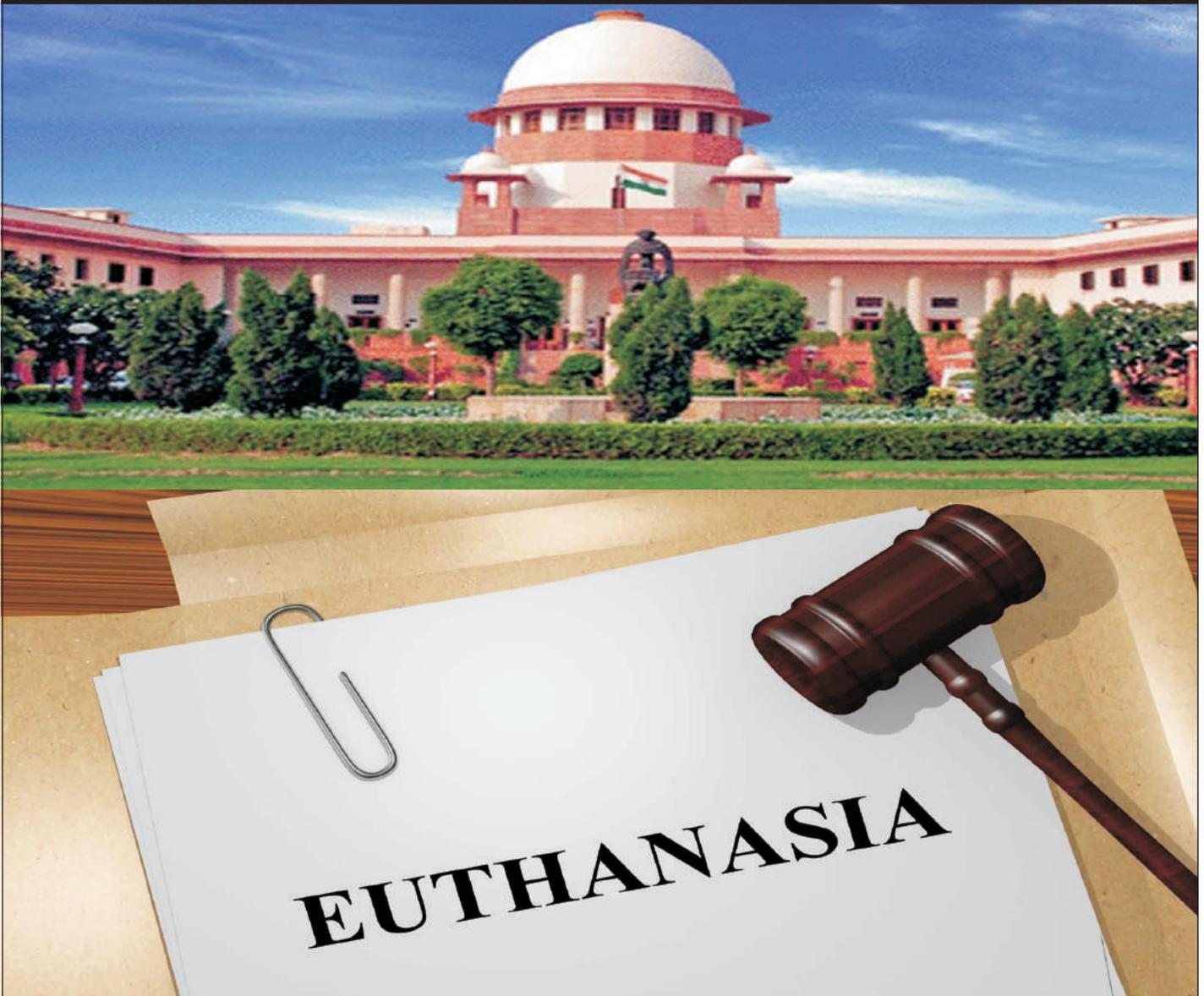# ELITE IAS

Current Affairs April- 2018

EUTHANASIA

8899999931/34

A-1 Chandra House, Top Floor, (Opp. ICICI Bank), Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-09

Index

BILATERAL & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, INDIA & THE WORLD AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

INDIAN ECONOMY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, DEFENCE AND HEALTH

MORE NEWS

EDITORIAL
Death With Dignity: SC's Verdict On Euthanasia

☞ The core philosophy underlying the Supreme Court's verdict allowing passive euthanasia and giving legal status to 'advance directives' is that the right to a dignified life extends up to the point of having a dignified death. In four concurring opinions, the five-member Constitution Bench grappled with a question that involved, in the words of Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, "finding substance and balance in the relationship between life, morality and the experience of dying".

☞ The outcome of the exercise is a progressive and humane verdict that lays down a broad legal framework for protecting the dignity of a terminally ill patient or one in a persistent vegetative state (PVS) with no hope of cure or recovery. For, in such circumstances, "accelerating the process of death for reducing the period of suffering constitutes a right to live with dignity". The core message is that all adults with the capacity to give consent "has the right of self determination and autonomy", and the right to refuse medical treatment is also encompassed in it.

☞ Passive euthanasia was recognised by a two-judge Bench in *Aruna Shanbaug* in 2011; now the Constitution Bench has expanded the jurisprudence on the subject by adding to it the principle of a 'living will', or an advance directive, a practice whereby a person, while in a competent state of mind, leaves written instructions on the sort of medical treatment that may or may not be administered in the event of her reaching a stage of terminal illness.

☞ Passive euthanasia essentially involves withdrawal of life support or discontinuation of life-preserving medical treatment so that a person with a terminal illness is allowed to die in the natural course. The court's reasoning is unexceptionable when it says burdening a dying patient with life-prolonging treatment and equipment merely because medical technology has advanced would be destructive of her dignity. In such a situation, "individual interest has to be given priority over the state interest". The court has invoked its inherent power under Article 142 of the Constitution to grant legal status to advance directives, and its directives will hold good until Parliament enacts legislation on the matter. The government submitted that it was in the process of introducing a law to regulate passive euthanasia, but opposed the concept of advance directive on the ground that it was liable to be misused. The stringent conditions imposed by the court regarding advance directives are intended to serve as a set of robust safeguards and allay any apprehensions about misuse. The court is justified in concluding that advance directives will strengthen the will of the treating doctors by assuring them that they are acting lawfully in respecting the patient's wishes. An advance directive, after all, only reflects the patient's autonomy and does not amount to recognition of a wish to die.

Indian Art and Culture, Society, Social and National Issues

Demand for Separate Lingayat religion

Why in news?

☞ The Karnataka government has recently decided to recommend to the Centre to grant religious minority status to the Lingayat community.

Who are the Lingayats?

➢ The Lingayats are strict monotheists.

➢ They instruct the worship of only one God, namely, Linga (Shiva).

➢ 'Linga' here does not mean Linga established in temples.

➢ It is rather the universal consciousness qualified by the universal energy (Shakti).

➢ Lingayats are currently classified as a Hindu sub-caste called "Veerashaiva Lingayats".

➢ There is a general misconception that Lingayatism is a subsect of Shaivism, which is itself a sect of Hinduism.

➢ There is also a misconception that the Lingayats are Shudras.

➢ But textual evidence and reasoning suggests that Lingayatism is not a sect or subsect of Hinduism, but an independent religion.

How did it evolve?

➢ The community actually evolved from a 12th century movement led by social reformer and philosopher-saint Basavanna.

➢ It emerged as a reactionary force against Hinduism.

➢ In essence, Lingayats remain staunch worshippers of the Hindu God Shiva.

➢ But they strongly protest against Hindu social practices such as caste discrimination and wearing of the sacred thread.

➢ As, caste discrimination is central to the post-Manu Hinduism.

➢ Basavanna and his associates thus asked their followers to not observe it.

➢ The Basavanna movement helped downtrodden sections of Hindu society break the chains of caste and seek the truth themselves.

➢ A person undergoing initiation in Lingayatism will be given an ishtalinga.

➢ The person henceforth becomes superior and therefore, all Lingayats must be treated as equal.

ELITE IAS *April - 2018*

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

About this move

➢ Lingayats account for nearly 17 per cent of the state's population.

➢ The demand for separate religion tag and minority status is a long pending demand of the Lingayat community.

➢ The State Cabinet has decided to accept the recommendations of the state minority commission in this regard.

➢ The religious minority recognition will thus be granted under the Karnataka Minorities Act.

➢ The status will cover two factions of the community-Lingayats and Veerashaiva Lingayats.

➢ The State Cabinet also decided to forward the demand to the Centre for notifying under the Central Minority Commission Act.

Why is the demand for separate religion status?

➢ The argument for Lingayats being a separate religion has existed in the mainstream for over seven decades.

➢ The status is complicated because the Lingayats still ascribe to some of the aspects of Hinduism.

➢ The demand was also weakened by its subsumption within the Veerashaiva nomenclature.

➢ This happened after large number of Hindu Veerashaivas embraced Lingayatism while continuing to follow Hindu practices.

➢ Writings by Basavanna 800 years ago prove that Lingayats were a religious entity separate from Hindus. But the teachings of Basavanna are slowly losing their distinct place in society.

➢ The increasing subsumption within the Veerashaiva and Hindu nomenclature, and decreasing importance for Basavanna's preaching are concerns among the Lingayats.

➢ The identification as a separate religion is thus seen as a crucial need at this juncture, for Lingayatism to survive.

➢ In the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Lingayats, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are included among Hindus.

➢ But Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains were identified by state and central governments as minority religions in 1993, 1963 and 2014 respectively.

➢ Only Lingayats remain unrecognised under a separate religious status.

ELITE IAS
April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ There is a demand that the community be identified only as "Lingayat", and not "Veerashaiva Lingayat" in caste certificates.

➢ Once recognised, Lingayats would be able to avail benefits under Articles 25, 28, 29 and 30 of the Constitution.

➢ The provisions under these deal with freedom of religion and rights of minorities.

Source: The Hindu

Consequences of India's falling sex ratio

Why in news?

☞ A recent report from the NITI Aayog said sex ratio at birth (SRB) nationwide had dropped from 906 in 2012-2014 to 900 in 2013-2015.

What is sex ratio at birth (SRB)?

➢ The SRB is the number of girls born for every 1,000 boys.

Highlights of the report:

➢ In all, 17 of 21 large Indian States saw a drop in the SRB, with Gujarat performing the worst, declining 53 points.

➢ Also, newer data from India's Sample Registration System show the SRB fell even further in 2014-2016, from 900 to 898.

Unique case for India:

➢ The number of girls born is naturally lower than the number of boys, and demographers speculate that this may be nature's way of offsetting the higher risk that men have of dying - male babies are biologically weaker than females, and men have historically seen higher mortality rates owing to risk-taking behaviour and participation in wars. This evens out the sex ratio of a population as it grows older. But India is a special case. Its SRB is far lower than 952 because of the preference for the male child.

☞ This means we are killing girl children in the womb. As on today, around 63 million girls are estimated to be 'missing' in India because of such actions.

How did it come about?

➢ Till the 1970s, female infanticide was the preferred way of killing the girl child.

➢ But in the Seventies, sex selection technologies like amniocentesis came about, in which doctors can test the amniotic fluid around a developing fetus for genetic abnormalities. But people soon realized this method could be used to determine the child's sex and to abort it, if female. Other technologies, including the cheaper and less invasive ultrasound, followed, allowing more people to use them.

4

Call: 8899999931/34,7065202020, Email: info@eliteias.in, Visit: www.eliteias.in
A-1, Chandra House, Top Floor, Opp. ICICI Bank, Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-110009

ELITE IAS

April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ A thriving market for sex selection sprung up with doctors openly advertising their services. In 1994, the government took notice and introduced the Prenatal Diagnostics Techniques Act which punishes healthcare professionals for telling expectant parents the sex of a child with imprisonment and hefty fines.

➢ In 2003, when technologies that allowed gender-selection even before conception became available, the act was amended to become the Prenatal Conception and Prenatal Determination Act (PC-PNDT).

➢ By any token, this Act has been a failure. In November 2016, a report from the Asian Centre for Human Rights noted that between 1994 and 2014, 2,266 cases of infanticide were registered in India, against 2,021 cases of abortion under the PC-PNDT, even though abortions outnumber infanticides today. In all, 17 out of 29 States had either not registered any case, or had zero convictions.

➢ The PHFI report in 2010 found major gaps in the training of personnel implementing PC-PNDT. Poor training meant that they were unable to prepare strong cases against violators to secure convictions.

Why does it matter?

➢ Low SRBs starting from the Seventies have led to large numbers of "surplus men" today in countries like India and China. There are concerns that skewed sex ratios lead to more violence against men and women, as well as human-trafficking.

➢ In India, some villages in Haryana and Punjab have such poor sex ratios that men "import" brides from other States. This is often accompanied by the exploitation of these brides.

Way Ahead

➢ India must implement the PC-PNDT more stringently, but must also dedicate more resources to fighting the preference for boys.

Source: The Hindu

Concerns over Aadhaar Linking

Why in news?

☞ Union government is making huge emphasis on Aadhaar linking amidst of various controversies over the public domain.

Key Facts

➢ Union government's March 31 deadline is creeping upon Indian citizens to link bank accounts, telephones, voter id, et al to Aadhaar.

➢ Recently to curb age fraud in various national and state-level wrestling competitions, the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has made the Aadhaar card mandatory for all senior, junior, sub-junior and cadet tournaments.

➢ Election Commission of India is also planning to link Aadhaar number with the voter Id for more transparency and accountability.

➢ Under the guidance of RBI every payment banks in India request their customers to link their Aadhaar number to enjoy the benefits of the services.

➢ Apart from this many educational institutions in India also made it is compulsory to produce Aadhaar during the student's enrolment.

Recent concerns related to Aadhaar linking

➢ To link the Aadhaar card with different services, or not seems to be dubious for many citizens as scam after scam tumbles out into public domain raising in the process questions on the operations of banks as well.

➢ There are also instances where a telecom company made illegal transaction to its payment banks from the DBT of Aadhaar linked bank accounts.

➢ It is into this leaky system that citizens are being asked to put in their life's savings, information, thumbprint, iris and all.

Stand of Supreme Court

➢ Union government earlier made December 31st, 2017 as the dead line to link Aadhaar with various services, but later SC intervened in this matter and made March 31, 2018 as the deadline.

➢ Recently Supreme Court directed the CBSE not to make Aadhaar number mandatory for enrolment of students appearing in NEET 2018 and other all India exams.

➢ There are much more cases regarding Aadhaar are pending before the SC and the arguments are soon to be heard.

The way forward

➢ The linking of personal information through a system like Aadhaar pushes the customer into a corner in an already uneven playing field.

➢ A leak of the customer's medicine buying pattern could tomorrow become the reason to withhold an insurance policy, without the customer's knowledge.

➢ Aadhaar was conceptualized to plug the leak in subsidies given to those who needed it and thus it should be restricted to that.

Source: The Hindu

ELITE IAS

April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

Rs 2,900 crore approved for Nirbhaya fund to make cities safe for women

Why in news?

☞ The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development have approved the projects worth Rs 2,919 crore under the Nirbhaya Fund for creating "safe cities".

➢ Through this fund, the special focus will be given on women safety in public spaces and quick response systems to create deterrence against crime in these safe cities.

➢ The Eight cities which are selected for initiatives to take shape include Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Lucknow.

Measures to create safe cities:

➢ All the plans for safe cities have been prepared in coordination with municipal corporations and police commissioners of these cities.

➢ To enhance the safety of public places like roads, schools and metro etc., use of latest technology such as facial recognition analytics, video monitoring, and person tracking systems.

➢ Dedicated women safety patrol vans with GPS tracking.

➢ It will enable GIS mapping of criminal hotspots, training of investigating officers and quick response police teams.

➢ Strengthen the "Police Didi" programme wherein female police officers interact with women living in slums.

➢ A cybercrime and legal assistance compensation lab will also be set up.

➢ ABHAYAM Vans for quick response to women in distress, One Stop Crisis Centres and 'She Teams' of women for surveillance.

➢ User trial of the panic button feature on mobile phones.

About 'Nirbhaya Fund'

➢ The government, in April 2015, made the women and child development ministry (WCD) as the nodal agency for the Nirbhaya Fund replacing the Home Ministry.

➢ To approve the funds under Nirbhaya fund, a committee has been constituted which comprised officials from various ministries, including women and child development, home affairs, road transport and railways.

➢ Between 2013 and 2017, the corpus of Nirbhaya Fund has grown to Rs 3,100 crore.

Source: The Hindu, Live Mint

Large burial ground unveiled in Haryana

Why in news?

☞ A Harappan excavation carried out by Archaeologists in Haryana has unveiled a large burial ground.

A brief account of Harappan studies

☞ Indus Valley Civilization had been spread across a vast area of land in present day India and Pakistan (around 12 lakh sq.km).

> ➢ It is called Harappan civilization after the place (Harappa in Pakistan) where first archaeological evidences for the civilization have been found.

> ➢ Harappan studies are focused primarily on urban design, crafts and trade, funeral customs say a lot about a community, what its people value, its social hierarchy, gender relations, and how it treats its children.

> ➢ There are five big known centres of the Harappan civilisation of which three are in Pakistan namely Harappa and Ganweriwala in Punjab, and Mohenjo Daro in Sindh).

> ➢ The other two important in sites are found in India namely Dholavira and Rakhigarhi.

> ➢ Some important burial grounds have been discovered in Lothal (Gujarat), Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Farmana (Haryana), Sanauli (UP).

About the recent excavation

☞ The excavations have been carried out in place called Rakhigarhi in Haryana by Indian archaeologists, and a South Korean team.

> ➢ The necropolis, dated to between 2,500 BC and 2,000 BC, or the Mature Harappan Period, sprawls under a 1 hectare patch of land that has long been under cultivation by present-day residents of Rakhigarhi.

> ➢ The excavation yielded graves contained full skeletal remains classified as **Primary burials.**

> ➢ The researchers subcategorised the primary burials into "typical" and "atypical" cases.

1. **Typical cases -** Single bodies buried in supine position inside a plain pit

2. **Atypical cases -** These have brick-lined graves, multiple bodies, or prone-positioned burials.

> ➢ In others, only a few human bones were found along with votive pots classified as **Secondary burials.**

> ➢ In yet others, only pots were found, **Symbolic burials** that suggest that the person died elsewhere.

April-2018

ELITE IAS

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

Significant findings

☞ The Harappan Civilization's normative form or forms of body disposal remains unclear, since there are possibilities of diverse groups following distinctive mortuary customs.

➢ The recent excavations noted pit burials with multiple bodies, and prone (face down) burials as significant departures from other Harappan necropolises.

➢ Brick-lined burials (as opposed to plain pits) were among the most elaborately constructed graves, and possibly implied a high social or ritual status.

➢ The important feature was that every individual found in a brick-lined pit was determined to be female, leading theory that these women played a special role in the community.

➢ However, women in typical burials got fewer votive pots than men, leading the study that if there were any "discriminatory" attitudes toward women in general.

➢ In Rakhigarhi, buried individuals seem to have got elaborate burials with numerous grave goods.

➢ Two burials had been done on a bed of pottery, which may be indicative of high social status.

Source: Indian Express

ELITE IAS
April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

Polity & Governance, Social Justice, Social Development

Passive Euthanasia legalized by Supreme Court

Why in news?

☞ The Supreme Court has delivered a landmark judgment allowing "living will" where, an adult in his conscious mind is permitted to refuse medical treatment or voluntarily decide not to take medical treatment to embrace death in a natural way.

Key Facts

➢ Right to Die - The Supreme Court has upheld that the fundamental right to life and dignity includes right to refuse treatment and die with dignity.

