

CONTENTS

S. No.	Topic	Page No.
<u>I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE</u>		
1.	Reverse Migration and its impact	1
2.	Right to Information	1
3.	Voluntary Code of Ethics for the 2019 General Election	3
4.	Lokpal	4
<u>II. SOCIAL JUSTICE</u>		
5.	Shiksha Vani	5
6.	West Nile Fever	6
<u>III. ECONOMY</u>		
7.	Voluntary retention route for Foreign Portfolio Investors	7
8.	Real Estate Investment Trust	8
9.	GI tag for Coffee Varieties	8
<u>IV. ENVIRONMENT</u>		
10.	Otter Census	9
11.	Bumphead Parrotfish in Andaman	9
12.	Ice Stupa	10
13.	India's first Forest-Certification Scheme gets global recognition	10
14.	United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)	11
<u>V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS</u>		
15.	World Trade Organisation	12
16.	Rise in Indians with Visa	13
17.	Corpat	14
18.	Indo Maldivian Relation	14
<u>VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY</u>		
19.	National Supercomputing Mission (NSM)	15
20.	Pulsars	16
<u>VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS</u>		
21.	RBI categorises IDBI Bank as private sector lender	16
22.	YONO Cash	16
23.	Kazakhstan renames capital Astana after ex-president	16
24.	Bomb Cyclone	17
25.	Cyclone Idai	17

26. TROPEX	17
27. Africa-India Field Training Exercise	17
28. KUSUM Scheme	17
29. Exercise Mitra Shakti VI	18
30. LIMA 2019	18
31. BEMPU	18
Questions	19



I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS II, IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON INDIAN SOCIETY

1. Reverse Migration and its impact

Source: Indian Express

Why in news:

- Fall in emigration, and reverse migration from the Gulf countries has created a great challenge for Kerala's welfare model.
- Reverse migration is a situation when people start to migrate from bigger cities to smaller one.

Current trend of migration:

- Migration trends indicate that the Gulf, which had long funded the Kerala development story may start to downfall. Economic slowdown in the Gulf countries and state policies favouring replacement of migrants with local labour, influx of workers from Africa and countries such as the Philippines, are forcing a reverse migration that has serious repercussions for Kerala's economy and society.
- Rising dollar-rupee exchange rate has prevented a fall in foreign remittances to Kerala, but the return of a large number of migrants, many of them blue collar workers, could squeeze employment and impact consumption and retail trade.
- Kerala Migration Survey, 2018 shows a negative trend in the last five years.
- Over the past decade, the number of people migrating to the Gulf has fallen whereas the number of reverse migrants has gone up in the same period.
- The prolonged slowdown in the Gulf economies since 2008 and visions of a post-oil economy influenced many of these countries to embark on policies such as Nitaqat in Saudi Arabia, which encouraged employment of local labour over migrants.
- The welfare society built by the Kerala model of development and higher wages, both partly facilitated by remittances, has also worked against migration: Higher wages have turned Kerala labour non-competitive in the Gulf countries and demographic changes, especially population reduction in the migration prone age-group, militate against migration.
- The state government realises the implications of this trend and has been introducing policies to cushion the impact of the reverse migration.

Steps to address the crisis:

- The state budget in February has proposed new pension, savings and loan schemes for expatriates. Loans, technical advice to start businesses, have been offered to integrate the returning migrants in the local economy.
- It is too early to say if these steps are sufficient to address the looming crisis. For instance, nearly a quarter of the households in Kerala have a migrant — and 90 per cent of migrants from the state are in Gulf countries — who sends money home.
- Any large-scale change in the numbers are sure to influence spending patterns at home, and thereby, Kerala's service economy.

Conclusion:

- Kerala's outward migration has co-existed with inward migration of labour from northern and eastern India. Studies indicate that nearly 2.5 million migrants, mainly from West Bengal, Odisha, UP, Bihar, are a part of the workforce in Kerala, mostly doing relatively low-paying jobs.
- Kerala's way out of the reverse migration crisis may hinge on the economy expanding to absorb the returnees in the workforce and for the low-skilled among them to compete with the non-Malayali internal migrants.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

2. Right to Information

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Despite the Central Information Commission (CIC) ruling of June 2013 that the political parties fall within the ambit of the transparency law, the parties continue to insist that they cannot be considered public authorities under the Act.

Background:

- The Association for democratic Reform had filed an RTI in October 2010, seeking information on donations and contributions received by political parties.
- Following no response from the political parties except for Communist Party of India (CPI), ADR complained to the Central Information Commission, the highest appellate body under the RTI Act.
- In 2013, the Central Information Commission had ruled that political parties come within the ambit of the Right to Information Act and that the national parties are public authorities.
- The CIC order said that since the National Political Parties INC/AICC, BJP, CPI(M), CPI, NCP and BSP

have been substantially financed by the Central government, they are held to be public authorities under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act.

- The criticality of the role being played by these political parties in the democratic set-up and the nature of duties performed by them also point towards their public character, bringing them in the ambit of Section 2(h).
- The six political parties were asked to make available details of voluntary financial contributions received by them and the donors' names and addresses.
- The political parties were directed to comply with the provisions of mandatory proactive disclosure by putting those details on their websites.
- The CIC rejected the arguments made by counsel of the political parties of their being out of the ambit of the RTI, and referred to a Supreme Court judgment, which said that "the little man of this country would have the basic elementary right to know full particulars of a candidate who is to represent him in Parliament where laws to bind his liberty and property may be enacted."
- The CIC concluded that "The people of India must know the source of expenditure incurred by political parties and by the candidates in the process of election.
- However, the political parties, with the exception of the CPI refused to give away information, claiming that they do not come under the RTI Act.

Analysis of the issue:

- Experts argue that, since the national political parties are the main players as far as elections are concerned, it is essential that they are held accountable by informed citizens.
- According to the RTI activists, only limited financial information of Political parties are available. Since, the limits on corporate funding have been removed, and the issues with electoral bonds and foreign funding, and the potential for conflict of interest, it is important that parties are subject to RTI.
- It has been argued that national parties receive massive indirect funding in the form of complete tax exemption, free airtime on government television and radio and bungalows and large tracts of land given free or at nominal rates.
- The political parties also have constitutional and legal responsibilities as they are registered with the Election Commission of India (ECI) and play a vital role in public life and governance. A number of non-governmental organisations, trusts, schools

and clubs have also been declared public authorities under the Act.

Proposed Amendments:

- The government has recently proposed some changes in the act which are said to be regressive in nature.
- There are set of targeted and fashioned amendments to the RTI Act which will not only undermine one part of the Act but structurally weaken the independence and authority of the only body that gives it teeth, thereby nullifying the entire Act.
- The government proposes to do away with the equivalence of the Central Information Commissioners with the Election Commissioners on the ground that the two have different mandates.
- The underlying assumption that transparency is less important for a democracy than holding of free and fair elections is absurd.
- The government also proposes to replace the existing fixed five-year tenure of the Information Commissioners with tenure as may be prescribed by it. This would make the tenure largesse to be bestowed by the government.
- This would be detrimental to the independence and authority of the Information Commissions.

Right to Information Act:

Salient features of RTI act

- All citizens possess the right to information.
- Information can be obtained within 30 days from the date of request in a normal case. If information is a matter of life or liberty of a person, it can be obtained within 48 hours from time of request.
- Every public authority is under obligation to provide information on written request or request by electronic means. Certain information are prohibited. Restrictions made for third party information.
- Appeal against the decision of the Central Information Commission or State Information Commission can be made to an officer who is senior in rank.

