

MONTHLY

FACTLY

EXCLUSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS FOR

PRELIMS

FEBRUARY 2019

ForumIAS

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POLITICAL AND NATIONAL ISSUES**Questions/Notes****1. National Security Act:**

News: Government of Madhya Pradesh invoked National Security Act against three men accused of killing a cow.

Facts:

- National Security Act 1980 is a preventive detention law for specific cases.
- The grounds of preventive detention include:
 - Matters related to India's security
 - Matters related to maintenance of law and order
 - Maintenance of supply of essential goods and services to the community
 - Regulating the presence of any foreigner in India and make arrangements for his expulsion
- NSA is applicable to whole of India except the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Though it is a central law, the state needs to be intimated if a person in that state has been detained under the NSA.
- The detained person can be held for up to 3 months.
- A three-person Advisory Board consisting of the High Court Judges can determine the legitimacy of any order made for more than 3 months.

2. Sedition Law:

News: Government sought a legal opinion on the Law Commission Report on the Sedition Law (124-A of the IPC).

Facts:

- The Law Commission submitted a "consultation paper" to the Centre saying that the country should not be quoted as an example of one using such regressive laws.
- It is a colonial era provision aimed at curbing any offensive actions against the government.
- Sedition is an act that brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise.
- Under sedition a person is liable to be punished with imprisonment for life or imprisonment up to three years with fine.

Other facts:

- The sedition provision comes in conflict with article 19 of the constitution, a fundamental right. There has been a constant effort to strike a balance

between the right to free speech and expression and power of State to impose reasonable restrictions (Article 19(2)).

Questions/Notes

3. Know India Programme:

News: 40 Indian Origin youth from 8 countries visited the country under the 53rd Edition of “Know India Programme”.

Facts:

- The partner states of this edition are Maharashtra and Daman & Diu.
- It is organised by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
- Its objective is of familiarizing the India Diaspora Youth, in the age group of 18-30 years, with developments and achievements made by the country and bringing them closer to the land of their ancestors.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Questions/Notes

1. Chabahar Port:

News: Afghanistan began exports to India through Chabahar port.

**Facts:**

- Chabahar Port is an India-Iran Initiative to reach out to the landlocked nation of Afghanistan and improve trade relations with it.
- The Chabahar Port is located on the Gulf of Oman and connects to the Delaram-Zaranj Highway.

Other facts:

- India-Afghanistan Air Corridor: It was announced in the Heart of Asia Conference 2016 to reduce the dependence on the Karachi Port, Pakistan.
- Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA): Under this agreement, goods originating in Afghanistan would be allowed transit upto Wagah via Pakistan and in return Afghanistan will allow Pakistan the transit route to Central Asian Republics (CARs).
- International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC): A Multi modal transport corridor signed in 2000 in St. Petersburg with Iran, Russia and India as founding members.
- It was expanded to include 11 new members: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, Belarus, Oman, and Bulgaria.
- Afghanistan is not a member state, however INSTC will boost connectivity to Afghanistan as well through Chabahar to Zaranj and Delaram.

2. Decolonization of Mauritius:

News: International Court of Justice in an advisory opinion said that Britain has to handover Chagos Archipelago to complete the process of decolonization of Mauritius.

Questions/Notes

**Facts:**

- Mauritius has maintained that Britain's "unilateral" decision to ban the right of return of Chagossians (African Tribe) and to renew the lease for the US base on Diego Garcia, one of the Chagos Islands, breached international law.
- Mauritius proposed a resolution in the UN General Assembly in 2016 to take Britain to the International Court of Justice in a dispute over sovereignty of the Chagos Islands.
- India supports Mauritius's claim over Chagos Island.
- According to Britain, the Government of Mauritius circumvents a vital principle: that a State is not obliged to have its bilateral disputes submitted for judicial settlement without its consent.

Other facts:

- It is the principal judicial organ of the UN established in 1945.
- It succeeded the Permanent Court of Justice of the League of Nations.
- It has no jurisdiction to deal with applications from individuals, NGOs or private groups.
- It rules only on the rights and obligations of States.
- The Court may entertain two types of cases:

- Contentious cases where they submit legal disputes between States to ICJ.
- Advisory proceedings where United Nations organs and specialized agencies refer requests for advisory opinions on legal questions to the court.
- It is headquartered in Peace Palace, The Hague, Netherlands.
- It comprises of 15 Judges, elected by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council for 9-year term.
- Five Judges are elected every 3 years to ensure continuity.
- India is a founding member of the ICJ.
- In 2017, India's nominee to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Dalveer Bhandari was re-elected to the fifth and the last seat of the International Court of Justice after withdrawal of Britain's candidate.

3. Geneva Convention 1949:

News: Recently, Pakistan Government was accused of violating the Geneva Convention in the treatment of Indian Air Force Pilot Abhinandan Varthaman.

Facts:

- The four Geneva Conventions and their three Additional Protocols sets out the humanitarian laws on how soldiers and civilians should be treated during the war.
- The Conventions have been ratified by all States and are universally applicable.
- Although they were adopted in 1949, on the basis of the experiences of the Second World War and three additional protocols were also adopted later on to expanded the rules.
- The provisions of the conventions apply in peacetime situations, in declared wars, and in conflicts that are not recognized as war by one or more of the parties.
- They contain stringent rules to deal with "grave breaches" as defined in the convention.
- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been mandated under the Geneva Conventions to ensure the application of international humanitarian law.

Other facts:

- International Red Cross and Red Cross Movement is a humanitarian movement with volunteers worldwide.
- It was established in 1863, and operates worldwide, helping people affected by conflict and armed violence and promoting the laws that protect victims of war.
- It is based in Geneva, Switzerland.

- It consists of various International and National organizations with common objective but are legally independent of each other.

4. World Government Summit:

News: The World Government Summit was held in Dubai, UAE.

Facts:

- It is held annually, where the Summit sets the agenda for the next generation of governments.
- It helps governments to focus on how they can harness innovation and technology to solve universal challenges facing humanity.
- It comprises a wide network of leaders of the public and private sectors, and inspires them to think collectively and creatively.

5. North Macedonia joins NATO:

News: North Macedonia recently became the 30th member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Facts:

- Macedonia was prevented from joining NATO or EU over its name as Greece cited historical concerns and opposed the use of the name "Macedonia".
- However, under the Prespa Agreement, 2018 between Greece and Macedonia, the changed name North Macedonia was adopted.

Other facts:

- NATO is a peacetime military alliance, established in 1949, consisting of members from North America and Europe.
- Twelve countries were part of the founding of NATO: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Article 5 of the treaty states that if an armed attack occurs against one of the member states, it shall be considered an attack against all members, who can then use military force against the attacking state.

6. W-GDP (Women GDP) Initiative:

News: The White House launched the W-GPD Initiative.

Facts:

- It is a government project led by Ivanka Trump.
- It aims to coordinate current programs and develop new ones to assist women in areas such as job training, financial support, and legal or regulatory reforms.
- The aim is to reach out to 50 million women in the developing world by 2025.

- The initiative aims to raise funds from public and private resources, with the U.S. Agency.
- It set up an initial fund of 50 million USD.

Questions/Notes

ForumIAS

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES**Questions/Notes****1. PM-KISAN:**

News: The Union Government has launched the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN).

Facts:

- To provide income support to all Small and Marginal land holding farmer families having cultivable land.
- Landholder farmer families with total cultivable holding upto 2 hectares shall be provided a benefit of Rs.6000 per annum per family payable in three equal installments that is every four months.
- Persons of higher economic status such as institutional land holders, former and present holder of constitutional posts, persons who paid income tax in last assessment year etc. shall not be eligible for benefits under the scheme.
- Responsibility of identifying the landholder farmer family eligible for benefits under the scheme shall be of the State/UT Government.
- The lists of eligible beneficiaries would be published at the village level.
- This is a Central Sector Scheme (CSS) and will be funded fully by the Government of India.
- A dedicated PM Kisan Portal will be launched for implementation of the scheme.

Other facts:

- A Small and Marginal landholder farmer family is defined as “a family comprising of husband, wife and minor children who collectively own cultivable land upto 2 hectare as per land records of the concerned State/UT”.

2. Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions:

News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) launched Ombudsman Scheme for Digital Transactions (OSDT) to boost customer confidence.

Facts:

- The scheme, launched under Section 18 of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- The Ombudsman for Digital Transactions is a senior official appointed by the Reserve Bank of India.
- It will provide a cost-free and expeditious complaint redressal mechanism relating to deficiency in customer services in digital transactions conducted through non-bank entities regulated by RBI.
- The Scheme also provides for an Appellate mechanism where complainant can appeal against the decision of the Ombudsman.

- The new ombudsman will work from the 21 existing offices of the Banking Ombudsman and work within the existing territorial jurisdictions.
- Ombudsman can award a Rs 1 lakh compensation in case of loss of customer's time, expenses incurred and mental agony and a maximum of Rs 20 lakh compensation is allowed.

Other facts:

- The Banking Ombudsman under the Banking Ombudsman Scheme 2006, is a quasi-judicial authority appointed by the Reserve Bank of India.
- All Scheduled Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Scheduled Primary Co-operative Banks are covered under the Scheme.

3. PM Shram-Yogi Maandhan Yojana

News: Ministry of Labour and Employment launched pension plan 'PM Shram-Yogi Maandhan Yojana' for informal workers.

Facts:

- Those unorganised workers whose monthly income is Rs 15,000/ per month or less are eligible.
- The beneficiary should belong to the age group of 18-40 years.
- He/she should not be an income tax payer.
- They shall receive minimum assured pension of Rs 3000/- per month after the age of 60 years.
- His/her spouse shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension received by the beneficiary, in case of the death of the beneficiary after 60 years of age.
- In case of death of the beneficiary before 60 years of age, his/her spouse will be entitled to join and continue the scheme by payment of regular contribution or exit the scheme.
- He/she is required to contribute the prescribed contribution amount from the age of joining PM-SYM till the age of 60 years and the matching contribution will be made by the Central Government.

4. FAME-India Phase 2

News: Union Cabinet has approved a proposal for implementation of the 2nd Phase of FAME-India ('Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India').

Facts:

- The scheme will be implemented over a period of 3 years from 2019-20 to 2021-22.
- Special incentives will be given for local manufacturing of critical components for electric vehicles, like lithium ion batteries.

- Incentives will be given to 3-wheeler/4 wheeler vehicles used for public transport or registered for commercial purposes and in e-2Ws segment, the focus will be on the private vehicles.
- Establishment of charging infrastructure at least one in a grid of 3km x 3km in the cities and on both sides of highways connecting major city clusters at every 25km.

Other facts:

- FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India) phase I began in 2015.

5. SHREYAS Scheme:

News: The Ministry of Human Resources Development launched Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills (SHREYAS).

Facts:

- It aims at improving the employability of students by introducing employment relevance into the learning process of the higher education system.
- To establish a culture of 'earn while you learn' system into higher education.
- The scheme involves three central ministries:
 - Ministry of Human Resource Development
 - Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship
 - Ministry of Labour & Employment
- It will be implemented by the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs).
- The scheme will have three programme simultaneously:
 - Add-on Apprenticeship for students who are currently completing the degree
 - Embedded Apprenticeship for the existing B.Voc programmes
 - Linking National Career Service with Colleges.

6. Revised Norms of Mid-Day Meal Scheme:

News: Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the revision of norms of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme.

Facts:

- Aims to enhance the enrollment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among school going children.
- Revised norms:
 - Cooking cost has been increased offsetting the impact of inflation on the food items under mid-day meal scheme.
 - The assistance for kitchen devices has been enhanced from flat rate of Rs5,000 per school to Rs10,000-Rs25,000 based on enrolment.

- A new component of Rs10,000 per kitchen for repair of more than 10-year-old kitchen has been introduced.
- An amount of Rs50 crore has been allocated for fortification of food items in a systematic manner addressing the problems of anaemia and micro nutrient deficiencies.
- The scheme also intends to encourage Kitchen gardens in schools.
- 'Tithi Bhojan': Concept of community participation will be encouraged under which people from the community celebrate important days such as child birth, marriage, birthdays etc. by contributing and complementing the scheme.
- Cooking competitions at block, district and state levels will be organised to promote innovative menus.

Other facts:

- Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), is a centrally sponsored scheme which covers all children studying in classes I-VIII (elementary schooling) of government, government-aided schools.

7. Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin:

News: Union Cabinet has approved the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G) beyond March, 2019.

Facts:

- The aim of the scheme was to provide a pucca house, with basic amenities, to all houseless householder and households living in kutcha and dilapidated house in rural areas by 2022.
- The immediate objective was to cover 1 crore households in three years from 2016-17 to 2018- 19.
- The scheme was originally meant to cover people in the EWS (annual income not exceeding Rs. 3 lakh) and LIG (annual income not exceeding Rs. 6 lakh) sections, but now covers the mid-income group (MIG) as well.

Salient features:

- The beneficiaries will be identified using information from Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011.
- The list will be presented to Gram Sabha to identify beneficiaries who have been assisted before or who have become ineligible due to other reasons.
- The unit cost will be shared between the center and the states in the ratio of 60:40 in plain areas and 90:10 in North Eastern and hilly states.
- There is a provision of assistance for toilets in the houses under SBM-G.

- A Pan-India training and certification programme of Masons has been launched under the scheme.
- The programme implementation is to be monitored through community participation (Social Audit), Member of Parliament (DISHA Committee), Central and State Government officials etc.

8. North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme:

News: The guidelines for the North East Special Infrastructure Development scheme were released recently.

Facts:

- It aims to ensure focused development of the North East region by providing financial assistance to physical infrastructure and social sector development.
- It is a scheme under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region.
- The scheme is 100% centrally funding and the funds are provided to the 8 State Governments of North Eastern Region on the basis of well-defined criteria.
- It will be over and above the existing schemes of government of India and state governments of the North Eastern region.

9. Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN (JAIV INDHAN- VATAVARAN ANUKOOL FASAL AWASHESH NIVARAN) Yojana:

News: Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN yojana.

Facts:

- Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoP&NG) will provide financial support to Integrated Bioethanol Projects using lignocellulosic biomass and other renewable feedstock.
- 12 commercial scale and 10 demonstration scale Second Generation (2G) ethanol projects will be provided viability gap funding support over the next six years in two phases.
- The ethanol produced by the scheme beneficiaries will be mandatorily supplied to Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs)
- Centre for High Technology (CHT), a technical body under the aegis of MoP&NG, will be the implementation Agency for the scheme.

Other facts:

- Government had launched Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme in 2003.
- This programme mandated Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to blend up to 10% of ethanol in Petrol.
- Bio ethanol is an alcohol produced from the fermentation of carbohydrates and cellulosic material.

Questions/Notes

Generations of Biofuels:

First Generation Biofuels:	It uses the food crops like wheat and sugar for making ethanol and oil seeds for bio diesel by conventional method of fermentation.
Second Generation Biofuels:	It uses non-food crops and feedstock such as Wood, grass, seed crops, organic waste are used in fuel preparation.
Third Generation Biofuels:	It uses specially engineered Algae whose biomass is used to convert into biofuels
Fourth Generation Biofuels:	It aimed at not only producing sustainable energy but also a way of capturing and storing CO ₂ .

10. STARS Scheme:

News: Ministry of Human Resource Development launched STARS Scheme (Scheme for Translational and Advanced Research in Science).

Facts:

- It was launched on the National Science Day (28 february).
- Under this, 500 science projects would be funded.
- The project will be coordinated by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore.

Other facts:

- National Science Day marks the discovery of the Raman Effect by physicist Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman.
- This year the theme was 'Science for the People and the People for Science'.

11. SWAYATT and START-UP Runway:

News: 'SWAYATT' initiative and GeM Start-up Runway initiative was launched by the Minister of Commerce and Industry.

Facts:

- SWAYATT is an initiative to promote Start-ups, Women and Youth Advantage Through e-Transactions on Government-e-Marketplace (GeM).
- GeM Start-up Runway is an initiative of GeM in association with Start -up India.
- It will facilitate Start-ups registered with Start -up India to access the public procurement market and sell innovative products and services to government buyers.