➢ It observed that the fundamental right to a "meaningful existence" includes a person's choice to die without suffering.

➢ But it is held that active euthanasia was unlawful.

➢ Dignified death - Lack of legal backing sometimes lead to suffering and undignified death of the patient.

➢ As, societal pressure and fear of criminal liability by relatives and medical doctors hamper them from making the needed decision.

➢ Religion, morality, philosophy, law and society have differing opinions on whether right to life included right to death or not.

➢ However, they all unanimously share the idea that a person should die with dignity.

➢ Individual Liberty - The issue of death and when to die transcended the boundaries of law.

➢ But the court had intervened because the sanctity of life included the dignity and autonomy of the individual.

➢ The search for a meaningful existence, the pursuit of happiness included the exercise of free will which includes the right of a person to refuse medical treatment.

➢ A person need not give any reasons nor is answerable to any authority on why he/she should write an advanced directive.

Supreme Court's guidelines on living will

➢ A Living Will is a healthcare directive, in which people can state their wishes in advance for their end-of-life care, in case they are not in a position to make a decision then.

➢ An adult with a sound and healthy mind can make a Living Will.

➢ It should be voluntarily executed and based on informed consent.

> It should be expressed in specific terms in a language "absolutely clear and unambiguous".

> The Living Will should contain the circumstances in which medical treatment should be withheld or withdrawn.

> It should give the name of the "guardian or close relative" who will give the go-ahead for starting the procedure of passive euthanasia.

> It should specify that the Will can be revoked any time.

> An individual has the right to withdraw or alter the Living Will, but only in writing.

> So, if there is more than one Living Will, the latest one will be valid.

> The Will shall be attested by two independent witnesses.

> It should preferably be counter-signed by the Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) who is assigned the jurisdiction by the District Court.

> The JMFC shall preserve one hard copy, along with one in the digital format, in his/her office.

> JMFC shall forward a copy of the Will to the Registry of the District Court.

> JMFC shall inform the immediate family of the executor, if not informed.

> A copy will be handed over to an official in the local government or Municipal Corporation or Municipality or Panchayat concerned.

> This authority shall nominate a custodian for the Living Will.

> Besides the guidelines, it was observed that modern medical science should balance its quest to prolong patient's life.

Exception

> The court held that a Living Will shall not be applicable to the 'treatment in question'.

> This is when there are reasonable grounds for believing that circumstances exist which the person did not anticipate at the time of making the advance directive.

> And necessarily which would have affected his/her decision had he/she anticipated such circumstances.

What if the board refuses the permission ?

☞ If permission to withdraw medical treatment is refused by the Medical Board, it would be open to the patient or his family members or even the treating doctor or the hospital staff to approach the high court and its chief justice will have to constitute a division bench to decide upon case.

April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

Right to Die:

☞ Right to die peacefully is part of Fundamental Right to Life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. Article 21 provides that "no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law".

Background: Aruna Shanbaug case

➢ Aruna Shanbaug is an Indian nurse who spent around 40 years in a vegetative state as a result of a sexual assault.

➢ In 2011, the Supreme Court, in a landmark judgement, issued a set of broad guidelines legalizing passive euthanasia in India.

➢ However, the present judgement observed that the previous judgement had complex procedure to get approval for passive euthanasia.

➢ This consequently made the dignity of a dying person dependent on the whims and will of third parties.

➢ The present judgement, allowing individual Living Will and framing the appropriate guidelines, has addressed the earlier shortfalls with taking forward passive euthanasia.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Supreme Court's Verdict on Honour Killing

Why in news?

☞ The Supreme Court in its recent verdict has upheld the choice of consenting adults to love and marry as a part of their fundamental rights.

About the verdict

➢ The judgment came on a petition filed by NGO Shakti Vahini to curb honour crimes.

➢ The court held that the consent of the family, community or clan is not necessary for marriage.

➢ This is to safeguard young couples under threat for marrying outside their caste or religion.

➢ The Court also issued a set of guidelines for the authorities, to stop interference by khap panchayats.

➢ The guidelines issued by the Court will be in place till the government comes up with a law.

Why are khap panchayats a grave concern?

➢ Khap panchayats are the self-appointed village courts.

➢ Khap panchayats wield enormous influence in villages of several states if India.

➢ They are often seen responsible for the growing number of honour killings in the country.

➢ They group against young couples to force their presence and dictate punishments.

➢ These "feudalistic" entities have no reluctance in committing crimes.

➢ The "sense of honour" perpetuates the idea of not to marry outside one's caste, clan or religion.

➢ Masculine dominance becomes the sole governing factor of perceptive honour.

➢ The police turn a blind eye and the administration hardly questions them.

➢ Women are treated by the khaps as servile persons who have no desire for autonomy.

➢ Their families are either silent spectators or active participants in their torture.

Court's observations

☞ The apex court ridiculed the "elevated sense of honour" of elders, the collective and khap panchayats.

➢ It observed honour killing that guillotines individual liberty, freedom of choice and one's own perception of choice.

➢ The human rights of a person are not mortgaged to the so-called honour of the family or clan or the collective.

➢ Khap panchayats were condemned for their belief that their duty is sanctified and their action of punishing the hapless victims is inviolable.

➢ It termed the elders, presiding over murder in broad daylight, as "patriarchal monarchs".

➢ The verdict thus comes down heavily on crimes committed in the name of honour.

Source: The Hindu

Supreme Court's Verdict on SC/ST PoA Act

Why in news?

☞ The Supreme Court has recently pointed out that the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA) is being rampantly misused.

About the recent verdict of SC on the PoA?

➢ SC has ruled that Section 18, which bars grant of anticipatory bail to anyone accused of violating its provisions, is not an absolute bar on giving advance bail to those against whom, prima facie, there is no case.

➢ In addition, the Bench has prohibited the arrest of anyone merely because of a complaint that they had committed an atrocity against a Dalit or a tribal person.

➢ In respect of public servants, no arrest should be made without the written permission of the official's appointing authority.

➢ And for private citizens, the Senior Superintendent of Police in the district should approve the arrest.

About SC/ST prevention of atrocities act

➢ The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) PoA Amendment Act, 1989, was introduced to protect the vulnerable sections of the society.

➢ The Act was amended in 2015 to cover newer forms of discrimination and crimes against Dalits and tribals.

➢ The act provides the following provisions

1. Establishment of Exclusive Special Courts and specification of Exclusive Special Public Prosecutors to enable speedy and expeditious disposal of cases.

2. Completion of trial of the case filed under POA within two months, from the date of filing of the charge sheet.

3. Defining clearly the term wilful negligence of public servants at all levels, starting from the registration of complaint, and covering aspects of dereliction of duty under this Act.

4. Addition of presumption to the offences if the accused was acquainted with the victim, the court will presume that the accused was aware of the caste or tribal identity of the victim unless proved otherwise.

Highlights of the SC's verdict

➢ Supreme Court in its judgement had made it clear that the SC/ST Atrocities Act should not perpetuate casteism.

➢ The court said 15-16% of the total numbers of complaints filed in 2015 under the Act were false and many cases were filed to settle personal scores and harass adversaries.

➢ SC made these statements in the view that any harassment of an innocent citizen, irrespective of caste or religion, is against the guarantee of the Constitution.

➢ Supreme Court has sought to strike a balance between protecting individual liberty and preserving the spirit of a law in favour of oppressed sections.

The Way Ahead

➢ In an ideal system, as long as every charge is judicially scrutinised and every investigation or prosecution is fair and honest, one need not worry about misuse and its adverse effects.

➢ However, social realities are far from being ideal which ought to concern the civil society including courts.

➢ The conviction rates under the Act remain low which proves the lackadaisical approach of investigators and prosecutors to bring home charges against perpetrators of such crimes.

➢ Even if courts are right in taking note of the tendency to misuse this law, society and lawmakers are justifiably worried about the sort of messaging contained in their rulings and observations.

➢ The strong demands from political parties are that words of caution and rules against misuse may be needed to grant relief to the innocent, but nothing should be done to de-fang the law itself.

Source: The Hindu, Times of India

Expedite Process for Special Status to Andhra Pradesh: Governor to Centre

Why in news?

☞ Andhra Pradesh government has asked the Centre to expedite resolution of all provisions in the AP Reorganization Act, 2014, including according special category status to the state.

What is the issue?

➢ Andhra Pradesh has been demanding a Special Category State (SCS) status from Centre ever since it was decided to carve out Telangana along with capital city Hyderabad.

➢ Following the bifurcation of A.P., Andhra lost a large volume of its revenue due to Hyderabad remaining the capital of Telangana.

➢ State-wide protests, slogan-shouting in Parliament, a Private Member Bill and intense lobbying have not resulted in a favourable decision yet.

Special Category State (SCS) status:

☞ Fifth Finance Commission introduced SCS in 1969 giving Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, and Nagaland additional Central assistance and tax concessions.

➢ Special category status is usually based on the recommendations of the National Development Council (NDC).

➢ The National Development Council (NDC) laid five guidelines to grant the status-

1. Hilly and difficult terrain;

2. Low population density or sizable share of tribal population;

3. Strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries;

4. Economic and infrastructural backwardness; and

5. Non-viable nature of State finances.

Which States are receiving it right now?

➢ Apart from Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, and Nagaland, eight more States were added to the list - Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttarakhand.

Difference between Special Status and Special Category Status (SCS):

☞ Andhra Pradesh is asking for Special Category Status and not Special Status, there's a big difference between Special Status and Special Category Status.

➢ **Special Status** is guaranteed by the Constitution of India through an Act passed by the two-third majority in both houses of the Parliament (example – J&K)

➢ **Special Category Status (SCS)** is granted by the National Development Council, an administrative body of the government.

What are the benefits which states get under SCS?

☞ The Planning Commission allocates funds to states through central assistance for state plans.

☞ Central assistance can be broadly split into three components.

1. Normal Central Assistance (NCA)

2. Additional Central Assistance (ACA)

3. Special Central Assistance (SCA)

➢ NCA, the main assistance for state plans, is split to favor special category states: the 11 states get 30% of the total assistance while the other states share the remaining 70%.

➢ The nature of the assistance also varies for special category states; NCA is split into 90% grants and 10% loans for special category states, while the ratio between grants and loans is 30:70 for other states.

➢ For allocation among special category states, there are no explicit criteria for distribution and funds are allocated on the basis of the state's plan size and previous plan expenditures.

➢ Allocation between non special category states is determined by the Gadgil Mukherjee formula which gives weight to population (60%), per capita income (25%), fiscal performance (7.5%) and special problems (7.5%).

➤ Special category states also receive specific assistance addressing features like hill areas, tribal sub-plans and border areas.

➤ Beyond additional plan resources, special category states can enjoy concessions in excise and customs duties, income tax rates and corporate tax rates as determined by the government.

Why can't the Centre grant Andhra special status?

➤ Under the 14th Finance Commission recommendations, the "special status" categorization has been removed. It is now restricted only to the north-eastern and three hilly states.

➤ The recommendations were accepted in 2015, a year after the Andhra was bifurcated.

What has the Centre offered instead?

➤ The Centre has offered to provide "special assistance" to Andhra for five years.

➤ Equivalent to the Special Status Category, it has offered 90:10 funding for all centrally sponsored schemes - which adds up to about Rs. 20,010 crore of central assistance.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018

Why in news?

☞ The Union Cabinet has recently approved the Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018 for introduction.

Key facts

The Bill covers a wide range of forms of trafficking which includes:

I. Trafficking for the purpose of forced labour, begging

II. Trafficking by administering chemical substance or hormones on a person for the purpose of early sexual maturity

III. Trafficking of a woman or child for the purpose of marriage or under the pretext of marriage or after marriage, etc

➤ In particular, the Bill comprehensively addresses the transnational nature of the crime.

➤ **Punishment**- It specifies punishment for promoting or facilitating trafficking of person.

➤ The activities may include.

I. producing, printing, issuing or distributing unissued, tampered or fake certificates.

II. registration or stickers as proof of compliance with Government requirements.

III. procuring or facilitating the acquisition of clearances and necessary documents from Government agencies fraudulently.

➤ Punishment ranges from rigorous imprisonment for minimum of 10 years to life, and fine of not less than Rs. 1 lakh.

➤ Besides, the Bill provides for the attachment and forfeiture of property and also the proceeds of crime.

➤ This is to break the organized nexus, both at the national and international level.

➤ **Relief**- The Bill provides for immediate protection of rescued victims and their rehabilitation.

➤ The Victims are entitled to interim relief immediately within 30 days to address their physical, mental trauma etc.

➤ Further appropriate relief within 60 days from the date of filing of charge sheet is also provided for.

➤ **Rehabilitation** - Rehabilitation is irrespective of criminal proceedings initiated against the accused or the outcome thereof.

➤ A specific Rehabilitation Fund for this purpose is created for the first time.

➤ This will be used for the physical, psychological and social well-being of the victim.

➤ It also for education, skill development, health care/psychological support, legal aid, safe accommodation, etc.

➤ **Confidentiality** - The confidentiality of victims/witnesses and complainants must be ensured by not disclosing their identity.

➤ Further the confidentiality of the victims is maintained by recording their statement through video conferencing.

➤ This also helps in trans-border and inter-State crimes.

➤ Time bound trial and repatriation of the victims, within a period of one year from taking into cognizance, is mandated.

➤ **Mechanism**- The Bill provides for designated courts in each district for the speedy trial of the cases.

➤ It creates dedicated institutional mechanisms at District, State and Central level.

➤ These will be responsible for prevention, protection, investigation and rehabilitation work related to trafficking.

ELITE IAS

April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

> National Investigation Agency (NIA) will perform the tasks of Anti-Trafficking Bureau at the national level present under the MHA.

> The National Anti-Trafficking Bureau will -

I. Perform the functions of international coordination with authorities in foreign countries and international organizations

II. Take up international assistance in investigation

III. facilitate inter-State and trans-border transfer of evidence and materials, witnesses and others for expediting prosecution

IV. facilitate inter-state and international video conferencing in judicial proceedings, etc

Significance of the Bill

> Trafficking in human beings is the third largest organized crime violating basic human rights.

> It is a global concern, also affecting a number of South Asian nations.

> But notably there is no specific law so far to deal with this crime.

> The Bill thus addresses a pervasive yet invisible crime affecting the vulnerable persons especially women and children.

> The new law will make India a pioneer in formulating a comprehensive legislation to combat trafficking.

Source: PIB

Haryana to set up Cooperative Election Authority

Why in news?

☞ The Haryana government announced that a Cooperative Election Authority would be set up in the State for supervising the election process in cooperative bodies.

What is State Co-operative Election Authority (SCEA)?

> The State Co-operative Election Authority (SCEA) is a statutory body responsible for superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Co-operative Societies in the State, according to the rules & regulations framed by State Government.

Constitution of State Cooperative Election Authority:

> As per The Constitution of India, (97th Amendment) Act,2011, Article 243ZK, the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections of a co-operative society in the state, shall vest in such an authority or body, as may be provided by the legislature of a State.

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

About Constitution 97th Amendment Act:

➤ The Constitution (Ninety Seventh Amendment) Act 2011 relating to the co-operatives is aimed to encourage economic activities of cooperatives which in turn help progress of rural India.

➤ It is expected to not only ensure autonomous and democratic functioning of cooperatives, but also the accountability of the management to the members and other stakeholders.

As per the amendment the changes done to constitution are:

➤ In Part III of the constitution, after words "or unions" the words "Cooperative Societies" was added.

➤ In Part IV a new Article 43B was inserted, which says: The state shall endeavour to promote voluntary formation, autonomous functioning, democratic control and professional management of the co-operative societies".

➤ After Part IXA of the constitution, a Part IXB was inserted to accommodate state vs centre roles.

Role of State Cooperative Election Authority:

➤ SCEA is empowered to appoint any officer or employee of the State Government, or any Co-operative Society, or any Local Body on any post with such designation and duties for the purpose of conducting the elections.

➤ SCEA is expected to prescribe code of conduct to be implemented in the area of operation of the society according to the nature of business or class of societies;

➤ SCEA may appoint Observers and Zonal officers, with a view to keep watch for smooth and fair conduct of elections as and when required.

➤ SCEA is empowered to issue such special or general orders or directions for fair and free elections, which may not be inconsistent with the provisions of the Act and the Rules.

➤ SCEA is expected to prescribe estimated amount of election expenditure for societies or class of societies to be deposited in the 'Election Fund' in advance by the society.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Guillotine provision utilized for passing Finance Bill

Why in news?

☞ Recently, Guillotine provision was deployed for passing all outstanding Demands for Grants in the Budget without "discussion". This has raised questions on the roles and responsibilities of the legislature in a democracy.

ELITE IAS

April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

What is Guillotine provision?

➢ "Guillotine" means to put together and fast-track the passage of financial business.

➢ After the Budget is presented, Parliament goes into recess for about 3 weeks.

➢ During this time, the House Standing Committees examine Demands for Grants for various Ministries, and prepare reports.

➢ After Parliament reassembles, the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) draws up a schedule for discussions on the Demands for Grants.

➢ Given the limited time, the House cannot take up the expenditure demands of all Ministries.

➢ The BAC therefore identifies some important Ministries for discussions.

➢ These may include Ministries of Home, Defence, External Affairs, Agriculture, Rural Development and Human Resource Development.

➢ This is when Members discuss the policies and working of Ministries.

➢ Once the House is done with these debates, the Speaker applies the "guillotine".

➢ This is to put to vote at once, all the other outstanding demands for grants that have not been discussed.

➢ This usually happens on the last day earmarked for the discussion on the Budget.

➢ The purpose is to ensure timely passage of the Finance Bill, marking the completion of the legislative exercise with regard to the Budget.

How were the Bills passed?

➢ Owing to the disruption in Parliament due to various issues, all Demands for Grants were "guillotined".

➢ The Finance Bill and Appropriation Bill (contained the consolidated Demands for Grants) with a spending plan of Rs 89.25 lakh crore.

➢ The Appropriation Bill details plans on how government ministries and departments would spend their money this fiscal.

➢ This, along with 21 amendments to the Finance Bill, which contains taxation proposals for 2018-19, was introduced.

➢ These were voted on, and passed by voice vote, all within 30 minutes.

➢ Procedurally, the government cannot be questioned as it is at the Speaker's discretion to deploy the Guillotine provision.

Growing Concerns

➢ It was an unusual step because there were still 3 weeks left in the Budget Session.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

- ➢ There is enough time for the Bills to have undergone "discussions" in the House.

- ➢ The government is technically right to fast-track legislative business but it seems to have silenced the voice of democracy and unfairly bypassed the convention.

- ➢ The clear majority of the ruling coalition in the Lower House guaranteed that the Bills would pass, without discussion.

- ➢ But beyond legislative majorities, democracy also functioned through debate, dissent, and accountability.

- ➢ One of the basic checks on the power of the executive in a democracy comes from the legislature's oversight over funds.

- ➢ The refusal to discuss the Finance Bill is symptomatic of the steady decline in the prestige and position of Parliament.

- ➢ It is also a stain in the ideas that the Parliament embodies.

- ➢ Notably, this Budget Session has spent the least time "discussing" the Finance Bill since 2004.

- ➢ The government is registering the largest year-on-year decline in time spent on the Finance Bill.

The Way Ahead

- ➢ The responsibility for the healthy functioning of Parliament is something that must be shared by every party.

- ➢ The government, despite its electoral dominance and even because of it, must ensure that it encourages debate rather than circumvent it.

Source: Indian Express

Government readies social security scheme for 50 crore workers

Why in news?

☞ In a move to increase the social well-being of the marginalized groups of the country, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has proposed a social security system to provide retirement, health, old age, disability, unemployment and maternity benefits to 50 crore workers in the unorganized sector and people below the poverty line.