How Amendment will weaken:

- It would affect the Independence of Information Commissioner.
- It would rather become a Institution of Government which would be reluctant to give information in Public.
- Public Confidence in Information Commissioners will be weaken.

- After Amendment Information Commissioners would be more interested in getting good will of Government so that their term could be increased.
- It will promote Corruption and reduce Accountability of Government officials to Public.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS

3. Voluntary Code of Ethics for the 2019

General Election

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Social Media Platforms and Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) has recently presented a “Voluntary Code of Ethics for the General Election 2019” to Election Commission.

Objective:

- The objective of the ‘Code of Ethics’ is to ensure free, fair & ethical usage of Social Media Platforms to maintain the integrity of the electoral process and identify measures that the platforms can take to increase confidence in the electoral process and to safeguard against misuse that vitiates the “free and fair character” of the General Election 2019.

About Voluntary Code of Ethics:

- The Code of Ethics has been developed as a follow up to the meeting with IAMAI and representatives of Social Media Platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Google, ShareChat and TikTok etc with the election commission.
- The Code voluntarily agreed upon by the Participants comes into operation with immediate effect.
- The Platforms have committed to process any violations reported under Section 126 of RP Act, 1951 within three hours as per Sinha Committee

- The Platforms have also agreed to create a high priority dedicated reporting mechanism for the ECI and appoint dedicated teams during the period of General Elections for taking expeditious action on any reported violations.
- Participants have also agreed to provide a mechanism for political advertisers to submit pre-certified advertisements issued by Media Certification and Monitoring Committee.
- The Code of Ethics also promises to facilitate transparency in paid political advertisements. IAMAI has agreed to coordinate with participants various steps mentioned in this code. Participants have also committed to voluntarily undertake voter awareness campaigns.

About Umesh Sinha committee:

- Sr. Deputy Election Commissioner Umesh Sinha committee had set up to review and suggest modifications and changes in the provisions of Section 126 and other sections of the Representation of the People Act 1951, provisions of Model Code of Conduct and any other ECI instruction in this regard.

Conclusion:

- This is appreciating steps taken by Social media platforms and the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI). The formulation of the Code augurs a good beginning but is essential, a work in making.
- The Participants need to follow in letter and spirit the commitments made in the Voluntary Code of Ethics for increasing confidence in the electoral process and to safeguard against misuse that vitiates the “free and fair character” of the polls.

<p>WHAT HAPPENED</p> <p>Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, Twitter, ShareChat and ByteDance agree to a voluntary code, applicable from March 20 for the duration of general elections</p> 	<p>PURPOSE OF THE CODE</p> <p>To identify measures that internet companies can put in place to increase confidence in the electoral process and help safeguard platforms against misuse</p>	<p>WHAT IS IN THE CODE</p> <p>EC can notify platforms of potential violations of Sec 126 of Representation of the People Act</p> <p>Code promises internet cos will commit to facilitating transparency in political ads</p> <p>Social media firms will provide mechanism for advertisers to submit pre-certificates issued by EC for ads that feature names of political parties and candidates</p>
---	--	--

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS

4. Lokpal

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Lokpal, the anti-corruption ombudsman is set to become operational with the selection of all its members.

The Lokpal & Lokayuktas:

- Since the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act was passed in 2013, there has been a delay of five years to appoint the Lokpal. The Lokpal is the anti-corruption ombudsman who takes up allegations of corruption among the Central government functionaries. The same will be done by the Lokayuktas appointed in the States.

Selection Committee:

- As per the act, the Lokpal is selected by a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Lok Sabha Speaker.
- Before that, a search panel will prepare a list of candidates for the selection committee.
- The Lokpal consists of 8 members; with 4 from the judicial fraternity and 4 are non-judicial.
- The Judicial members could be a judge of the Supreme Court or a High Court.

- The non-judicial members should be people of impeccable integrity having special knowledge in matters of public administration, law & management, anti-corruption policy, finance and banking, and vigilance for not less than 25 years.
- The Act states that 50% of the members of the Lokpal should be from among the STs, SCs and OBCs, women and minorities.
- The same applies to the search committee too.

Highlights of the Lokpal Act of 2013:

- The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.
- The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.
- The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
- The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
- The States will have to institute Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.
- The Act also ensures that public servants who act as whistleblowers are protected.

<p>A long-drawn debate</p> <p>A short history of the Lokpal Bill from the 1960s to the present</p>		<p>2005: The second ARC recommended that a Lokpal be established without delay</p> <hr/> <p>2013: Lokpal Act, 2013, passed in Parliament</p> <hr/> <p>2016: Lok Sabha agreed to amend the 2013 Act</p>
<p>1963: The idea of an Ombudsman first came up in Parliament during a discussion on budget allocation for the Law Ministry</p>	<p>State level – to probe complaints against public functionaries, including MPs</p>	<p>2017: The SC on April 27 clarified that the Lokpal appointment process need not be stalled merely due to the absence of the Leader of the Opposition, who is a member of the Lokpal selection committee as per the 2013 Act</p>
<p>1966: The First Administrative Reforms Commission recommended two independent authorities – one at the Centre and one at the</p>	<p>1968: Lokpal Bill introduced in Parliament, but was not passed. Eight attempts were made till 2011 to pass the Bill, but all in vain</p>	
	<p>2002: The Constitution review commission headed by M.N. Venkatachaliah recommended appointment of the Lokpal and the Lokayuktas. It also recommended that the Prime Minister be kept out of the Lokpal's ambit</p>	

Lokpal Powers:

- The Lokpal has the jurisdiction over Central Ministers, Central Government employees, and Members of Parliament.
- It also has the jurisdiction to inquire Prime Minister in matters of corruption relating to atomic energy, public order, space and international relations. For this to happen, at least two-third members of the Lokpal must approve for an inquiry.
- Inquires are held in-camera.
- It has superintendence powers over CBI.
- When a case referred to the CBI by the Lokpal, the officer of the case cannot be transferred without the permission of the Lokpal.
- Lokpal can authorise the CBI search and seize.
- It has the power to confiscate assets, proceeds, benefits arisen out of the acts of corruption.
- It has the power to transfer or suspend a public servant connected to the allegations of corruption.
- It can pass directions to prevent the destruction of records during the preliminary inquiry.

Conclusion:

- It took five years to select the members of the Lokpal since the enactment of the Act shows the hesitancy of the government in constituting the ombudsman.
- The time for Lokpal has eventually come. It will be successful only if it works impartially and time will tell if the desired transparency in the work of public servants has been achieved or not.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: GS II, EDUCATION

5. Shiksha Vani

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Central Board of Secondary Education launched a podcast app 'Shiksha Vani' earlier this week to broadcast vital information to students and parents promptly.
- The Shiksha Vani is initiated to keep the students, parents and teachers updated about the latest news and events of the CBSE.
- The podcast is bound to boost transparency in the system, in turn, increasing efficiency.

