

INDEX

S.No	Content	Page No.
1	FASTags mandatory for all vehicles	8
2	NCPCR issues advisory over misuse of children during protests against CAA	8
3	1.65 crore farmers registered on e-NAM	9
4	Vijay Diwas - 2019	10
5	Ayush Minister gives information about Ayurveda, Siddha & Unani system's recognition in neighbouring countries	11
6	Government took several initiatives for providing Ease of Doing Business	11
7	Employability increased by nearly 50 percent	12
8	Ministry of HRD implementing SamagraShiksha scheme	13
9	National Energy Conservation Day	13
10	Delhi Dialogue-XI gets underway in New Delhi	14
11	Andhra Pradesh government decides to bring new laws to protect women & children	14
12	Inner Line Permit regime extended to Manipur	14
13	Drones to be deployed to destroy hidden marijuana plantations	15
14	7th Economic Census: First time digital to be complete by 2020	15
15	India Design Council launched two initiatives	16
16	FICCI India Sports Awards 2019	16
17	Lok Sabha passes Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2019	17

18	Bill introduced in Lok Sabha to amend welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act	17
19	Govt authorised NHAI to set up Infrastructure Investment Trust	17
20	International Universal Health Coverage Day	18
21	Draj Bridge for all-weather connectivity inaugurated in Jammu and Kashmir Rajouri	19
22	Union Government formulated Rules to prevent Crime against Women	20
23	India climbs one spot to 129th in Human Development Index	21
24	National Anti-Doping Agency appoints Actor SunielShetty as its Brand Ambassador	22
25	Climate Change Performance Index 2019	23
26	Digital Exhibition on history of Constitution of India being held in New Delhi	24
27	Rural areas in all States, UTs become Open Defecation Free	25
28	Recycling of Ship Act,2019	27
29	Human Library	27
30	Mumbai Central Railway Station certified as India's first Eat Right Station	27
31	Mysore University to set up separate Department of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Studies (DDRS)	28
32	Woman Suraksha policy	29
33	India stands as fifth worst country in terms of biometric use	29
34	Law Ministry to set up fast track courts after data on POCSO from HCs	30
35	100 days of PradhanMantri Van DhanYojana	31
36	National Florence Nightingale Award	32

37	India ranked 73rd in the 2019 E-commerce Index Current Affairs	32
38	Ravneet Singh took charge as the Chief of Personnel of the Indian Navy	33
39	Cipla Foundation introduced MSL to provide quality education	33
40	First mega food park of Central India	33
41	Law Ministry launched a drive on fundamental duties	34
42	“India Ranking Society” established to rank educational institutes	35
43	Intensified Mission Indradhanush 2.0	35
44	India becomes first country to make entire Haj process digital	36
45	India’s first Maritime Museum in Gujarat	37
46	DPIIT invites applications for first-ever National Startup Awards 2020	37
47	National Broadband Mission	38
48	Government approves changes in Interest Subvention Scheme guidelines for MSMEs	39
49	Minorities Rights Day	39
50	PMGSY – Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PHASE III)	40
51	Government Instant Messaging System	41
52	GeM Samvaad	41
53	NITI Aayog: Plans to include eggs, chicken, and fish in PDS supply	42
54	Global Gender Gap Index 2020: WEF	43
55	Pakistan to import polio markers from India	44
56	Free Wi-Fi services provided to all villages by 2020	44
57	Government launched Good Governance Index	45
58	NITI Aayog to launch SDG India Index & Dashboard 2019–20	45
59	Losar Festival: Ladakhi New Year being celebrated	46
60	National Tribal Dance Festival begins in Raipur	46

61	India's 1st transit-oriented development project in Delhi	47
62	Second edition of Eat Right mela	47
63	South India's earliest Sanskrit Inscription found in A.P.	48
64	India's first university for transgender community in UP	48
65	Digital Radio to be launched in 2024	49
66	120th birth anniversary of Shaheed Udham Singh being celebrated	49
67	Cabinet approves funds for updating National Population Register	49
68	Govt announces India's first Chief of Defence Staff to bring better synergy between forces	50
69	World's longest mountain tunnel under Rohtang Pass named after Atal Bihari Vajpayee	51
70	CSIR develops advanced security ink to stop counterfeiting of currency notes	51
71	24 December: National Consumer Day	52
72	'Nagpur Resolution: A Holistic approach for empowering citizens' adopted during regional conference organised by DARPG in Nagpur	53
73	National Farmers Day 2019: Everything you need to know	54
74	FSSAI delinks front of packet labelling from general labelling	54
75	Plan to build new Parliament Building	55
76	Thiruvananthapuram-Kasargode Semi High Speed Rail Corridor	55
77	The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Sixth Amendment) Bill, 2019	55
78	Breast Milk Banks	57
79	Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019	58
80	Electoral Bond Scheme and the challenges associated with it.	62
81	Global gender parity index 2020	64

