Supari'

- For the first time in the arecanut sector, 'Sirsi Supari' grown in Uttara Kannada has received the Geographic Indication (GI) tag.
- It is cultivated in Yellapura, Siddapura and Sirsi taluks.
- Totgars' Cooperative Sale Society Ltd., Sirsi, is the registered proprietor of the GI.
- The arecanut grown in these taluks have unique features such as a round and flattened coin shape, particular texture, size, cross-sectional views, taste, etc. These features are not seen in arecanut grown in any other regions. Its average dry weight is 7.5 g and average thickness is 16 mm. This particular variety has a unique taste due to differences in chemical composition.
- Sirsi Supari has a unique taste due to differences in chemical composition and the total average flavonoids content in it is around 90 whereas in others it is around 80.

27. Wood Snake

- A species of wood snake that wasn't seen for 140 years has resurfaced in a survey conducted by scientists in the Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The species is endemic to the Meghamalai forests and the Periyar Tiger Reserve landscape.

28. What are 'cool-spots'?

- 'Cool-spots' are the world's last refuges where high numbers of threatened species still persist. Cool-spots could be the result of protection or because of intact habitat that has not been cleared yet.

29. India -Russia Submarine deal

- India sealed a \$3-billion deal with Russia for leasing a nuclear-powered attack submarine for the Indian Navy for a period of 10 years.

About the Submarine:

- The two countries signed an inter-governmental agreement capping months of negotiations on price and other aspects of the deal.
- Under the pact, Russia will have to deliver the Akula class submarine, to be known as Chakra III, to the Indian Navy by 2025.
- It will be a nuclear Powered Submarine
- It will be the third Russian submarine to be leased to the Navy.
- The Chakra-III is expected to give India an edge over its rivals in the Indian Ocean region given one of the major strengths of a nuclear submarine is its ability to remain underwater for months, making detection difficult.

30. India Urban Observatory

What is Urban Observatory?

- An Urban Observatory platform that uses data from different sources to enable analysis and visualisation over a geospatial platform
- It requires continuous collection and analysis of appropriate urban data that can be envisaged spatially and analysed to obtain various possible types of correlation
- The concept of Urban Observatories was formally initiated at the UN Habitat-II Conference in 1997 in Istanbul.

India Urban Observatory:

- The India Urban Observatory is an important component of the recently launched Data Smart

Cities strategy that envisions to create a 'Culture of Data' in cities, for intelligent use of data in addressing complex urban challenges.

- The conceptualization of the India Urban Observatory recognizes the value of enhancing engagement among all four stakeholders — government, citizens, academia, and industry, along with improvements in the internal workflow and decision-making processes of city governments.
- The India Urban Observatory will become the chief data analysis & Management Hub of the Ministry & would enable evidence-based policy formulation, capacity building of ecosystem partners on data-driven governance & foster innovation."
- The India Urban Observatory will collect data from various IoT devices and sensors, the Integrated Command & Control Center (ICCC) and other urban indicators and analyze them to generate insights for all stakeholders and city planners.

Data Smart Cities Strategy:

The strategy aims to lay down the basic premise, three foundational pillars vis. People, Process, Platform, and a suggested roadmap for cities to improve their readiness for intelligent use of data.

- Making cities 'DataSmart' is key to realizing the full potential of technology interventions and innovation ecosystems in cities.
- The DataSmart Cities Strategy also presents a Data Maturity Assessment Framework (DMAF), that measures the readiness and evolution of cities in their efforts to implementing the Data strategy.
- The assessment of cities as per the DMAF will foster a culture of data and drive innovation in India's Smart Cities through a spirit of collaboration and healthy competition.

31. NARI Shakti Puraskar

- President of India presented the Nari Shakti Puraskar 2018, the highest civilian honour for women in India, at a special ceremony held in Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, on International Women's Day.

About the Award:

- It is India's highest civilian award for recognising the achievements and contributions of women.
- The awards are given away by the President of India every year on March 8, International Women's Day at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.
- The Nari Shakti Puraskar is conferred on individual women, public and private institutions and public

departments for their activism and/ or their contributions to the cause of women's empowerment.

- The award, instituted in the year 1999 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, is given in six institutional categories and two individual categories.