12. Atal Jaianushandhan Biotech Mission- Undertaking Nationally Relevant Technology Innovation (UNaTI):

News: The Atal JaiAnusandhan Biotech Mission - Undertaking Nationally Relevant Technology Innovation (UNaTI) was launched by the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Facts:

- It is under the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology.
- It aims to transform Health, Agriculture and Energy sectors during the next 5 years.
- This mission includes:
 - GARBH-ini: A Mission to promote Maternal and Child Health and develop prediction tools for preterm berth
 - IndCEPI: A Mission to develop affordable vaccines for endemic diseases
 - Development of biofortified and protein rich wheat contributing to POSHAN Abhiyan
 - Mission on Antimicrobial Resistance for Affordable Diagnostics and Therapeutics
 - Clean Energy Mission for innovative technology and interventions for Swachh Bharat

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS**Questions/Notes****1. National Mineral Policy 2019:**

News: Union Cabinet has recently approved the National Mineral Policy, 2019.

Facts:

- The policy is based on the recommendations of the committee headed by Dr. K Rajeswara Rao.
- The New National Mineral Policy will ensure more effective regulation of the mining sector and sustainable mining sector development.

Salient features:

- Introduction of Right of First Refusal for reconnaissance permit and prospecting license (RP/PL) holders.
- Encouraging the private sector to take up exploration
- Auctioning in virgin areas for composite RP cum PL cum ML on revenue share basis,
- Encouragement of merger and acquisition of mining entities
- Transfer of mining leases and creation of dedicated mineral corridors to boost private sector mining areas.
- The 2019 Policy proposes to
 - Grant status of industry to mining activity to boost financing of mining for private sector and for acquisitions of mineral assets in other countries by private sector
 - Long term import export policy for mineral will help private sector in better planning and stability in business
 - To rationalize reserved areas given to PSUs which have not been used and to put these areas to auction, which will give more opportunity to private sector for participation
 - To make efforts to harmonize taxes, levies & royalty with world benchmarks to help private sector

Other facts:

- National Mineral Policy 2019 replaces the National Mineral Policy 2008.

2. National Policy on Electronics 2019:

News: The Union Cabinet has given its approval to the National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019).

Facts:

- It was proposed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

- The Policy envisions positioning India as a global hub for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing – (ESDM).

Main features:

- Create eco-system for globally competitive ESDM sector
- Provide incentives and support for manufacturing of core electronic components and special incentives for mega projects which are extremely high-tech and entail huge investments
- Promote Industry-led R&D and innovation in all sub-sectors of electronics
- Promote trusted electronics value chain initiatives to improve national cyber security ecosystem
- Create Sovereign Patent Fund (SPF) to promote the development and acquisition of IPs in ESDM sector
- Provide incentives and support for significantly enhancing availability of skilled manpower, including re-skilling
- Formulate suitable schemes and incentive mechanisms to encourage new units and expansion of existing units
- Special thrust on Fabless Chip Design Industry, Medical Electronic Devices Industry, Automotive Electronics Industry and Power Electronics for Mobility and Strategic Electronics Industry

3. National Policy for Software Products 2019:

News: The National Policy on Software Products - 2019 was launched to develop India as a Software Product Nation.

Facts:

- An initial outlay of Rs.1500 Crore is involved to implement the programmes/ schemes envisaged under this policy over a period of 7 years.
- Rs1500 Crore is further divided into Software Product Development Fund (SPDF) and Research & Innovation fund.
- To achieve the vision of NPS-2019, the Policy has the following five Missions:
 - Industrial development: To promote the creation of a sustainable Indian software product industry, driven by intellectual property (IP), leading to a ten-fold increase in India share of the Global Software product market by 2025.
 - Startups and employment generation: To nurture 10,000 technology startups in software product industry, including 1000 such technology startups in Tier-II and Tier-III towns & cities and generating direct and in-direct employment for 3.5 million people by 2025.

- Skilling the youth: To create a talent pool for software product industry through (i) up-skilling of 1,000,000 IT professionals, (ii) motivating 100,000 school and college students and (iii) generating 10,000 specialized professionals that can provide leadership.
- Cluster based approach: To build a cluster-based innovation driven ecosystem by developing 20 sectoral and strategically located software product development clusters having integrated ICT infrastructure, marketing, incubation, R&D/testbeds and mentoring support.
- Monitoring: To monitor the scheme & programmes for the implementation of this policy, National Software Products Mission will be set up with participation from Government, Academia and Industry.

4. India Post Bank as Payment Bank:

News: The Standing Committee on Information Technology has submitted its report on 'Setting up of Post Bank of India as a Payments Bank- Scope, Objectives, and Framework'.

Facts:

- The main aim of the IPPB is of improving financial inclusion.
- It has been incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013.
- It is wholly owned by the Government of India under the Department of Posts (DoP).

Other facts:

- A payments bank has a limited range of products to offer.
- It cannot lend to customers and can accept only demand deposits.
- It can accept deposits upto Rs. 1 Lakh per account from individuals and small businesses.
- It can issue ATM/debit cards but not credit cards.
- 25% of its branches must be in the unbanked rural area.
- It has to maintain the Cash Reserve Ratio and invest minimum 75% of its "demand deposit balances" in Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR).

5. National Minimum Wage:

News: The Expert Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Anoop Satpathy has brought out a Report on "Determining the Methodology for the Fixation of the National Minimum Wage (NMW)".

Facts:

- In 2017, Code on Wages Bill, provided for bringing in a statutory National Minimum Wage.

- In this regard, this expert committee was tasked to determine the methodology for Fixation of National Minimum Wage.

Committee recommendations:

- Need to update existing norms for fixing minimum wages.
- Creation of a research unit in the Ministry of Labour and Employment to set and adjust minimum wages.
- Minimum wages should be fixed at round figures.
- The committee has grouped the states into five regions based on a composite index and have recommended region specific national minimum wage.
- Single value of the National Minimum Wage- for India should be set at Rs.375 per day as of July 2018.
- Need for elaborating a nationally representative and culturally palatable food basket that would focus on a balanced diet rather than merely its calorie intake.

Other facts:

- Code on Wages Bill, 2017 will amalgamate the four central labour laws relating to wages: The Payment of Wages Act, 1936, The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, The Payment of Bonus Act, 1965 and The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
- Types of wages:

Minimum wage	Living wage	Fair wage
It is paid by an employer/industry to its workers irrespective of its ability to pay.	It enables the earner to provide for himself and his family not only the bare essentials but also comforts like education for his children, health, social needs, insurance etc.	It is linked with the capacity of the industry to pay. It is above the minimum wage but below the living wage.

6. Periodic Labour Force Survey:

News: National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) released draft report of the first Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS).

Facts:

- PLFS was launched in 2017 by the NSSO.
- It is a regular survey for generating estimates of various labour force indicators on a quarterly basis for urban areas and for both rural and urban areas on an annual basis, at State/UT and all-India level.
- It would supply data for both formal sector and informal sector.
- It will use to approaches to measure labour force indicators in India: Usual Status (US) approach and Current Weekly Status (CWS) approach.

- Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) Method is a new feature of this survey, this requires the field operators to use tablets to enter the data.

Other facts:

- National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) is under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

7. River Information System:

News: The Union Minister of Shipping recently inaugurated the Phase 2 of the River Information System (RIS).

Facts:

- It is one of the components of Jal Marg Vikas Project.
- It is on the National Waterway-1 (River Ganga) between Farakka and Patna (410 km).
- It is an enhanced inland navigation safety system preventing ship-to-ship collisions, ship - bridge collisions, groundings etc.
- It also provides virtual navigational aids to guide the vessel during navigation.

Other facts:

- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has taken up installation of River Information System (RIS) initially in National Waterway-1 (NW-1) on river Ganga, in three phases:
 - Haldia-Farakka Stretch (already operationalized)
 - Farakka-Patna Stretch (covered under Phase 2)
 - Patna-Varanasi Stretch
- Jal Vikas Marg in a capacity augmentation project for navigation on the Haldia-Varanasi stretch of National Waterway-1 (Ganga) with the technical and financial assistance of the World Bank.

8. Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT):

News: The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) has been renamed as the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

Facts:

- DIPP was under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- It was established in 1995 and reconstituted in the year 2000 with the merger of the Department of Industrial Development.
- It looked after external trade earlier, now the Department will also look over the subject of internal trade including retail trade, welfare of traders and their employees etc.
- This brings both internal and external trade under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Other facts:

- Earlier matters related to internal trade were under the domain of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.

10. Global IP Index:

News: US Chamber of Commerce recently released its Global Intellectual Property Index.

Facts:

- It is the 7th edition of the annual International IP Index.
- It analyses 50 world economies, based on 45 indicators.
- India is ranked 36th as opposed to 44th in 2018.

11. Strategic Petroleum Reserve:

News: The Visakhapatnam Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) facility was recently operationalized.

Facts:

- Strategic Oil Reserve is a storage of crude oil which would act as a cushion during any external supply disruptions.
- According to the IEA and the Integrated Energy Policy 2006 a country should maintain a reserve equivalent to 90 days of oil imports for strategic-cum-buffer stock purposes.
- Construction of storage facilities are maintained by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited, under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- Presently, strategic reserves are situated at Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), Mangalore (Karnataka), and Padur (Kerala) with three projects in pipeline at Chandikhol (Odisha), Bikaner (Rajasthan) and Rajkot (Gujrat).

Other facts:

- International Energy Agency is an autonomous body, founded in 1974 to help countries collectively respond to oil supply disruptions, within the OECD framework.
- Only the OECD member states can become members of the IEA.
- India is not a member but has joined IEA as an associate member.
- To become a member of the IEA, a country must have petroleum product reserves equivalent to 90 days of the previous year's net imports.
- It publishes the World Energy Outlook (WEO).

12. International Financial Services Center Authority Bill:

News: Union Cabinet has approved the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) Authority Bill, 2019.

Facts:

- The Bill provides for the establishment of an authority to develop and regulate the financial services market in the International Financial Services Centres.
- The authority will consist of 9 Members-Chairperson; four members to be nominated from RBI, SEBI, IRDAI and PFRDA; two members from amongst the officials of the Ministry of Finance; two members to be appointed on the recommendation of a Selection Committee.
- As per the Bill, all transactions of financial services in IFSCs will be in such foreign currency as specified by the Authority, in consultation with the central government.
- An International Financial Services Centres Authority Fund will be established to which all the grants, fees and charges received by the Authority will be credited.

Other facts:

- SEZ act provides for the establishment of an IFSC in India within an SEZ in India.
- It also enables the government to regulate the activities of IFSC.
- IFSC has been designated as a 'deemed foreign territory' for all practical purposes, but which is physically on Indian soil.
- Gujarat International Finance Tec-City Co. Ltd (GIFT) is the country's first IFSC.

13. Printing Presses Declared as Public Utility:

News: The currency printing presses and mints are now categorized as 'public utility service' under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

Facts:

- The notification was issued by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- The Notification under the Act is valid for six months and can be reissued after expiry.

Other facts:

- Under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, no person employed in a public utility service shall go on strike in breach of contract without giving a notice to the employer.
- Public Utility Services are those business undertakings engaged in supplying essential goods and/or services of daily necessity for the general public.
- In India the right to strike is a legal right and not a fundamental right.
- The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 mentions the ground and conditions for the legal strike and if those provisions and conditions are not fulfilled then the strike will be considered illegal.

14. IPRISM:

News: Second edition of 'IPrism' launched in India.

Facts:

- It was launched by Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) in collaboration with ASSOCHAM and ERICSSON India.
- IPrism is an Intellectual Property (IP) competition for students of schools, polytechnic institutes, colleges and universities.
- This competition is for residents of India only.
- IPrism this year will be based on IP in Daily Life in two categories – filmmaking and comic book making.

Other facts:

- Last edition of IPrism was based on film on Piracy and Counterfeiting and mobile gaming app.
- CIPAM has been created under the aegis of Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.
- It aims to implement the National IPR Policy 2016.

15. Petrotech 2019:

News: The 13th edition of PETROTECH - 2019, India's flagship Hydrocarbon Conference was organized.

Facts:

- It was organised under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.
- PETROTECH conference is a biennial International Oil & Gas Conference.
- It provides a platform for national and international experts in the oil and gas industry to exchange, knowledge, expertise and experience.

16. ESG Fund:

News: India's first ESG (environment, social and governance) based Fund has been launched.

Facts:

- It is called the Avendus India ESG Fund.
- It has been launched by Avendus Capital Public Markets Alternate Strategies.
- The fund aims at raising \$1 billion from the domestic and international markets.

Other facts:

- ESG investing is an umbrella term for investments that also consider and evaluate the long-term impact that business practices have on society and the environment.

17. Women's Livelihood Bond:

News: Women's Livelihood Bonds (WLBs) were launched recently.

Facts:

- It has been jointly launched by the World Bank, UN Women, and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI).
- It has an initial corpus of Rs 300 crore.
- It will enable individual women entrepreneurs to borrow around Rs 50,000 to Rs 3 lakh at an annual interest rate of around 13-14 per cent or less.
- The bonds will have a 5-year maturity.
- SIDBI will act as the financial intermediary and channel funds through participating financial intermediaries like banks, NBFCs etc.

18. INSTEX SAS:

News: France, Germany and the United Kingdom announced the creation of INSTEX SAS (Instrument for Supporting Trade Exchanges).

Facts:

- It is aimed at facilitating legitimate trade between European economic operators and Iran.
- It will function as a non-dollar, euro-denominated clearing house.
- It would be based in France with a German banker heading it and UK will head the supervisory board.
- It will focus initially on sectors such as pharmaceutical, medical devices and agri-food goods and will not address oil-related transactions, which is Iran's primary source of foreign currency.

Other facts:

- It is the backdrop of the US pulling out of the Iranian Nuclear Deal-JCPOA.
- Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program reached in Vienna on July 2015 between Iran, the P5+1, and the European Union.

19. AGRI-Market Infrastructure Fund:

News: Union cabinet has recently approved the creation of a Rs, 2,000 crore Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund (AMIF).

Facts:

- It aims to develop and upgrade rural agriculture markets.
- It will be created with NABARD.
- It will provide the state/ UT governments subsidized loans for their proposal for developing marketing infrastructure.

20. New Initiatives for Khadi and Village Industries:

News: Recently, 8 different schemes of Khadi & Village Industries have been merged under 2 umbrella heads 'Khadi Vikas Yojana' and 'Gramodyog Vikas Yojana'.

Facts:

- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has added in a new component of 'Rozgar Yukt Gaon' to introduce enterprise-based operation in the Khadi sector and to create employment opportunities for the next financial year.

21. National Housing Bank:

News: Cabinet approved payment to acquire its stake in National Housing Bank.

Facts:

- The change in ownership from RBI to government will segregate RBI's role as banking regulator and as owner of NHB.

Other facts:

- Earlier the entire 100% stake in National Housing Bank (NHB) was owned by the RBI.
- It is a statutory body set up to operate as the principal agency to promote and regulate housing finance institutions.
- It launched NHB Residex-the first official residential housing price index in 2007.

22. National Productivity Council:

News: National Productivity Council (NPC) celebrated its 61st Foundation Day.

Facts:

- It is under Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- It aims to promote the cause of productivity in all sectors of the Indian economy.

Other facts:

- It is a constituent of the Tokyo-based Inter Governmental body called the Asian Productivity Organization (APO).
- India is a founding member of the APO.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS**Questions/Notes****1. Operation Digital Board:**

News: Recently, Ministry of Human Resource Development launched Operation Digital Board.

Facts:

- It aims to set up one digital and interactive board per classroom in government and government-aided schools by 2022.
- It will be introduced in schools from class 9th onwards as well as in higher education institutions.
- University Grant Commission (UGC) will be the implementing agency of Operation Digital Board for higher education.
- It aims to make teaching process interactive and introduce flipped learning.

Other facts:

- Flipped learning is where students are introduced to the learning material before class, with classroom time then being used to deepen understanding through discussion with peers, teachers and problem solving activities.

2. Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities:

News: The Union Cabinet has given its approval for constitution of Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities (DNCs).

Facts:

- In consonance with the recommendations of Idate Commission, the Union cabinet has approved a permanent Development and Welfare Board under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- It will be under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for the purpose of implementing development and welfare programmes for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities.

Other facts:

- Nomadic Tribes and Denotified Tribes both are the ones that were regarded as criminal tribes under Criminal Tribes Act, 1871.
- It is a colonial era rule where if the local government had reason to believe that a gang or a tribe had “addicted to systematic commission of non-bailable offences” then it was registered as criminal tribe under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871.
- Act was repealed in 1949 and was replaced by the Habitual Offenders Act, 1951 on the recommendations of Ananthasayanam Ayyangar Committee.

- In 2002, Justice Venkatachaliah Commission recommended for strengthening the programmes for economic and educational development of Denotified Tribes (DNTs) and constituting a special commission to look into the needs and grievances of the DNTs.
- Consequently, a National Commission for Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes was constituted in 2005 under the chairmanship of Balkrishna Sidke Renke followed by National Commission for Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes chaired by Bhiku Ramji Idate 2015 for a three-year period.
- It submitted its report “Voices of the Denotified, Nomadic & Semi-Nomadic Tribes” in 2018.

3. Defining Minorities in India:

News: The Supreme Court recently asked the National Commission for Minorities to issue guidelines for defining the term ‘minority’ and for their identification State-wise.

Facts:

- This was in response to a PIL seeking minority status for Hindus in Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, J&K, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Punjab.
- The Constitution of India uses the word ‘minority’ in various articles: Article 29, 30, 350 A and 350 B.
- It recognises minorities based on religion and language.
- However, it neither defines the term ‘minority’ nor delineates the criteria for determining a minority.
- As per sec 2(c) of the NCM Act 1992, ‘minority’ means a community notified as such by the Central govt.
- Central government notifies 6 religious communities, viz Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains as minority communities.

Other facts:

- It was set up under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992, thus it is a statutory body.
- It is a quasi-judicial body with powers of a civil court.
- It consists of a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and five Members to be nominated by the Central Government –all should be from Minority communities.
- The Chairperson and every Member shall hold office for a term of three years from the date he assumes office.

4. Darwaza Band Campaign:

News: Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched part II of the Darwaza Band campaign.

Facts:

- It is a nation-wide campaign to promote toilet use and freedom from open defecation.
- It is promoted under the aegis of Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen).
- The World Bank is the supporting agency of the ongoing part two of the Darwaza Band campaign.

5. Nyaya Bandhu:

News: Union Minister for Law and Justice and IT launched the Nyaya Bandhu mobile application.

Facts:

- It aims to provide legal services without charge in the country.
- It provides a platform to connect the registered eligible beneficiaries with the practicing advocates who are willing to volunteer their time and money in providing their services as a pro bono.

Other facts:

- The launch was on the sidelines of the launch of a tele-law mobile app for the 'tele-law' service and its dashboard (to monitor the usage of the app).

6. Samadhan Portal:

News: The Ministry of Labour and Employment launched Samadhan (Software Application for Monitoring and Disposal, Handling of Industrial Disputes) portal.

Facts:

- It is a dedicated web portal for conciliation, arbitration and adjudication of industrial disputes.
- It brings all stakeholders of the industrial disputes on single integrated platform.
- Workers have the option to go to the labour court directly in case no action is initiated within 45 days of raising a dispute online.

7. Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog:

News: Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for the establishment of Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog.

Facts:

- The Aayog will work in collaboration with Animal Sciences or Agriculture University or departments or organizations of the Central or State Government.
- Its mandate will be to research in the field of breeding and rearing of the cow, organic manure, biogas etc.
- It would help in providing a policy framework for conservation of indigenous cow breeds.

8. National Commission for Safai Karamcharis:

News: Government approved the proposal for extension of tenure of the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) for the next three years.

Facts:

- NCSK was constituted in 1994 as a statutory body under the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993.
- The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993 lapsed in 2004, since then it is a non-statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- It serves as a recommendatory body to Central Government for elimination of inequalities and improving the status of safai karamcharis.
- The commission is also monitoring the implementation of The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

9. Inclusive Internet Index 2019:

News: India ranked 47th in Inclusive Internet Index 2019.

Facts:

- It is released by the Economist Intelligence Unit.
- It is the third edition of Inclusive Internet Index.
- It covers 100 countries, Sweden has topped the ranking and Congo is on the last spot for 2019.
- It measures inclusiveness based on four categories: Accessibility (network coverage), Affordability (pricing), Relevance (availability of local-language content) and Readiness (capability to access internet).

10. Delhi Declaration on Digital Health:

News: The 4th Global Digital Health Partnership Summit adopted the Delhi Declaration on Digital Health for sustainable development.

Facts:

- The declaration called for WHO's leadership in digital health.

- It is committed to accelerate and implement the appropriate digital health interventions to improve the health of the population at national and sub-national levels by 2023.

Other facts:

- Digital health is the convergence of digital technologies with health, healthcare, living, and society.
- The Global Digital Health Partnership Summit was hosted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Digital Health Partnership (GDHP).

11. National Rural Transformation Project:

News: The World Bank and the Government of India has recently signed an agreement for the National Rural Economic Transformation Project (NRETP).

Facts:

- The agreement is worth \$250 Million, in addition to the \$500 million National Rural Livelihoods Project (NRLP) approved by the World Bank in July 2011.

Mandate:

- It would support enterprise development programmes for rural poor women and youth by creating a platform to access finance and by developing financial products.
- It will also support youth skills development, in coordination with the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana.
- Peer-to-peer learning, a successful strategy under the NRLP will also continue to be used in this project.

12. Swachh Shakti 2019 Programme:

News: Swachh Shakti 2019 Programme is a convention of Women Sarpanches, aimed at empowering the women.

Facts:

- It was held in Kurukshetra, Haryana.
- It is being organized by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation in association with the Government of Haryana.
- It aims to bring in to focus the leadership role played by rural women in Swachh Bharat Mission.

Other facts:

- The Swachh Shakti 2018 was organised by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, in association with the Government of Uttar Pradesh, at Lucknow.

- The Swachh Shakti program was first held in 2017 at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

Questions/Notes

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SECURITY AND DEFENCE**Questions/Notes****1. Military Exercises:**

Exercise	Related Facts:
Cobra Gold Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an Asia-Pacific military exercise held in Thailand every year. Thailand, United States, Singapore, Japan, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and South Korea were the participating countries. Indian Army represented India in the exercise. It contains three main components: military field training, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) training.
Exercise Topchi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was held at Deolali Camp near Nashik, Maharashtra. Conducted by the Indian Army. It showcased the artillery.
Cutlass Express 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The exercise was aimed at interdicting illegal maritime activity in the Western Indian Ocean. It was the 8th edition, held in the vicinity of Djibouti, Mozambique and Seychelles. The annual Exercise Cutlass Express is sponsored by U.S- Africa Command (USAFRICOM) and conducted by Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF). The Indian Navy was represented in the exercise through INS Trikand.
Exercise Rahat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Joint exercise between Indian Army and NDMA. Aimed at synergising efforts for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. The exercise will be conducted simultaneously in three places, beginning at Jaipur in the form of a tabletop exercise and then at Kota and Alwar.

2. Project 75-I:

News: Recently, the Defence Acquisition Council approved Indigenous construction of 6 Project 75 India submarines.

Facts:

- These six will be diesel-electric submarines, which will also feature advanced Air-independent propulsion (AIP) systems to enable them to stay submerged for longer duration and substantially increase their operational range.

- Project 75 India (P-75I) is follow-on of the Project 75 Kalvari-class submarines for the Indian Navy.
- The P75-I project is part of a 30-year submarine building plan that ends in 2030.
- Under this, India has to build 24 submarines — 18 conventional submarines and six nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs).

Other facts:

- 6 Scorpene-class submarines are currently being built under 'Project 75' of the Indian Navy.
- INS Kalvari, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj, INS Vela, INS Vagir and INS Vagsheer are the 6 Scorpene class submarines.
- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) under the Defence Minister was constituted for overall guidance of the defence procurement planning process.
- The objective of the Defence Acquisition Council is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces in terms of capabilities sought and timeframe prescribed by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.

