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I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS II, PARLIAMENT AND STATE LEGISLATURES – STRUCTURE, FUNCTIONING, CONDUCT OF BUSINESS, POWERS

1. The President's address to both Houses of Parliament

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The President recently addressed to the joint sitting of Parliament at the beginning of the Budget Session of this year.

Constitutional requirement:

- Article 87(1): "At the commencement of the first session after each general election to the House of the People and at the commencement of the first session of each year the President shall address both Houses of Parliament assembled together and inform Parliament of the causes of its summons."
- Originally, the Constitution required the President to address both Houses of Parliament at the commencement of "every session". This requirement was changed by the First Amendment to the Constitution.
- The President's speech essentially highlights the government's policy priorities and plans for the upcoming year.
- It is drafted by the Cabinet, and provides a broad framework of the government's agenda and direction.

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

2. Banning Unregulated Deposit Schemes and Chit Funds (Amendment) Bill, 2018

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Union Cabinet recently gave its approval to move official amendments to the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018, pursuant to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF).
- The amendments aim to strengthen the Bill in its objective to effectively tackle the menace of illicit deposit taking activities in the country, and prevent such schemes from duping poor and gullible people of their hard earned savings.

Key provisions of the Bill:

- The Bill bans unregulated deposit taking activities altogether, by making them an offence ex-ante rather than the existing legislative-cum-regulatory framework which only comes into effect ex-post with considerable time lags.
- Creation of three different types of offences, namely, running of Unregulated Deposit Schemes, fraudulent default in Regulated Deposit Schemes, and wrongful inducement in relation to Unregulated Deposit Schemes.
- Severe punishment and heavy pecuniary fines to act as deterrent.
- Provisions for disgorgement or repayment of deposits in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally.
- Attachment of properties/assets by the Competent Authority, and subsequent realization of assets for repayment to depositors.
- Clear-cut time lines have been provided for attachment of property and restitution to depositors.
- Creation of an online central database, for collection and sharing of information on deposit-taking activities in the country.

About "Deposit Taker" and "Deposit":

- "Deposit Takers" include all possible entities (including individuals) receiving or soliciting deposits, except specific entities such as those incorporated by legislation.
- "Deposit" is defined in such a manner that deposit-takers are restricted from camouflaging public deposits as receipts, and at the same time, not to curb or hinder acceptance of money by an establishment in the ordinary course of its business.

What is the need?

- To deal with the menace of illicit deposit taking schemes, as in the recent past, there have been rising instances of people in various parts of the country being defrauded by illicit deposit taking schemes.
- The worst victims of these schemes are the poor and the financially illiterate, and the operations of such schemes are often spread over many States.

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

3. Government to set up unified authority for regulating financial services in IFSCs

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Union Cabinet has recently approved

establishment of a unified authority for regulating all financial services in International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) in India through International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019.

- The first IFSC in India has been set up at GIFT City, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

Issues of unified authority:

- Currently, the banking, capital markets and insurance sectors in IFSC are regulated by multiple regulators, i.e. RBI, SEBI and IRDAI.
- The dynamic nature of business in the IFSCs necessitates a high degree of inter-regulatory coordination. It also requires regular clarifications and frequent amendments in the existing regulations governing financial activities in IFSCs.
- The development of financial services and products in IFSCs would require focussed and dedicated regulatory interventions.
- Therefore, a unified financial regulator for IFSCs in India would provide world class regulatory environment to financial market participants. This also be essential from an ease of doing business perspective.
- The unified authority would also provide the much needed impetus to further development of IFSC in India in-sync with the global best practices.

Main features of the Bill:

- **Management of the Authority:** The Authority shall consist of a Chairperson, one Member each to be nominated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), two members to be nominated by the Central Government and two other whole-time or full-time or part-time members.
- **Functions:**
 - (a) regulate all such financial services, financial products and FIs in an IFSC which has already been permitted by the Financial Sector Regulators for IFSCs.
 - (b) regulate such other financial products, financial services or FIs as may be notified by the Central Government from time to time.
 - (c) recommend to the Central Government such other financial products, financial services and financial institutions which may be permitted in the IFSCs.
 - (d) **Powers of the Authority:** All powers exercisable by the respective financial sector regulatory (viz. RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, and PFRDA etc.) under the

respective Acts shall be solely exercised by the Authority in the IFSCs in so far as the regulation of financial products, financial services and FIs that are permitted in the IFSC are concerned.

About IFSC:

- An IFSC enables bringing back the financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centers by Indian corporate entities and overseas branches / subsidiaries of financial institutions (FIs) to India by offering business and regulatory environment that is comparable to other leading international financial centers in the world like London and Singapore.
- It would provide Indian corporates easier access to global financial markets. IFSC would also compliment and promote further development of financial markets in India.

Services of IFSC:

- Fund-raising services for individuals, corporations and governments.
- Asset management and global portfolio diversification undertaken by pension funds, insurance companies and mutual funds.
- Wealth management.
- Global tax management and cross-border tax liability optimization, which provides a business opportunity for financial intermediaries, accountants and law firms.
- Global and regional corporate treasury management operations that involve fund-raising, liquidity investment and management and asset-liability matching.
- Risk management operations such as insurance and reinsurance.
- Merger and acquisition activities among trans-national corporations.

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

4. Abolition of Ombudsman for direct, indirect taxes

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime minister recently has approved the proposal for abolition of Institution of Income-Tax Ombudsman and Indirect Tax Ombudsman.

Details of the topic:

- The approval comes in the wake of alternative complaint redressal mechanisms chosen by public and the institution of Ombudsman could not

prove to be more effective than regular existing parallel channels of grievance redressal.

- The Institution of Income-Tax Ombudsman was created in the year 2003 to deal with grievances of public related to settlement of complaints relating to Income Tax. However, the Institution of Ombudsman failed to achieve its objectives.
- It was observed that institution of new complaints have in turn fallen to single digits. Also, tax payers started preferring alternate methods of grievance redressal like CPGRAMS (Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System), Aaykar Seva Kendras etc. further, it was also decided in 2011 to close vacant offices of Indirect Tax Ombudsman.

About the Ombudsman:

- It was established for resolution of complaints relating to the Income Tax Department like an overdue refund.
- It was autonomous and hence independent of the jurisdiction of the Income tax department.