About the proposed scheme:

- ➢ The scheme will be implemented in three phases over 10 years, after which the government hopes to make it universal.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➤ The scheme will be implemented in four tiers with the government wholly financing the cost for people below the poverty line.

➤ The first phase of the scheme will cost Rs 18,500 crore. The first phase will see all workers getting the bare minimum, which includes health security and retirement benefits.

➤ The second phase will see unemployment benefits being added to it while in the third phase; other welfare measures can be added.

Funding of the scheme:

➤ The scheme will be largely funded from the Building and Construction Worker Cess and funds allocated to other scattered schemes through the National Stabilisation Fund set up for the purpose.

Regulatory authority:

☞ Its implementation would be regulated and monitored by an overarching regulatory body called the National Social Security Council to be chaired by the prime minister with finance minister, health minister and chief ministers of all states along with workers and employers as its members.

Classification of workers:

☞ The 50 crore beneficiaries will be classified into four tiers.

➤ **The first tier** will comprise destitute and people below poverty line who cannot contribute for their security and hence the cost will be entirely borne by the government under tax-based schemes.

➤ **The second tier** will comprise workers in the unorganised sector who have some contributory power but are not self-sufficient.

➤ **The third tier** of beneficiaries will include those who either by themselves or jointly with their employers can make adequate contribution to the schemes, so as to be self-sufficient.

➤ **The fourth tier** will comprise comparatively affluent people who can make their own provisions for meeting the contingencies or risks as they rise.

Need for a social security scheme:

➤ India's total workforce stands at around 500 million. A little over 10% of this is in the organised sector, where workers enjoy social security of some sort under EPFO and ESIC. But a major portion of the total workforce is still in the unorganised sector, where workers do not often get even the minimum wage and lack any kind of social security cover.

Way ahead:

➤ The success or failure of the social security scheme depends on the implementation and execution of the project. But if the project succeeds, it will have a huge impact on the standard of living of employees in India.

Source: Economic Times

Nari Shakti Puraskar 2017

➢ President Ram Nath Kovind presented Nari Shakti Puraskars 2017 to 30 eminent individuals and 9 distinguished institutions.

About Nari Shakti Puraskars:

➢ To acknowledge Women's achievements, the Government of India confers Nari Shakti Puraskars on eminent women and institutions in recognition of their service towards the cause of women empowerment.

➢ The Nari Shakti Awards were initiated in the year 1999.

➢ The awards recognize the efforts made by women & institutions in rendering distinguished services for the cause of women, especially vulnerable and marginalized women.

➢ The Ministry of Women and Child Development announces these national level awards for eminent women, organisations and institutions.

➢ The Nari Shakti Puraskar carries a cash award of Rs.1 Lakh and a certificate for individuals and institutions.

Eligibility for the Puraskars:

➢ The Puraskars are open to all Indian Institutions, organisations and individuals.

➢ The WCD Ministry invites nominations from the State Governments, Union Territory Administrations, concerned Central Ministries/Departments, Non-Governmental Organisations, Universities/ Institutions, private and public sector undertakings (PSUs) working for empowerment of women.

➢ However, in exceptional cases, the Selection Committee may also, suo moto, recommend a person or institution for the award, with justification.

Selection process for the Puraskars:

➢ A Screening Committee to scrutinize and short list the nominations received for the Awards and a Selection Committee constituted for the purpose considers the achievements of organizations and individuals nominated or recommended for the Puraskars by the prescribed authority.

➢ The outstanding contributions in the field are of primary consideration in identifying the recipients of Puraskars.

➢ The final selections of the Awardees are made by the National Selection Committee which takes into account the recommendations of the Screening Committee.

➢ The National Selection Committee may at its discretion also consider individuals other than those recommended by the State Governments/Central Ministries.

Source: PIB

ELITE IAS
April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

Cabinet approves the Trafficking of Persons Bill, 2018

Why in news?

☞ The Union Cabinet has approved the Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018 for introduction in the Parliament.

Highlights of Bill:

Aggravated forms of trafficking

☞ It takes into consideration aggravated forms of trafficking. It includes trafficking for purpose of forced labour, begging, trafficking of a woman or child for the purpose of marriage or under the pretext of marriage or after marriage, trafficking by administering chemical substance or hormones on a person for the purpose of early sexual maturity etc.

☞ It comprehensively addresses transnational nature of the crime.

Punishment

☞ It prescribes punishment for promoting and facilitating trafficking of person. It includes producing, printing, issuing or distributing unissued, tampered or fake certificates, registration or stickers as proof of compliance with Government requirements, or commits fraud for procuring or facilitating acquisition of clearances and necessary documents from Government agencies.

☞ The punishment prescribed under it ranges from rigorous minimum 10 years to life and fine not less than Rs. 1 lakh. In order to break the organized nexus, both at national and international level, it mandates for attachment & forfeiture of property and also proceeds for crime.

Confidentiality of victims and witnesses

☞ It deals with confidentiality of victims and witnesses and complainants by not disclosing their identity. It will be maintained by recording their statement through video conferencing (it will help trans-border and inter-State crimes).

Trial and repatriation

➢ It has provision for time bound trial and repatriation of the victims. It will be within a period of 1 year from taking into cognizance.

➢ It provides immediate protection of rescued victims and their rehabilitation.

➢ The victims will be entitled to interim relief immediately within 30 days to address their physical, mental trauma etc. and further appropriate relief within 60 days from the date of filing of charge sheet.

Rehabilitation Fund

➢ It creates Rehabilitation Fund for the first time.

➢ It will be used for physical, psychological and social well-being of victim including education, skill development, health care and psychological support, legal aid, safe accommodation etc.

➢ It mandates designation of courts in each district for the speedy trial of the cases.

Institutional mechanisms

➢ It creates dedicated institutional mechanisms at District, State and Central level. They will be responsible for prevention, protection, investigation and rehabilitation work related to trafficking.

➢ The tasks of Anti-Trafficking Bureau at the national level will be performed by National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Anti- trafficking bureau:

➢ The bill proposes the establishment of a national anti-trafficking bureau, which shall be entrusted with the gamut of issues aimed at controlling and tackling the menace under various forms.

➢ Functions include coordination, monitoring and surveillance of illegal movement of persons and prevention.

➢ The bureau will also be entrusted with increasing cooperation with authorities in foreign countries for boosting operational and long-term intelligence for investigation of trafficking cases and driving in mutual legal assistance.

Significance of the bill:

➢ Human Trafficking is third largest organized crime violating basic human rights. At present there is no specific law to deal with this crime. The bill addresses the issue of human trafficking from point of view of prevention, rescue and rehabilitation.

➢ The Bill addresses one of most pervasive yet invisible crimes affecting most vulnerable persons especially women and children.

➢ It will make India leader among South Asian countries to combat trafficking, as UNODC and SAARC nations are looking forward to India to take lead by enacting this law.

Background:

➢ As per data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), human trafficking numbers rose by almost 20% in 2016 against the previous year.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➤ NCRB said there were 8,132 human trafficking cases last year against 6,877 in 2015, with the highest number of cases reported in West Bengal (44% of cases), and followed by Rajasthan (17%). Of the 15,379 victims who were caught in trafficking, 10,150 were female and 5,229 males.

➤ Currently, there is no single law dealing with human trafficking and the crime is covered under different acts administered by at least half-a-dozen ministries, including WCD, home, labor, health, Indian overseas affairs and external affairs. More often than not, this results in lax enforcement.

<div align="right">Source: PIB</div>

Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme to continue till 2020

Why in news?

☞ The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved continuation of Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) beyond 12th Plan for 3 years from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

☞ The scheme has been extended with total outlay of Rs. 5,500 crore to create sustainable estimated employment opportunities for 15 lakh persons in three financial years.

About Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP):

☞ The PMEGP is an effective scheme aimed at reducing unemployment and generating sustainable employment opportunities in rural and urban India.

☞ This is credit linked Scheme of Govt. of India by merging erstwhile REGP and PMRY scheme.

☞ The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is the nodal implementation agency for the PMEGP at the national level. At the state/district level, state offices of KVIC, Khadi and Village Industries Boards (KVIBs) and District Industry Centres (DIC) are the implementing agencies.

☞ The scheme's targets are fixed taking into account the extent of backwardness of state; extent of unemployment; extent of fulfillment of previous year targets; population of state/union territory; and availability of traditional skills and raw material.

Key features of the scheme:

➤ No income ceiling for setting up of projects.

➤ Assistance under the Scheme is available only to new units to be established.

➤ Existing units or units already availed any Govt. Subsidy either under State/Central Govt. Schemes are not eligible.

➤ Any industry including Coir Based projects excluding those mentioned in the negative list.

ELITE IAS

April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ Per capita investment should not exceed Rs. 1.00 lakhs in plain areas and Rs. 1.50 lakhs in Hilly areas.

➢ Maximum project cost of Rs. 25.00 lakhs in manufacturing sector and Rs. 10.00 lakhs in Service Sector.

Source: The Hindu

Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Bill, 2018

Why in news?

☞ Rajasthan recently passed a Bill providing for death penalty to those convicted of raping girls of 12 years and below.

About the Bill

➢ The Bill seeks to amend the Indian Penal Code with the insertion of new provision.

➢ The Bill had inserted **two new sections**, 376-AA and 376-DD, in the IPC.

➢ Section 376-AA provides for capital punishment or rigorous imprisonment ranging between 14 years and lifelong incarceration.

➢ Section 376-DD makes a similar provision for gang-rape of a girl child.

➢ It lays down death penalty or imprisonment from 20 years to lifelong incarceration for those convicted of the offence.

➢ Each of the persons constituting the gang will be deemed to be guilty of the offence.

➢ The Bill will become a law after it gets the Presidential assent.

➢ Rajasthan became the second State, after Madhya Pradesh, to pass such a Bill.

Need of such a bill

➢ National Crime Records Bureau's 2016 report highlights a steady increase of cases of crimes against children in Rajasthan.

➢ The State recorded around 4,000 such cases in 2016, which was 3.8% of the crimes against children registered across the country.

➢ The legislation is said to aim at protecting the girl child by laying down a deterrent punishment, including death sentence, to the offenders.

The drawbacks

➢ The demand for the death penalty in a rape case puts forth the idea of ultimately equating rape with death.

➢ Progressive groups and individuals condemn sexual violence but opposes death penalty.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ They argue that patriarchal notions of 'honour' lead society to believe that rape is the worst thing that can happen to a woman.

➢ Rape is a tool of patriarchy, an act of violence, and has nothing to do with morality, character or behaviour of the woman.

➢ There is a thus a need to strongly challenge this stereotype of the 'destroyed' woman who loses her honour and who has no place in society after she's been sexually assaulted.

➢ In this line, the Justice Verma Committee ruled against recommending death penalty even in the rarest of the rare rape cases.

➢ Justice Verma Committee was formed in 2013 to look into crimes against women after the infamous Delhi gang rape case.

➢ The committee also rejected the suggestion of chemical castration, saying it would violate human rights.

➢ As, mutilation of the body is not permitted under the constitution.

➢ It would be unconstitutional and inconsistent with basic human rights treaties to expose any citizen without the consent to potentially dangerous medical side effects.

The way ahead

➢ The mandatory minimum sentences for sexual offences have already been increased by the POCSO Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013.

➢ So the need of the day is successful prosecutions, an increase in number of convictions and social awareness.

➢ It is the lack of fear of being caught which drives most criminals and rapists.

➢ Thus, a robust criminal justice system would act as a more effective deterrent against rape or sexual violence.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, Live Mint

International Relations, India & the World & International Affairs

India and Vietnam enhance nuclear cooperation

Why in news?

➢ India and Vietnam have signed a MoU on Cooperation between the **Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP)** and the Vietnam Atomic Energy Institute (VINATOM).

➢ Its purpose is to strengthen technical cooperation in field of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

Background:

☞ India and Vietnam countries had signed a civil nuclear cooperation agreement in 2016 and the MoU will enhance training and research collaboration possibilities.

About Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP):

➢ GCNEP is sixth Research & Development unit under Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). It is located near Bahadurgarh, Haryana.

➢ It helps in capacity building, in association with interested countries and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

➢ It is involved technology, human resource development, education & training and giving momentum to R&D in enlisted areas.

Objectives of GCNEP:

➢ Develop enhanced nuclear safeguards to effectively and efficiently monitor nuclear materials and facilities.

➢ Establish accreditation facilities for radiation monitoring.

➢ Train manpower in field of Nuclear Security and Radiological Safety.

➢ Promote development of advanced, more proliferation resistant nuclear power reactors.

➢ Provide education in field of Advanced Nuclear Energy Systems, Isotopes and Radiation Technologies, nuclear forensic.

Source: The Hindu

U.S. expelled 60 Russian officials

Why in news?

☞ Recently, United States has expelled 60 Russians officials and ordered to shut Russian consulate in Seattle. The diplomatic ties between the nuclear powers U.S and Russia continue to deteriorate. The consulate in Seattle alone was ordered for a closure is due to its proximity to one of US's submarine bases and Boeing Aircraft Company.

Rationale behind this move

➢ Recently an ex-Russian spy in UK was poisoned with military grade chemical nerve agent.

➢ The UK side claimed that this substance was related to the Novichok-class nerve agents developed in the Soviet Union.

➢ UK administration accused Russia of orchestrating the attack and expelled 23 Russian diplomats as a punitive measure.

➢ Following these actions US administration ordered the expulsion of Russian intelligence officers from the United States and the closure of the Russian consulate in Seattle.

US's stand on its decision

➢ The U.S. takes this action in conjunction with its NATO allies and partners around the world in response to Russia's use of a military-grade chemical weapon on the soil of the United Kingdom.

➢ US claim its actions will make the United States safer by reducing Russia's ability to spy on Americans and to conduct covert operations that threaten America's national security.

➢ It is believed that with these steps, the U.S. and its allies pose clear to Russia that its actions have consequences.

➢ United States also stated that its ready to build a better relationship with Russia, but this can only happen with a change in the Russian government's behaviour.

Response of Russia

➢ The Russian side has strongly rejected the accusations and offered assistance in the investigation.

➢ Russian Defence Ministry made it clear that all chemical weapons stockpiles in Russia had been completely destroyed in late 2017. Which had been even confirmed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)?

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➤ However, Moscow's request for samples of the chemical substance used to poison the ex-spy was denied by UK.

➤ Moscow also expelled UK diplomats and ordered the British Council to stop its activities in Russia in response to the UK move and plans to take the same move with US.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

India, Russia, Bangladesh sign pact for Rooppur atomic plant

Why in news?

☞ India, Bangladesh and Russia have signed tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) for cooperation in construction of Rooppur nuclear power plant near Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Key facts:

➢ The Rooppur project is the first initiative under an Indo-Russian deal to undertake atomic energy projects in third countries.

➢ This will also be the first time Indian companies will be able to participate in a nuclear power project abroad. India is not a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and hence cannot participate directly in construction of atomic power reactors.

➢ Now, Indian companies can be involved in construction and installation works, the supply of materials and equipment of non-critical category in the interest of the Rooppur nuclear power plant.

Background:

➢ India has a nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia and Bangladesh.

➢ The Russian side is building a nuclear power plant in Bangladesh on a "**turnkey" basis**, which means the contractor will complete the whole project and they will be liable for any problems that arise in the plant. The scope of work includes design, production and supply of equipment, construction, installation, start-up and commissioning.

Source: Economic Times

China's Expansion into the Arctic

Why in news?

☞ In a recently released white paper, China has announced that it would develop a Polar Silk Road (PSR).

Development in the Arctic region: Causes

➢ The unintended consequences of climate change are contributing to the transition of the arctic region.

➢ Rising temperatures are melting some of the thick sheets of ice of the Arctic Ocean.

➢ This is exposing and making usable, some of the hitherto blocked up potential. That, in turn, is opening channels through which ice-breaking ships can pass.

➢ Once it becomes navigable, commercial ships will be able to move through the Arctic, opening shorter shipping routes.

➢ The 'northeast passage' of the region will open up towards Europe, which will head towards the U.S. and Canada.

➢ The Arctic is said to possess 30% of the world's undiscovered natural gas and 13% of its undiscovered oil reserves.

What is China looking for?

➢ China's 360-degree hunt for resources and new trade routes is taking new turns.

➢ The new development in the Arctic is reinforcing China's interests in the region.

➢ China's obsession with becoming a leading, and advanced, industrial heavyweight is increasingly driving Beijing towards the Arctic.

➢ It has become unrelenting and undeterred by obstacles posed by geography, politics or technology.

➢ The **Polar Silk Road** (PSR) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) initiatives aim at industrializing Eurasia.

➢ This is aimed through massive infrastructural development and network of trans-continental connectivity.

➢ China is also focusing on **cyber-connectivity.**

➢ This is displayed by its embrace of the **digital economy**, demonstrated by the rise of the global e-commerce giant Alibaba, or Wechat.

➢ Talks are on in Chinese government to build a 10,500 km **fibre-optic undersea link** across the Arctic Circle.

➢ The enterprise, called the **Northeast Passage Cable Project**, will provide China a new high-speed digital traffic link.

➢ The proposal also involves Finland, Japan, Russia and Norway as partners in this undertaking.

- ➤ China will get increasingly connected with European financial and data hubs.

- ➤ Beijing's forays in the Arctic are a result of its long-term planning for deeper engagement with the Arctic.

- ➤ China has invested in Iceland following the 2008 financial crisis.

- ➤ Eight years later, Chinese company Shenghe Resources purchased 12.5% of Greenland Minerals and Energy.

☞ China has also signalled its interest in two Iceland ports, as well as Norway's Arctic Kirkenes port.

Russia's role

- ➤ Among its littoral countries, Russia claims the largest slice of the Arctic Ocean.

- ➤ Coupled with its massive mineral reserves in Siberia, Russia is fast becoming China's chief natural-resource ally.

- ➤ Russia is thus seen as a key to China's success in the Arctic.

- ➤ The state-owned China Development Bank is set to invest in the Russian energy company Novatek. Novatek is heading the Arctic LNG II project.

- ➤ The deal would provide China access to the Arctic's liquefied natural gas.

- ➤ Significantly, the agreement would open up areas within Russia's Exclusive Economic Zone in the Arctic where the Chinese can carry out explorations.

Source: The Hindu

Myanmar puts off border pact with India

Why in news?

☞ Citing "domestic compulsions", Myanmar has indefinitely deferred signing an agreement with India to streamline the free movement of people within 16 km along the border.

Indo- Myanmar border:

☞ India's 1,643-km border with Myanmar touches four states: Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km) and Mizoram (510 km) and permit free movement regime (FMR) upto 16 km beyond border.

Background:

- ➤ In January 2018, Union Cabinet had approved agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) between India and Myanmar on land border crossing to enhance economic interaction between people of two countries.

- ➤ To give it shape, Central Government had asked four Border States with Myanmar to distribute "border pass" to all the residents living within 16 km from the border.

- ➤ The agreement has been deferred twice in the past seven months.

Significance of agreement:

➤ The agreement will facilitate movement of people on basis of valid passports and visas which will enhance economic and social interaction between two countries.

➤ It will facilitate regulation and harmonization of already existing free movement rights for people ordinarily residing in border areas of both countries.

➤ It will also give boost to economy of North East and leverage geographical connections with Myanmar to boost trade and people to people ties.

➤ It will also safeguard traditional rights of largely tribal communities residing along border which are accustomed to free movement across land border.

Need for free movement across border:

➤ There are over 250 villages with over 300,000 people living within 10 km of the border who frequently cross the border through 150 small and large, formal and informal, border crossings.

➤ Also, both the countries intend to put a system in place after India raised the issue of movement of extremists and smugglers freely across the border.