Key Facts:

- The App, Shiksha Vani, is at present available on the google play store for downloading.
- The App opens up to the landing page of CBSE Podcast, Shiksha Vani, which will automatically redirect to the home page with clickable buttons.
- The app has separate clickable buttons (recent, regional officers, principals, teachers, parents and students etc.) in the home page that lead you to pages containing information about each of it.
- By clicking on the "recent" button on the home page, you get to stay abreast with all the latest updates from the board. The podcast has already published its first episode, the evaluation process of Class 10 and 12 board examinations, on the platform.
- You also get to receive the information on the various genres of CBSE by entering the registered mobile number on the respective page. For instance, if you are a teacher and want to know the updates for teachers, click on the button "teachers" on the home page. Now, enter the registered phone number in the space provided, and you will receive the latest information for teachers.
- The Central Board of Secondary Education launched Shiksha Vani believing that the easy availability of up-to-date information regarding educational tools and initiatives can improve outcomes.
- The board also believes in the use of new, appropriate and user-friendly technology to make sure that its actions reach the audience accurately.
- As its initial step, the podcast released an update confirming that the evaluation process for the on-going CBSE Board Examination 2019 has started.

How Podcasts Help CBSE?

- Compared to written information issued by the CBSE in the form of circulars, the engagement will be high for the podcasts because of oral communication.
- Oral communication is more effective, time efficient and environment-friendly.
- Hence, the CBSE will make use of this podcast facility to inform and share the latest information on the academic, training initiatives, examinations and others.

CBSE Shiksha Vani Tabs:

The CBSE Shiksha Vani consists of eight types of tab for various categories of audience. They are:

1. Principals
2. Teachers
3. Centre Superintendent and Invigilators

4. CNS and Examiners
5. Regional Officers
6. Parents and Students
7. Public
8. Recent

What are the Benefits of Shiksha Vani?

- Helps in giving out uniform directions to all its affiliated schools.
- Helps in spreading information during relevant events such as evaluation of exam answer sheet, declaration of result etc.
- Helps in broadcasting official information about the evaluation as the podcast is said to promote zero-error policy for evaluation.
- Podcasts are less time consuming and extremely engaging as compared to written information or circulars.

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

6. West Nile Fever

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare with National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has assessed the state preparedness and action taken to deal with West Nile Fever (WNF) in Malappuram district, Kerala.

What are the guidelines?

- The State has been advised to follow the National Vector Borne Disease Control Program (NVBDCP) guidelines of personal protective measures to prevent mosquito bites.
- The Ministry has also recommended vector surveillance and control to be carried out in coordination with NVBDCP.
- All cases of JE/AES are to be investigated as per guidelines of JE (Japanese Encephalitis)/AES (Acute Encephalitis Syndrome) and also tested for West Nile Virus. Further, the community is to be sensitized through IEC campaigns on use of personal protective measures to prevent mosquito bites as per NVBDCP Guidelines.

Directorate of National Vector Borne Diseases Control Programme:

- It is the national level Technical Nodal office equipped with Technical Experts in the field of Public Health, Entomology, Toxicology and parasitology aspects of malaria.
- The Directorate is responsible for framing technical guidelines & policies as to guide the

states for implementation of Programme strategies. It is also responsible for budgeting and planning the logistics pertaining to central sector.

About West Nile fever:

- West Nile Fever is a mosquito-borne zoonotic disease caused by a flavivirus -West Nile Virus (WNV).
- This virus is related to viruses that cause Japanese Encephalitis, yellow fever and St. Louis encephalitis.
- Human infection is most often due to bites from infected mosquitoes.
- To date, no human-to-human transmission of WNV through casual contact has been documented.
- Infection with WNV is either asymptomatic (no symptoms) in around 80% of infected people, or can lead to West Nile fever or severe West Nile disease.

Symptoms:

- Not all infected people carry the symptoms of the virus. Only 1 in 5 will show symptoms of the disease.
- The disease is dreaded as it has irreversible effects on the brain.
- The symptoms include – fever, headache, weakness etc.
- But, the WNV shows certain nervous system symptoms – disorientation, convulsion, stupor, loss of vision etc.
- The most affected people are old age persons, those with diabetes, cancer, and hypertension.

Origin and Its Spread:

- As per World Health Organisation (WHO), the first case of WNV infection was detected in 1937 in Uganda.
- WNV is found across Africa, Europe, Middle East, West Asia and America.

Current Status in India:

- The disease occurred sporadically in India.
- There is no sign of the disease being spread across the country.
- Majority of the cases in India are from the Northeast.
- As per experts from Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the virus infection in a boy in Kerala is of academic interest. Also, they say that there is no worry that the virus will spread as it has poor transmission capability.

Testing and Vector Surveillance:

- Testing for West Nile Virus is available at the National Institute of Virology, Pune and National Institute of Virology, Allapuzha.
- Facility for xeno-diagnosis with respect to infection among vectors is available at VCRC, Kottayam.
- NCDC branch in Kozhikode, in coordination with VCRC, Kottayam, will provide assistance for vector surveillance and xeno-diagnosis in the vector as well as prepare and disseminate a standardised hospital management protocol of AES case management to be followed by all hospitals catering to cases of AES.

What is xeno-diagnosis?

- Xeno-diagnosis is a diagnostic method used to document the presence of infectious disease microorganisms or pathogens by exposing possibly infected tissue to a vector and then examining the vector for the presence of the microorganisms or pathogens it may have ingested.

Being Vigilant:

- Being vigilant to such threats is absolutely necessary. It is how the threat of Nipah and Zika have been controlled. Globally too, WHO states that epidemics from pathogens is one of the ten global health threats in 2019.
- The others are:
 1. Air Pollution and Climate Change
 2. Non-communicable Disease
 3. Global Influenza Pandemic
 4. Fragile and Vulnerable Settings
 5. Antimicrobial Resistance
 6. Ebola and Other High Threat Pathogens
 7. Weak Primary Healthcare
 8. Vaccine Hesitancy
 9. Dengue
 10. HIV

Conclusion:

- India being a tropical country coupled with a huge population, pathogens pose a great threat. Any new virulent strain might lead to heavy loss of life.
- Thus, the government must prepare for any eventualities and must try to mitigate the damage earlier.

III. ECONOMY

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY

7. Voluntary retention route for Foreign Portfolio Investors

Source: Economic Times

Voluntary Retention Route (VRR):

- VRR is a new channel of investment available to FPIs to encourage them to invest in debt markets in India over and above their investments through the regular route. The objective is to attract long-term and stable FPI investments into debt markets while providing FPIs with operational flexibility to manage their investments.

When was this route proposed?

- This new investment route was proposed by the central bank in October 2018 at a time the rupee was weakening against the dollar very sharply. There were also talks of a special NRI bond scheme to attract more dollar funds into the economy and stabilise the rupee.

How are they different from the regular FPI investments?

- Guidelines say that investments through VRR will be free of the macro-prudential and other regulatory prescriptions applicable to FPI investments in debt markets, provided FPIs voluntarily commit to retain a required minimum percentage of their investments in India for a period of their choice. But the minimum retention period shall be three years, or as decided by RBI.

How much money can an FPI invest through this route?

- Investments under this route as of now shall be capped at Rs 40,000 crore for VRR-GOVT and 35,000 crore per annum for VRR-COPR. But the limit could be changed from time to time based on macro-prudential considerations and assessment of investment demand. There will be separate limits for investment in government securities and investment in corporate debt.

Are there any other facilities for investors through VRR?

- FPIs investing through this route will be eligible to participate in repos for their cash management, provided that the amount borrowed or lent under repo were not to exceed 10 per cent of the investment under VRR. They will also be eligible to participate in any currency or interest rate derivative instrument, OTC or exchange-traded instrument to manage their interest rate risk or currency risk.