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

5. National Register of Citizens

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The National Register of Citizens exercise is among the most ambitious experiments the Indian state has undertaken.
- The census is, of course, conducted every decade, on a national level and gives the state a window into the size and nature of Indian population. But the NRC is a unique exercise for the onus to prove citizenship lies with the citizens. They have to, through tedious documentary evidence, show how they have come to be citizens of India living in Assam.

About National Register of Citizens (NRC) of Assam:

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is the list of Indian citizens of Assam. It was prepared in 1951, following the census of 1951.
- For a person's name to be included in the updated NRC list of 2018, he/ she will have to furnish:
- Existence of name in the legacy data: The legacy data is the collective list of the NRC data of 1951 and the electoral rolls up to midnight of 24 March 1971.
- Proving linkage with the person whose name appears in the legacy data.
- The process of NRC update was taken up in Assam as per a Supreme Court order in 2013. In order to

wean out cases of illegal migration from Bangladesh and other adjoining areas, NRC updation was carried out under The Citizenship Act, 1955, and according to rules framed in the Assam Accord.

- All cases referred by the police are heard by Foreigner's Tribunals (FTs). Earlier, retired judges were appointed to these tribunals.

Distressing and Frightening cycle:

- The official presumption that people residing in Assam areas are foreigners has reduced several million of these highly impoverished, mostly rural, powerless and poorly lettered residents to a situation of helplessness and extreme poverty, destitution, hardship.
- It has also caused them abiding anxiety and uncertainty about their futures. They are required to convince a variety of usually hostile officials that they are citizens, based on vintage documents which even urban, educated, middle-class citizens would find hard to muster.
- And even when one set of officials is finally satisfied, another set can question them. And sometimes the same official is free again to send them a notice, starting the frightening cycle afresh.

Much Tougher on women:

- Women are especially in danger of exclusion from the citizenship register. Typically, they have no birth certificates, are not sent to school, and are married before they become adults.
- Therefore, by the time their names first appear in voters lists, these are in the villages where they live after marriage, which are different from those of their parents.
- They are told that they have no documents to prove that they are indeed the children of the people they claim are their parents. There were cases of being excluded from citizenship on this ground alone.

Illegal Immigrants:

- Impoverished migrant workers often travel to other districts of Assam in search of work, as construction workers, road-builders and coal-miners.
- In the districts to which they migrate, the local police frequently record their names as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.
- The police then mark them out as illegal immigrants. They receive notices from foreigner's tribunals located in districts where they might have worked years earlier, far away from their home districts they have to travel to for every hearing, adding further to their costs.

About “D-voters”:

- Another process began in the mid-1990s when the then Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan, as a one-time measure, directed officials to identify “doubtful voters” by marking a “D” against their names on the voters’ list.
- This would temporarily bar them from voting or standing for elections, until an inquiry was completed.
- But this temporary measure became permanent. The power was vested permanently with junior officials who could doubt the citizenship of any person at any time without assigning any reason.
- Those with the dreaded “D” beside their names had no recourse for appeal under the rules, with years passing without any inquiry.

Challenges:

- No person in any one of the testimonies that we heard was given legal aid by the state, which is bound to deploy lawyers paid by the state to fight their cases in the Foreigner’s Tribunals (FTs) and higher courts.
- People instead spoke of panic spending, of enormous amounts of money to pay lawyers, as well as for costs of travel of witnesses who they bring with them to testify in their favour. For this, they have had to sell all their assets or borrow from private moneylenders.
- Even if a person finds her name in the NRC, the police can still refer her case to an FT as an election official can even deem her to be a “D”-voter.
- Article 20 of the Constitution includes as a fundamental right that “no person shall be prosecuted and punished for the same offence more than once”.
- But this principle has been waived for FTs. We found that even after an FT had confirmed a person to be an Indian citizen, another FT and often the same FT can again issue notice to the same person to prove her legitimate citizenship once more.
- A person is never be allowed to feel secure that the state has finally accepted that she is an Indian citizen.

Conclusion:

- Now people have to bear the entire burden of proving citizenship on their shoulders and the arbitrary and opaque multiple forums to which they are summoned. The large majority of them are poorly educated and very impoverished, doing low-paid work such as drawing rickshaws, or working as domestic work or farm labour. People deprived of both education and resources are

caught in a complex, bizarre, complicated, frightening bureaucratic maze from which they find it hard to emerge.

- Trapped at the crossroads of history, people destinies depend on institutions and government officials that treat them with undisguised hostility and bias. There are indeed few parallels anywhere in the world of the state itself producing statelessness on the scale and in the manner that it is doing in Assam.

II. ECONOMY

TOPIC: GS III, GOVERNMENT BUDGETING

6. Best Practices in Budget Formulation

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Transparency International conducted a survey to analyse the best practices followed by the states in the Budget Formulation.

- The survey was based on 4 parameters which include public disclosure, budgetary process, post-budget fiscal management and efforts to make the budget more transparent and citizen-friendly.

Findings of the Survey:

- The top slot in the survey was occupied by Assam. Assam was followed by Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.
- Meghalaya, Manipur and Punjab figured in the bottom list.
- Assam is the only state out of the 29 states and 2 UTs, which has published a Citizens Budget in the public domain. Also, the government of Assam is the only government that has conducted budget awareness campaigns across 17 districts.

Transparency International:

- It is an international non-governmental organization based in Berlin, Germany.
- It was founded in 1993 by a group of individuals who decided to take up a stance against corruption.
- The Corruption Perception Index is the most widely used indicator of corruption worldwide.

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY AND ISSUES RELATED TO PLANNING

7. Prompt Corrective Action Framework

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has lifted the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework operational curbs

on Bank of India (BoI), Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) and Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC).

- The PCA restrictions were lifted after these banks provided a written commitment that they would comply with the norms of minimum regulatory capital, net NPAs (Non-performing Assets) and leverage ratio on an ongoing basis.
- These Banks have also apprised RBI of the structural and systemic improvements they have put in place.

About PCA:

Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework has been issued by the RBI to maintain the sound financial health of banks.

- The Reserve Bank has specified certain regulatory trigger points, as a part of prompt corrective action (PCA) Framework, in terms of three parameters, i.e. capital to risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR), net non-performing assets (NPA) and Return on Assets (RoA), for initiation of certain structured and discretionary actions in respect of banks hitting such trigger points.
- The PCA framework is applicable only to commercial banks and not extended to co-operative banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and FMs.