3. Chinook Helicopters:

News: India received Boeing Co.'s Chinook helicopters.

Facts:

- It will bolster the heavy-lift capabilities of the Indian Air Force.
- It is a multi-role, vertical-lift platform, which is used for transporting troops, artillery, equipment, fuel and is also useful in humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

Other facts:

- The Boeing Company is an American multinational corporation that designs, manufactures, and sells airplanes, rotorcraft, rockets, satellites, and missiles worldwide.

4. DHANUSH:

News: It is the first long-range artillery gun to be produced in India.

Facts:

- It is an upgraded version of the Swedish 155-mm Bofors howitzers.
- It is the product of joint efforts by the Ordnance Factory Board and the Army with contributions from the DRDO, DGQA etc. and several private enterprises.

5. Hyperspectral Programme:

News: The Indian Air Force (IAF) has commissioned the development of a Hyper Spectral Programme.

Facts:

- It aims at monitoring suspicious moments along the international border and some parts within the country.
- It is the first of its kind to detect or identify the presence of a human below trees, dense foliage, shrubs or inside a structure, whether it is day or night and detect human presence from air even if there is cloud cover, dense fog or snow cover.
- Data/images will be captured through optical and infrared sensors, mounted on unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

6. Milan 2T:

News: The Defence Acquisition Council gave approval for acquisition of 5,000 Milan 2T anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) from France.

Facts:

- Milan-2T is a French 2nd-generation man-portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile.
- It is produced in India by Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) in partnership with a French firm.
- It has a range of 2 Km.

Other facts:

- Some of the indigenous anti-tank missiles include: NAG, HELINA, SANT (Stand-off Anti-Tank) Missile, Cannon Launched Laser Guided Missile (CLGM), SAMHO, AMOGHA-1, AMOGHA-2, AMOGHA-3.

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**Questions/Notes****1. Kelp Forest:**

News: Climate change could lead to decline of underwater kelp forests, according to a study.

Facts:

- Ocean warming and ocean acidification can cause changes in the microbiome on the surface of Kelp, leading to disease symptoms like blistering, bleaching and eventually degradation of the kelp's surface.
- Blistering and bleaching will affect the Kelp's ability to photosynthesize and survive.

Other facts:

- Kelp forests is "underwater forests" that grow in shallow oceans in warm and sunny waters.
- They are large brown algae seaweeds.
- Kelp forest grows in nutrient-rich waters.
- Smaller areas of anchored kelp are called kelp beds.

2. Polar Vortex:

News: US middle-west experienced sub-zero temperatures due to the polar vortex.

Facts:

- It is a large area of low pressure and cold air surrounding the Earth's North and South Pole.
- It is counterclockwise in the northern hemisphere and clockwise in the southern hemisphere.
- There are two polar vortexes in each hemisphere: one in the troposphere and the other in stratosphere.
- The boundary of the polar vortex is the boundary between the cold polar air to the north, and the warmer sub-tropical air.
- The boundary shifts all the time, shrinking pole-ward in the summer while it sometimes becomes less stable and expands, sending cold air southward in winters, with the jet stream. This is called a polar vortex event.

3. Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment Report:

News: The Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) released the "Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment" report.

Facts:

- It reveals that more than one-third of the glaciers in the region could retreat by 2100, even if the global temperature rise is capped at 1.5°C.

- Since the 1950s, only reductions in glacier area (or shrinkage) have been observed.
- Eastern Himalaya glaciers have tended to shrink faster than glaciers in the central or western Himalaya.
- Glacier areas in the Karakoram have not changed significantly, it is termed as the Karakoram anomaly.

Other facts:

- Hindu Kush Himalayas along with the Tien Shan mountains in Central Asia represent the largest area of permanent ice outside the two polar regions, hence it is termed as the third pole.
- Elevation-dependent warming (EDW) is an expression of global warming wherein there is an enhancement of warming rates with elevation.
- This may be due to the decreased albedo and exposure of the dark soil beneath, increasing the solar radiation absorption leading to elevation dependent amplification of warming.
- International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is a regional intergovernmental learning and knowledge sharing centre.
- It serves the eight regional member countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.
- It is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

4. Indus Dolphin:

News: Government of Punjab declared the Indus Dolphin as Punjab's 'State Aquatic Animal'.

Facts:

- They are freshwater, and functionally blind species of dolphins.
- They use echolocation to navigate, communicate and hunt prey.
- Except for a tiny population in India's Beas River (185 km stretch between Talwara and Harike), Indus river dolphins live exclusively in the Indus river in Pakistan.

Other facts:

- Punjab's State Animal: Blackbuck
- Punjab's State Bird: Northern Goshawk
- Punjab's State Tree: Sheesham
- Punjab's State Flower: Gladiolus

5. Landscape Level Approach:

News: A two-year study in Karnataka has concluded that landscape-level management is necessary for mitigating human-elephant conflicts.

Facts:

- Landscape level strategy deals with large-scale processes in an integrated and multidisciplinary manner, combining natural resources management with environmental and livelihood considerations.

Other facts:

- Asian Elephant Alliance: A group of 5 NGOs has come together to secure 96 existing corridors used by elephants across 12 States in India by raising £20 million in the next 10 years.
- It was launched in July 2015 in London, United Kingdom.
- The 5 NGOs are: Elephant Family, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), IUCN Netherlands, World Land Trust (WLT) and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI).

6. Sundarbans Wetlands:

News: India has designated Sundarban Reserve Forests as the 27th wetlands of International Importance in the Ramsar Wetland Convention.

Facts:

- It is the 27th site in India to become internationally important.
- It is the largest tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world.
- It is now the largest Ramsar Site in India.
- It is the only mangrove habitat which supports a significant population of Royal Bengal Tigers and other animals such as critically endangered northern river terrapin, the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin, and the endangered fishing cat.
- It is located in delta region of Padma, Meghna and Brahmaputra river basins.

Other facts:

- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- It was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.
- Chilika lake was designated the first Ramsite in India in 1981.

RAMSAR SITES IN INDIA



- Montreux Record, a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference, is maintained as part of the Ramsar List.
- Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan and Loktak Lake, Manipur are the two wetland sites included in the Montreux Record.

7. Cheetah reintroduction:

News: The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has reported to the Supreme Court that African cheetahs from Namibia, will be translocated and be kept at Nauradehi wildlife sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.

Facts:

- Project Cheetah was launched 2009 under which an expert committee short listed some sites where Cheetah could be reintroduced including Kuno-Palpur and Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, Velavadar National Park in Gujarat and the Shahgarh bulge in Rajasthan.
- African Cheetah is a large cat that occurs in Southern, North, East Africa and in some localities of Iran.

- African Cheetah is categorised as vulnerable in the IUCN red list of threatened species.

Other facts:

- Asiatic Cheetah is a Critically endangered species as per the IUCN red list of threatened species.

8. The New Delhi Declaration on Indian Rhinos 2019:

News: Second Asian Rhino Range Countries meeting, has signed the New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019.

Facts:

- It intends to conserve and review the population of the Greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran rhinos (three species of Asian Rhino) every four years.

Other facts:

- Asian Rhino Range Countries include India, Nepal, Bhutan, Indonesia and Malaysia.
- Javan and Sumatran rhinos are currently classified as critically endangered.
- The Sumatran rhino, the smallest of all rhino species.
- The Sumatran rhino only Asian rhino with two horns.
- The Great one-horned rhino or Indian Rhino is the largest of the rhino species.
- It is found commonly in Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and India. In India it is found in Assam in – Kaziranga National Park, Manas National Park, Pobitora Reserve Forest, Orang National Park, Laokhowa Reserve Forest etc.
- It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act.
- Indian Rhino Vision 2020 has been implemented by Assam State Government with the Bodo autonomous council as an active partner and supported by WWF- India.
- The government of Assam has raised the Special Rhino Protection Force from people living in the fringe areas of the Kaziranga National Park, for Rhino conservation and preservation.