What is the Border Pass Proposal?

☞ As per the proposal, there would have been no restrictions on the movement of people across the borders. The domiciles were to be allotted border passes and those going across for agriculture, work or to meet relatives should carry the pass at all times.

Source: The Hindu

US's Tariff Increase on Imports

Why in news?

☞ Recently, United States has imposed heavy tariffs on steel and aluminium imported from all countries except Canada and Mexico.

About the new tariff plan

➤ Trump has recently signed two proclamations on levying increased import duties.

➤ They impose a 25% tariff on steel and a 10% tariff on aluminium imported from all countries except Canada and Mexico.

➤ The tariffs will take effect in 15 days.

Why this tariff decision is questionable?

➤ The US has used the national security clause of the Trade Expansion Act to increase duty.

➤ The US is both an exporter and importer of these items.

➤ Notably, it meets 70% of its requirements from the domestic sources.

➤ So there is no obvious threat to national security from imports as claimed by the US.

How is tariff decision and US's WTO commitments related?

➤ The WTO makes member countries notify the bound duty (the ceiling duty) for each product.

➤ A country cannot increase its import duty for a product above this level.

➤ In fact, the actual import for a product takes place at the applied duty, which is generally lower than the bound duty.

➤ The **difference between the bound and applied duty** is called '**water'** in trade language.

➤ For the US, the 'water' is less than 1% on most items.

➤ So, if the applied duty on a product in the US is 3%, the country can increase it up to 4% and not higher than that.

➤ This low 'water' is the suo moto commitment taken by the US at the WTO.

➤ This was taken with the conviction that low import duties are a must for national development.

➤ Since the US cannot increase duties under this, it has used the WTO security exception for the present duty increase.

➤ Clearly, the decision of choosing a low water policy by the earlier US governments has restricted Trump's policy options.

➤ He had earlier expressed his dissatisfaction with the trade deals and reasoned it for US's trade deficit.

➤ The EU, Japan, and most other developed countries have also chosen for less than 2% water.

➤ However, most of the developing countries did not agree with the US on this then.

➤ They chose to retain high water for most products, so as to raise the applied duty up to the level of bound duty when needed.

➤ As a result, if India raises duty on steel from 10% to, say, 20%, it does not violate the WTO law, as the bound duty on steel is 40% for India.

What are the implications?

➤ A 25% duty on steel will increase the domestic steel price by 5%.

➤ This could lead to an increase in the input cost for some industries, further leading to high cost of their products for consumers.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➤ This may create inflationary pressure, leading to high-interest rates and dollar appreciation.

➤ This may have negative impact on both the economy and exports.

➤ Many steel and aluminium user industries may not compete at higher costs.

➤ They may have to shut down, leading to job losses.

➤ The largest supplier of steel and steel products to the US is China and not Canada or Mexico as widely reported.

➤ China could retaliate by making import restrictions from the US, which may become disadvantageous for the US firms.

➤ It has already started investigations into the billion dollar imports of the grain sorghum from the US.

➤ China could also dump some of the $4 trillion US Treasury bonds it holds, creating disruption in the US market.

➤ The affected countries are already talking about taking retaliatory measures.

➤ Countries may also take the US to dispute settlement at the WTO.

➤ The duty decision is potential of further weakening the multilateral trade architecture.

➤ The US duty on steel and aluminium also mean that the global surplus would have to be dumped in some other countries at a lower price.

➤ The steel sector already plagued with excess capacity would face more turmoil.

Implications for India

➤ The protectionist measure by the US and potential counter-measures by other countries might hurt the steel industry globally.

➤ This might put downward pressure on steel and aluminium prices.

➤ This is a cause of worry for Indian metal companies as manufacturers have to look for newer markets.

➤ Indian metal producers with exposure to Europe and the United States already warned of increased costs and lower sales.

➤ This might affect the recent recovery in the volume growth and profitability of metal producers.

➤ A downward pressure on the stock price of metal companies would also make it tough to raise fresh equity capital for debt-repayment or capacity expansion.

Source: Business Standard

ELITE IAS

April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

Cambridge Analytica's Facebook Scandal

Why in news?

☞ A global data analytics company is in spotlight for involving in a data scandal during US election.

About the scandal

➢ The UK based company has involved in a data breech of more than 55 million Facebook users during the US president's election.

➢ This had created a shock across the globe as the scandal revealed how democracy is struggling to come to terms with complex technological developments.

➢ As of now there are no clear details about the exact nature of this scandal, what laws were violated, who is responsible.

➢ It is also not entirely clear whether such similar violations have not happened in the past.

A threat to the Democracy

➢ In recent times many tech companies uses their ability to attract clients depending on their ability to socially engineer electoral outcomes.

➢ In computer science parlance, it is a kind of confidence trick that gets you to divulge information.

➢ It is that the voters think they are getting what they want, but all the time it is the clients who are getting out of the voters what they want.

➢ The democracy increasingly becoming such a confidence trick, merely with an effect of social engineering that a good combination of surveillance and data extraction.

➢ These leads to the concern than Voters are manufactured instead of exercising their sovereignty.

➢ By which both state surveillance and private power are a challenge for democracy.

Implications for India

➢ In India like other developing nations the technology players are given free pass and there is a debate about their credibility in recent times.

➢ India's information architecture has a handful of large private players who can exercise near monopoly power, with very little accountability.

➢ Indian citizens are much concerned about the government's data collection initiatives like Aadhaar but not cautious about the privacy of the data which are being compromised with the private players ranging from Selfies to CCTV footages.

ELITE IAS
April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

What preventive steps need to be taken?

➢ Various safeguards against contracting of data needs to be brought in by tech companies.

➢ Both the public and private sector need to be transparent and accountable about their data collection protection, and its monetization mechanism

➢ Regulatory architectures must ensure that the collection of data, the use and profiting from data, do not subvert the ideals of citizenship.

<div align="right">Source: Indian Express</div>

Russia's Covert Operations

Why in news?

➢ Recently, a former Russia agent Mr. Sergei Skripal (now living in exile in U.K.) was attacked by unknown persons with a poisonous nerve agent.

➢ The attack is suspected to have a high-profile Russian government involvement and has hence resulted in tensions.

Who is Sergei Skripal?

➢ Mr. Skripal is a former Army Colonel who was part of the Russian army's intelligence wing and then worked in the Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow.

➢ Skripal was a double agent, who betrayed fellow army veterans, and provided information to Britain that considerably damaged Russian intelligence.

➢ He was arrested in Moscow in December 2004 for spying for Britain, and sentenced to 13 years in prison in August 2006.

➢ In July 2010, a spy swap was facilitated, which freed Mr. Skripal and exiled him to UK, where he has been living quietly since.

➢ He and his daughter were recently attacked with a poisonous nerve agent, and the act is suspected to be a Russian state sponsored one.

➢ This violates the "Cold War era espionage etiquette" of not disturbing pardoned spies and could also potentially escalate Russia - U.K. tensions.

How the countries have reacted?

➢ **UK -** Reactions to most previous attacks was muted for the fear of escalating tensions with Russia and thereby losing out on massive Russian investments.

➢ But the current episode has stirred a hornet's nest as there has been a clear and targeted string of attacks that has been going on unabated.

➢ British PM Teresa May gave out a strongly worded statement and has called for stringent actions if the Russians don't cooperate in the case.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

- ➢ **Russia -** The Kremlin spokesman denied that his country had any role in the Skripal incident or the other pervious murders.

- ➢ Russia has maintained that the crime had taken place in British territory and that they have knowledge of the act to support an investigation.

- ➢ Further, the spokesperson condemned the British PM's speech as irresponsible and unnecessarily provocative.

What gives credence to the suspicion?

- ➢ The nerve agent used belongs to a family of deadly substances called Novichok, which is believed to have been developed by the Soviets in the 1970s.

- ➢ Additionally, number of high-profile deaths linked to Russia has taken place in Britain and also Russia has had a history of murdering betrayers.

- ➢ Several other high-profile defectors currently live in the UK and there have already been instances of similar high profile attacks on them.

- ➢ **1978 -** Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov (erstwhile USSR) was poisoned and killed in London with a pellet containing ricin.

- ➢ **2006 -** Alexander Litvinenko was a former officer of Russia's Federal Security Service and fierce critic of President Vladimir Putin.

- ➢ He died due to radioactive polonium poisoning of his tea, but identified his killer as Russian MP Andrei Lugovoi (former KGB officer).

- ➢ **2012 -** Alexander Perepilichny was a Russian businessman and whistleblower who died while jogging near London under suspicious circumstances.

- ➢ An enquiry into his death is under way.

- ➢ **2013 -** Boris Berezovsky is an exiled Russian billionaire was found hanging in his apartment in Berkshire in southeast England.

Source: Indian Express, Times of India

Concerns raised in WTO regarding Indian export subsidy programmes

Why in news?

- ☞ Recently, the US has challenged in the WTO almost all Indian export subsidy programmes.

What is the issue?

- ➢ It has challenged practically almost the entire of India's export programmes which include the following:

- ➢ Merchandise Exports from India Scheme

➢ Export Oriented Units Scheme and sector specific schemes, including Electronics Hardware Technology Parks Scheme.

➢ Special Economic Zones

➢ Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme

➢ Duty free imports for Indian exporters

What are the concerns?

➢ As per the US administration, these apparent export subsidies provide financial benefits to Indian exporters.

➢ The benefits allow them to sell their goods more cheaply.

➢ It thus claims that the programmes harm American workers by creating an uneven playing field.

➢ **Expansion** - It is said that India's exemption under the WTO's special and differential provisions for developing countries expired in 2015.

➢ It is thus alleged that despite the expiry, New Delhi has increased the size and scope of these programmes.

➢ E.g. India introduced the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme in 2015.

➢ It is expanded to include more than 8,000 eligible products, nearly double the number of products covered at its inception.

➢ Exports from SEZs increased over 6,000% from 2000 to 2017.

➢ In 2016, exports from these zones accounted for nearly 30% of India's export volume.

Dispute settlement mechanism

➢ The US has sought consultations on the matter in the WTO.

➢ Consultations are the first step in the WTO dispute settlement process, to arrive at a mutually agreed solution.

➢ In failing this, the US may request the establishment of a WTO dispute settlement panel to review the matter.

Implications of this move

➢ The US complaint at the WTO has come as a direct attack on India's trade regime.

➢ Notably, it comes on the backdrop of a series of US trade decisions that are grossly in violation of basic WTO norms.

➢ If selective tariffs of US are taken to the WTO, there is a good chance that these will be declared violative of the rules.

➢ But even before India could protest against such selective tariffs, the US has fired the next shot.

➢ In US's selective tariffs plans, clearly, only certain sectors and certain countries will be targeted.

➢ This may appear that this is helpful for some other countries, which will avoid being hurt.

➢ But in the long term, it will ultimately hurt all, though in varied proportions.

➢ The world seems to be moving to a regime where countries can discriminate against select countries and commodities.

➢ The trend is largely undermining the international trading system and could potentially lead to a breakdown of the global trading order.

Source: The Hindu

WTO to set up compliance panel in solar dispute between India, US

Why in news?

☞ **The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) of World Trade Organization (WTO)** has decided to set up panel to examine whether India has complied with its 2016 ruling in case against US regarding domestic content requirements (DCR) rules for solar cells and modules.

What is the issue?

➢ In 2013, US had filed complaint before WTO, arguing that domestic content requirement imposed under India's ambitious Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (NSM) violates global trading rules by unfavourably discriminating against imported solar cells and modules.

➢ In February 2016, WTO panel had ruled that India had violated its national treatment obligation, by imposing the domestic content requirement. US had claimed that its solar exports to India have fallen by more than 90% since India had brought in the DCR rules.

➢ But after ruling, US had alleged that India continues to apply WTO-inconsistent measures and had approached WTO demanding action against India for non-compliance of WTO ruling in December 2017. India, however, has maintained that it has complied with WTO's ruling and had requested WTO to set up a panel to determine its compliance with rulings of dispute.

About the Dispute Settlement Body of WTO:

➢ The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) makes decisions on trade disputes between governments that are adjudicated by the Organization.

➤ By joining the WTO, member countries have agreed that if they believe fellow members are in violation of trade rules, they will use the multilateral system of settling disputes instead of taking action unilaterally — this entails abiding by agreed procedures (Dispute Settlement Understanding) and respecting judgments, primarily of the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB), the WTO organ responsible for adjudication of disputes.

➤ The General Council convenes as the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to deal with disputes between WTO members. Such disputes may arise with respect to any agreement contained in the Final Act of the Uruguay Round that is subject to the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU).

➤ The DSB has authority to establish dispute settlement panels, refer matters to arbitration, adopt panel, Appellate Body and arbitration reports, maintain surveillance over the implementation of recommendations and rulings contained in such reports, and authorize suspension of concessions in the event of non-compliance with those recommendations and rulings.

Significance of Dispute Settlement Body:

➤ Dispute settlement is regarded by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the central pillar of the multilateral trading system, and as the organization's "unique contribution to the stability of the global economy".

➤ A former WTO Director-General characterized the WTO dispute settlement system as "the most active international adjudicative mechanism in the world today."

Source: The Hindu

❑ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) approves India's membership

Why in news?

➤ The shareholders of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) have given their nod to India's candidature to international financial institution.

➤ With this, India will become the 69th member of EBRD.

➤ It will enable Indian companies to undertake joint investments in regions in which the EBRD operates.

How this membership is significant for India?

➤ The membership of EBRD will enhance India's international profile and promote its economic interests.

➤ It will give India access to EBRD's Countries of Operation and sector knowledge.

- It will boost India's investment opportunities and also improve investment climate in country.

- The membership of EBRD will help to increase scope of cooperation between India and EBRD through co-financing opportunities in manufacturing, services, energy and Information Technology.

- It will also help India leverage technical assistance and sectoral knowledge of EBRD for benefit of development of private sector.

- The membership of EBRD will also enhance competitive strength of Indian firms and provide enhanced access to international markets in terms of business opportunities, procurement activities, consultancy assignments etc.

- It will open up new vistas for Indian professionals on one hand and give fillip to Indian exports on other.

- It will also have positive impact on employment generating potential due to increased economic activities.

- It will also enable Indian nationals to get employment opportunity in EBRD.

About EBRD:

- The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is an international financial institution that supports projects in over 30 countries, from Eastern Europe to central Asia and the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

- Investing primarily in private sector clients whose needs cannot be fully met by the market, the EBRD promotes entrepreneurship and fosters transition towards open and democratic market economies.

Ownership:

☞ The EBRD is owned by 65 countries and two intergovernmental institutions: the European Union and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Mandate of EBRD:

- The mandate of the EBRD stipulates that it must only work in countries that are committed to democratic principles.

- Respect for the environment is part of the strong corporate governance attached to all EBRD investments.

Support provided by EBRD:

- The EBRD provides project financing for banks, industries and businesses, both new ventures and investments in existing companies.

- It also works with publicly owned companies, to support privatisation, restructuring state-owned firms and improving municipal services.

➢ It uses close relationship with governments in the region to promote policies that will bolster the business environment.

Governance:

➢ The powers of the EBRD are vested in the Board of Governors to which each member appoints a governor, generally the minister of finance.

➢ The Board of Governors delegates most powers to the Board of Directors, which is responsible for the EBRD's strategic direction.

➢ The President is elected by the Board of Governors and is the legal representative of the EBRD. Under the guidance of the Board of Directors, the President manages the EBRD's work.

<div align="right">Source: The Hindu, Live Mint</div>

Iraq overtakes Saudi Arabia as oil supplier to India

Why in news?

☞ Iraq has overtaken Saudi Arabia by a wide margin to become India's top crude oil supplier, meeting more than a fifth of the country's oil needs in the current financial year.

Reasons for increase of imports from Iraq:

➢ Iraq was able dethrone Saudi Arabia as India's largest crude oil supplier mainly by supplying heavily discounted crude compared to crude oil sold by Saudi Arabia at Official Selling Price of OPEC.

➢ In given time period, prices of crude oil had shot up following production cuts by OPEC members. However, Iraq did not follow the aggressive pricing due to its heavy dependence on oil revenues to fund its economy.

➢ Moreover, Indian refiners in recent years have invested heavily in modernizing plants to more efficiently process low grade crudes including Basra heavy crude from Iraq, giving greater flexibility in the cost-saving oil grades they can buy.

Facts Related to the Import: At a Glance

➢ Saudi Arabia traditionally has been India's top oil source but in the April-January period of 2017-18.

➢ India imported 184.4 MT of crude oil during the period as compared to 213.9 MT in the entire 2016-17 fiscal, and 202.8 MT in 2015-16.

➢ Easing of western sanctions in 2015 has led to the Indian refiners raising their purchase from Iran. Now Iran continued to be the third largest supplier after Saudi Arabia.

➢ Venezuela is India's fourth largest supplier followed by Nigeria.

➢ India is 80% dependent on imports to meet its oil needs.

<div align="right">Source: The Hindu, Times of India</div>

Indian Economy and Economic Development

Implementation of GST E-way Bills

Why in news?

☞ Recently, the Union government has announced introduction of GST E-way bills from April 1, 2018.

About e-way bill

➢ The E-way bill is a document to be generated online under the GST system, when goods of the value of more than Rs.50,000 are shipped inter-State or intra-State.

➢ The E-way bill must be raised before the goods are shipped and should include details of the goods, their consignor, recipient and transporter.

➢ The transporter has to carry the invoice and the copy of E-way bill as support documents for the movement of goods.

➢ Though check-posts have been abolished under GST, a consignment can be intercepted at any point for the verification of its E-way bill, for all inter-State and intra-State movement of goods.

➢ If a consignment is found without an E-way bill, a penalty of Rs.10,000 or tax sought to be evaded, whichever is greater, can be levied.

➢ Whether goods are transported on one's own or hired conveyance, by air, rail or road, the E-way bill has to be generated.

Significance of E-way bills

➢ GST has the ability to unify India as a market and do away with bothersome inter-State check-posts.

➢ Ministry of Road Transport and Highways reports that a typical truck in India spends 20 per cent of its time in inter-state check points.

➢ Both the GST levy and the E-way bill were expected to root out such transit delays, while at the same time plugging tax evasion.

➢ Every E-way bill generated by a sender or buyer of goods is to be automatically updated in the outward sales return (GSTR1) of the supplier, leaving little scope for tax evasions on shipments.

➢ In the previous tax regime, tax officials had to manually cross-check the way bill with the tax returns filed, to verify if all the consignments came within the tax net.

About the implementation

➢ E-way bills have been planned for a reintroduction on April 1, which was earlier planned on February 2018 for inter-State transactions.

April - 2018

ELITE IAS

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ The intra-State transactions may be brought into the ambit from June 1, although Karnataka has implemented it already.

➢ It has now been clarified that the value of Rs.50,000 will apply to a single consignment and not to an assortment of goods from different parties.

➢ The minimum distance allowed for movement of goods without the requirement of an e-way bill within a state has been increased from 10 km to 50 km.

Areas of concern

➢ Business community is apprehensive that with GST collections falling short of the monthly norm of over Rs.1-lakh crore in 2017-18 the e-way bill may turn into a revenue-raising measure in 2018-19.

➢ In effect, this could lead to viewing every moving truck with suspicion, thus government ensure e-way bill as an alternative way to verify tax credit claims.

➢ Thus the original objective of replacing check post hold-ups, dubious paperwork and efficient system should not be lost sight of.

➢ For a flawless implementation errors and mismatches of compliance must be rooted out, the software backbone of the system need to be strengthened.

➢ In the event of an e-way bill lapsing if a vehicle breaks down in transit, there could be documentation challenges, regulations to resolve these needs to be made.