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

8. Real Estate Investment Trust

Sources: Livemint, The Hindu

Why in news:

The Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Embassy Office Parks REIT, India's first REIT to be listed, was fully subscribed recently.

- The Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Embassy Office Parks Real Estate Investment Trust (Embassy REIT) was subscribed 2.5 times, with the share sale generating a demand of over Rs 5,300 crore.
- Following the success of the IPO, Blackstone-backed Embassy REIT will be India's first publicly-listed REIT. It will also open the doors for more real estate firms to raise capital through this route.

About REIT:

- A Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) is an investment vehicle that allows people to invest in real estate and hold properties under it, and then lease it out to earn rental income. In India, REITs are only allowed for holding commercial properties.
- REITs are collective investment vehicles that operate and manage property portfolios and give returns to investors. Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) mandated that all REITs be listed on exchanges and make an initial public offer to raise money.
- There are three types of REIT available: equity REITs which purchase, own and manage income-generating properties; mortgage REITs which lend money directly or indirectly to real estate owners; and hybrid REITs which are a combination of the first two.

How does an REIT work?

- REITs are similar to mutual funds. While mutual funds provide for an opportunity to invest in equity stocks, REITs allow one to invest in income-generating real estate assets.
- REITs raise funds from a large number of investors and directly invest that sum in income-generating real estate properties (which could be offices, residential apartments, shopping centres, hotels and warehouses). The trusts are listed in stock exchanges so that investors can buy units in the trust. REITs are structured as trusts. Thus, the assets of an REIT are held by an independent trustee on behalf of unit holders.

Significance:

- The Indian real estate sector has been facing a liquidity crunch on account of unsold inventory and low demand. REITs can help cash-strapped developers to monetise their existing property.
- In real estate sector, both rent and capital appreciation from property depend on the location, infrastructure and industrial development around that area. REITs juggle these risks through a diversified portfolio of properties.
- REITs can reduce the risk related to your property investments as 80 per cent of the value of the REIT should be in completed and rent-generating assets. They are required to be run by professional managements with specified years of experience notified by SEBI.

**TOPIC: GS III, ISSUES RELATING TO
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS**

9. GI tag for Coffee Varieties

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Geographical Indications Registry has granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag for Coorg Arabica Coffee, Wayanad Robusta Coffee, Chikmagalur Arabica Coffee, Araku Valley Arabica Coffee and Bababudangiri Arabica Coffee.

Coorg Arabica Coffee:

- According to the GI application, Coorg Arabica Coffee is grown specifically in Kodagu district in Karnataka. Kodagu district of Karnataka is famous for Coffee cultivation. The unique biotic and abiotic conditions provide uniqueness to the Coffee grown in the region of Kodagu. The broader landscape provides it with a unique aroma and flavour to the coffee when roasted.

Wayanad Robusta Coffee:

- Wayanad Robusta Coffee both as a pure crop and as mixed crop along with pepper in the Wayanad region of Kerala. Wayanad produces almost around 90% of Kerala's Coffee produce and forms the backbone of the coffee economy of Kerala.

Chikmagalur Arabica Coffee:

- Chikmagalur Arabica Coffee is grown in Chikmagalur district, Karnataka. It is the region in India where the coffee cultivation first began.

Bababudangiri Arabica Coffee:

- Bababudangiris Arabica Coffee is grown specifically in the birthplace of coffee in India and region is situated in the central portion of Chikmagalur district, as per GI application. The coffee grown here is known for its unique flavour

and aroma. Selectively hand-picked and processes by natural fermentation, the cup exhibits full body, acidity, mild flavour and striking aroma with a note of chocolate which makes it unique.

Araku Valley Arabica Coffee:

- Araku Valley Arabica Coffee, grown around Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh and Koraput district in Odisha, is light to medium in strength, has a pleasant acidity with a citrus note of grape fruit and a mild jaggery-like sweetness.

Geographical Indication Tag:

- A GI tag is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation by virtue of their geographical association. The tag conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to the geographical origin of the product. The owner of the GI tag has exclusive rights over the product.

IV. ENVIRONMENT

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

10. Otter Census

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

For the first time, Uttar Pradesh is taking a census of otters in its protected areas.

- The exercise that began in the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR) will be completed by the end of this month. Otters will be counted in other forests of Uttar Pradesh once their census has been done in PTR.

About Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR):

- PTR is in the foothills of the Himalayas, south of Nepal. Covering an area of approximately 800 square kilometres, the reserve sprawls across parts of Pilibhit, Lakhimpur Kheri and Bahraich districts.
- With the Sharda and Ghaghara rivers encircling a considerable part of the reserve, it is rich in water bodies.
- The forests of PTR are home to tigers, leopards, elephants, different species of deer and monkeys and reptiles like snakes, mugger crocodiles and gharials.

About Otters:

- Otters are an important part of the forest ecosystem.

- A growing or healthy population of otters means the water bodies of the reserve are pollution-free. Clean water bodies mean a healthy ecosystem of the forest.
- A mammal, an otter spends much of its time in or close to water bodies. Otters live on fish.
- India is home to 3 of the 13 species of otters found worldwide. These are:
 - Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*) – IUCN status: Near Threatened.
 - Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutra perspicillata*) – IUCN status: Vulnerable.
 - Small-clawed Otter (*Aonyx cinereus*) – IUCN status: Vulnerable.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

11. Bumphead Parrotfish in Andaman

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Protection of coral cover along the existing protected marine areas in the Andaman and Nicobar islands is necessary for conservation of the endangered bumphead parrotfish, a new study has suggested.

About Bumphead parrotfish:

- Bumphead parrotfish (*Bolbometopon muricatum*), is an important component of coral reef ecosystem, but is highly endangered globally.
- IUCN Red list Status: Vulnerable
- This fish is a highly prized resource, but is threatened due to limited knowledge about its distribution and abundance in Indian waters.
- A large body size, aggregating behaviour and limited activity at night make *B. muricatum* an easy target for spear-fishers. Combined with slow growth and low replacement rates, this has resulted in population declines across the Indo-Pacific and Red Sea regions.

Need of the hour:

- Ban night fishing for the species and implement regulations regarding reef fishing. Considering the vulnerable status of Bumphead parrotfish globally, the species could be a flagship for educational campaigns focusing on the importance of conserving similar fish groups and protecting the coral reefs.

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

12. Ice Stupa

Source: Economic Times

Why in news:

The Indian Department of Post has released a 'special stamp cover on Ice Stupa' in Leh. The special stamps aim to create awareness about depleting glaciers and affect the ecology around the Himalayas.

About Ice Stupas:

- Ice Stupas refer to the artificial glaciers which freeze and hold the water that keeps flowing and wasting away down the streams and into the rivers throughout the winter. Instead, this ice will melt in the springtime, just when the fields need watering.
- The idea of the Ice Stupa project was conceptualised by HIAL (Himalayan Institute of Alternatives) founder Sonam Wangchuk to reduce problems of Ladakhi farmers in spring.
- This is achieved by freezing the stream water vertically in the form of huge ice towers or cones of 30 to 50m height that look very similar to the local sacred mud structures called Stupa or Chorten. These ice mountains can be built right next to the village itself where the water is needed. Very little effort or investment would be needed except for laying one underground pipeline from a higher point on the stream to the outskirts of the village.
- Water always maintains its level. Therefore, water piped from 60m upstream would easily rise close to 60m up from ground when it reaches the village. Water is made to fall from that height in cold Ladakhi winter nights when it is -30 to -50°C outside (with wind chill factor). The water would freeze by the time it reaches the ground and slowly form a huge cone or Ice Stupa roughly 30 to 50m high.
- Since these ice cones extend vertically upwards towards the sun, they receive fewer of the sun's rays per the volume of water stored; hence, they will take much longer to melt compared to an artificial glacier of the same volume formed horizontally on a flat surface.