9. Low Carbon Strategy for Renewable Energy Integration:

News: NITI Aayog, International Energy Agency (IEA) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) released a report titled “Low Carbon Strategy for Renewable Energy Integration”

Facts:

- The report emphasized on the need to effectively integrate such large-scale Renewable Energy in the Grid.

Other facts:

- The International Energy Agency is a Paris-based autonomous intergovernmental organization established in the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in 1974 in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.
- The Asian Development Bank is a regional development bank established in 1966, which is headquartered in Metro Manila, Philippines.

10. Report on rainwater harvesting in urban cities:

News: Parliamentary Standing Committee on Urban Development submitted its report on “Rainwater Harvesting in Metropolitan Cities”.

Facts:

- NITI Aayog has outlined the following techniques for rainwater harvesting- Roof Top Rain Water Harvesting and Driveway Rain Off Harvesting.
- Chennai has become the 1st city to be 100% rainwater compliant.
- It has a separate legislation making RWH mandatory and a massive awareness campaign “Conserve Water where It falls”.
- Delhi Jal Board also gives a 10% rebate in water bills for providing RWH in a house.

Other facts:

- In India, rainwater harvesting has been an ancient practice.
- Following are the names of the structures of Rain Water Harvesting in different parts of India:
 - Himachal Pradesh- Kul, Kuhl; Rajasthan- Baoris, Jhalaras, Johad, Nadis; Maharashtra- Bhandaras; Bihar- Ahar-Pynes; Karnataka- Kere; Madhya Pradesh- Bundela Tank, Chandela Tank, Katas, Pat; Tamil Nadu- Eri, Ooranis; Nagaland- Cheo-ozih; Andhra Pradesh- Cheruvu; West Bengal- Dungs.

11. Eviction Order of Forest Dwellers:

News: The Supreme Court recently stayed its order to evict forest dwellers in over 16 states.

Facts:

- The Supreme Court ordered that all those Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers, whose claims over forest land were rejected under the 2006 Forest Rights Act should be evicted by state governments.

Other facts:

- The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 grants ownership rights, Use rights to minor forest produce, Relief and development rights to rehabilitate in case of illegal eviction or forced displacement and Forest management rights to protect forests and wildlife.
- Eligibility to get rights under the Act is confined to those who "primarily reside in forests" and who depend on forests and forest land for a livelihood. Further, either the claimant must be a member of the Scheduled Tribes scheduled in that area or must have been residing in the forest for 75 years.
- The Act provides that the gram sabha, or village assembly, will initially pass a resolution recommending whose rights to which resources should be recognised and this resolution is then screened and approved by screening committees consisting of three government officials and three elected members of the local body at that level.

12. Small Grants Programme:

News: A workshop on MoEFCC-Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP Small Grants Programme (SGP) was inaugurated in New Delhi.

Facts:

- This program was launched alongside the Rio Earth Summit in 1992.
- This initiative provides direct financial and technical support to communities and Civil Society Organizations.
- The program is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and executed by the United Nation Development Program (UNDP).
- In India the program is hosted through the National Host Institution (NHI)-Centre for Environment Education (CEE).

Other facts:

- The Global Environment Facility was established at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.
- Centre for Environment Education is a national level institution supported by Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, GOI as a "centre of excellence".

13. Environmental Rule of Law:

News: The first ever global assessment of environmental laws is titled "Environmental Rule of Law".

Facts:

- It is released by the United Nations Environment Programme (UN).

- The United Nations defines rule of law as having three related components firstly, law should be consistent with fundamental rights secondly it must be inclusively developed and fairly effectuated and thirdly the law should bring forth accountability not just on paper, but in practice.

14. Bramble Cay Melomys:

News: It is the first mammal to be officially driven extinct as a result of human-driven climate change.

Facts:

- Bramble Cay melomy is an island rodent.
- It was an endemic species of the isolated Bramble Cay, a vegetated coral cay located at the northern tip of the Great Barrier Reef.
- It was considered the Great Barrier Reef's (Australia) only endemic mammal.

15. Wallace's Giant Bee Rediscovered:

News: Wallace's Giant Bee, species of bee has been rediscovered in a remote part of Indonesia.

Facts:

- The bee (Megachile Pluto), aka 'flying bulldog' is the world's largest bee.
- It has a wing span of around 6 centimeters.
- It has a vulnerable IUCN status.
- They make their nests in termite mounds.
- These are resin bees, because they build their residences out of resin.
- They don't make honey.
- It is named after Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-discoverer of the theory of evolution along with Charles Darwin.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Questions/Notes

1. Measles-Rubella:

News: Global Measles and Rubella Update stated that India had 56,399 confirmed measles cases and 1,066 confirmed rubella cases in 2018.

Facts:

- Measles and Rubella are highly contagious viral diseases.
- They spread by contact with an infected person through coughing and sneezing.
- Measles weakens the immune system and opens the door to secondary health problems.
- Measles virus is an exclusive human pathogen and has no animal reservoirs or vectors.
- Rubella, also known as German Measles.
- It is a mild disease but can have serious consequences for pregnant women and their children as it may cause congenital rubella syndrome in the foetus.
- Measles-rubella (MR) vaccine is given at 9-12 months and 16-24 months of age for preventing both measles and rubella diseases in the child as no specific treatment is available for the disease.

2. Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet:

News: DRDO successfully flight tested the indigenously developed 'Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)' propulsion-based missile system.

Facts:

- SFDR is an Indo-Russian R&D project which has been established to develop a long-range air-to-air missiles and a surface-to-air missile system.
- The Defence Research Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad is the leading agency for the collaborative mission project.
- SFDR technology, based on the ramjet propulsion system.
- The solid ramjet fuel is 100% fuel and obtains oxidizer from air, thus providing greater impulse.
- This air breathing ramjet propulsion technology enables missile propulsion at high supersonic speeds (above Mach 2) for engaging targets at long ranges.

Other facts:

Ramjet and Scramjet:

- Ramjet engine does not have any turbojet engines, it achieves compression of intake air just by the forward speed of the air vehicle whereas a Scramjet engine is an improvement over the ramjet engine as it efficiently operates at hypersonic speeds and allows supersonic combustion.
- Thus scramjet is known as Supersonic Combustion Ramjet, or Scramjet.

3. Param Shivay:

News: PARAM Shivay, the first super computer designed & built under the National Supercomputing Mission by C-DAC (Center for Development of Advanced Computing).

Facts:

- It was launched at IIT-BHU.
- The National Supercomputing Mission, launched in 2015, envisages empowering our national academic and R&D institutions of the country by installing a grid comprising of more than 70 high-performance computing facilities.
- The Mission would be implemented jointly by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) for over a period of seven years, through the C-DAC and Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- Applications: Climate Modelling, Computational Biology, Atomic Energy Simulations, National Security/ Defence Applications, Disaster Simulations and Management, Computational Material Science and Nanomaterials, Cyber Physical Systems, Big Data Analytics etc.
- The Mission also includes development of highly professional High Performance Computing (HPC) aware human resource to be able to operate the supercomputer facility. PARAM Shavak is one such machine that has been deployed to provide training.

Other facts:

- It is the premier R&D organization of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for carrying out R&D in IT, Electronics etc.
- PARAM 8000, first supercomputer of India, was built by CDAC.
- Top 500 Project: It was started in 1993 and ranks the 500 most powerful non-distributed computers in the world based on the LINPACK benchmark.
- This list of supercomputers is published twice a year.
- Currently, China dominates the list with 229 supercomputers out of 500 while since June 2018, the American "Summit" is the world's most powerful supercomputer.
- India has 4 supercomputers in the Top-500 list of supercomputers with Pratyush and Mihir being the fastest supercomputers in India.

4. Space Debris:

News: A new device named Space Harpoon that captures junk has been tested successfully.

Facts:

- It is part of the Remove DEBRIS project, a multi-organization European effort.
- The Remove Debris satellite platform has four methods for release, capture and deorbit of space debris Net capture, Harpoon Capture, Vision-based navigation and De-orbiting process.
- The Space Harpoon is meant for larger targets, for example full-size satellites that have malfunctioned and are drifting from their orbit.