Source: Business Standard

Revamping RBI's Regulatory Power

What is the issue?

☞ Recently, The RBI Governor has highlighted some fundamental limitations existing in relation with RBI's regulatory power. This comes as a response to government blaming the RBI for the recent PNB scam.

Government's response to the scam

➢ The government, soon after state-owned Punjab National Bank's fraud case, accused the RBI for its supervisory failures.

➢ It also blamed the bankers and auditors for their shortfalls.

RBI's concerns

➢ RBI governor made mention of RBI's warnings about possible risks, but said that the PNB's internal systems failed to take note of it.

➢ In response to the government's accusation, the RBI governor Urjit Patel pointed out the limitations to RBI's power.

April - 2018

ELITE IAS

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ He highlighted the issues such as -

✔ The absence of powers to remove the directors on the management of PSU banks who are appointed by the government

✔ The lack of power to force a merger or trigger liquidation of a state-owned bank

✔ The limited legal authority for RBI to hold these bank boards accountable

➢ The government, the owner of public sector banks, still control a dominant share of the country's banking business.

➢ RBI Governor pointed out that the banking regulatory powers were not 'ownership neutral' in India.

➢ This is possibly why the RBI could not fully exercise its powers to crack down on corporate governance issues at state-owned banks.

➢ A system of dual regulation, by the finance ministry in addition to RBI, has resulted in ineffective banking regulation.

➢ Patel urged the government to strengthen the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to give RBI enough power to regulate PSU banks.

The Way Ahead

➢ The RBI's stance is valid, given the discomfort with knee-jerk reactions and the blame games since the fraud came to light.

➢ The greater challenge is governance reform in banks.

➢ The government should swiftly settle the issue of separation of ownership and regulatory control.

➢ It can consider making the regulatory powers of RBI fully "ownership neutral".

➢ Besides, privatisation does appear to be an easy option to address some of the concerns. But it is important to see whether such an option should be exercised during a crisis.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu

Draft Agriculture Export Policy

Why in news?

☞ A new Draft Agriculture Export Policy was released recently by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Key facts

➢ The 'National Agriculture Export Policy' is formulated in line with the vision to double the farmers' income by 2022.

➢ It is also towards the goal of increasing the share of agricultural exports from present about USD 30 billion to over USD 60 billion.

➢ Getting to one of the top 10 exporting countries of agricultural products is also one of the goals.

Concerns addressed

➢ India is today a leading global producer of food grain, dairy and several horticultural crops. But it holds a minuscule 2.2% share in global agri-exports.

➢ It is stuck at the lowest rung of the value chain, and India's farm exports are highly reliant on a handful of commodities.

➢ These include marine products, meat, and rice and plantation crops.

➢ Exports even in these items are frequently interrupted by self-imposed and arbitrary trade curbs.

➢ State-level curbs on movement of produce add to already high costs from fragmented farms and poor logistics.

➢ High rejection rates on consignments due to poor quality, antibiotic and pesticide residues and other phyto-sanitary grounds are major concerns.

➢ Policy interventions such as e-Nam and the repeal of the APMC Acts by States have made scant progress.

➢ Domestic price and production volatility of certain agricultural commodities lead to using the existing policy for short-term goals. These include taming inflation, providing price support to farmers and protecting the domestic industry.

➢ These decisions may serve the immediate purpose of maintaining domestic price equilibrium.

➢ However, they end up distorting India's image in international trade as a long term and reliable supplier.

➢ It is thus imperative to frame a stable and predictable policy.

Key recommendations

➢ The policy stresses on improving the infrastructure, and storage and exit point logistics.

➢ It suggested a comprehensive need-gap analysis of existing export oriented infrastructure across the value chain for this.

➢ The policy emphasised promoting R&D activities for new product development for the upcoming markets.

➢ Increased focus on R&D, new varieties and state of the art lab for effective accreditation and monitoring is called for.

➢ This will be part of the efforts towards establishing a strong quality regime.

> Besides, the policy stressed the need to ensure greater interaction between the various research organizations and industry bodies.

> The policy aims to boost high value and value added agricultural exports, focusing on perishables.

> Improving the institutional mechanism for tackling market access barriers is suggested as a measure.

> Dealing with sanitary and phytosanitary issues are also the priorities.

> Processed agricultural products and all kinds of organic products will not be brought under any kind of export restriction.

> Monopoly of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) is a long existing concern.

> It prevents private players from setting up markets and investing in market infrastructure.

> APMC across states have not been able to achieve farmers' welfare envisaged in these acts.

> The policy hinted at continuing the efforts with state governments to remove perishables from their APMC Acts.

> It also suggested better coordination between central ministries that are now working at cross-purposes.

> State governments would also be urged to standardize/ rationalize mandi taxes for largely exported agricultural products.

> Simplification or uniformity of mandi/agricultural fee across states will create a transparent supply chain.

> This will empower the farmers, providing wider access to markets and enabling free trade across the country.

> It is proposed that the agricultural export policy must focus on promotion of value added, indigenous and tribal products.

> Development of organic export zones/organic Food Park with an integrated approach is suggested to help promote shipments.

> Global bodies like US FDA and European Food Safety Authority are empowered to frame, regulate and implement policies related to both agricultural production and trade.

> The draft policy considered working towards bringing in similar agencies in India.

> Besides the policy made a case for promoting contract farming as it would help in attracting investments.

Source: The Hindu, PIB, Business Standard

❑ RBI to discontinue the issue of Letters of Undertakings (LoUs) and etters of Comforts (LoCs)

Why in news?

☞ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to discontinue the issue of Letters of Undertakings (LoUs) and Letters of Comforts (LoCs).

What are LoUs and LoCs?

LoUs

➢ These are assurance given by one bank to another to meet a liability on behalf of a customer, which is usually valid for 180 days.

➢ It is used for overseas import remittances and involves four parties an issuing bank, a receiving bank, an importer and a beneficiary entity overseas.

➢ LoUs are conveyed from bank to bank through "Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication" (SWIFT) instructions.

LoCs

➢ A letter of comfort is a written document that provides a level of assurance that an obligation will ultimately be met.

➢ In its traditional context, a letter of comfort is given to organizations or persons of interest by external auditors regarding statutory audits, statements, and reports used in a prospectus.

➢ The letter of comfort will be attached to the preliminary statements as assurance that it will not be materially different from the final version.

What is the importance of these instruments?

➢ LoUs and LoCs offer exporters a source of cheap and dynamic working capital in a banking system that is clotted with high interest rates and complex procedures.

➢ When mobilised legally with appropriate margin money and bank guarantees logged into the bank's formal transaction recording system LoUs have proven to be more convenient sources of funding than the conventional letters of credit (LoCs).

Criticism of this move

➢ Depriving exporters of this instrument can have a disruptive effect on the buyers' credit market and several adverse consequences for the economy at large.

➢ It would raise borrowing costs by between 0.5 percentage point and 1 percentage point.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➤ Exporters will also be forced to access the dollar market for funds, exerting pressure on the rupee just as oil prices are hardening.

➤ Apart from other anxieties this ban comes at a time when disruptions caused by the goods and services tax (GST) are yet to be sorted out, as many exporters have been waiting for months for offset dues from the Integrated GST to materialize.

The Way ahead

➤ A racehorse sector such as gems and jewellery, which accounts for roughly 16 per cent of India's exports and employs over 5 million workers, could be a particular victim of this move.

➤ Although only about 5 per cent of jewellers utilise the LoU/LoC route, these are usually the bigger players that account for the bulk of exports, India being the world's largest exporter of cut and polished diamonds.

➤ RBI must consider the fact that the prime factor of the recent scam is not LoUs, its noncompliance of the state owned bank with CBS (core banking system) and SWIFT.

➤ Thus this integration should be the focus of the RBI's concerns for all banks that are involved in export finance so that disclosure is institutionalised rather than dependent on the integrity of a bank executive.

➤ Besides no instrument, whether LoU or LC, can be considered 100 per cent safe so banning one in preference to another demands much more serious examination of RBI.

Source: Business Standard

Increasing Trade Deficit in India

Why in news?

☞ Recently, Ministry of Commerce and Industry has stated that India's trade deficit has increased.

What is trade deficit?

➤ A trade deficit is an economic measure of international trade in which a country's imports exceeds its exports.

➤ A trade deficit represents an outflow of domestic currency to foreign markets.

➤ It is also referred to as a negative balance of trade (BOT).

➤ Trade Deficit = Total Value of Imports – Total Value of Exports

India's trade deficit

➤ The Trade deficit of India for February 2018 was estimated at $11,979.21 million, 25.8 per cent higher than the $9,521.73-million deficit reported during February 2017.

- Exports from the country rose 4.48 per cent in dollar terms during February this year compared to the same month of the last fiscal.

- But, in rupee terms, export growth was flat with a mere 0.27 per cent rise, reflecting a dip in value of the Indian currency.

Causes behind the increasing trade deficit

- During the recent past there is an increase in imports of petroleum, crude & products, electronic goods, machinery, electrical & non-electrical, pearls, precious & semi-precious stones and coal, coke & briquettes among others.

- India's crude oil import bill during February 2018 stood at $10,194.33 million, 32.05 per cent higher than the import bill of February 2017 on the back of a recovery in crude prices.

- This is also because the Global crude oil prices have increased 17.90 per cent in February 2018 compared to February 2017.

Implications for India

- For India economic growth is on the back of higher exports of petroleum products, organic and inorganic chemicals, drugs and pharmaceuticals, rice and electronic goods.

- Exports during February 2018 have increased when compared during February 2017.

- But increasing deficit had weakened Indian currency, as the pace of overall exports has slowed down in February 2018 which is distressing.

- It is even more disconcerting that Indian exports faltering when the global economy is on an uptick.

Source: Economic Times

First Mega Food Park in Maharashtra at Satara inaugurated

Why in news?

☞ The first Mega Food Park in the state of Maharashtra, M/s Satara Mega Food Park Pvt. Ltd. at Village Degaon, District Satarawas has recently been inaugurated.

Key facts

- This is the **12th Mega Food Park** operationalized in the country so far and the 10th operationalized during the tenure of present government.

- **India's first mega food park 'Srini Mega Food Park'**, sprawling 147-acre space, was opened in Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh in 2012.

About Mega Food Parks Scheme:

☞ The Mega Food Parks Scheme aims to provide a mechanism to bring together farmers, processors and retailers and link agriculture production to the market so as to ensure maximization of value addition, minimization of wastages and improving farmers' income.

➢ The primary objective of the Scheme is to provide modern infrastructure facilities for the food processing along the value chain from the farm to the market with a cluster based approach based on a hub and spokes model.

Implementation of the scheme:

➢ The Mega Food Park project is implemented by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) which is a Body Corporate registered under the Companies Act. However, State Government, State Government entities and Cooperatives are not required to form a separate SPV for implementation of Mega Food Park project.

Financial assistance:

➢ Under the Scheme, Government of India provides financial assistance upto Rs. 50.00 Crore per Mega Food Park project.

Infrastructure facilities:

➢ The Scheme includes creation of infrastructure for primary processing and storage near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) and common facilities and enabling infrastructure like roads, electricity, water, ETP facilities etc. at Central Processing Centre (CPC). These PPCs and CCs act as aggregation and storage points to feed raw material to the food processing units located in the CPC.

Collection Centres:

➢ The CCs work as a point of aggregation of the produce from individual farmers, farmer groups and Self Help Groups (SHGs).

➢ They feed the raw materials to PCCs.

➢ They are mostly managed by local entrepreneurs. They serve as farm level aggregation points for adjoining areas.

Primary Collection Centres:

➢ The PCCs work as primary handling centres which use the raw materials to be processed further in the CPC.

➢ A PCC serves a number of CCs in the proximity.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➤ They provide primary processing facilities such as weighing, sorting, grading, washing, crating and storage of the produce.

Central Processing Centre:

➤ CPC is an industrial park in a large area and houses a number of processing units owned by different business houses.

➤ The park shall provide common facilities such as electricity, water and effluent treatment besides specialised services such as warehousing, cold storage, logistics and backward integration through the network of primary processing centres and collection centres.

Advantages of Mega Food Parks:

☞ The Mega Food Parks are expected to provide high quality food processing infrastructure near the farms. These included logistics, transportation, and central processing centres so as to ensure –

➤ Direct as well as indirect employment generation in rural areas

➤ Exposing farmers to a more systematic, market driven and profitable farming activities

➤ Generation of additional income for the farmers

➤ Reduction in post harvest losses

➤ Maintenance of value chain from the farm to the market.

Challenges in the implementation of the scheme:

☞ Despite its huge potential, MFPS has failed to gain momentum due to several reasons.

➤ Promoters have faced difficulties in selling the new concept to banks and, as a result, have failed to secure loans to build the parks.

➤ Acquiring the 50 acres of land, which is mandatory under MFPS, has been another challenge that most developers have failed to address.

➤ Convincing small enterprises to set up shop at these facilities has not been easy.

➤ The overall economic slowdown, globally, and in India, did not help either.

Source: PIB

Cabinet approves establishment of National Financial Reporting Authority

Why in news?

☞ The Union Cabinet approved establishment of National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) as an independent regulator for the auditing profession.

- ➢ It aims to tighten regulatory oversight over auditors and plug loopholes.

- ➢ It will be independent from those it regulates for enforcement of auditing standards and ensuring quality of audits.

About National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA):

☞ The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) is a body proposed in Companies Act 2013 for the establishment and enforcement of accounting and auditing standards and oversight of the work of auditors.

- ➢ NFRA will have 15 members, including a chairperson and three full-time members. Besides, there would be a secretary.

Functions:

- ➢ It would be an overarching watchdog for auditing profession and once set up, the current powers of the ICAI to act against erring chartered accountants will be vested with the new regulator.

- ➢ The NFRA will have powers to debar an erring auditor or auditing firm for up to ten years besides slapping heavy penalties.

Jurisdiction:

- ➢ The jurisdiction of the NFRA will extends investigation of Chartered Accountants and their firms to all listed companies as well as large unlisted public companies. Government will prescribe thresholds in the rules.

- ➢ Government can also refer other entities for investigation where public interest is involved. However, inherent regulatory role of existing ICAI will continue in respect of its members and specifically to audits pertaining to private limited companies and public unlisted companies below threshold limit notified in rules.

- ➢ Further, ICAI will continue to play its advisory role with respect to accounting and auditing standards and policies by making its recommendations to NFRA.

NFRA and Quality Review Board (QRB):

- ➢ QRB will continue its quality audit in respect of private limited companies, public unlisted companies below prescribed threshold and also with respect to audit of companies delegated by NFRA.

Significance of the move:

- ➢ The decision is expected to result in improved foreign/domestic investments, enhancement of economic growth, supporting the globalisation of business by meeting international practices, and assist in further development of audit profession.

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

Need for establishing NFRA:

➢ The need for establishing NFRA has arisen on account of the need felt across various jurisdictions in the world, in the wake of accounting scams, to establish independent regulators, independent from those it regulates, for enforcement of auditing standards and ensuring the quality of audits to strengthen the independence of audit firms, quality of audits and, therefore, enhance investor and public confidence in financial disclosures of companies.

➢ ICAI's disciplinary record is often criticised-a charge that the institute is now trying to cope with.

➢ Corporate balance sheets cannot be trusted, because sometimes, CAs will put their signature on any fiction for a price.

➢ Not just this, helping businesses evade taxes is the main service many of them offer.

➢ Only 25 auditors had faced any action in over a decade even as 1,400 cases were pending.

Background:

➢ While Companies Act 2013 had provided for NFRA as a regulatory agency for audit, accounts and financial reporting, Section 132 of the law has remained on paper as the rules are yet to be notified. It is one of the few sections of the law that has not been notified yet.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

Cabinet approves Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018

Why in news?

☞ The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Finance to introduce the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018 in Parliament.

➢ The bill aims to tighten the noose on the wilful defaulters who tends to abscond the nation to evade the clutches of the law.

Highlights of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018:

➢ The bill defines fugitive economic offender (FEO) as any individual against whom warrant for arrest in relation to scheduled offence (enlisted in the this law) has been issued by any court in India, but he leaves or has left India to avoid criminal prosecution or refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution.

➢ The onus is on authorities to prove that an individual is a fugitive economic offender. It gives government right to confiscate property of such economic offenders in India and abroad. Its provisions are also be applicable on proxy-owned properties of economic offenders.

➢ It is applicable in cases where total value involved in such economic offences is Rs.100 crore or more. It keeps banks and other financial institutions at Centre and provides help to them recover amount.

➢ It establishes Special Court under the Prevention of Money-laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 to declare a person as FEO.

➢ The special court will also appoint 'administrator' to oversee confiscated property. It will be responsible for disposing of confiscated property and t property will be used to satisfy creditors' claims.

➢ It debars fugitive economic offender from defending any civil claim at the discretion of any court including High Court. If prior to the declaration, the alleged FEO returns to India and submits to the appropriate jurisdictional court, proceedings under this Act will cease by law.

Need for such law:

➢ There have been several instances of economic offenders fleeing country to evade clutches Indian law to remain outside jurisdiction of Indian courts.

➢ The absence of such offenders from Indian courts has several deleterious consequences. It hampers investigation in criminal cases, wastes precious time of courts of law, undermines rule of law in India.

➢ Further, most such cases of economic offences involve non-repayment of bank loans thereby worsening financial health of banking sector.

➢ Moreover, existing non-coherent civil and criminal provisions in law are not entirely adequate to deal with severity of problem.

Significance of the Bill:

➢ The bill will provide effective, expeditious and constitutionally permissible deterrent legal teeth to enforcing agencies to ensure that such actions of FEO are curbed.

➢ The Bill is expected to re-establish the rule of law with respect to the fugitive economic offenders as they would be forced to return to India to face trial for scheduled offences.

➢ This would also help the banks and other financial institutions to achieve higher recovery from financial defaults committed by such fugitive economic offenders, improving the financial health of such institutions.

➢ It is expected that the special forum to be created for expeditious confiscation of the proceeds of crime, in India or abroad, would coerce the fugitive to return to India to submit to the jurisdiction of Courts in India to face the law in respect of scheduled offences.

Source: The Hindu

Finance Ministry to consolidate overseas operations of public sector banks

Why in news?

☞ Public-sector banks (PSBs) have started rationalising the overseas operations by consolidating 35 operations and closing down non-viable branches as part of the clean and responsible banking initiative.

Key facts:

➢ The consolidation includes bank branches, remittance centres and representative offices. It will be without affecting international presence of PSBs in these countries.

➢ Moreover, 69 operations also have been identified for further examination.

Background:

➢ As per the banking sector agenda approved at the PSB Manthan in November last year, public sector banks (PSBs) have to examine all 216 overseas operations.

Need for rationalisation:

➢ The rationalisation of overseas operations of banks is significant as jewellery designer Nirav Modi allegedly cheated Punjab National Bank (PNB) of Rs 12,700 crore in connivance with PNB staff and officials of overseas branches of other state-owned banks.

➢ Moreover, it is part of government's commitment to 'clean and responsible banking and move towards cost efficiencies and synergies in overseas market.

➢ Presently, public sector banks have about 165 overseas branches, besides subsidiaries, joint ventures and representative offices.

➢ **State Bank of India has the largest number of overseas branches** (52) followed by Bank of Baroda (50) and Bank of India (29).

➢ **The state-owned banks have largest number of branches in United Kingdom (32)** followed by Hong Kong and UAE (13 each) and Singapore (12).

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Extension of Urea Subsidy

Why in news?

☞ The government has recently approved a proposal to extend urea subsidy till 2020.

Key Facts

➢ Urea is made available to farmers at a statutorily controlled price of Rs 5,360 per tonne.