Need:

- Leh lies in the cold desert region and most villages in the region face acute water shortage, particularly during the two crucial months of April and May when there is little water in the streams whereas in June there is an excess of water and

even flash flooding due to the fast melting of the snow and glaciers in the mountains.

- By September all farming activities end and yet a smaller stream flow throughout the winter steadily but wastefully going into the Indus river without being of use to anybody.

Significance:

- The Ice Stupa is a survival technique that has been developed over a period. Each stupa has the capacity to store at least 30-50 lakh litres of water. This is apart from the naturally saved water in the slopes of mountains. Ice Stupas are aimed at reducing water crisis in the region and also to convey a message to the world that how the Mountain people are forced to do such innovative ideas to solve the water crises, Ice Stupas also sends a message to all the people who live in big cities to not use resources in such a way that it creates problem for mountain people.

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

13. India's first Forest-Certification Scheme gets global recognition

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The council of Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), a Geneva-based non-profit, has decided to endorse the Certification Standard for Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) developed by Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF), an Indian non-profit.

- The Certification Standard for Sustainable Forest Management developed by NCCF is the first forest-certification scheme from India to get global recognition.
- PEFC provides independent third-party certification for sustainable forest management.

Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF):

- NCCF is a non-profit organisation came into existence in January 2015 as a Society to have a globally aligned certification program developed within India and address the concerns for sustainable management of forests and the plantations, while at the same time making the Indian wood and forest fibre based industry competent globally.
- The NCCF was set up by representatives of forest-based industries, non-profits, forest auditors and

government forest departments with an aim to set standards for certifying India's forests, their products and their sustainable management.

- The NCCF's forest certification scheme is aimed to improve India's forest management regime that is often criticised for various issues ailing the sector such as forest rights, forest degradation, biodiversity losses, encroachments, lack of manpower etc.

Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification:

- Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) is the world's largest forest certification system which seeks to transform the way forests are managed globally and locally to ensure that all of us can enjoy the environmental, social and economic benefits that forests offer.

Certification Standard for Sustainable Forest Management:

- Certification Standard for Sustainable Forest Management was developed through a multi-stakeholder Standard Development Group (SDG) which involved professional foresters, forestry research and academic institutions of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (ICFRE and IIFM), business groups, forest-based industries, NGOs (social and environment related), workers and trade unions, and many more.
- The Standards evolved were India specific and was based on key elements of existing models in India such as the Bhopal India Process of the IIFM, the National Working Plan Code and the provisions contained in the National Forest Policy for the promotion of afforestation, sustainable utilization of forest products and growth of the forest-based industries.

Significance and the need for forest certification:

- Forest certification has been accepted as an efficient tool for forest management world over. Given that forests of India serve important ecological, economic and social functions that also provide livelihood to over 275 million forest dependent people of this country, there is need for certification for sustaining and enhancing these roles of forests.

What is forest certification?

- Forest certification, a global movement initiated in 1990s after Rio Earth Summit, is a market-based non-regulatory conservation tool designed to promote sustainable management of forests and trees outside forests by an independent third party.
- As several developed countries have put trade restrictions on import of non-certified timber, non-timber forest products and wood-based

goods into their countries, getting sustainable forest management certificates has become mandatory for exports.

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

14. United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Fourth Environment Assembly was held in Nairobi from 11th to 15th March 2019.

- The theme of the UNEA this year was Innovative Solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable production and consumption.
- India piloted resolutions on two important global environment issues relating to Single-use Plastics and Sustainable Nitrogen management at the fourth session of UNEA. UNEA adopted both the resolutions with consensus.

Resolution on Single-use Plastics:

- The resolution on Single-use Plastics rings the alarm about plastic waste since only nine per cent of the nine billion tonnes of plastics ever produced have been recycled and that most of it end in landfills, dumps and the environment.
- The resolution notes the important role of key sectors such as plastics producers, retailers and the consumer goods industry, as well as importers, packaging firms, transport firms, and recyclers to contribute to the reduction of plastic waste, arising from their products and activities, as well as to provide information on the impacts arising from their products and encourages innovative approaches such as the use of extended producer responsibility schemes, deposit refund schemes and other initiatives.
- The resolution also welcomes the global efforts to raise awareness about the negative impacts of plastic pollution and in that regard appreciating the 2018 World Environment Day held under the theme "beating plastic pollution" with India as its global host.

Resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management:

- The resolution recognises the multiple pollution threats resulting from anthropogenic reactive nitrogen, with adverse effects on the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments, contributing to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, while acknowledging the benefits of nitrogen.

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC: GS II, INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS, IR

- The resolution notes the initiatives like the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM), International Nitrogen Management System as a science support system for policy development across the nitrogen cycle and the initiatives taken by South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP).
- The resolution calls for options to facilitate better coordination of policies across the global nitrogen cycle at the national, regional and global levels, including consideration of the case to establish an intergovernmental coordination mechanism on nitrogen policies, based primarily on existing networks and platforms and consider the case for developing an integrated nitrogen policy, which could enhance the gravity of common cause between multiple policy domains.

About UN Environment Assembly:

- The United Nations Environment Assembly is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment. It addresses the critical environmental challenges facing the world today.
- The Environment Assembly meets biennially to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law.
- The Assembly is the governing body of the UN Environment Programme (UN Environment) and the successor of its Governing Council, which was composed of 58 member States. The UN Environment Assembly, with a universal membership, is now composed of 193 Member States.
- The United Nations Environment Assembly was created in June 2012, when world leaders called for UN Environment to be strengthened and upgraded during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also referred to as RIO+20.

Previous sessions and outcomes:

- The first and second sessions of the UN Environment Assembly tackled and adopted resolutions on major issues of illegal trade in wildlife, air quality, environmental rule of law, financing the Green Economy, the Sustainable Development Goals, and "delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".
- The Third Environment Assembly took place in Nairobi in December 2017 under the overarching theme "Towards a pollution-free planet".

15. World Trade Organisation

Source: The Hindu

Context:

Big developing countries like India, China, and Brazil are opposing the developed country's demand for ending special and differential treatment to developing countries at World Trade Organisation (WTO).

What are the issues?

- Citing the selective economic and trade data, the developed countries are trying to put an end to the special and differential treatment provided to the developing countries.
- It is a fact that big developing countries have rapidly progressed economically but still not at par with the developed countries.
- The developing countries, by submitting a paper to the WTO General Council countered the moves of developed nations.
- In the paper, they stated that the per capita economic outcomes and clear poverty levels are an indication for the continuation of special and differential treatment.
- They further showed that the gap in per capita GDP of Brazil, India, China and Indonesia with that of US and UK increased by 71% and 63% between 1994-96 and 2014-16.
- Also, the developing countries need special provisions as there are many on-going negotiations on subsidies. For example, developing countries can protect their poor fishermen by negotiating for proper fisheries subsidy.
- The developing countries submission to WTO also stated the difference in capabilities of developed and developing countries, especially in agriculture.
- In developing countries, the farm holdings are small and the majority is dependent on it for livelihood.
- The demand by the developed countries amounts to them curtailing the development of the developing nations.