What are the types of restrictions?

- There are two types of restrictions, mandatory and discretionary. Restrictions on dividend, branch expansion, directors compensation, are mandatory while discretionary restrictions could include curbs on lending and deposit.

What will a bank do if PCA is triggered?

- Banks are not allowed to renew or access costly deposits or take steps to increase their fee-based income. Banks will also have to launch a special drive to reduce the stock of NPAs and contain generation of fresh NPAs. They will also not be allowed to enter into new lines of business. RBI will also impose restrictions on the bank on borrowings from interbank market.

Impact:

1. Small and medium enterprises will have to bear the brunt due to this move by RBI. Since the PCA framework restricts the amount of loans banks can extend, this will definitely put pressure on credit being made available to companies especially the MSMEs.
2. Large companies have access to the corporate bond market so they may not be impacted immediately. It has been predicted that if more state-owned banks are brought under PCA, it will

impact the credit availability for the MSME segment.

TOPIC: GS III, ECONOMICS OF ANIMAL-REARING

8. Rashtriya Gokul Mission

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Union Finance Minister Piyush Goyal has allotted ₹750 crore to the Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM) under revised estimates for the financial year 2018-19.

- The RGM was launched in December 2014 on an outlay of ₹500 crore (2014-15 to 2016-2017) for developing and conserving indigenous breeds through selective breeding and genetically upgrading 'nondescript' bovine population.

About Rashtriya Gokul Mission:

- To conserve and develop indigenous bovine breeds, government has launched 'Rashtriya Gokul Mission'.
- The scheme comprises of two components namely National Programme for Bovine Breeding (NPBB) and National Mission on Bovine Productivity (NMBP).

Objectives of RGM:

- Development and conservation of indigenous breeds;
- Breed improvement programme for indigenous breeds so as to improve the genetic makeup and increase the stock;
- Enhancing milk production and productivity of bovine population by increasing disease free high genetic merit female population and check on spread of diseases;
- Upgrading nondescript cattle using elite indigenous breeds like Gir, Sahiwal, Rathi, Deoni, Tharparkar, Red Sindhi;
- Distribution of disease free high genetic merit bulls for natural service;
- To bring all breedable females under organised breeding through AI or natural service using germ plasm of high genetic merits;
- To arrange quality Artificial Insemination (AI) services at farmers' doorstep;
- To create e-market portal for bovine germplasm for connecting breeders and farmers;
- To increase trade of livestock and livestock products by meeting out sanitary and phyto sanitary (SPS) issues;

- To select breeding bulls of high genetic merit at a young age through application of genomics.

Implementation:

- Rashtriya Gokul Mission is implemented through the “State Implementing Agency (SIA viz Livestock Development Boards). State Gauseva Ayogs will be given the mandate to sponsor proposals to the SIA’s (LDB’s) and monitor implementation of the sponsored proposal. All Agencies having a role in indigenous cattle development will be the “Participating Agencies” like CFSPTI, CCBFs, ICAR, Universities, Colleges, NGO’s, Cooperative Societies and Gaushalas with best germplasm.

Gokul Gram:

The Rashtriya Gokul Mission also envisages establishment of integrated cattle development centres ‘Gokul Grams’ to develop indigenous breeds including upto 40% nondescript breeds.

- To promote indigenous cattle rearing and conservation in a scientific manner.
- To propagate high genetic merit bulls of indigenous breeds.
- To optimize modern Farm Management practices and promote Common Resource Management.
- To utilize animal waste in economical way i.e. Cow Dung, Cow Urine.

National Kamdhenu Breeding Centre:

- Under RGM, two “National Kamdhenu Breeding Centres” (NKBC) are being established as Centres of Excellence to develop and conserve Indigenous Breeds in a holistic and scientific manner.

Concerns:

- The RGM doesn’t address the issue of cattle past their reproductive or useful age. The government, in 2017, banned cattle slaughter, making it difficult for farmers to send away aged cattle. This raised stray cattle numbers. Although the ban was lifted later, the threat of vigilante violence has hit farmers.

TOPIC: GS III, ECONOMICS OF ANIMAL-REARING

9. Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog

Source: PIB

Why in news:

Cabinet approved the proposal for establishment of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog for Conservation protection and development of cows and their progeny.

Functions:

- The Aayog will work in collaboration with Veterinary, Animal Sciences or Agriculture University or departments or organizations of the

Central/State Government engaged in the task of research in the field of breeding and rearing of cow, organic manure, biogas etc.

- It will take up scientific activities for genetic upgradation and increasing productivity of cows.
- It will provide the policy framework and direction to the cow conservation and development programmes in the country and for ensuring proper implementation of laws with respect to the welfare of cows.

Significance:

- The setting up of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog will lead to conservation, protection and development of cattle population in the country including development and conservation of indigenous breeds.
- It will result in increased growth of livestock sector which is more inclusive, benefitting women, and small and marginal farmers.

Background:

- The creation of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog for the conservation, protection and development of cows and their progeny will provide the policy framework and direction to the cow conservation and development programmes in the country and for ensuring proper implementation of laws with respect to the welfare of cows. It is in pursuance of the announcement of setting up of the Aayog in the Union Budget 2019-20.

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

10. National Institutes of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management Bill, 2019

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Union Cabinet has approved the introduction of National Institutes of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management Bill, 2019.

- The objective of the bill is to confer the status of Institutions of National Importance to National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management (NIFTEM) at Kundli, Haryana, and the Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology (IIFPT) at Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu.

Benefits:

- The legislation would provide for functional autonomy to the institutes to design and develop courses, undertake research activities and leverage

enhanced status in their academic pursuits, so that they become world class institutes.

- The institutes would implement the reservation policy of the Government and would also undertake special outreach activities for the benefits of concerned stakeholders.
- It would enable the institutes to provide world class teaching and research experience by adopting innovative practices.

TOPIC: GS III, TRANSPORT AND MARKETING OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE AND ISSUES

11. Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs has given its approval for the creation of a corpus of Rs. 2000 crore for Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF).

About Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF):

The fund will be created with NABARD for development and up-gradation of agricultural marketing infrastructure in Gramin Agricultural Markets and Regulated Wholesale Markets.