➢ The difference between the delivered cost of the fertiliser at farm gate and maximum retail price is given as subsidy to manufacturers.

➢ The Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs (CCEA) has recently cleared the proposal of the Department of Fertilizers.

➢ Accordingly, the urea subsidy has been extended for 3 years till 2020.

➢ Normally, the ministry of chemicals and fertilisers takes approval for the urea subsidy on an yearly basis.

➢ However, this time it has received clearance for 3 years.

➢ The CCEA has also approved implementation of direct benefit transfer (DBT) for disbursement of fertiliser subsidy

➢ DBT would entail 100% payment to fertiliser companies.

➢ Continuation of the urea subsidy will facilitate smooth implementation of DBT scheme in fertiliser sector.

❑ **The direct benefit transfer (DBT) for fertilisers differs from LPG subsidy in following ways**

➢ For fertilisers, payment would not be transferred to a farmer's bank account.

➢ It would instead go to manufacturers and importers on actual sales made by a retailer.

➢ Currently, the company is eligible for subsidy payment after submitting invoices prepared on the basis of receipts at the district-level warehouses. This typically takes 45-60 days.

➢ Under DBT, the retailer will record the transaction on a point of sale machine authenticated with biometric information of the farmer.

➢ The fertiliser maker will be entitled to get 100% subsidy in 7 days.

➢ The government is pushing all companies to set up retail centres.

➢ DBT would set right some of the challenges faced by both the industry and the government such as – diversion of subsidised urea for industrial use,delay in subsidy payments,skewed usage of nutrients, smuggling to neighbouring countries

ELITE IAS

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

April-2018

Concerns with urea subsidy

➢ Farmers tend to **use urea excessively** because of its low prices, made possible by the subsidy.

➢ This is ruinous for **soil health** and agriculture in the long-run.

➢ Moreover, a bulk of subsidised urea is cornered by a handful of **rich farmers**.

➢ Farmers with large land-holdings can show a **high urea demand.**

➢ This can become a route for both farmers and re-sellers to exploit the black market for urea.

The way ahead

➢ Farmers should be aware of the effects of overuse of fertilisers on soil health.

➢ A far better approach would be to fix a **per hectare grant** in place of fertiliser subsidies.

➢ The grant could be mapped against the fertiliser requirement that, in turn, is assessed from soil health card sampling.

➢ This can ensure access to fertiliser and address urea leakages as well as curb its overuse.

Source: The Hindu,PIB

Environment and Ecology

Forest Fire in Tamilnadu

Why in news?

☞ Recently, a massive forest fire occurred at Kurangani forest on the Western Ghats in Theni district of Tamil Nadu.

Key facts

➢ The Kurangani fire turned into a disaster as 36 trekkers were stuck on the mountains.

➢ With their regular trekking route cut off by the fire, many panicked and lost their direction.

➢ While a number of trekkers were injured in falls, as many as 16 persons lost their lives.

➢ In the immediate aftermath of fire, there is a temporary loss of food and shelter, causing displacement of territorial birds and mammals, upsetting the ecological balance.

Causes of forest fire

➢ Forest fires may be caused by different factors like natural causes, including lightning, but 99% of the fires in the forests are man-made.

➢ Attempts to encroach upon forest lands, renewal of pastures or regain agricultural land at the expense of forests.

➢ Fire caused by poachers and timber smugglers to destroy evidence of illegal activities or merely fire by miscreants or burning of waste in illegal dumps.

➢ It is also suspected that the locals might set fire in order that there may be growth of fresh grass for their cattle, or to shift cultivation patterns on the hills.

➢ A smouldering fire not stamped out properly, leftover by travellers, campers and picnickers.

➢ It can even might be of a spark that has escaped from a deliberate one on agricultural lands or from controlled burning elsewhere.

Measures to control forest fire

➢ Better monitoring of reserve forest areas and keeping a close watch on fire-prone spots have been recommended.

➢ State government need to appoint temporary fire watchers for this purpose at the same time government need to take measures to fill the vacancies in the forest departments.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ Forest department should have a special unit of disaster management and rescue team to respond such incidents in near future.

➢ Thus minimization of loss of life has to be prioritized by the respective governments as the forests fires have the tendency to change wildlife and human habitats.

Source: The Hindu

Diclofenac Threat to Vultures

Why in news?

☞ The 104 birds bred at Rani, Assam face a serious threat by Diclofenac drug used in cattle.

About the vulture population in India

➢ India hosts 9 vulture species, 5 of them the highly endangered Gyps species.

➢ Assam is naturally a suitable habitat for vultures.

➢ It is home to 6 species, including winter visitors from the Himalayas — the Himalayan and Eurasian griffons.

➢ The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Assam at Rani, Guwahati has 104 vultures, brought in as chicks.

➢ It has 30 adults and sub-adults: all oriental white-backed and slender-billed.

➢ These are 2 of the 6 species found in Assam that are old enough to be set free.

➢ The vulture population in Assam is presently battling toxic chemicals in livestock carcasses, due to Diclofenac use.

How diclofenac affects vultures?

➢ Diclofenac is a painkiller, usually injected to cattle.

➢ The digestive system of vultures is so evolved.

➢ This makes it possible to tolerate bacteria and natural toxins in putrefying meat.

➢ But they are vulnerable to chemicals such as diclofenac.

➢ Diclofenac present in the carcasses of cattle, injected as a painkiller, finds way into the vulture.

What are the challenges involved?

➢ Diclofenac for veterinary use was banned in 2005 but it was continued to be made for humans.

➢ BNHS pressured the government into banning the vials (containers) of 30 ml or more in 2015.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➤ Humans need 3-5 ml while only 30 ml or more works for cows.

➤ But untrained veterinarians use the 30 ml vials for veterinary use, with fatal consequences for vultures.

➤ The last of the 2015 stocks of the big vials expire by December 2018.

➤ This is thus delaying the freedom (release) for adult vultures being reared in captivity in the State.

➤ Even after the expiry of diclofenac stocks, there is no guarantee that the birds will be safe.

➤ The rampant use of pesticides by farmers and more than 70,000 tea gardens is another concern.

➤ Villagers generally poison carcass of dead animals with pesticides to kill dogs, jackals and leopards that are a danger to livestock.

➤ Unfortunately, vultures that feed on these carcasses become the unintended victims.

➤ Recently, around 30 vultures, most of them Himalayan griffons, died in Assam, after feeding on the poisoned carcass of a goat.

➤ Vultures take time to mature, pair for life, breed once a year, and live up to 70 years.

➤ This extended cycle make captive breeding efforts challenging.

Measures to address this

➤ The VCBC takes various efforts to save the birds by reducing their exposure to the fatal drug.

➤ Mutton is the only food given at the VCBC and goats are kept for 10-12 days before the feeding.

➤ This is to ensure that traces of any toxic painkiller or other chemicals are flushed out.

Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC)

➤ The VCBCs are set up by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in association with State Forest Departments.

➤ The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Assam is at Rani, about 30 km west of Guwahati.

➤ It is one of the 4 Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres in India.

➤ The other three are in Pinjore (Haryana), Buxa (West Bengal), Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh).

Source: The Hindu

Micro-plastics in Bottled Waters

Why in news?

☞ A new research has shown the presence of micro-plastic particles in bottled drinking waters.

Key facts

➢ Bottled waters are found to be contaminated with plastic including polypropylene, nylon, and polyethylene terephthalate (PET).

➢ A single bottle could hold dozens or possibly even thousands of microscopic plastic particles.

➢ The study finds a global average of 10.4 plastic particles per litre, in the 100 micron or 0.10 millimetre size range.

➢ The tests also showed a much greater number of even smaller particles which are also likely plastic.

➢ The global average for these smaller particles is around 300 per litre.

➢ Water in glass bottles is also found to hold micro-plastics.

What is micro plastic?

➢ Micro-plastics are particles that are smaller than 5 millimetres in size.

➢ They enter the environment as primary industrial products, such as those used in scrubbers and cosmetics.

➢ It could also enter via urban waste water and broken-down elements of articles discarded by consumers.

➢ Washing of clothes too releases synthetic microfibers into water bodies and the sea.

➢ Micro-plastics escape the filtration and treatment processes for waste water, and end up in sites of nature.

➢ The durable properties of plastics make them persistent and slow to degrade in the environment.

➢ Evidently, various studies have found micro-plastics in the oceans, soil, air, lakes, and rivers.

➢ It thus enters the food chains of even birds, animals and fishes.

➢ This results in significant global impacts on wildlife, from marine environment pollution.

Why is the study so significant?

➢ Bottled water is marketed as the very essence of purity.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ It is in fact the fastest-growing beverage market in the world.

➢ Bottled water output will soon hit 300 billion litres a year.

➢ Packaged water is a lifeline for many people worldwide who have no other option for safe drinking water.

➢ Notably, some 4,000 children die every day from water-borne diseases.

The way ahead

➢ Micro-plastic is not directly regulated in bottled water. But legislations make it clear that there must be no contaminants.

➢ It is the government's responsibility to educate people to know what they are drinking and eating.

➢ The WHO has come forward to commission a review of the health impact of plastics in water.

➢ More such studies, as a globally coordinated effort, are necessary to assess the impact of plastics on health.

➢ India has a major problem dealing with plastics, particularly single-use shopping bags.

➢ These reach dumping sites, rivers and wetlands along with other waste.

➢ The most efficient way is to control the production and distribution of plastics.

➢ Banning single-use bags and making consumers pay a significant amount for the more durable ones is a feasible solution.

➢ Enforcing Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, requiring segregation of waste materials, will reduce the burden on the environment.

➢ Waste separation can be done in partnership with the community, and it presents a major employment opportunity as well.

➢ The very nature of plastics has to be changed from being cheap and disposable to durable, reusable and fully recyclable.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

Environmental Clearance for Neutrino Observatory

Why in news?

☞ India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) is proposed to be established in the Tamil Nadu section of the Western Ghats for furthering research. As the site is being mapped in an eco-sensitive, environmental clearances and other compliances are to be strictly adhered to.

ELITE IAS *April - 2018*

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

About the INO Project

➢ India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) is a particle physics research project to primarily study the elusive sub-atomic particles called neutrinos.

➢ A neutrino (í) interacts only via weak short range subatomic forces and gravity, which makes it very hard to detection it.

➢ Neutrinos typically pass through normal matter unimpeded and undetected, and its rest mass is almost zero (1 millionth of an electron).

➢ Its detection needs high-end instruments and an environment that is effectively shielded from other radiant interference.

➢ Hence, a cavern is being carved out at the depth of 1,300 meters (4,300 ft) below the Western Ghats stretch near Theni for establishing the research site.

➢ The site will underlie more than 1000 meters of overhead rock that will effectively shield it from natural cosmic radiation from outside.

➢ The observatory is said to symbolize India's quest for research in particle physics and demonstrate intent to nurture centres of excellence.

About the clearance granted

➢ The project had become controversial as the proposed site lies close to the Mathikettan Shola National Park, which is a biodiversity hotspot.

➢ About a year ago, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) had suspended the environmental clearance granted to the INO.

➢ But recently, the NGT verdict on the Rs. 1500 crore project was overturned and has been cleared by the Union Environment Ministry as a special case.

➢ The approval is only conditional and it needs the consent of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and the National Board for Wildlife.

Source: The Hindu

Draft National Forest Policy - 2018

Why in news?

☞ Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has recently released the "Draft National Forest Policy, 2018" for public comments.

Key facts

➢ Currently, the "National Forest Policy of 1988" is the primary document that drives India's forest outlook.

➢ While Forest Rights Act was passed in 2006, a comprehensive new forest policy that covers the new evolving concerns was needed.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ Hence, the present draft on climate change concerns has factored in climate change concerns and management plans forest and wildlife.

➢ It also talks of "safeguarding the livelihood of forest dependent people" and envisions raising the country's forest cover from 25% to 30% of its land area.

Concerns related to the draft forest policy

➢ It persists with the methodological weakness of the "Indian Forest Survey Reports" of the past 30 years that conflate plantations with forest cover.

➢ It talks about improving the productivity of forest plantations by the intensive scientific management of commercially important species.

➢ While it does mention native plants like bamboo, it also stresses the need for plantations of exotics like eucalyptus and casuarina.

➢ These provisions seems to disregard the compelling evidence that plantations are no substitute for natural ecosystems that with good biodiversity.

➢ Ecologists vouch that nurturing natural ecosystems comprising of indigenous species are key for ecological sustainability and for climate change mitigation.

➢ Also, a 2015 study in Nature had cautioned against "promoting intensive forestry for maximum timber yield under the flag of climate change".

How effective are forests in addressing climate change?

➢ While the exotic vs. indigenous species debate is raging, some researchers claim that mere regeneration of forests isn't enough to check global warming.

➢ The efficiency of the "carbon cycle in forests" (which varies from forest to forest), is said to be a key factor for climate change mitigation.

➢ India has largely lacked nuanced studies to map forests and their carbon cycle potential and the draft policy doesn't offer a roadmap to address these.

➢ Such concerns need to be addressed while finalizing the new forest policy.

Source: Indian Express

World Water Development Report

Why in news?

☞ The United Nations World Water Development Report (WWDR) was released ahead of World Water Day (March 22).

About the report

➢ The WWDR is an annual and thematic report that focuses on different strategic water issues each year.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

- It aims to provide decision-makers with the tools to implement sustainable use of our water resources.

- The development of the WWDR is coordinated by the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP).

- The report is a joint effort of the UN agencies and entities which make up UN-Water.

- The latest report was released at the 8th *World Water Forum* in Brasilia, hosted by Brazil.

Highlights

- Global demand for water has increased six-fold over the past 100 years and continues to grow at the rate of 1% each year.

- Demand for water is projected to rise faster in developing countries.

- The report highlights that more than 5 billion people could suffer water shortages by 2050.

- This could be due to the effects of climate change, increased demand and polluted water supplies.

- Climate change will put an added stress on supplies because it will make wet regions wetter and dry regions drier.

- Drought is arguably the greatest single threat from climate change.

- Drought and soil degradation, the biggest risks of natural disaster, are likely to worsen.

- Pollution has worsened the water bodies and water is expected to deteriorate further in the coming two decades.

- This would be mainly due to agriculture runoffs of fertilizer and other agrochemicals.

- They load freshwater supplies with nutrients that lead to the growth of pathogens and choking algae blooms.

- Industry and cities are also a significant problem.

- About 80% of industrial and municipal wastewater is discharged without treatment.

- Water scarcity can lead to civil unrest, mass migration and even to conflict within and between countries.

- The report thus warns of conflict and civilisational threats unless actions are taken.

Following are the suggestive measures

- Reducing the stress on rivers, lakes, aquifers, wetlands and reservoirs is important.

- Water shortage cannot be offset by groundwater supplies, a third of which are already in distress.

➢ Nor is the construction of more dams and reservoirs likely to be a solution.

➢ The report emphasizes a shift away from watershed management.

➢ It calls for a wider geographic approach that takes in land use in distant areas, particularly forests.

➢ Although farmers have long seen trees as a drain on water supplies, the vegetation helps to recycle and distribute water.

➢ Evidently, the São Paulo (Brazil) drought of 2014-15 has been linked to Amazon deforestation.

➢ The key for change, even for the water problem, will be agriculture.

➢ **Agriculture** is the biggest source of both water consumption and pollution.

➢ The report thus emphasises the importance of **nature-based solutions**.

➢ Nature-based solutions can be personal – such as dry toilets – or broad landscape-level shifts in agricultural practices.

➢ In agricultural practices, it is essentially an approach to rely more on soil and trees than steel and concrete.

➢ It calls for shift to "conservation agriculture".

➢ This would make greater use of rainwater rather than irrigation, and regularise crop rotation to maintain soil cover.

➢ This is crucial to reverse erosion and degradation, which currently affects a third of the planet's land.

➢ The suggestions imply that the potential savings of such practices exceed the projected increase in global demand for water.

➢ This would ease the dangers of conflict and provide better livelihoods for family farmers and poverty reduction.

Source: Live Mint

International Solar Alliance (ISA) summit

Why in news?

➢ India and France co-hosted the first International Solar Alliance (ISA) summit in New Delhi recently.

➢ This is a significant event in defining India's place in the new global order.

About the International Solar Alliance (ISA)

➢ The ISA was unveiled at the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015 by the Indian PM Modi and then French President Francois Hollande.

➢ The idea is to form a coalition of solar resource-rich countries.

➢ The aim is to collaborate on addressing the identified gaps in their energy requirements through a common approach.

➢ Towards this, the ISA has set a target of 1 terawatt (TW) of solar energy by 2030.

➢ The ISA is open to 121 prospective member countries, most of them located between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

➢ This is the region worldwide with a surplus of bright sunlight for most of the year.

➢ So far, however, only 56 countries have signed the ISA Framework Agreement.

India's role

➢ India is a founding-member of the alliance.

➢ Besides, it plays a significant role in terms of being a host as well as a major contributor to the achievement of the target.

➢ The ISA is the first international body that will have a secretariat in India.

➢ India, with a target to produce 100 GW of solar energy by 2022, would account for a tenth of ISA's goal.

➢ India will also provide 500 training slots for ISA member-countries and start a solar tech mission to lead R&D.

India's proposal

☞ The basis for ISA is global equitable sustainable development.

➢ It suggests a 'third' way to the inequality and environmental damage characterizing the current U.S. and China-led models.

➢ This vision follows from India's call for 'climate justice'.

➢ Notably, India's approach to climate justice reframes climate change as a social and not a physical problem.

➢ The shift fills the gap in the thrust of the 'Chinese dream' and 'America first' both of which ignore sustainable development.

➢ India is thus considered as a balancing factor in this regard, especially by countries in the South-east Asian region.

➢ This is also why China and the U.S. are seeking to work with India.

How prospective is the "International Solar Alliance" (ISA)?

➢ ISA was proposed jointly by India and France in the backdrop the "Paris Climate Talks" or CoP 21.

- With 61 countries already onboard the ISA, India and France are clearly promising an alternative leadership model for the less developed world.

- This is significant in the face of U.S. pullout from the Paris Climate Accord and the greater vulnerability of poorer countries to climate change.

- ISA is oriented towards sunshine countries (between the tropics), and it focuses on Project financing and technical assistance.

- While it has been estimated that $1 trillion is needed to meet the ISA targets, India and France have thus far committed $1.4 billion and $1.3 billion, respectively.

- India's solar power tariff is around Rs. 2.40 a unit, which makes Solar a costly option domestically.

- While India has targeted a solar capacity addition of over 100 GWs by 2022, this seems unviable unless various solar components become cheaper.

- Also, addition of new thermal power plants (as they produce more stable output) is a hindrance to solar deployment.

The way forward for India

- The inaugural International Solar Alliance (ISA) summit underlines India's place in the new world order.

- India has to take advantage of the **transforming global trends**.

- The challenge at this juncture is to push infrastructure, e-commerce, human capital and technology **development**.

- These are essential for India to position itself in the emerging global scenario, where economy, ecology and cyber space are defining the place.

- In the new world order, India should give primacy to rules that will chart a path for its **own sustainable prosperity**.

- This does not mean India should move away from **multilateral groupings.**

- But rather, in 2018, India will have to make **hard choices**.

- E.g. India should not reject collaboration in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is the framework for a new order.

- But existing political and economic order suggest that India should work with China to jointly set the **new multilateral rules**.

- The two sides, India and China, have just recognised sensitivity to each other's concerns, interests and aspirations.

- Also, as part of this dynamics, India must consider longer-term and not immediate interests in Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

➢ This approach should reflect in other areas like the BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, etc, for establishing **non-hierarchical relations.**

➢ In terms of maritime trade routes, India should organise platforms which include China and Japan.