Facts and Figures:

- GDP per capita of US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the EU as of 2017 was \$59,531, \$45,032, \$53,800, \$42,941, and \$33,715.
- For many developing countries, these numbers were below \$10000.

- As per UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the world's undernourished people are in countries like India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Tanzania, Uganda, Philippines, and Brazil.

Special and Differential Treatment:

- These are special provisions provided to developing countries under WTO agreements. These include:
 1. Developing countries are allowed to take a longer time for implementing commitments and agreements of the WTO.
 2. Special measures to improve trading opportunities for developing countries.
 3. WTO Member countries are required to safeguard the trade interests of developing countries.
 4. Provide support to developing countries to handle trade disputes, and implementing technical standards.
- In the Doha Declaration, it was agreed by all the member countries that special and differential treatment provisions are integral to WTO agreements and review them to strengthen them.
- In Bali Ministerial 2013, a mechanism was established to review and analyze these special provisions.
- The Committee on Trade and Development (CTD) of the WTO is mandated to look into the matter.

Way Ahead:

- Since the beginning of the trade negotiations in the Uruguay round, the developed countries have tried to undermine the development aspirations of the developing countries.
- They tried to safeguard their trade interests but have been effectively thwarted by the developing nations.
- For India, it is still a long way to reconsider the special and differential provisions.
- The country has the largest under-nourished population in the world and its per capita is much lower than the developed countries.
- Its developmental needs call for retaining the special provisions of WTO agreements.

TOPIC: GS II, BILATERAL RELATION

16. Rise in Indians with Visa

Source: PIB

Why in news:

- The number of Indians issued EB-5 visas in the US has gone up by three times in the last two years.

- The number of EB-5 visas issued increased by 293% in 2018, compared to 2016. 585 visas were issued in fiscal 2018, during 12-month period that ended last September, compared to 174 in fiscal 2017 and 149 in fiscal 2016.

About EB-5 visas:

- Investment around Rs. 7cr must to apply for EB-5 visa.
- EB-5 visa was created under the Immigration Act, 1990.
- It is an employment-based fifth preference category Visa, known as 'cash for green card'.
- One can apply for EB-5 visa by investing at least Rs. 7cr in a business, which employs minimum ten Americans.
- People generally invest in regional centers rather than opening their own businesses and apply for permanent residence after holding the conditional visa for 21-months.
- EB-5 applications increased as obtaining H-1B visas became difficult.
- Although the current wait-time for Indians to obtain EB-5 visa is 18-30 months, it can increase depending on the approval of the pending visa applications.
- Many reports suggest that some rich families send the investment amount to their kids studying in the US so that they can get EB-5 visa.

EB-5 Visa VSH-1B Visa:

- H-1B visa needs no investment, just sponsorship from employer.
- H-1B visa, unlike EB-5 visa, does not require any investment.
- One just has to find a job with an American company, which is willing to sponsor it.
- In case an individual loses job, the visa is taken away and the person needs to go back.
- However, US President Donald Trump's anti-immigration stance has made the policies for obtaining H-1B visa pretty difficult.

India vs. China:

- Indians third in applying for EB-5 visa, after Chinese, Vietnamese.
- According to the statistics issued by the US Department of State, Indians are behind Chinese and Vietnamese "investors" to apply for EB-5 visa.
- Each year only 10,000 conditional visas are issued, with a 7% country cap.
- In case the visa quota is unused, it is redistributed among other countries.

- Currently, Chinese have a wait time of around 14 years with 8,180 pending applications.

TOPIC: GS II, BILATERAL RELATION, IR

17. Corpat

Source: PIB

Context:

33rd edition of the India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (IND-INDO CORPAT) took place at port Blair.

Key Highlights:

- The IND-INDO CORPAT Series of bilateral seek to underscore India’s peaceful presence and solidarity with friendly Maritime neighbours countries to ensure good order in the maritime domain, consolidate interoperability and strengthen existing bonds of friendship between India and Indonesia.
- During the stay in Port Blair harbour, various activities such as official calls, formal reception on board ship, sporting fixtures between both navies, ship open to visitors and professional interactions have been planned.

Role of the Indian Navy in IOR:

- Indian Naval assets have been increasingly deployed in recent times to address the maritime concerns on the region.
- In addition, as part of the Indian Government’s vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), the Indian Navy has also been involved in assisting countries in the Indian Ocean Region with EEZ Surveillance, Search and Rescue, and other capacity-building and capability-enhancement activities.
- The 33rd IND-INDO CORPAT, also coinciding with 70 years of India-Indonesia diplomatic ties, will contribute towards the Indian Navy’s efforts to consolidate inter-operability and forge strong bonds of friendship across the seas.

TOPIC: GS II, BILATERAL RELATION, IR

18. Indo Maldivian Relation

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

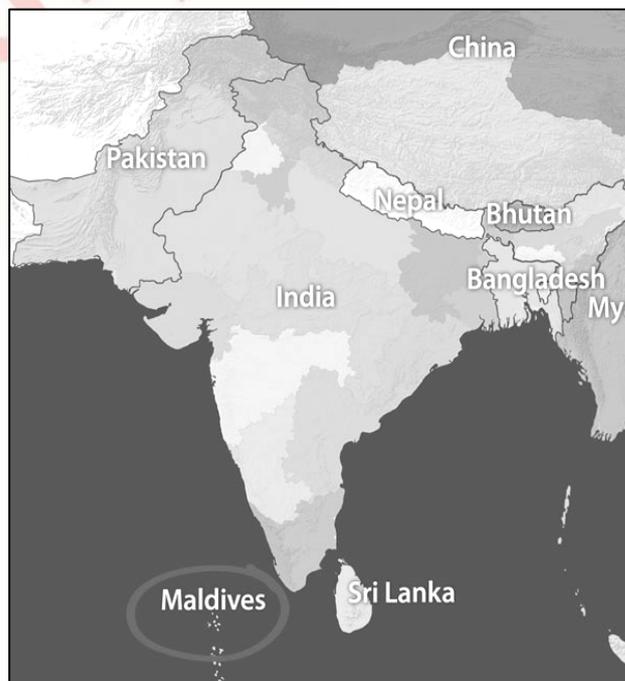
At the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives (FM), the External Affairs Minister of India (EAM) recently paid an official visit to the Maldives.

Highlights of Visit:

- The visit to the Island nation comes after the formation of the new government in Maldives

which has openly reaffirmed its commitment to India First Policy.

- On its part, India reiterated its neighborhood first policy.
- At the visit, three agreements were signed by the countries which are being seen as first full-fledged bilateral engagement between the countries.
- The three agreements include:
 1. Agreement on visa exemption for diplomats.
 2. MoU on renewable energy projects.
 3. MoU on thousand additional slots for Maldivian students for various courses in India.
- During the visit, the Minister had inaugurated the renovated Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital.
- The Maldivian government offered new land for Indian Embassy.
- Prior to the MEA’s visit, the President of Maldives made his first official visit to India signalling resetting of ties.
- During that visit, Prime Minister of India had announced \$1.4 billion grants for Maldives.