Other facts:

- Space debris encompasses both natural (meteoroid) and artificial (man-made) particles.
- The term Kessler syndrome is associated with Space Debris, which is used to describe a self-sustaining cascading collision of space debris in Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

5. National Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis:

News: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched National Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis.

Facts:

- The Plan provides a strategic framework, based on which National Viral Hepatitis Control Program was launched in 2018 under National Health Mission.
- It is an inflammation of the liver often caused by viruses.
- There are 5 main hepatitis viruses: A, B, C, D and E.
- Viral hepatitis types B and C can cause chronic hepatitis while Hepatitis A and E usually cause acute hepatitis.
- Hepatitis A and E are typically caused by ingestion of contaminated food or water while Hepatitis B, C and D usually occur as a result of contact with infected body fluids.
- There are vaccines to prevent hepatitis A, B and E. However, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

Other facts:

- National Viral Hepatitis Control Program aims to end viral hepatitis as a public health threat in the country by 2030.
- It aims to reduce morbidity and mortality due to viral hepatitis.

6. SPHEREX:

News: NASA has announced the launch of a new telescope Spectro-Photometer for the History of the Universe, Epoch of Reionization and Ices Explorer (SPHEREX) in 2023.

Facts:

- It is part of NASA's Explorer Program.
- It has a twofold aim: to understand the evolution of the universe and to explore how common the ingredients for life are in our galaxy.
- It will survey the entire sky every 6 months in optical as well as near-infrared light, creating the first spectral all-sky survey at infrared wavelengths.
- It will be placed in a Low-Earth polar orbit, also known as a Sun-synchronous orbit.

7. HIPPOCAMP:

News: The International Astronomical Union (IAU) has assigned the name Hippocamp to Neptune's smallest moon S/2004 N1 discovered in 2013.

Facts:

- "Hippocamp" is a horse-headed, fish-tailed creature in Greek mythology.
- Except Earth, all of the planets in our solar system have names derived from Greek or Roman mythology.
- Natural satellites are also named after greek or roman mythology but Uranus here is an exception.

Other facts:

- IAU is an International Association of Professional astronomers active in professional research and education in astronomy.

8. India's first District Cooling System:

News: A UAE-based international cooling provider has entered into a 30-year concession with Andhra Pradesh government to build, own, operate and transfer India's first district cooling system.

Facts:

- This district will be in the state's newly built capital Amravati.
- District cooling systems produce chilled water, steam or hot water at a central plant and then pipe that energy out (either underground or over rooftops) to buildings for air conditioning, space heating and water heating.
- This system reduces carbon emissions and generate less noise as compared to traditional air conditioning systems.

9. Super-efficient Air Conditioning Programme:

News: Recently, a Super-Efficient Air Conditioning Programme was launched for residential and institutional customers.

Facts:

- It was launched by the Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL).

- Implementation for the programme for 12 months will be done jointly by EESL and private discom - BSES Rajdhani Delhi.
- Super-Efficient Air Conditioners are distributed under the programme, which are 40% more efficient and cost effective.
- It will reduce energy consumption, phase out Hydrofluorocarbons and reduce refrigerant demand as per India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP).
- EESL investment is partially supported by a grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), partially by Asian Development Bank (ADB) grants and loans and technical assistance from United Nations Environment (UNEP).

Questions/Notes

MISCELLANEOUS

Questions/Notes

1. Bagru Block Painting:

News: The 'Titanwala Museum' in Bagru, Rajasthan was inaugurated.

Facts:

- It aims to preserve the art of traditional Bagru block printing.
- It is a traditional technique of printing with natural colours mainly red and black.
- It is practised by the Chippa community in Bagru village of Rajasthan.
- Traditionally, motifs printed at Bagru are large with bold lines.

Other facts:

- Block Printing across India:

Place	Block Printing Technique
Andhra Pradesh	Kalamkari
Rajasthan	Sanganeri and Dabu printing
Madhya Pradesh	Bagh Print, Bherugarh Print (Batik)
Gujarat	Ajrakh Printing

2. Maithili Language:

News: The Ministry of Human Resource Development has decided to implement the recommendations of a committee for the promotion and protection of Maithili language and its scripts.

Facts:

- Mithilakshar or Tirhuta is the script of the Maithili language.
- It is mainly spoken in India (Bihar, Jharkhand etc.) and Nepal.
- The language has been accorded a constitutional status in the 8th Schedule of the constitution.
- The committee has suggested establishing a Script and Manuscript Centre at Darbhanga and creating of audio-visual teaching material for Mithilakshar script.

Other facts:

- In 1910 the first Maithili organization, the Maithili Mahasabha came into being for the development of Maithili and Maithili.
- It is one of the 22 languages mentioned in the schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution.

- The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution includes 22 major languages: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarathi, Hindi, Kananda, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali and Oriya.

3. India's National War Memorial:

News: India's national war memorial was inaugurated at the India Gate complex in Delhi by the PM.

Facts:

- It was first proposed in 1960.
- It is built to honor soldiers who laid down their lives defending the nation, post-independence.
- The Memorial has four concentric circles, a central stone obelisk (15.5m), and an eternal flame.
- The concentric circles are designed as a Chakravayuh (an ancient Indian war formation) and are called:
 - Amar Chakra or Circle of Immortality
 - Veerta Chakra or Circle of Bravery
 - Tyag Chakra or Circle of Sacrifice
 - Rakshak Chakra or Circle of Protection
- It has a place called the Param Yodha Sthal, with the busts of 21 recipients of the Param Vir Chakra.

Other facts:

- India's wartime Gallantry Awards: Param Vir Chakra, maha Vir Chakra, Vir Chakra
- India's Peace Time Gallantry Awards: Ashoka Chakra, Kirti Chakra and Shaurya Chakra

4. Cultural Heritage Youth Leadership Programme:

News: Cultural Heritage Youth Leadership Programme was launched to promote, understand and develop fondness for India's rich cultural heritage amongst the youth.

Facts:

- Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Culture, is the implementation agency for this programme.
- The programme focuses on the under privileged children residing in backward areas and interacts with them in vernacular languages for their better understanding.

5. Attukal Pongala:

News: An annual 10-day Attukal Pongala festival was held at Attukal Temple in Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala).

Facts:

- Attukal temple is also popularly known as women's Sabarimala - where only women are allowed to take part in the rituals.
- Here the Goddess is fondly referred to as 'Attukalamma'.

Other facts:

- Pongala (meaning- 'to boil over') is the ritual in which women prepare sweet payasam and offer it to the goddess.
- It was listed in the Guinness World Records in 2009 for being the largest religious gathering of women on a single day.

6. Ghumot:

News: Ghumot has been notified as a heritage instrument of Goa.

Facts:

- It is a membranophone type percussion instrument.
- It is also known as Ghumat, Dakki or Budike.
- It is part of the Mando, a musical form of the Goan Catholics, Zagor folk dance and Dulpod dance song.

Other facts:

- A smaller form of ghumot is used as the main accompaniment to the 'Burrakatha' a folk storytelling tradition of Andhra Pradesh.

7. Indian Council of Historical Research:

News: Government of India reconstituted Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR).

Facts:

- It is an autonomous organization under Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD).
- It is registered under the Societies Registration Act 1972.
- Its objective is to promote historical research and to encourage objective and scientific writing of history.
- It also provides fellowships and financial assistance to the young teachers in colleges, universities both in India and abroad.
- The council is headed by an eminent historian nominated by the Government of India.

FEBRUARY POINTLY

Questions/Notes

1. Arun-III: Arun III is an under-construction run-of-the river type hydro-electric project constructed by SJVN Arun III Power Development Company Private Limited in Nepal at the Arun River.

2. Sela tunnel: It is a tunnel built by the Border Roads Organization to provide all weather connectivity to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and other forward areas.

3. SWAYAM: Project called 'Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds' (SWAYAM), which will provide one integrated platform and portal for online courses.

4. Swayam Prabha: A project for operationalising 32 Direct to Home (DTH) Television Channels for providing high quality educational content to all teachers, students and citizens across the country interested in lifelong learning.

5. Diksha portal for teachers: Union Ministry of Human Resource and Development (HRD) has launched Diksha Portal (diksha.gov.in) for providing digital platform to teachers to equip them with advanced digital technology.