AMIF will provide the State/UT Governments subsidized loan for their proposal for developing marketing infrastructure in 585 Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) and 10,000 Grameen Agricultural Markets (GrAMs). In these GrAMs, physical and basic infrastructure will be strengthened using MGNREGA and other Government Schemes.

States may also access AMIF for innovative integrated market infrastructure projects including Hub and Spoke mode and in Public Private Partnership mode.

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY

12. Foreign Direct Investment to India

Source: Economic Times

Why in news:

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has released the data related to the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows during April-September 2018-19.

Highlights of the data:

- The Foreign direct investment (FDI) into India was declined by 11 per cent to USD 22.66 billion during April-September period of 2018-19.
- Key sectors that received maximum foreign investment during the first six months of the fiscal include services (USD 4.91 billion), computer software and hardware (USD 2.54 billion),

telecommunications (USD 2.17 billion), trading (USD 2.14 billion), chemicals (USD 1.6 billion), and automobile industry (USD 1.59 billion).

- Singapore with the FDI of USD 8.62 billion inflow was the largest source of FDI during April-September 2018-19.
- Singapore was followed by Mauritius (USD 3.88 billion), the Netherlands (USD 2.31 billion), Japan (USD 1.88 billion), the US (USD 970 million), and UK (USD 845 million).

Concerns:

- The Foreign Direct Investment growth witnessed a five-year low growth of 3 per cent at \$ 44.85 billion in 2017-18. A decline in foreign inflows could put pressure on the country's balance of payments and may also impact the value of the rupee.

III. ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION

13. Elephant Corridors

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Asian Elephant Alliance, an umbrella initiative by five NGOs, has come together to secure 96 out of the 101 existing corridors used by elephants across 12 States in India.

- According to a recent survey, seven elephant corridors in Jharkhand, U.P., Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have already been impaired due to land use changes.

Key points:

- The joint venture is aiming at raising ₹20 million (₹187.16 crore) to secure the 96 remaining elephant corridors, old and new, in the next ten years.
- The alliance joined hands to raise the mammoth sum as money was the main constraint in securing the land.
- NGOs Elephant Family, International Fund for Animal Welfare, IUCN Netherlands and World Land Trust have teamed up with Wildlife Trust of India's (WTI) in the alliance.

About Elephant Corridors:

- Elephant corridors are narrow strips of land that connect two large habitats of elephants. Elephant corridors are crucial to reduce animal fatalities due to accidents and other reasons. So, fragmentation of forests makes it all the more important to preserve migratory corridors.

Why protect elephant corridors?

- The movement of elephants is essential to ensure that their populations are genetically viable. It also helps to regenerate forests on which other species, including tigers, depend.
- Nearly 40% of elephant reserves are vulnerable, as they are not within protected parks and sanctuaries. Also, the migration corridors have no specific legal protection.
- Forests that have turned into farms and unchecked tourism are blocking animals' paths. Animals are thus forced to seek alternative routes resulting in increased elephant-human conflict.
- Weak regulation of ecotourism is severely impacting important habitats. It particularly affects animals that have large home ranges, like elephants.

Way forward:

- Efforts should be to expand elephant corridors, using the successful models within the country. This includes acquisition of lands using private funds and their transfer to the government. Ending human interference in the pathways of elephants is more a conservation imperative.

About Gaj Yatra:

- Gaj Yatra is 15-month-long national campaign aimed to protect elephants, India's national heritage animal in 12 elephant range states.
- It was launched in August 2017 by Environment and Forest Minister Harsh Vardhan on the occasion of World Elephant Day 2017 (observed on August 12).
- The campaign is being led by Wildlife Trust of India (WTI).
- It aims to involve people from all walks of life in conservation of elephants. Under this campaign, WTI is securing 101 elephant corridors across in 12 elephant range states through its Right to Passage project, in partnership with Union government's Project Elephant, state forest departments and various NGOs. The aim this project is to rehabilitate people affected by man-elephant conflict in corridor areas while ensuring uninterrupted movement of elephants between key habitats.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION

14. Flamingo Sanctuary

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

A committee, chaired by Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan, has accorded wildlife clearance to the

Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed train corridor that encroaches upon a flamingo sanctuary and the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, the home to leopards, in Mumbai.

- A wildlife clearance is a critical part of the forest clearance process.
- The proposal involves diversion of 3.2756 ha of forestland from the Thane Creek Flamingo Wildlife Sanctuary and 97.5189 ha of land close to the boundary of the forest's protected area.
- Apart from the creek, the proposal also involves diverting 32.75 ha of forestland and 77.30 ha of non-forestland from Sanjay Gandhi National Park and from 0.6902 ha of forestland and 4.7567 ha of non-forest land from Tungreshwar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Sanjay Gandhi National Park:

- Sanjay Gandhi National Park is spread over three districts – Palgar, Thane and Mumbai Suburb. The National Park is home to a number of endangered species of flora and fauna and harbours approximately 800 species of flowering plants, 45 species of mammals, 43 species of reptiles among others.

Flamingo Sanctuary:

- Western side of the Thane creek is a dedicated flamingo sanctuary. Thane Creek is home to flamingos as well as other migratory and residential bird species. It is Maharashtra's second marine sanctuary after the one at Malvan.

About Bullet Train Project:

- Largely funded by a soft loan by Japan, the Rs 1 trillion Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project has a track-length of 508 km, and will originate at the Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai and terminate at the Sabarmati, in Gujarat. The length across the State of Maharashtra will be 155.64 km 4.3 km across Dadra & Nagar Haveli. The total length across the state of Gujarat would 348.2 km and would pass through the districts of Ahmedabad, Kheda, Anand, Vadodara, Bharuch, Surat, Navsari, and Valsad in Gujarat.

TOPIC: GS I, IMPORTANT GEOPHYSICAL PHENOMENA

15. Polar Vortex

Source: India Today

Why in news:

Meteorologists have blamed a phenomenon called the 'Polar Vortex' for the bitter cold that has descended on much of the central and eastern United States.

- The cold front was forecast to hit the Midwest especially hard, with the wind chill expected to plummet to minus 50F (minus 46C) in Chicago.

- Midwest region comprises Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.
- The weather system has covered Chicago, the nation's third largest city, in ice and snow, with Lake Michigan and the Chicago River freezing.