32. National Crime Records Bureau

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) will celebrate its 34th Inception Day on March 11, 2019.

About National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):

- Formed in 1986, NCRB is mandated to empower the Indian Police with Information Technology and is responsible for collecting, maintaining and analysing the crime data of the country. It facilitates Investigating Officers with updated IT tools and information in Investigation of Crimes.
- NCRB is the Nodal Agency for authentic source of data on crime, accidents, suicides, and prisons for policy matters and research.
- Bureau is also apex nodal agency for all Finger Print related matters including accreditation of Finger Print Experts in the country.
- Bureau is implementing & monitoring agency for implementation of Crime & Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), a Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan of Government of India.
- The project aims at creating a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in the country.

33. India is world's 2nd largest arms importer

- India was the world's second largest arms importer from 2014-18, ceding the long-held tag as largest importer to Saudi Arabia, which accounted for 12% of the total imports during the period.

About the News:

- India was the world's second largest importer of major arms in 2014–18 and accounted for 9.5% of the global total," according to the latest report published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

- Russia accounted for 58% of Indian arms imports in 2014–18, compared with 76% in 2009-13. Israel, the U.S. and France all increased their arms exports to India in 2014-18.
- Pakistan stood at the 11th position accounting for 2.7% of all global imports. Its biggest source was China, from which 70% of arms were sourced, followed by the U.S. at 8.9% and, interestingly, Russia at 6%.
- The Five largest exporters in 2014-18 were the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China together accounting for 75% of the total volume of arms exports in 2014-18.

34. Reko Diq Mine

- Pakistan's military is participating in the development of Reko Diq Mine as it is considered as a strategic national asset.
- However, the mine is facing problems due to (a) multi-billion dollar legal dispute with foreign mining firms and (b) inability to attract foreign investment as Pakistan is under economic crisis.

About Reko Diq Mine:

- The Reko Diq mine is located near Reko Diq town in Chagai District, Baluchistan, Pakistan.
- It is a large copper mine located in the west of Pakistan in Balochistan.
- Reko Diq represents one of the largest copper reserve in Pakistan and in the world having estimated reserves of 5.9 billion tonnes of ore grading 0.41% copper.
- The mine also has gold reserves amounting to 41.5 million oz.
- The Reko Diq area is part of the Tethyan Magmatic Arc, extending through central and southeast Europe (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece) Turkey, Iran and Pakistan through the Himalayan region into Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.
- Reko Diq area is one of many eroded remnant volcanic centers in the Chagai volcanic chain of mountains which runs in an east–west line across Balochistan between the Quetta to Taftan railway and the border with Afghanistan.
- TCC has identified a large, low-grade copper-gold resource at Reko Diq.

Question:

1. The Official Secrets Act meant for ensuring secrecy and confidentiality in governance, mostly on national security and espionage issues. In the light of above statement, What is your opinion on the government request to Supreme Court for “criminal action” against those responsible for making “stolen documents” on the Rafale deal public. Justify your opinion with an example.
2. Do you think that mediation should be given priority in prolonging cases which often lead to communal clashes? Explain in the light of recent Supreme court’s step to solve the Ayodhya case through mediation.
3. The President may make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of the certain Union territory. In the light of above statement, discuss the provisions and significance of Article 240 of Indian Constitution.
4. India’s north east has faced an influx of people from Bangladesh since the early 20th century. In the light of above statement, discuss the impact of recent National Register of Citizens updation in the region.
5. Critically examine the recently introduced Electoral bonds to promote transparency in funding and donation received by political parties.
6. In view of the current Lok Sabha Elections, discuss the various steps taken by the Election Commission to ensure free and fair Election.
7. Accession to the Nice, Vienna and Locarno Agreements will help the Intellectual Property Office in India to harmonise the classification systems for examination of trademark and design applications, in line with the classification systems followed globally. Discuss.
8. Discuss the significance of United Nations ‘Transports Internationaux Routiers’ (TIR) convention in the light of India’s Trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia.
9. Globally, frontier research and innovation are shifting towards multidisciplinary and collaborative paradigm and require substantial communication and computational power. In the light of above statement, discuss the objectives, features and significance of National Knowledge Network.