➢ This is to allow for the development of **Indian Ocean-centric rules** of engagement.

<div align="right">Source: The Hindu</div>

March 3: World Wildlife Day

Why in news?

☞ The World Wildlife Day is observed every year on 3rd March to celebrate and raise awareness about the world's wild fauna and flora.

➢ The theme for this year is '**Big Cats: Predators under Threat***'.

➢ The World Wildlife Day aims to create awareness and encourages people across the globe to protect endangered species.

About Big cats:

➢ Big cats are among most widely recognized and admired animals across the globe.

➢ Big cat species are found in Africa, Asia, and North, Central and South America, representing a virtually global distribution.

➢ These predators are facing many and varied threats, mostly caused by human activities. Overall, their populations are declining at disturbing rate due to loss of habitat and prey, conflicts with people, poaching and illegal trade.

➢ For example, tiger populations plummeted by 95% over the past 100 years and African lion populations dropped by 40% in just 20 years. But a range of measures are underway to arrest this decline.

➢ The theme aims to raise awareness about plight of big cats and galvanize support for many global and national actions that underway to save these iconic species.

➢ It also expands definition of big cats being used, which includes not only lion, tiger, leopard and jaguar (4 largest wild cats that can roar) but also cheetah, snow leopard, puma, clouded leopard, etc.

About the World Wildlife Day:

➢ The World Wildlife Day is celebrated to mark the signing of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on this day in 1973.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ On 20 December 2013, at its 68th session, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 3 March, the day of signature of the CITES, as UN World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness of the world's wild animals and plants.

➢ The UNGA resolution also designated the CITES Secretariat as the facilitator for the global observance of this special day for wildlife on the UN calendar.

About CITES:

☞ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is international agreement to regulate worldwide commercial trade in wild animal and plant species.

➢ Its aim is to ensure that international trade does not threaten the survival of the species in the wild.

➢ It was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It entered into force in July 1975.

➢ CITES is legally binding on state parties to the convention, which are obliged to adopt their own domestic legislation to implement its goals.

➢ It classifies plants and animals according to three categories, or appendices, based on how threatened. They are as follows:

Appendix I species:

➢ It lists species that are in danger of extinction. It prohibits commercial trade of these plants and animals except in extraordinary situations for scientific or educational reasons.

Appendix II species:

➢ They are those that are not threatened with extinction but that might suffer a serious decline in number if trade is not restricted. Their trade is regulated by permit.

Appendix III species:

➢ They are protected in at least one country that is a CITES member states and that has petitioned others for help in controlling international trade in that species.

➢ In addition, CITES also restricts trade in items made from such plants and animals, such as food, clothing, medicine, and souvenirs.

Source: The Hindu

NBA calls for plan to manage import of exotic fish

Why in news?

☞ Expressing concern over the increase in the import of ornamental fishes to the country, which is posing a threat to India's native fish populations, the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) has urged the government to come up with quarantine facilities at major seaports and airports.

Concerns:

➢ The government of India has only approved the import of 92 species of ornamental fish but the number of ornamental fish species being imported and in trade is somewhere between 200-300.

➢ The huge market for Invasive Alien Species (IAS) is turning out to be major threat to India's aquatic biodiversity.

➢ Several studies have disclosed the occurrence of exotic ornamental fish in many inland aquatic systems, including biodiversity-sensitive areas such as the Western Ghats.

What are Invasive Alien Species (IAS)?

➢ Alien species is a species introduced by humans – either intentionally or accidentally-outside their natural areas, where they out-compete the native species and upset the ecological balance.

National list of Invasive Alien Species (IAS):

➢ Under the Centre for Biodiversity and Policy and Law (CEBPOL), the NBA is trying to bring out a national list of IAS.

➢ So far, no attempt has been made by any scientific organisation to have a national IAS list across different categories.

➢ The list will be put made available on a public platform and will be communicated to different Ministries and stakeholders.

➢ The announcement by NBA assumes significance as scientists and experts in the country are still divided over the number of IAS and their economic and ecological impact.

Need for such list:

➢ While the number of publications on IAS has increased over the past few years, there has been no coordinated effort for the management of IAS.

➢ Statisticians and biologists need to come together for distribution mapping and the application of statistical approaches in the management of IAS.

➢ Most of the fish are imported from Southeast Asian countries. Besides legislative measures, there is the need for educating and creating awareness among Customs officials at airports and seaports.

ELITE IAS *April - 2018*

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

About CEBPOL:

➤ Centre for Biodiversity and Policy and Law (CEBPOL) is a bilateral collaboration between the Indian and Norwegian governments, and focuses on biodiversity policies and laws.

About National Biodiversity Authority (NBA):

➤ The NBA was established by the Central Government in 2003 to implement India's Biological Diversity Act (2002).

➤ The NBA is a Statutory Body.

➤ It performs facilitative, regulatory and advisory functions for the Government of India on issues of conservation, sustainable use of biological resources and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources.

Source: The Hindu

Only 13% of tiger conservation areas meet global standards

Why in news?

☞ According to recent survey, only 13% of tiger conservation areas that are part of Conservation Assured | Tiger Standards (CA|TS) Partnership meet global standards.

➤ The survey was conducted over hundred tiger conservation areas by 11 leading conservation organisations and countries with tiger ranges that are part of CA|TS Partnership.

Key findings of the survey:

➤ The surveyed area is home to approximately 70% of the world's wild tigers. The survey found that at least one-third of tiger conservation these areas are severely at risk of losing their tigers and most of these sites are in Southeast Asia.

➤ Two-thirds of surveyed area is reported fair to strong management, but their basic needs such as encroachment against poaching, engaging local communities and managing conflict between people and wildlife remained weak for all surveyed areas.

➤ Despite poaching being one of greatest threats faced by big cats, 85% of the areas surveyed do not have the staff capacity to patrol sites effectively. 61% of areas in Southeast Asia have very limited anti-poaching enforcement.

What is CA|TS?

➤ CA|TS is a set of criteria which allows tiger sites to check if their management will lead to successful tiger conservation.

➤ CA|TS is organised under seven pillars and 17 elements of critical management activity.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ CA|TS was developed by tiger and protected area experts.

➢ Officially launched in 2013, CA|TS is an important part of Tx2, the global goal to double wild tiger numbers by the year 2022.

➢ Developed by WWF and partners, the Global Tiger Forum (GTF) has endorsed CA|TS and has requested member countries to establish National Review Committees for purpose of initiating CA|TS.

➢ CA|TS is an important tool in the achievement of the CBD's Global Aichi Targets, in particular Aichi Target 11 and 12, and contributes to the implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas, particularly the last goal related to Standards, Assessment and Monitoring.

How does CA|TS work and who is using it?

➢ Sites taking part will initially be 'registered' (standards not yet attained) then, when all required standards are met, 'approved' (standards achieved). An approved site has achieved excellence in tiger site management. Sites are evaluated through an assessment and independent review process.

➢ Of the 13 tiger range countries Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Russia have registered and rolled out CA|TS, whilst discussion is ongoing with Bhutan, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and China.

➢ Currently there are two sites that are CA|TS approved; Chitwan National Park in Nepal and Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve in Russia.

Why is CA|TS important?

➢ Protected areas are a good strategy for retaining forest cover; however their role in protecting wildlife depends on the quality of management.

➢ Many studies show that tiger numbers can continue to decline in protected areas, particularly due to bushmeat (tiger prey) hunting or the poaching of tigers themselves for trophies, traditional medicines and other illegal activities.

➢ Until CA|TS, there has not been a set of criteria which not only provide clarity on management of tiger sites, but also encourage further development and sharing of best practice across the tiger range countries.

Why tigers?

➢ Tigers are a large, charismatic species that require rigorous conservation efforts and best practices to ensure their future in the wild. This, combined with their need for vast areas of forest, make tigers an "umbrella species".

➢ By focusing on tigers, and ensuring the forest they live in is protected to the highest standard, all the other species in the same forest benefit too.

Source: The Hindu

Bomb cyclone clean up continues

Why in news?

☞ A winter storm – also known as a "bomb cyclone" –has slammed into the northeast United States.

➢ The storm has roughly 80 million people along its path, with 22 million of those affected by a coastal flood warning.

What is Bomb Cyclone?

☞ Bomb Cyclone is a nickname given to a phenomenon called "bombogenesis," in which a weather system experiences a sharp drop in atmospheric pressure and intensifies rapidly, unleashing hurricane-force winds.

➢ By definition, the barometric pressure must drop by at least 24 millibars in 24 hours for a storm to be called a bomb cyclone; the formation of such a storm is called bombogenesis.

➢ What makes a storm a "bomb" is how fast the atmospheric pressure falls; falling atmospheric pressure is a characteristic of all storms.

➢ These strong winter systems are notorious for packing big winds and waves to go along with heavy snow – possibly resulting in downed trees, power outages and coastal flooding.

➢ It happens after the pressure inside a storm cell falls so quickly that it gives the storm explosive strength.

Mechanism of Bomb Cyclone:

➢ Deep drops in barometric pressure occur when a region of warm air meets one of cold air. The air starts to move and the rotation of the earth creates a cyclonic effect.

➢ The direction is counter-clockwise in the Northern hemisphere leading to winds that come out of the northeast.

Hurricanes vs. cyclones vs. typhoons:

☞ Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons are all tropical storms. They are all the same thing but are given different names depending on where they appear. When they reach populated areas they usually bring very strong wind and rain which can cause a lot of damage.

➢ Hurricanes are tropical storms that form over the North Atlantic Ocean and Northeast Pacific.

➢ Cyclones are formed over the South Pacific and Indian Ocean.

➢ Typhoons are formed over the Northwest Pacific Ocean.

Source: Indian Express

Pollutants in mobiles, laptops to be checked

Why in news?

☞ Central Pollution Control Board will begin random checks on mobile phones, laptops and other electronic goods to check whether their constituent metals exceed safety norms.

Key facts

➢ The tests will be conducted at Centre for Materials for Electronic Technology,Hyderabad.

➢ The levels of lead, cadmium, hexavalent chromium, mercury and polybrominated diphenyl ethers in the mobile phones will be checked.

➢ If the company fails the Reduction on Hazardous Substance (RoHS) test, they have to withdraw its line of products or pay fines.

➢ The decision followed key amendments to the Electronic Waste Management Rules (EWR) that was formalized recently.

☞ **Some of updated rules under the E-waste (Management) Amendment Rules are as follows:**

1. Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs) shall apply to the CPCB for registration to undertake activities prescribed in the Rules.

2. Under the Reduction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) provisions, cost for sampling and testing shall be borne by the government for conducting the RoHS test.

➢ A PRO is a European concept whereby the producer's responsibility of managing the waste is transferred to the PRO.

➢ A PRO's aim is to bring in more efficiency, cost-effectiveness and awareness while managing the end-to-end operations associated with waste management.

Source: The Hindu

Science and Technology, Defense, Health

Supersonic cruise missile Brah Mos successfully flight-tested

Why in news?

☞ BrahMos missile was recently flight-tested successfully for the first time with an indigenous seeker.

About Brah Mos missile

➢ BrahMos is a supersonic cruise missile.

➢ It is a joint collaboration between India and Russia.

➢ The missile is capable of being launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets.

➢ Its range was initially capped at 290 km as per obligations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

➢ But since India's entry into the club, the range has been extended to 450 km, and the plan is to increase it to 600km.

➢ The Army and Navy have already inducted the missile.

➢ The air-launched version was test-fired for the first time last year from a modified Su-30MKI aircraft.

➢ The submarine-launch variants are still in their testing phase.

➢ BrahMos was flight tested with an **Indian-made seeker** for the first time, at Pokhran test range, Rajasthan.

About seeker technology

➢ The seeker technology is a critical technology that determines the accuracy of a missile.

➢ So far, the seeker technology had come from Russia.

➢ The technology is a closely guarded secret.

➢ Mastering it is a significant milestone in missile technology and would reduce import dependence.

➢ The seeker was developed by Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Hyderabad, in collaboration with other DRDO labs.

Its significance

➢ The missile demonstrated its supreme operational capability with the new indigenous seeker.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ The development would be a further boost to the country's security.

➢ It was developed jointly by BrahMos Aerospace and DRDO; both companies have teamed up with the private sector.

➢ This is particularly with an aim to bolster in-house manufacturing capability of the missile and to propel indigenization.

➢ The test is a significant step in bolstering the export potential of the missile.

➢ With the successful test, several South-East Asian countries have shown interest in purchasing the missile.

➢ Exports are significant especially since China has reportedly sold a high-tech missile tracking system to Pakistan.

➢ Both Pakistan and China are also developing Air Launched Cruise Missiles.

➢ The geopolitical situation is tense and recently peaked between Vietnam and Beijing.

➢ China threatened to attack Vietnamese posts in the South China Sea if its efforts to explore oil fields was not called off.

➢ Notably, Vietnam is one among many countries to have shown an interest in the Brah Mos.

<div align="right">Source: The Hindu, Business Line</div>

Google Plans to Ban Crypto currency Ads

Why in news?

☞ Recently, search engine company Google has made a move to block crypto currency ads, including ones for initial coin offerings.

Rationale behind this move

➢ Google has claimed that it had taken this move for improving the ad experience and for removing harmful or intrusive ads.

➢ It is also to be noted that Google is a corporation, and a corporation is free to take such business decisions.

➢ As the crypto-bubbles are concerning every stakeholder, in order to prevent crypto currency scams Google has taken this move.

What are increasing concerns of crypto currency?

➢ Crypto-currency is a digital currency that allows transacting parties to remain anonymous while confirming the transaction is valid.

➢ The provision of anonymity is widely misused especially in making cross-border transactions.

➢ They are widely used as a means for money-laundering, terror funding and drug trafficking, and other illegal activities.

➤ The increasing share and presence of bitcoins due to speculative trading for return on investments is also a concern.

What are the reactions against this move?

➤ Google's ad-blocking move has been protested by many crypto currency-entrepreneurs as it not been for an encouraging policy and business atmosphere.

➤ Crypto currency market claims that as technology is evolving rapidly it is difficult to evaluate as dynamically each development's worth and take decisions.

➤ In such a case, caution may seem a sensible thing, but a summary resistance disguised as caution is hazardous.

➤ It will mean that technology that is disruptive; whose full impact can't be charted just yet, suffers because of passive hostility.

➤ Thus policy and businesses must hedge for the risks emerging tech may carry, but that doesn't have to be restrictive.

Source: Financial Express

Silver copper telluride (AgCuTe) – novel material to convert waste heat into electricity

Why in news?

☞ Researchers have developed silver copper telluride (AgCuTe), a novel compound that exhibits poor thermal conductivity in the 25-425 degree C range but shows good electrical conductivity.

About AgCuTe:

➤ The new material made from silver, copper, and tellurium shows high levels of thermoelectric performance that the scientists are hoping could someday be harnessed to extract electricity from waste heat of chemical, thermal, or steel power plants.

➤ Due to the low thermal conductivity of AgCuTe, one end of the 8 mm-long rod that is contact with waste heat remains hot while the other end maintains cold temperature.

➤ The temperature difference is essential for the generation of electrical voltage. At the same time, the material exhibits good electrical conductivity like metal.

Significance:

➤ The compound, silver copper telluride (AgCuTe), shows promise as a thermoelectric material for converting waste heat into electricity.

➤ Potential applications of the thermoelectric technology are in automobile industry, chemical, thermal and steel power plants where large quantities of heat are wasted.

Source: The Hindu

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

India successfully test-fires ATGM Nag in desert conditions

Why in news?

☞ Indigenously developed Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGM) Nag was successfully test-fired.

About Nag:

➢ Nag is a third-generation, fire-and-forget, anti-tank guided missile.

➢ It is developed by India's state-owned Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to support both mechanised infantry and airborne forces of the Indian Army.

➢ The missile incorporates an advanced passive homing guidance system and possesses high single-shot kill probability.

➢ It is designed to destroy modern main battle tanks and other heavily armoured targets.

➢ Nag can be launched from land and air-based platforms.

➢ The land version is currently available for integration on the Nag missile carrier (NAMICA), which is derived from a BMP-2 tracked infantry combat vehicle.

➢ The helicopter launched version known of NAG missile is known as NAG (HELINA) can be fired from Dhruv advanced light helicopter (ALH) and HAL Rudra attack helicopter.

➢ The Nag missile was indigenously developed under the Indian Ministry of Defence's integrated guided missile development programme (IGMDP), which also involved the development of four other missiles that are Agni, Akash, Trishul and Prithvi.

Source: Indian Express

Paschim Leher (XPL-18)

Why in news?

☞ The Western Naval Command of the Indian Navy has concluded a large scale operational exercise named 'Paschim Leher' in the Arabian Sea.

Key facts

➢ The objective of the exercise was to build interoperability between Indian Navy, Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Coast Guard.

➢ The exercise tests operational readiness of the Western Naval Command and the execution of its operational plans. The XPL 2018 enabled testing and revalidation of operational plans and manoeuvres in a hostile maritime scenario on India's Western Seaboard.

➢ The exercise will enable further refine the operational, logistics and administrative plans of the Western Naval Command.

Source: The Hindu

ELITE IAS
April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

CIMON- AI-based 'flying brain' to assist ISS astronauts

Why in news?

☞ Airbus, an aeronautics company based in Netherlands, is developing CIMON (Crew Interactive MObile CompanioN), a 3D-printed artificial intelligence system.

> CIMON will soon join the crew aboard the International Space Station (ISS) to assist astronauts.

About CIMON:

> CIMON is described by its creators as a "flying brain".

> It is an AI-based space assistant for Germanys DLR Space Administration.

> CIMON will be the first AI-based mission and flight assistance system.

> The entire structure of CIMON is made up of plastic and metal, created using 3D printing.

> CIMON has a brain-like AI network and is designed to support astronauts in performing routine work, for example by displaying procedures or offering solutions to problems. With its face, voice and artificial intelligence, becomes a genuine 'colleague' on board.

Applications of CIMON:

> With CIMON, crew members can do more than just work through a schematic view of prescribed checklists and procedures; they can also engage with their assistant.

> CIMON makes work easier for the astronauts when carrying out every day routine tasks, helps to increase efficiency, facilitates mission success and improves security, as it can also serve as an early warning system for technical problems.

Source: The Hindu

Govt sanctions Rs 1000 cr for IMPRINT-II

Why in news?

☞ In a major boost for research and innovation in the country, the Ministry of Human Resource Development has sanctioned Rs. 1000 crore for phase II of Impacting Research Innovation and Technology (IMPRINT) India programme.

> Under the IMPRINT-II, a fund is being created by Department of Science and Technology (DST) and HRD Ministry together, in which participation will come from industry and other interested Ministries.

> The project will be run as a separate vertical in coordination with DST.

About IMPRINT India Programme:

☞ Impacting Research Innovation and Technology (IMPRINT) India Programme is joint initiative of Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institute of Science (IISc).

☞ It seeks to develop road map for research to solve major engineering and technology challenges in 10 technology domains relevant for country.

☞ These domains include health care, information and communication technology, energy, sustainable habitat, nano technology hardware, water resources and river systems, advanced materials, manufacturing, security and defence, and environment and climate.

☞ These domains are distributed among IITs Kharagpur, Kanpur, Bomaby, Rookree, Madras and IISC, Bengaluru.

Objectives of IMPRINT

➢ Identify areas of immediate relevance that requires innovation in the society.

➢ Ensure support and higher funding for research for identified areas.

➢ Measure outcomes of innovation and research efforts and its impact on people's standard of living.

Significance

➢ It will motivate technical institutions to conduct research in areas where the country is heavily dependent on foreign technology.