What is Polar Vortex?

- The Polar Vortex is a large area of low pressure and cold air surrounding the Earth's North and South Poles, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which can become unstable during winter in the Northern Hemisphere.
- It always exists near the poles, but weakens in summer and strengthens in winter. The term 'vortex' refers to the counter-clockwise flow of air that helps keep the colder air near the Poles.
- Many times during winter in the northern hemisphere, the polar vortex will expand, sending cold air southward with the jet stream. This occurs fairly regularly during wintertime and is often associated with large outbreaks of Arctic air in the United States.
- There is some debate among scientists about whether polar vortices have become more frequent and, if so, what effect climate change might be having on them.
- It is not a feature that exists at the Earth's surface. Weather forecasters examine the polar vortex by looking at conditions tens of thousands of feet up in the atmosphere; however, when we feel extremely cold air from the Arctic regions at Earth's surface, it is sometimes associated with the polar vortex.

- This is not confined to the United States. Portions of Europe and Asia also experience cold surges connected to the polar vortex.

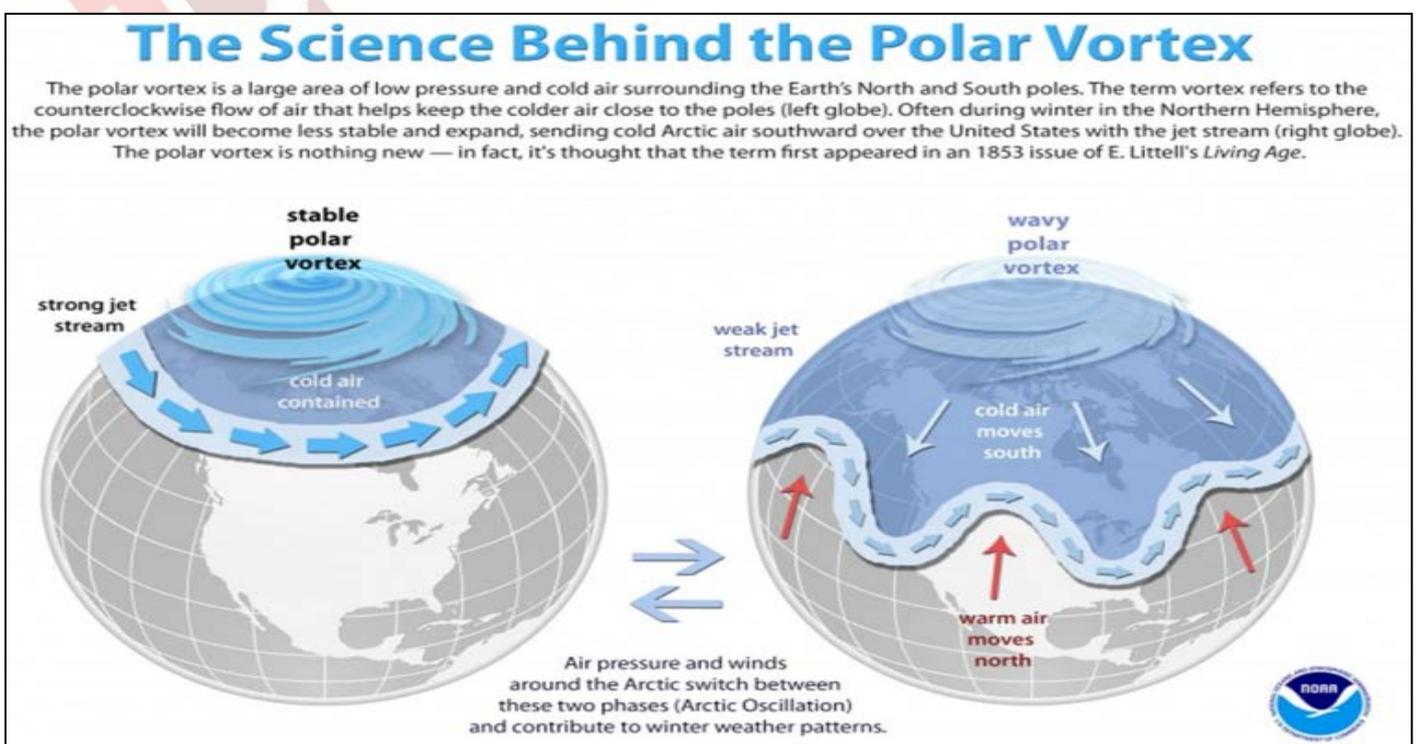
Features:

1. The polar vortex spins in the stratosphere.
2. Usually, when the vortex is strongest, cold air is less-likely to plunge deep into North America or Europe. In other words, it forms a wall that protects the mid-latitudes from cold Arctic air.
3. But occasionally, the polar vortex is disrupted and weakens, due to wave energy propagating upward from the lower atmosphere. When this happens, the stratosphere warms sharply in an event known as sudden stratospheric warming, in just a few days, miles above the Earth's surface.
4. The warming weakens the polar vortex, shifting its location somewhat south of the pole or, in some instances, 'splitting' the vortex up into 'sister vortices'.

Effects of Polar Vortex:

The split higher up in the atmosphere can give rise to both, sudden and delayed effects, much of which involves declining temperatures and extreme winter weather in the eastern US along with northern and western Europe.

- A sudden stratospheric warming also leads to a warm Arctic not only in the stratosphere but also in the troposphere as well.
- A warmer Arctic, in turn, favours more severe winter weather in the Northern Hemisphere mid-latitudes including the eastern US.



What are high and low-pressure systems?

- Not all areas have the same exact air pressure. Some areas have more pressure than their surroundings, and some areas have less.
- Those that have less pressure are called low-pressure systems. Low-pressure systems suck air into them because nature wants everything to have equal pressure. By doing this, they generally create winds and undesirable weather.
- High-pressure systems, on the other hand, have more air pressure than their surroundings. That means they are constantly pushing air away from them into the areas that have lower pressure. They are often times associated with clear blue skies.
- A polar vortex is simply a semi-permanent, massive low-pressure system that hovers over the poles of our planet.

**TOPIC: GS I, IMPORTANT
GEOPHYSICAL PHENOMENA**

16. Magnetic North Pole drifting fast towards Russia

Source: Indian Express

What's the news?