Why Maldives Visit Is Important?

- Maldives under the Presidentship of Abdullah Yameen, in cahoots with China, had cut-off ties with India.
- Many development projects of India in the country had been cancelled.
- China was given priority in developmental projects.

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III AWARENESS IN THE FIELD OF IT

- This has been viewed by many experts as part of China's 'String of Pearls' strategy.
- With India's support, the Maldivian opposition came to power and formed a democratic government.

String of Pearls Strategy of China:

- It is an unofficial geopolitical strategy of China to curtail the progress of India.
- As part of the strategy, China will establish strategic ties with the neighbouring countries of India and establish naval bases in them.
- The strategy has both military and commercial aspects to it.
- Glimpses of the strategy can be seen in the way China established the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), establishment of a military base in Djibouti, previous involvement in the politics of Maldives and Sri Lanka etc.

Countering the Strategy:

- India on its part is taking numerous measures to counter the Chinese Strategy.
- To re-establish its ties with the neighbouring Indian Ocean countries, the government has launched Project Mausam to revive cultural ties with those countries through which the old monsoon sea routes fall.
- The country constantly conducts military and naval exercises with major Indian Ocean littoral countries.
- In economic arena, India's commercial interests generally follow the economic interest of the host nations and creates a win-win situation.
- Unlike China, the loans provided by India are soft loans with low interests.
- Also, India's strong ties with major countries like France, USA and Australia are thwarting any misadventure of China in the region.

India-Maldives Ties:

- Since independence from the British, the ties between the two countries have been cordial barring particular times when the local political leaders fell into the influence of China and Pakistan.
- For India, ties with Maldives is of strategic significance in the Indian Ocean.
- It is why India will continue its goodwill with Maldives in the future as well.

19. National Supercomputing Mission (NSM)

Source: The Hindu, PIB

Why in news:

IIT Kharagpur has signed an MoU with Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) to set up a 1.3 Petaflop high-performance computing facility and data centre funded under the National Supercomputing Mission.

- The new supercomputing system would be used for specific challenge domains like cryptography, chemistry, molecular dynamics, drug discovery, artificial intelligence and data sciences where the new system would be utilized.
- **Peta Flop:** Peta Flop is the measurement of computing power based on the frequency of mathematical calculations that can be done per second.

About National Supercomputing Mission (NSM):

- National Supercomputing Mission, approved in 2015, is being implemented and steered jointly by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY).
- The Mission envisages empowering national academic and R&D institutions spread over the country by installing a vast supercomputing grid comprising of more than 70 high-performance computing facilities.
- These supercomputers will also be networked on the National Supercomputing grid over the National Knowledge Network (NKN). The NKN is another programme of the government which connects academic institutions and R&D labs over a high speed network.
- The Mission includes development of highly professional High Performance Computing (HPC) aware human resource for meeting challenges of development of these applications.

Significance of Supercomputers:

- World-wide supercomputing facilities have enabled countries in their S&T capabilities in areas such as designing vehicles, aeroplanes, massive structures like high rise buildings and bridges, infrastructure, discovery of new life saving drugs, discovery and extraction of new energy sources including oil, natural gas etc.

- Over the years, supercomputers have benefitted mankind in several ways. Weather prediction has reached accuracy of forecast as well as real time tracking of natural phenomenon. Timely warning of cyclones in the recent past have saved many lives and property. The Mission aims to further such capabilities beyond current levels.

C-DAC:

- Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) is a premier R&D organisation of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

20. Pulsars

Source: Indian Express

Why in news:

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has discovered a pulsar speeding through space.

- This pulsar is dubbed PSR J0002+6216 (J0002 for short) and sports a radio-emitting tail pointing directly towards the expanding debris of a recent supernova explosion.

More about the discovery:

- NASA found the pulsar hurtling through space at nearly four million kilometres an hour. The speed of the pulsar in the space is so fast that it could travel the distance between the Earth and the Moon in just six minutes.
- Pulsar J0002 was discovered in 2017 by a citizen-science project called Einstein@Home, which uses time on the computers of volunteers to process Fermi gamma-ray data.
- Located about 6,500 light years away in the constellation Cassiopeia, J0002 spins 8.7 times a second, producing a pulse of gamma rays with each rotation. The pulsar lies about 53 light years from the centre of a supernova remnant called CTB 1.
- Its rapid motion through interstellar gas results in shock waves that produce the tail of magnetic energy and accelerated particles detected at radio wavelengths using the Very Large Array (VLA).

What is a pulsar?

- Pulsar is a celestial object that emits regular pulses of radio waves and other electromagnetic radiation at rates of up to one thousand pulses per second.
- Pulsars are superdense, rapidly spinning neutron stars left behind when a massive star explodes.

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

21. RBI categorises IDBI Bank as private sector lender

- IDBI Bank has been categorised as a 'private sector bank' for regulatory purposes by Reserve Bank of India consequent upon LIC acquiring 51% of the total paid-up equity share capital of the bank.
- IDBI Bank has been under the prompt corrective action framework of RBI that bans it from corporate lending and branch expansions, salary hikes and other regular activities.
- However, the lender has charted out a revival strategy to bring banking and insurance under one roof, along with its new owner Life Insurance Corporation (LIC).

22. YONO Cash

- The State Bank of India has launched the YONO Cash service for its customers which will allow them to withdraw cash from ATMs without their debit cards.
- A part of SBI's digital banking platform, You Only Need One (YONO), the cardless cash withdrawal service will be available across 16,500 ATMs of the bank in the country. Such SBI ATMs will be called YONO Cash Point.
- The initiative will address concern of using debit card at the ATMs for cash withdrawals by eliminating possible risk associated with it.

How to withdraw cash using YONO Cash service:

- SBI customers can use the YONO app on their smartphones to withdraw cash from SBI ATMs, or YONO Cash Points, without using their debit and credit cards. After installing the YONO app on their phones, SBI account holders will have to set a 6-digit YONO PIN for withdrawing cash.
- Once a request for withdrawing cash is placed, a 6-digit code will be sent to the user's phone via SMS, which will then have to be entered into a YONO Cash Point.

23. Kazakhstan renames capital Astana after ex-president

- Kazakhstan has renamed its capital Astana to Nursultan to honour outgoing leader Nursultan Nazarbayev.
- Mr Nazarbayev served nearly 30 years as leader of the oil-rich nation.

24. Bomb Cyclone

- The bomb cyclone swept has through the US Great Plains resulting in blizzard conditions, hurricane-like winds, snow and heavy rain and subsequent flooding.
- Bomb Cyclone or bombogenesis refer to a rapidly intensifying area of low-pressure winter storm when there is a pressure drop by at least 24 millibars in 24 hours. The decrease of the pressure intensifies the storm. This pressure drop intensification and subsequent winter storms result in strong winds, beach erosion and coastal flooding, especially with high tide.
- Bombogenesis storm can be tropical or non-tropical and proximity to a large body of water, particularly an ocean, during cold months contributes to the creation of a bomb cyclone.
- Bomb Cyclone is caused by a collision of warm air and cold air which develop into rotating storm-like pattern and lead to an explosive deepening of pressure. Worldwide about 40 to 50 'bomb cyclones brew each year.