82	National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)	67
83	NEFT has made available for all time 24 x 7	68
84	The Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019	69
85	The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019	70
86	The AP Legislative Assembly has passed the Andhra Pradesh Disha Act, 2019 (Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2019).	71
87	NPPA invokes DPCO 2013 Ceiling prices of 21 key medicines raised by 50%	72
88	PMMVY should be universal	74
89	Highlights of 38th GST Council Meeting	76
90	National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)	78
91	NEFT has made available for all time 24 x 7	79
92	The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019	80
93	ISRO to launch RISAT 2BR1	81
94	Punjab partnered with WEF to promote electric mobility	82
95	Government to introduce AI as a subject in the next academic year	83
96	World's first fully electric commercial aircraft was successfully tested in Canada	83
97	ISRO to set up third rocket launch pad	84
98	India to Host 36th Geological Congress	84
99	NASA select site Nightingale for observation	84
100	CSIR and CNRS signed MoU to promote Scientific and Technological Research	85
101	DRDO successfully test-fired a BrahMos supersonic cruise missile	85

102	International Astronomical Union names a star after Indian Woman Scientist	86
103	Pinaka guided rocket system	86
104	Ethiopia launches its first satellite	87
105	New laser-based system to spot space junk	87
106	NTPC to add 10GW solar capacity	88
107	China successfully launches largest carrier rocket	88
108	Russia inducts first Avangard hypersonic missiles into service	88
109	ISRO is planning to launch satellite Aditya to study Sun	89
110	Astronaut Christina Koch created a record	89
111	Global Bio-India Summit	89
112	Government launched the Operation Clean Art	91
113	1.5° C is almost impossible: UNEP gas emissions reports	91
114	Karnataka govt. and NDMA conducts workshop on 2020 Heatwave	92
115	World Soil Day is observed on 5 December	92
116	Four medium intensity earthquakes hit J&K	93
117	Swachh-Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan	93
118	Plastic Waste in Development of Roads	94
119	Sambhar Lake	95
120	Mangroves of Sundarbans Wetland	96
121	Tiger Conservation in Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam and Andhra Pradesh	97
122	South Asian Games begins in Kathmandu	99
123	National Code for Good Governance in Sports	99
124	South Asian Games: India leads with 214 medals	100
125	Ballon d'Or awards(Golden Ball)	100

126	South Asian Games concluded in Nepal: India finish on top	101
127	World Anti-Doping Agency imposes 4-year ban on Russia	102
128	Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik clinch gold at National Wrestling Championships	103
129	World Rapid Chess Champion	103
130	Angela Merkel tops 2019 Forbes' List of World's most-powerful women	104
131	Finland youngest-ever Prime Minister	104
132	National Stock Exchange gets a new Chairman	104
133	Ripu Daman Bevli named as Plogging Ambassador of India	104
134	Prithviraj Singh Roopun elected as new President of Mauritius by parliament	105
135	Soma Roy Burman appointed new Controller General of Accounts	105
136	Shivangi became the first Naval Woman Pilot in India	105
137	Sub-Lieutenant Shivangi.	105

EXCEL
CIVILS ACADEMY

EMPOWERING FUTURE LEADERS

National Issues

1. FASTags mandatory for all vehicles

- FASTags or prepaid rechargeable tags for Toll collection, that allow automatic payment, will become mandatory for all vehicles from 15 December, 2019.
- The government launched the National Electronic Toll Collection System which provides for the collection of user fee through FASTag to save fuel and time, curb pollution and ensure seamless movement of traffic. With the help of a FASTag, drivers will not have to stop their vehicles at Toll Plazas to pay tax.
- National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has equipped all fee plazas with Electronic Toll Collection System.
- A FASTag uses radio frequency identification technology to enable direct toll payments from a moving vehicle.
- If anyone goes into an electronic Toll collection lane without a FASTag, he or she has to pay double charges.
- Earlier, it was decided that all lanes except one on each side in fee plazas will be declared FASTag lanes.
- NHAI that at least 75% toll lanes must have to collect Toll electronically and 25% 'FASTag lane' may be temporarily converted to hybrid lanes.
- That this temporary measure to be adopted for 30 days only to facilitate a smooth flow of traffic and avoid inconvenience to users.

2. NCPCR issues advisory over misuse of children during protests against CAA

- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has issued advisory to the Directors General of Police of all States regarding the use of children in unlawful activities like stone-pelting during the protests in various States against the amended Citizenship Act.
- It has come to Commission's notice that certain groups of protesters are involving children in unlawful activities like stone-pelting and other violent acts during the protests.
- Such use of children prima facie amounts to a violation of the right of children under provisions of Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2015.
- The Act states that any adult or an adult group uses children for illegal activities either individually or as a gang shall be liable for rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years and shall also be liable for a fine of five lakh rupees.