News publications across the world have been reporting that the magnetic north pole is drifting fast from the Canadian Arctic and towards Russia.

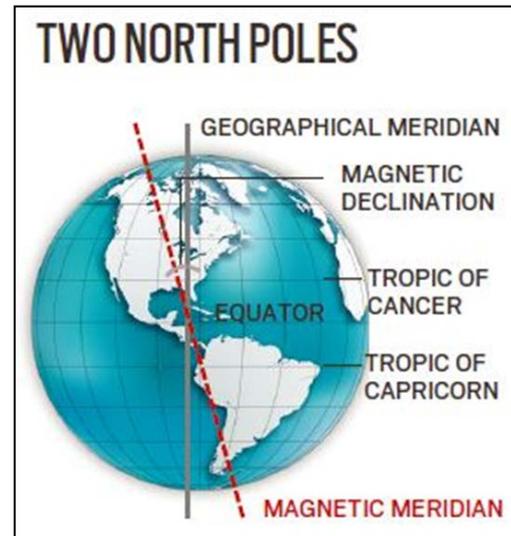
Poles of the Earth:

The Earth has two pairs of north and south poles.

- The geographic poles are defined by the axis around which the planet rotates, and are fixed.
- The Earth behaves like a giant bar magnet — well, almost — and this behaviour defines its magnetic north and south poles, which are not static. A compass points towards magnetic north.
- Geographic north pole- It is northern axis around which the earth rotates and is fixed. The North Pole is located in the middle of the Arctic Ocean.
- The Magnetic North Pole (also known as the North Dip Pole) is a point on Ellesmere Island in Northern Canada where the northern lines of attraction enter the Earth.

Origin of Earth's magnetism:

- The origin of Earth's magnetism lies in its outer core, a more than 2,000-km layer of liquid iron and some other metals like nickel that surrounds the central core, or the innermost part. This liquid iron is in constant motion due to Earth's rotation and various other reasons, and this motion produces a magnetic field.



What's the issue now?

- Currently, the magnetic north pole is located somewhere over northern Canada, a fact discovered in 1831 by Sir James Clark Ross. Since then the magnetic north pole has been moving across the Canadian Arctic towards Russia, and has moved hundreds of miles over the last several decades. This phenomenon is known as the Polar Shift Theory.
- Scientists have now realised the pace of this movement has suddenly increased, quite significantly, from about 14-15 km per year till the 1990s to about 55 km per year in the last few years. This has led to scientists updating the World Magnetic Model (WMM) that tracks this movement. It was a year ahead of schedule.

Why it is moving faster?

- The movement of liquid iron and other metals in the outer core of the Earth is known to influence the magnetic field, but this movement is chaotic and turbulent. Scientists do not fully understand how the movement happens or why.
- The study of the phenomena happening inside the earth can only be done indirectly or through computer modelling, because of the extremely hot temperatures prevailing there. Scientists hope that this acceleration in the shifting of magnetic north pole would throw some new insights into the phenomena happening deep inside the Earth's surface.

The Consequences:

- The entire transportation sector, especially aviation and shipping, depends on correctly knowing the position of magnetic north to chart out their navigation paths. Similarly, it is crucial for militaries, who need to know this for firing their missiles or for other purposes. Knowing the magnetic north is vital for a number of civilian applications as well.

- The compasses that are used in modern instrumentation are much more sophisticated, digital and more accurate. This is the reason why they need to be recalibrated to reflect the change in the magnetic north pole. This is what the unscheduled release of the WMM has done.

About the World Magnetic Model:

James Clark Ross first located magnetic north in 1831 in the scattered islands of Canada's Nunavut territory. Since then, the pole has largely marched north, traversing hundreds of miles over the last several decades.

- To keep up with all these changes, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the British Geological Survey developed what eventually became known as the World Magnetic Model.
- The model is updated every five years, with the last update in 2015. Between each update, scientists check the model's accuracy against data from ground magnetic observatories and the European Space Agency's Swarm mission—a trio of magnetic-field mapping satellites that zip around Earth 15 to 16 times each day.

IV. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPICS: GS II, IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

17. Macedonia signs NATO accession agreement

Sources: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Macedonia moved a step closer to Nato membership, signing accession papers after resolving a long-running name row with Greece.
- Macedonia has signed accession papers with NATO. The signing of accession papers allows Macedonia take part in NATO ministerial meetings as an invitee. To acquire full membership, all 29 current members must ratify the accession protocol.

Russia worried against Macedonia:

- Russia has raised concerns against Macedonia becoming part of NATO. Russia has always accused NATO of destabilising the Balkans by pushing Macedonia and Montenegro to join NATO.
- Russia sees Balkan nations as its sphere of influence and is against NATO or any other body led by US or EU making inroads to these Balkan countries.
- Russia is mainly concerned because NATO's membership provides a guarantee of mutual

defence, provides a welcome insurance policy against possible incursions.

- Russia perceives this as an attempt by the west to contain it by making inroads to the areas which Russia considers its sphere of influence.

About North Atlantic Treaty Organization (North Atlantic Alliance):

It is an intergovernmental military alliance.

- Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949.
- Headquarters — Brussels, Belgium.
- Headquarters of Allied Command Operations — Mons, Belgium.
- It constitutes a system of collective defence whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.

Objectives:

- Political – NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.
- Military – NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defence clause of NATO's founding treaty – Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organisations.

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

18. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

Sources: the Hindu

Why in news:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is organising a meeting of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Cluster Group on Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in New Delhi.

About IORA:

- The Indian Ocean Rim Association was set up with the objective of strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean Region

- The IORA is a regional forum, tripartite in nature, bringing together representatives of Government, Business and Academia, for promoting co-operation and closer interaction among them.
- It is based on the principles of Open Regionalism for strengthening Economic Cooperation particularly on Trade Facilitation and Investment, Promotion as well as Social Development of the region.
- India, Australia, Iran, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Singapore, Mauritius, Madagascar, UAE, Yemen, Seychelles, Somalia, Comoros and Oman are among the members of IORA.

Significance of IORA:

- The existence of IORA is a reminder of the untapped potential of Indian Ocean regionalism. Nearly five decades ago, in the aftermath of decolonisation, the attempt to bring together the Indian Ocean states faltered amidst deep divisions within the littoral and due to the negative impact of the Cold War. Today, the IORA underlines the region's agency in shaping its own future.