25. Cyclone Idai

- Tropical Cyclone Idai has caused huge deaths and economic losses in Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.
- Cyclone Idai made landfall on Mozambique and later moved in a westerly direction. Idai is the deadliest Tropical cyclone witnessed in 2019.
- Idai originated from a tropical depression that formed off the eastern coast of Mozambique and made landfall in Mozambique. The depression later reemerged into the Mozambique Channel and was upgraded into Moderate Tropical Storm.

26. TROPEX

- Annual Theatre Level Readiness and Operational Exercise (TROPEX) recently concluded.

About TROPEX:

- TROPEX 2019 is the largest maritime exercise of the Indian Navy was conducted in the month of February in the Arabian Sea and North Indian Ocean.
- It was the largest in terms of geographical extent covering the IOR, and also with regard to number of units participating.
- About 60 ships of Indian Navy, 12 ships of Indian Coast Guard and 60 aircraft participated in TROPEX 19.

- The exercise also included a Tri-services Amphibious Exercise that saw the participation of Army and Air Force personnel and assets.
- As a prelude to TROPEX, the largest coastal defence exercise over codenamed 'Sea Vigil', was conducted on 22 and 23 Jan 19 with participation of all coastal states and union territories along with all maritime stake holders.
- Overall, the exercise validated the Navy's readiness and capability to meet various mandated roles, in support of national objectives.

27. Africa-India Field Training Exercise

- The inaugural Africa-India Field Training Exercise-2019 for India and African nations called AFINDEX-19 scheduled from 18 March to 27 March 2019 started with a grand opening ceremony on 18 March 2019 at Aundh Military Station, Pune.

About AFINDEX-19:

- The aim of the exercise is to practice the participating nations in planning and conduct of Humanitarian Mine Assistance and Peace Keeping Operations under Chapter VII of United Nations Peace Keeping Operations.
- The exercise will focus on exchange of best practices between the participating nations, team building and tactical level operations in conduct of United Nations mandated tasks to include establishment of a new mission, sitting of a United Nations Headquarters for Peace Keeping operations, sitting of Military Observer sites during the peace keeping missions, protection of civilians, nuances of standing combat deployment, convoy protection, patrolling aspects and aspects related to Humanitarian Mine Assistance.
- Contingents of the 17 African Nations i.e. Benin, Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe came together for the opening ceremony along with a contingent of Maratha Light Infantry representing India.

28. KUSUM Scheme

- The Government of India has recently approved scheme for farmers for installation of solar pumps and grid connected solar power plants.
- Administrative Approval for the scheme has been issued by the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) on 08.03.2019. DISCOMs and State Nodal agencies shall be implementing this scheme for which the detailed guidelines will be issued shortly.

About KUSUM Scheme:

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has formulated a Scheme ‘Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (KUSUM)’. The Scheme is currently under the process of seeking approval.

The proposal on KUSUM Scheme provides for:

- Installation of grid-connected solar power plants each of Capacity up to 2 MW in the rural areas;
- Installation of standalone off-grid solar water pumps to fulfill irrigation needs of farmers not connected to grid;
- Solarisation of existing grid-connected agriculture pumps to make farmers independent of grid supply and also enable them to sell surplus solar power generated to DISCOM and get extra income.

29. Exercise Mitra Shakti VI

- The joint exercise for the year 2018-19 will be conducted from 26 March to 08 April 2019 in Sri Lanka.

About Mitra Shakti VI:

- Exercise MITRA SHAKTI is conducted annually as part of military diplomacy and interaction between armies of India & Sri Lanka.
- The aim of the exercise is to build and promote close relations between armies of both the countries and to enhance ability of joint exercise commander to take military contingents of both nations under command.
- The exercise will involve tactical level operations in an international Counter Insurgency and

Counter Terrorist environment under United Nations mandate.

- Exercise MITRA SHAKTI-VI will go a long way in further cementing relationship between both the nations and will act as a catalyst in bringing synergy and cooperation at grassroots levels between both the armies.

30. LIMA 2019

- Indian Air Force to participate in Langkawi International Maritime Aero Expo (LIMA) 2019.

About LIMA:

- Langkawi International Maritime Aero Expo (LIMA-2019) is planned in Langkawi, Malaysia from 26 March 2019 to 30 March 2019.
- Indian Air Force is participating in the Maritime Aero Expo for the first time, during which it will showcase its indigenously developed LCA fighter aircraft.
- Participation of IAF in LIMA-2019 will provide an opportunity to air-warriors to interact with their Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) counterparts and foster close relationship between the two services.
- This will serve as a foundation for any future interaction with the Malaysian Air Force. It will also provide an opportunity to RMAF to assess the capabilities of LCA.

31. BEMPU

- Bempu, an eight-gram bracelet, is made in India Hypothermia alert device and it was invented in 2016.

<p>BABY KOL KILUK</p>	<p>RECHARGEABLE VERSION SOON</p>
<p>In PNG, the bracelet is called ‘baby kol kiluk’ (baby cold watch). Unicef is using the bracelets for preventive management of hypothermia under its project, ‘Saving lives spreading smiles’ for early essential newborn care.</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">Pic: Unicef</p>	<p>Ratul Narain said they are working on improving the product’s battery life. “Most babies don’t need monitoring after 30 days as they grow and put on weight. However, very small and critical babies need a second band after 30 days. The issue is the size of the battery, which is made to suit small babies. The battery makes up for most of the bracelet and it’s tough to pack more battery in it,” he explained.</p>
	<p>Narain said efforts are on to reduce the cost. “Now that we have achieved volume, we have been able to lower the price for governments and donor partners to Rs 1,250. To lower the cost further, we are launching a rechargeable bracelet in August that can be used for multiple babies. The effective price per baby would be less than Rs 100,” Narain said. So far, 15,000 units of Bempu bracelets have been used across the world.</p>
<p>FOR TIMELY ALERT: Bempu is a made-in-India hypothermia alert device and was innovated in 2016</p>	

Key Facts:

- Currently, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is using the device extensively in PNG, in southwestern Pacific to save newborns from extreme cold and sudden drop in temperature.
- The facility has so far been used largely in Henganofi district, Eastern Highlands province of the country.
- It was used for children with less than 2.5kg birth weight.
- Eastern Highlands province was chosen for the pilot as it's one of the coldest terrains in PNG.

Question:

1. Explain the concept of reverse migration and its repercussions. Discuss the various factors that are forcing the same, keeping the recent trend of migration.
2. Highlighting the key features of RTI act 2005 how far do you agree that political parties be included under the purview of RTI act?
3. Discuss the role and objectives of the Social Media Platforms and Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) in context of ensuring free, fair & ethical usage of Social Media Platforms to maintain the integrity of the electoral process.
4. Oral communication is more effective, time efficient and environment-friendly. In the light of above statement, discuss the steps taken by the Central Board of Secondary Education towards improving the oral communication, highlighting their significance.
5. Do you think that the Lokpal desired transparency in the work of public servants? Also explain the Jurisdiction of Lokpal in India.
6. Do you agree that there is differential treatment to developing countries at World Trade Organisation (WTO)? Justify your opinion with examples.
7. The IND-INDO CORPAT Series of bilateral seek to underscore India's peaceful presence and solidarity with friendly Maritime neighbours countries to ensure good order in the maritime domain, consolidate interoperability and strengthen existing bonds of friendship between India and Indonesia. Comment.
8. Do you think that the 'String of Pearls' is an unofficial geopolitical strategy of China to curtail the progress of India? Justify your opinion with examples.