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

- NCPCR is a statutory body set up in 2007 under Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.
- Its objective is to protect, promote and defend child rights in India including rights adopted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, 1989, ratified by India in 1992. (This convention defines child as a human being below 18 years of age).
- It falls under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development
- The Child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2015

- JJ Act has been passed by Parliament of India amidst intense controversy, debate and protest on many of its provisions by Child Rights fraternity.
- It replaced the Indian juvenile delinquency law, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, and allows for juveniles in conflict with Law in the age group of 16–18, involved in Heinous Offences, to be tried as adults.

3. 1.65 crore farmers registered on e-NAM

- Over 1.65 crore farmers across the Country have been registered on National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) platform.
- 585 wholesale regulated markets have already been integrated with e-NAM platform and additional 415 markets have been approved for integration with it.
- Till November 2019, 2 crore 99 lakh metric tonnes of agri-commodities have been recorded on e-NAM platform.

National Agricultural Market(e-NAM)

- NAM is a pan-India electronic trading portal, which links the existing Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis across the country to form a unified national market for agricultural commodities.
- The NAM portal is a single window service for any information and services related to APMC that includes:
 - ✓ Commodity arrivals and prices
 - ✓ Buy and sell trade offers
 - ✓ Provision to respond to trade offers, among other services

- The NAM reduces the transaction costs and information irregularity even when the agriculture produce continues to flow through the mandis.
- The States can administer agriculture marketing as per their agri-marketing regulations, under which, the State is divided into various market areas and each market area is administered by a separate APMC which will impose its own marketing regulation that include fees.

4. Vijay Diwas - 2019

- Vijay Diwas is celebrated on December 16 every year to commemorate India's victory over Pakistan in 1971. India had defeated Pakistan in this war.
- Another fact is that Bangladesh was born on this day. Hence, Bangladesh celebrates its Independence day on December 16 every year.

What is Vijay Diwas?

The Government of India decided on December 03, 1971, that India would go for war with Pakistan to save Bengali Muslims and Hindus. This war was fought between India and Pakistan for 13 days only. But, the Pakistani army surrendered before India with 93,000 soldiers. It was the Indian Army's one of the biggest victories ever was against Pakistan.

What happened in 1971?

- Prior to 1971, Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan, which was called 'East Pakistan'.
- It is believed that people of 'East Pakistan' were tortured, exploited, raped and murdered by the Pakistani Army.
- India supported Bangladesh against Pakistan's oppression in 'East Pakistan'.
- There was huge discontent against the military ruler of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan, in 'East Pakistan'.
- On December 3, 1971, the government of India ordered the Indian Army to declare war against Pakistan to save people of 'East Pakistan'.
- This war was fought under the leadership of Field Marshal Manekshaw. About 1500 soldiers of India were martyred during this war.
- On 16 December 1971, about 93,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered before the Indian Army Commander Lt Gen Jagjit Singh Arora in Dhaka.
- Bangladesh emerged on the world map with India's victory in this war.

5. Ayush Minister gives information about Ayurveda, Siddha & Unani system's recognition in neighbouring countries

- The Indian systems of Ayurveda and Siddha are recognized in Nepal and Sri Lanka and the Unani system in Bangladesh.
- Minister of State for Ayush Shripad Yesso Naik gave this information in a written reply in the Lok Sabha last week.
- The Ayush Ministry has signed country-to-country MoUs with 22 countries for cooperation in the field of Traditional Medicine and Homoeopathy.

6. Government took several initiatives for providing Ease of Doing Business

- The Corporate Affairs Ministry has taken several initiatives for providing Ease of Doing Business to law-abiding corporate.
- This is in pursuance of the objective of providing greater Ease of Doing Business, bring about greater transparency in corporate structure and fostering better corporate compliance to enhance the efficiency of the process under the Companies Act of 2013.
- They include the creation of an institution of a robust Insolvency and Bankruptcy framework.
- India has improved its ranking on the **World Bank's Doing Business 2020** report moving up 14 positions to 63rd position as compared to 77th position in 2018.
- The Ministry has contributed towards insolvency resolution. India's ranking jumped 56 places to 52 in 2019 from 108 in 2018. Recovery rate increased from 26.5 per cent in 2018 to 71.6 per cent in 2019.
- The **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019** was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 12th of December, 2019.

Ease of Doing Business

- The World Bank publishes this report every year. The index has been created to evaluate the impact of the economic policies/reforms implemented by the government in the respective countries to promote and make it easier to do business.
- This report is published after evaluating the performance of countries under the following 11 parameters (for this year's ranking, the labour market parameter is not considered, hence this year's ranking is based on ten parameters).
- Empirical research from government officials, lawyers, business consultants, accountants, other professionals is done in order to collect the data for the performance of these countries.