Way ahead:

- IORA's success would depend, to a large extent, upon what the middle powers of the Indian Ocean littoral, like Indonesia, Australia and India, can do. Together the three countries have already breathed new life into an organisation that few had heard of.
- Also, India's growing sea-borne trade and a historic power shift in the Indian Ocean compel Delhi to pay greater attention to securing a sustainable regional order in the vast littoral.

TOPIC: GS II, EFFECT OF POLICIES AND POLITICS OF DEVELOPED

19. INSTEX – Instrument In Support of Trade Exchanges

Sources: The Hindu

Why in News:

- INSTEX is a payment mechanism being setup by the European Union to secure trade with Iran and skirt US sanctions after Washington pulled out of the landmark nuclear deal last May.

Key features of INSTEX:

- INSTEX will allow trade between the EU and Iran without relying on direct financial transactions.
- INSTEX is registered at Paris with an initial 3,000 Euros in the capital and a supervisory board with members from France and Germany and chaired by the UK.

- It is a project of the governments of France, Germany and Britain and will receive the formal endorsement of all 28 EU members.
- It will initially be used for non-sanctionable trade, including humanitarian goods such as medicine, food and medical devices.

Significance:

- This mechanism is the first concrete step by the EU to counter Trump's unilateral decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal.
- The launching of INSTEX is not only a matter of Iran-EU relations but also embodies a new approach by the bloc towards US policies.
- It "becomes an opportunity when it's understood as an experiment and as part of a bigger project to strengthen EU economic power."

US Reaction:

- It has warned EU that any attempt to evade its "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran would be subject to stiff penalties.

TOPICS: GS II, BILATERAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL GROUPINGS AND AGREEMENTS INVOLVING INDIA

20. Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Sources: the Hindu

Why in News:

The U.S is suspending its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty effective February 2 and will withdraw from the treaty in six months.

Recent Issues:

- US in early December announced that it would suspend its obligations under the INF treaty by Feb. 2, citing Russian "cheating," unless Moscow comes into compliance with the terms of the pact.
- The U.S. government says the new Russian missile violates provisions of the pact that ban production, testing and deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 310 to 3,400 miles.

Absence of treaty:

- It is unclear what INF-prohibited systems the United States could deploy to Europe or Asia in the near term. The U.S. military has not developed any land-based missiles within the prohibited ranges for decades and has only just started funding a new ground-launched cruise missile to match the 9M729.

- Moscow is in a very different position and could rapidly expand deployment. The number of operational 9M729 missiles has been quite limited, but released from its official obligations under the treaty, Moscow could deploy more units rapidly.
- Russia could also effectively reclassify the RS-26 Rubezh, an experimental system that has been tested just above the INF Treaty's 5,500-kilometer limit. To avoid violating the INF, Russian officials previously described the RS-26 as an intercontinental ballistic missile. However, it could form the basis for a missile of a slightly shorter range if Moscow wished to boost its INF forces — without counting it under the U.S.-Russian New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or New START, governing longer-range systems.
- This move is also likely to undermine the 2010 New START treaty governing U.S. and Russian long-range nuclear systems. The INF Treaty's demise will undercut New START by reopening questions on the relationship between intermediate and strategic systems that have been resolved for 30 years by the elimination of ground-based, intermediate-range missiles.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty:

- The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty, formally Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles) is a 1987 arms control agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union.
- Under the INF Treaty, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. agreed to eliminate within three years all ground-launched-missiles of 500-5,500 km range and not to develop, produce or deploy these in future.
- The U.S. destroyed 846 Pershing IIs and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) and the U.S.S.R., 1,846 missiles (SS-4s, SS-5s and SS-20s), along with its support facilities.

Importance:

- Under the Treaty, the two parties agreed that a whole important class of nuclear weapons would be removed from Europe, and only tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) or short-range missiles mostly deployed on the territory of Germany would remain.
- The INF Treaty for years served to mitigate fears of both parties in relation to possibility of military escalation, operational miscalculation, and helping to shift the logic of MAD [mutually assured destruction] to the higher "more sensitive" political level.

V. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

21. India's communication satellite GSAT-31

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Indian Space Research Organisation's latest communication satellite, GSAT-31 was successfully launched by Arianespace aboard its launch vehicle Ariane 5 from the spaceport in French Guiana recently.

- The Ariane-5 vehicle (Flight VA247) also carried Saudi Geostationary Satellite 1/Hellas Sat 4 along with GSAT-31.

About GSAT- 31:

- It is a telecommunications satellite designed and manufactured by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- It is India's 40th communication satellite and derives its heritage from ISROs earlier INSAT/GSAT satellite series.
- It will be placed in Geostationary Orbit (36,000 km above the equator) using its onboard propulsion system.
- It has a unique configuration of providing flexible frequency segments and flexible coverage. Hence, it will provide communication services to Indian mainland and islands.
- With a mission life of around 15 years, GSAT-31 will be used for supporting VSAT networks, Television uplinks, Digital Satellite News Gathering, DTH-television services, cellular backhaul connectivity and many such applications.
- The satellite will also be used for bulk data transfer for a host of emerging telecommunication applications.
- It will also provide wide beam coverage to facilitate communication over large oceanic region, comprising large parts of Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean, using a wide band transponder.

Objectives:

- Augment the Ku-band transponder capacity in Geostationary Orbit for at least 15 years.
- Provide continuity to operational services on some of the in-orbit satellites.
- Help bridge the digital divide in the Indian subcontinent as part of an ambitious Indian space program, whose objectives are to develop India while pursuing scientific research and planetary exploration.

India's communication satellite GSAT-31 successfully launched from French Guiana

GSAT-31, the communication satellite of India configured on ISRO's enhanced I-2K Bus, utilising the maximum bus capabilities of this type. This satellite will augment the Ku-band transponder capacity in Geostationary Orbit.

GSAT-31, launched by Ariane-5 (VA 247), will provide continuity to operational services on some of the in-orbit satellites.

The satellite derives its heritage from ISRO's earlier INSAT/GSAT satellite series. The satellite provides Indian mainland and island coverage.