➢ Under IMPRINT-I Programme, 142 projects at cost of Rs. 318.71 crore are already under implementation.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

National E-Mobility programme launched

Why in news?

☞ The Union government has recently launched the National E-Mobility Programme.

About the National E- Mobility Programme:

➢ The Programme aims to provide an impetus to the entire e-mobility ecosystem including vehicle manufacturers, charging infrastructure companies, fleet operators, service providers, etc.

➢ The Programme will be implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) which will aggregate demand by procuring electric vehicles in bulk to get economies of scale.

➢ Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) will issue a fresh tender for additional 10,000 e-vehicles. These electric vehicles will replace the existing fleet of petrol and diesel vehicles.

Significance of this move:

➢ India has embarked on an ambitious e-mobility plan and the government has taken the leadership in enabling e-mobility in India. The National E-Mobility Programme is a step towards ushering in an era of clean, green and future-oriented technologies in the country.

Source: PIB

NASA's Parker Solar Probe

Why in news?

☞ NASA is inviting people around the world to submit their names online to be placed on a microchip aboard NASA's historic Parker Solar Probe mission launching in summer 2018.

About NASA's Parker Solar Probe:

☞ NASA's Parker Solar Probe will be the first-ever mission to "touch" the sun.

Objectives:

➢ To trace how energy and heat move through the solar corona and

➢ To explore what accelerates the solar wind as well as solar energetic particles.

Goals:

➢ Determine structure and dynamics of magnetic fields at sources of solar wind.

➢ Trace flow of energy that heats corona and accelerates solar wind.

➢ Determine what mechanisms accelerate and transport energetic particles.

➢ Explore dusty plasma near Sun and its influence on solar wind and energetic particle formation.

Key facts about the probe:

➢ The spacecraft, about the size of a small car, will travel directly into the sun's atmosphere about 6.2 million miles from our star's surface.

➢ It is scheduled for launch in 2018 to explore the Sun's outer atmosphere.

➢ The probe will use Venus' gravity during seven flybys over nearly seven years to gradually bring its orbit closer to the Sun.

➢ The Parker Solar Probe will perform its scientific investigations in a hazardous region of intense heat and solar radiation.

➢ The primary power for mission is dual system of solar panels (photovoltaic array). Secondary source consists of much smaller secondary array power that uses pumped-fluid cooling to maintain operating temperature.

Solar shadow-shield

➢ The spacecraft is designed to endure harsh environment near Sun, by approaching within 8.5 solar radii (5.9 million kilometers) to 'surface' (photosphere) of Sun where incident solar intensity is approximately 520 times intensity at Earth orbit.

➢ It will be protected by solar shadow-shield made of reinforced carbon-carbon composite.

➢ The spacecraft systems and scientific instruments are located in central portion of shield's shadow, where direct radiation from Sun is fully blocked.

Source: The Hindu, Economic Times

ELITE IAS *April-2018*

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

National Health Protection Scheme: The Related Concerns

What is the issue?

➢ The union government in its budget had announced the massive "National Health Protection Scheme" (NHPS).

➢ Brainstorming with state governments that already have comprehensive Health Insurance Schemes has highlighted the many challenges.

What are the challenges?

➢ NHPS was touted as the "world's largest health protection plan", but concerns of expenditure and infrastructural support sprouted almost immediately.

➢ States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andra Pradesh already have some form of mass health insurance program and their experience is now being analysed.

➢ Niti Aayog and the Union Health Ministry organised a consultation with these states, where several serious challenges were flagged by them.

➢ **Moral hazard -** refers to the tendency of insured people to buy or be sold additional healthcare interventions irrespective of their actual needs.

➢ This leading to expenses that do not necessarily add to the health and well-being of the insured but necessarily bleeds the insurer (the government here).

➢ Typical moral hazard procedures include Caesarean sections, hysterectomies, and procedures for inserting orthopaedic implants.

➢ National Family Health Survey had in fact noted a disproportionately higher number of C-sections for childbirths if government insurance was available.

➢ While the ideal rate for C-sections is 10%-15%, India's private sector record a whopping 40%, which is in stark contrast with the public hospitals (11.5%).

➢ To plug this loophole, Kerala has made it mandatory to get all non-emergency surgical and medical packages pre-authorised.

➢ In Tamil Nadu's case, 138 of the 686 eligible procedures under the insurance scheme are covered only if they are carried out in government hospitals.

➢ **Eligibility criteria -** It has been said that eligibility for NHPS scheme will be determined based on data from the socio-economic caste census (SECC).

➢ The number of poor and vulnerable beneficiary families eligible for the scheme is proposed to be based on deprivation and occupational criteria.

➢ The scheme will be open to all States/UTs and the proposed target population would comprise of:

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

(a) Families that belong to any of the 7 deprivation criteria

(b) Automatically included families as per SECC database for rural areas

(c) Defined occupational criteria for urban areas

➢ Several states argued that depending on the SECC would limit the reach of the scheme as the SECC data covers only a smaller target group.

➢ Some have vouched that the "National Food Security Act" entitlement list be used as the basis of NHPS, which might substantially increase NPHS coverage.

➢ **Costs -** During initial meetings with general insurers, NITI Aayog had calculated the annual premium per family to be Rs 1,082.

➢ However, insurers have pegged the actuarial premium at Rs 2,500, citing the sustainability of the scheme.

➢ If the government agrees to the premium amount put forth by the insurers, the cost will more than double from the present estimate of Rs 10,000 crore.

➢ **Procedures -** The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has been asked to prepare a list of procedures/diseases to be covered under NHPS.

➢ Once finalised, the list will be circulated to states that opt for the scheme, with a provision to make marginal changes in the package rates.

➢ Packages are important because the coverage amount is limited, and no ceiling has been proposed on family size.

➢ In addition, a balance will have to be struck between prevalent need (by analyzing the disease burden) and procedures that are value for money.

➢ For example, whether organ transplant will be covered is a tricky question, as the money paid as premium is meager and only a few government hospitals have the capability of carrying out such procedures.

➢ **Identification -** The document for identification has also been a contentious issue as many states have opposed the usage of Aadhaar for the same.

Aspects under consideration

➢ Parliament enacted the Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act in 2010, and a regulatory framework for private hospitals is in the pipeline.

➢ The executive action for laying down standard treatment guidelines as specified in the law is hence awaited along with 3rd party audit.

➢ The option for pre-authorisation for non-emergency procedures like the kerala's model is also being considered.

Source: Indian Express

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

End TB India Summit

Why in news?

☞ At the recent "End TB India Summit", PM Modi declared intent for eliminating the disease by 2025, five years ahead of the global target. But despite the well intentioned push from the highest levels, there are considerable challenges that make reaching the target uncertain.

The related concerns

➢ TB is a highly stigmatized and omnipresent disease in India.

➢ It kills over a 1,000 Indians every day despite being a curable disease.

➢ But approach towards the disease remains disempowering and paternalistic, and is largely oblivious of the multiple parameters involved.

➢ Accurately diagnosing, recording all diagnosed cases and treating the most vulnerable communities has been challenging.

➢ While private sector is the dominant player for TB treatment in India, many hospitals do not have a proper TB protocol, which is worsening the situation.

➢ Partnerships to tackle TB with communities, the private health sector, government and other stakeholders remain weak.

➢ There is thus a need for an expanded and inclusive strategy for TB, backed by sufficient funding and rigorous implementation.

➢ The most troubling aspect of TB in India is the lack of patient cooperation to ensure proper and continued treatment for the full course.

➢ Patient continuance for treatment is a challenge because TB treatment is long drawn and affects one's earning potential drastically.

➢ Hence, while millions get affected, diagnosis and sustained treatment is pathetic as even accessing free treatment is financially burdening.

The way forward

➢ It is important to talk to TB survivors and affected communities and identify the exact hurdles for getting themselves treated.

➢ Expanding the treatment apparatus to vulnerable population clusters and enhancing accesses to remote terrains could help in bridging the gap.

➢ Simultaneously, it needs to be recognized that poor nutrition, unplanned urbanization, and limited public awareness feed the epidemic.

➢ Empowering communities and making cities more livable and healthcare more accessible and affordable for all are also essential.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ Drug resistance is a serious issue and calls for moving away from standardized regimes for drug selective and targeted treatment.

➢ High incidences of 'multi drug resistance' (MDR) warrants an upfront drug susceptibility test (DST) for all TB patients to identify the exact strand of TB.

➢ Further, new drugs that have the potential for curing the most resistant TB strains should be made available under controlled conditions.

Source: Indian Express

GSAT-6A Launched

Why in news?

☞ The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has recently launched communication satellite GSAT-6A, on board its geosynchronous rocket GSLV-F08, at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh. This is the 12th flight of the GSLV rocket and the sixth with and indigenous cryogenic upper stage.

About GSAT- 6A satellite:

➢ The GSAT-6A is a high power S-band communication satellite with a mission life of about 10 years.

➢ A key feature of the satellite is to provide mobile communication to India through multi beam coverage facility.

➢ The satellite will also provide a platform for developing technologies such as demonstration of 6 m S-Band Unfurlable Antenna, handheld ground terminals and network management techniques that could be useful in satellite based mobile communication applications.

➢ The satellite is expected to be heavily used by security forces which are stationed in the remotest areas of the country.

About GSLV:

☞ The GSLV is a three stage/engine rocket. The core of first stage is fired with solid fuel while the four strap-on motors by liquid fuel. The second stage is the liquid fuel-propelled and the third is the cryogenic engine.

☞ GSLV-F08, weighing 415.6 tonnes with a height of 49.1 meters comes with notable improvements like induction of High Thrust Vikas Engine, electromechanical actuation system in place of electro-hydraulic actuation system.

What Is An 'Unfurlable Antenna'?

➢ ISRO's 'unfurlable antenna' is a six-meter-wide antenna which looks somewhat like an umbrella.

- This will be 'unfurled' once the GSAT-6A satellite has been put in orbit. This antenna, specially designed for the mission, is three times as broad as the antennas that are usually used by ISRO.

- This antenna will allow mobile communication from anywhere via hand-held ground terminals.

- Apart from communications, the GSAT-6A satellite is believed to be designated for military use as well.

What Is S-Band? How Is It Useful?

☞ S-band is an electromagnetic spectrum covering frequencies from 2 to 4 gigahertz (GHz). It crosses the conventional boundary between the Ultra High Frequency (UHF) and Super High Frequency (SHF) bands at 3.0 GHz. S-band is used by weather radars, surface ship radar, and some communications satellites. S-band is very useful because the 2.5 Ghz band is used globally for 4G services, and is worth billions of dollars. The S-band spectrum is extremely valuable for mobile broadband services.

Source: The Hindu

Bridge course" provision in the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill 2017

Why in news?

☞ A "bridge course" provision in the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill 2017 has recently been introduced in the Lok Sabha.

About the bridge course provision

- The NMC Bill, 2017 attempts to facilitate integration of the different systems of medicine in a much broader sense.

- The Bill calls for a joint sitting of the NMC, the Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH), and the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM), at least once a year and proposes "specific educational modules or programmes to develop bridges across the various systems of medicine".

- According to the provision, doctors of Indian systems of medicine and homoeopathy (AYUSH) will be allowed to prescribe limited allopathic medicines upon passing the course.

- The bridge course will only be introduced if all the members present at a joint sitting of the NMC.

- The bill also specifies that the members present in the joint sitting can spell out the health conditions for which AYUSH practitioners will be allowed to prescribe certain allopathic medicines.

Issues related to Indian healthcare sector

- India has only one allopathy doctor for approximately 1,613 people as against the WHO's norm of 1 :1,000 ratio

April-2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

➢ This assumes that 80 per cent of the 10.23 lakh doctors registered with the Medical Council of India or State medical councilsare in active service.

➢ But Indian Medical Register does not reflect doctors who have retired, left the country or passed away.

➢ Therefore, the total universe of doctors in the country might actually be smaller than the official figures.

➢ The shortage is compounded by the concentration of medical colleges in Southern States, as well as the reluctance of doctors to serve in rural areas despite measures such as compulsory rural internships.

Significance of AYUSH doctors

➢ AYUSH includes Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy,Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy system of medicine.

➢ In India nearly 8 lakh AYUSH practitioners in the country have been providing primary healthcare in several areas.

➢ Students of homoeopathy, for instance, are trained in almost every subject that an MBBS student is taught during their five-and-a-half-year undergraduate course.

➢ It is often the case that textbooks, faculty and even the lecture halls where students of MBBS and Bachelor of Homoeopathic Medicine and Surgery (BHMS) are taught, are the same.

➢ Like their MBBS counterparts, BHMS students also undertake an internship, including a six-month stint at a hospital.

➢ When compared with public healthcare allopathy doctors the AYUSH doctors performed better in terms of time spent with patients, as well as adherence to medical history checklists.

Significance of the bridge course

➢ In accordance with the Drugs and Cosmetics Act Rules, some State governments have issued orders allowing AYUSH doctors to prescribe allopathic medication.

➢ The validity of such orders has been upheld by the Supreme Court.

➢ In this scenario enhancing the supply of allopathic doctors is undoubtedly the main goal but achieving the ideal doctor-population ratio could take decades.

➢ For that cause India wants to achieve Medical pluralism which is already a reality in several countries like China, Japan, etc.

➢ Thus the bridge course is aimed to serve an important part of a broader effort to empower and better utilise the capabilities of AYUSH practitioners for healthcare delivery.

Source: Business Standard

More News

Sarora Paintings

➢ Saora paintings are painted by **Lanjia Saora tribals** in the mud walls of their homes.

➢ The tribe inhabits the great Bansadhara River in southern Odisha.

➢ The tribe finds mention in the Hindu epic Ramayana with Savari, Lord Ram's devotee.

➢ A Saora painting is called **Idital** and the person who creates it is known as the **iditalma.**

➢ Saura paintings are done to appease their presiding deity, Edital, who is invoked during all rituals and celebrations.

➢ Each painting has a rectangular frame, and features icons of deities, or those drawn from nature.

➢ The frequently featured motifs include Labasum (the earth god), Jodisum (the village deity), Manduasum (the sun god) and Jananglosum (the wind deity).

Earth hour

➢ Earth hour is a global campaign raising awareness about the impact of climate change.

➢ Earth Hour, which started in Australia in 2007, is set to be observed by millions of supporters in 187 countries.

➢ People were urged to join Earth Hour's "Give Up to Give Back" campaign by switching off all non-essential lights between 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm.

➢ This year's theme is **the impact of warming on biodiversity and wildlife.**

➢ Some of the species at risk include Australia's green turtles, black-flanked rock wallabies and koalas, as well as the Adelie penguin colonies in Antarctica.

8th March: International Women's Day 2018

➢ International Women's Day was celebrated on March 8 across the world.

➢ The 2018 theme of IWD is **'Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women's lives'**. The theme aims to encourage women to raise voice for their rights and promote growing global movement to support gender parity.

About the International Women's Day:

➢ It is an annual marker that aims to bring attention to women's accomplishments and obstacles.

➤ The first Women's Day was celebrated on February 28, 1909, in New York by the Socialist Party of America. The day was dedicated to the 15,000 women who marched through New York in 1908 as part of the garment strike.

➤ In 1910, a German activist Clara Zetkin proposed the idea of celebrating Women's Day in March at the 1910 International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen.

➤ On March 19, 1911, Women's Day was celebrated in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland.

➤ In 1975, the United Nations declared March 8 as the official date to celebrate Women's Day.

➤ The UN celebrates the day on the basis of different themes.

➤ In 2017, the theme was "Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030".

➤ The day has now come to be also known as the United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace.

Wings India 2018

➤ The theme of the event is "India-Global Aviation Hub".

➤ The event with was organised jointly by the Union Civil Aviation Ministry, Airports Authority of India and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

About "Wings India 2018

➤ "Wings India 2018" aims to be the most comprehensive platform in the region for the interactions, forging alliances, investments and air connectivity between the States and the global aviation players/ stakeholders.

➤ It will have a special focus on connecting the cities and towns aimed at increasing the regional connectivity in the country.

2018 Pritzker prize for Balkrishna doshi

☞ Legendary Indian architect Balkrishna Doshi (90), a pioneer of low-cost housing design has won the prestigious Pritzker Prize, considered architecture field's Nobel.

➤ He is the **first Indian to receive the award**.

➤ He is one of the last living architects to have apprenticed with Franco-Swiss trailblazer Le Corbusier distinguished his work by committing to sustainable architecture and inexpensive housing.

About the Pritzker prize

➤ The international Pritzker prize was established by Chicago's Pritzker family in 1979.

ELITE IAS

April - 2018

(A Unit of Elite Academy for Education & Training Pvt. Ltd.)

- It is awarded each year to a living architect/s for significant achievement.

- It is considered to be one of the world's premier architecture prizes, and is often referred to as the Nobel Prize of architecture.

- It is awarded annually and bestows laureates with $100,000 along with bronze medallion.

- The award is conferred on the laureate/s at a ceremony held at an architecturally significant site throughout the world.

- Previous winners include world-renowned architects like Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, IM Pei, and Shigeru Ban.

Saposhi Malware

- Recently, India's cybersecurity agencies have detected a new malware called Saposhi that can take over electronic devices and use them for Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks.

- Saposhi Malware is capable of taking over electronic devices and turning them into bots (device taken over by malware) which can then be used for any purpose, including DDoS attacks which, with enough firepower, can cripple entire industries.

Ama Gaon, Ama Vikas programme

- Odisha Government has launched 'Ama Gaon, Ama Vikas' (Our Village, our development) programme to reach out to people in rural areas and involve themselves in developmental activities.

- Under this programme, people can directly send their grievances to Chief Minister's Office (CMO) at Secretariat in Bhubaneswar through Wi-Fi enabled latest technology video wall vans.

- This initiative administration will help people in solving their grievances instantly.

Namaste Shalom

- Namaste Shalom is a regular monthly magazine on bilateral relations between the two friendly nations – India-Israel.

- The magazine aims to strengthen India-Israel relations and provide a platform for exchanging views between Indians and Jews the world over.

- Recently, the social media of 'Namaste Shalom' was launched.

DEFEXPO India 2018

- India's biggest ever land, naval and homeland security exhibition Defence Expo 2018 was held in Chennai.

- It will brand India as a defence exporter of several defence systems and components for all three Services – Army, Navy and Air Force.

- Defence Expo 2018 is the 10th edition of the exhibition.

- It is the first time that the defence expo is going to be held in Chennai.

- Till 2016, all defence expos had been held only in New Delhi.

- In 2017, it was held in Goa.

First Indian woman wrestler to win gold at Asian Wrestling Championships

- India's Ace wrestler Navjot Kaur won gold medal in the 65kg freestyle wrestling category of Senior Asian Championships held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

- With this, she created history by becoming **first Indian woman wrestler to win gold medal in Senior Asian Championships.** This was also India's first gold in the ongoing championships.

India's first helitaxi launched in Bengaluru

☞ India's first HeliTaxi was launched in IT capital Bengaluru, Karnataka n a bid to provide last-mile connectivity.

What is HeliTaxi?

- HeliTaxi is a helicopter shuttle service.

- HeliTaxi provides connectivity between Airport and Electronic City (located in south about 70 km from airport in the city centre), home to hundreds of technology firms including, Infosys and other multinationals.

- It has reduced travelling time between airport and Electronic City from two hours (by road) to 15 minutes.

Why Bengaluru need such service?

- Bengaluru has poor road density (measure of road length per square km area of land) as compared to other Indian cities. So, such service was needed much more than other cities to ferry air passengers to and from the city.

**Call: 8899999931/34,7065202020, Email: info@eliteias.in, Visit: www.eliteias.in
A-1, Chandra House, Top Floor, Opp. ICICI Bank, Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-110009**