GSAT-31

40th communication satellite of india

Salient Features

Lift off Mass	: 2535 kg
Spacecraft Power	: 4.7 kW
Payload	: Ku-band transponders
Coverage Area	: Indian mainland and island
Mission Life	: Around 15 years

Applications

- GSAT-31 will be used for supporting VSAT networks, Television uplinks, Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG), DTH-television services, cellular backhaul connectivity and many such applications
- The satellite also provides wide beam coverage using a wide band transponder
- Two Ku-band beacon downlink signals are transmitted by the satellite for ground tracking purpose

VI. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

22. CART-cell Therapy

- The approvals of chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapies have provided more options for select patients with non-Hodgkin lymphoma and acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), but there can be challenges on how to optimally manage the toxicities associated with this approach.

About CAR-T:

- An 11-year-old has become the first patient to receive CAR-T therapy (immunotherapy) that uses the body's own cells to fight cancer.
- CAR-T is a personalized form of cancer treatment.
- CAR-T involves removing immune cells and modifying them in a laboratory so they can recognize cancer cells.
- Immunotherapy is treatment that uses your body's own immune system to help fight cancer
- First, the patient has blood removed and the white blood cells are separated out, with the rest of the blood being returned to the patient.
- A harmless virus is used to insert genes into T-cells, a special type of immune cell.
- These genes cause the T-cells to add a hook on to their surface, known as a chimeric antigen receptor (CAR).
- These engineered CAR-T cells - programmed to recognize and destroy the patient's cancer cells - are multiplied in huge numbers and then infused back into the patient.

23. 'Eat Right India' movement

- 'Eat Right India' movement has been recently launched by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- It is a collective effort of key stakeholders and citizens and is aligned with Government's recent focus on public health through its three key programmes, namely 'Ayushman Bharat', 'Swachh Bharat Mission', and 'POSHAN Abhiyaan'. 'Swasth Bharat Yatra', a pan-India Cyclothon, is a key element of the Eat Right India movement.
- Swasth Bharat Yatra would provide the trigger for cascading the message of Eat Right India to every corner of the country.
- Food safety and healthy diets are critical in the context of India's high burden of foodborne diseases, under-nutrition, micro-nutrient

deficiencies and growing incidence of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

About Swasthya Bharath Yatra:

- Tamil Nadu has received the Swasth Bharat Yatra award under 'The Best Performing State' category recently.
- 'Swasth Bharat Yatra' is a pan-India Cyclothon and a key element of the 'Eat Right India' movement.
- It was also organized in commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- Swasth Bharat Yatra would provide the trigger for cascading the message of Eat Right India to every corner of the country.
- 'Eat Right India' movement has been launched by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The 'Eat Right India' movement is a collective effort of key stakeholders and citizens.
- It is aligned with Government's recent focus on public health through its three key programmes, namely 'Ayushman Bharat', 'Swachh Bharat Mission', and 'POSHAN Abhiyaan'.

24. IPR Culture

- Intellectual Property Rights Facilitation (IPF) Cell has been recently established under the Department of Defence Production to promote self-reliance in Intellectual Property Rights in Defence Sector.
- Several Ordnance Factories and Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) have been carrying out innovative research on the development of certain materials, components / sub-assemblies / assemblies leading to performance upgradation of the existing system / platforms.
- A need has been felt to create a structured mechanism to facilitate and encourage innovative activities with a primary objective to "Boost Intellectual Property culture" which would enhance the Intellectual Capital that is vital for encouraging in-house Research & Development in such organizations. With this objective in view, an

Promoting IPR culture in Defense sector:

- Boosting Intellectual Property culture in Defense would enhance the Intellectual Capital that is vital for the future endeavors
- The following are the steps taken to encourage in-house Research & Development in Ordnance Factories and Defense PSUs

- An Intellectual Property Rights Facilitation (IPF) Cell has been established under the Department of Defense Production.
- It is to promote self-reliance in Intellectual Property Rights in Defense Sector.
- Department of Defense Production has also launched the Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti.
- The mission aims to encourage Defense Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and Ordnance Factory Board to boost "IPR culture" in their respective organization to promote self-reliance in defense sector.
- The challenges faced by the Defense Public Sector Undertakings and Ordnance Factory Board in pursuing Intellectual Property Rights in defense sector are
 - lack of awareness
 - availability of trained manpower
 - The need to collectively appraise the challenges ahead with private sector, Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and end users.

25. Exercise RAHAT

- A display of relief operation for the time of any disaster under 'Exercise RAHAT' has been recently displayed by Indian Disaster Relief Forces, Rapid

Action Force, police and other stakeholders in Rajasthan Armed Constabulary (RAC) Ground in Kota.

- The exercise aims at highlighting importance of a synergized response by all stakeholders involved in disaster relief operation.

About Exercise RAHAT:

- 'EXERCISE RAHAT' is Joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Exercise.
- Jaipur based Sapta Shakti Command will be conducting on behalf of Indian Army
- The Joint exercise in coordination with NDMA is being conducted to synergise efforts for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.
- Representatives from Armed Forces, National Disaster Management Response Mechanism (NDMRM), SDMA Rajasthan will be participating in the exercise.

26. Parmanu Tech 2019

- The 'Parmanu Tech 2019' conference was recently organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE).
- The conference discussed issues related to Nuclear Energy and Radiation Technologies.

Question:

1. The Indian Constitution has provisions for holding joint session of the two houses of Parliament. Enumerate the occasions when this would normally happen and also the occasions when it cannot, with reasons thereof.
2. Recently cabinet approves Promulgation of Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance, 2019. Discuss its significance.
3. The Union Cabinet has approved establishment of a unified authority for regulating all financial services in International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) in India through International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019. Critically examine.
4. Why did the government decide to abolish the office of Ombudsman? Critically examine.
5. Enumerate the major points of the 'Assam accord (1985)'. How is it associated with the present issue of the National Register of Citizens?
6. Recently, Macedonia moved a step closer to Nato membership, signing accession papers after resolving a long-running name row with Greece. Discuss its significance.
7. The existence of IORA is a reminder of the untapped potential of Indian Ocean regionalism. Comment.
8. The launching of INSTEX is not only a matter of Iran-EU relations but also embodies a new approach by the bloc towards US policies. Discuss.
9. What is INF Treaty? Recently US's withdrawal from INF Treaty- Is it the End of Arms Control? Discuss.