- Higher the score achieved by a country better will be its ranking
- The first report was published in 2003 (it was called 'Doing Business' report, the ranking of countries started in 2006). More than 3500 reforms have been implemented across the countries after its launch. In this year alone of 2017-18, there has been a peak of reforms with 314 reforms implemented across 128 economies. The Indian government has implemented 37 reforms during this reference period.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) is the bankruptcy law of India which seeks to consolidate the existing framework by creating a single law for insolvency and bankruptcy.
- The 2016 Code provides for a time-bound process to resolve insolvency. When a default in repayment occurs, creditors gain control over the debtor's assets and must make decisions to resolve insolvency within a 180-day period.
- To ensure an uninterrupted resolution process, the Code also provides immunity to debtors from resolution claims of creditors during this period.
- The Code also consolidates provisions of the current legislative framework to form a common forum for debtors and creditors of all classes to resolve insolvency.
- It has recently been amended.

7. Employability increased by nearly 50 percent

- The **India Skills Report** said that nearly half of the professional degree holders are employable now.
- The report was released by **Wheebox, People Strong, CII**.
- Earlier, nearly 70% of the professional degree holders were found to be unemployable.
- Nearly 47% of the students who were surveyed are found to be employable or ready to take-up jobs in 2019.

India skills Report

- It is a joint initiative of **Wheebox**, a Global Talent Assessment Company, **PeopleStrong**, a leading HR Tech Company and **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)**.
- It is supported and backed by renowned partners like United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and Association of Indian Universities (AIU).

Employability

- Employability refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment.

- In simple words employability means the state or quality of being employed.
- For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and abilities they possess, the way they present those assets to employers, and the context within which they seek work.
- It is an ongoing developmental process that benefits from active reflection.

8. **Ministry of HRD implementing SamagraShiksha scheme**

- Ministry of HRD is implementing the Scheme of **Vocationalisation of School Education** under ‘SamagraShiksha – an integrated scheme for school education’.
- Under the scheme, a vocational subject is offered for Classes IX to XII along with the general education.
- Till 2018-19, the scheme has been implemented in 8654 schools, with a reported enrolment of more than 10 lakh students.

About Samagrashiksha scheme

SamagraShiksha is an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class 12. The scheme has been prepared with the broader goal of improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes. It subsumes the three Schemes of SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).

The major objectives of the Scheme are

- Provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students
- Bridging Social and Gender Gaps in School Education
- Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education
- Ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions
- Promoting Vocationalisation of education
- Support States in implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009
- Strengthening and up-gradation of SCERTs/State Institutes of Education and DIET as a nodal agencies for teacher training

9. **National Energy Conservation Day**

- NEC Day is celebrated every year on 14 December. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), under Union Ministry of Power spearheads the celebrations of the day every year since 1991.
- BEE is also observing National Energy Conservation Week from 9-14 December 2019, in order to drive mass awareness about importance of energy efficiency and conservation.

Objective:

- To drive mass awareness about importance of energy efficiency and conservation
- To showcase India's achievements in energy efficiency and conservation.

10. Delhi Dialogue-XI gets underway in New Delhi

- Delhi Dialogue-XI got underway at PravasiBharatiya Kendra in New Delhi.
- The theme for this year's Delhi Dialogue is Advancing Partnership in Indo-Pacific.
- The notion of shared maritime space is not new.
- Mr Muraleedharan hoped that the discussions in the Dialogue will yield a rich harvest of ideas.

11. Andhra Pradesh government decides to bring new laws to protect women & children

- The Andhra Pradesh Government has decided to bring new laws to protect women and children.
- The state Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister Y. S. Jaganmohan Reddy has approved to enact the new law, Andhra **Pradesh Disha Act**, Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2019 and Andhra Pradesh Special Court for Specified Offences against Women and Children Act- 2019.
- Draft DISHA ACT provides for harsher punishments, including death sentence, to those guilty of heinous crimes against women.
- The Act would cover sexual offences against women and children, acid attacks and harassment of women.
- It also provides for completion of the judgement process in 21 working days.

12. Inner Line Permit regime extended to Manipur

- The Inner Line Permit (ILP) regime has been extended to Manipur.
- President Ramnath Kovind signed an order in this regard.
- Manipur is the fourth state after Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram where the ILP regime has been made applicable.
- To visit the ILP-regime states, outsiders, including people from other States of the country, need to take permission.

Inner Line Permit (ILP)

- It is an official travel document issued by the Government of India to allow inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected/restricted area for a limited period.
- The document is an effort by the Government to regulate movement to certain areas located near the international border of India.

13. Drones to be deployed to destroy hidden marijuana plantations

- The Centre has decided to deploy drones to destroy marijuana plantations before the crop is harvested and finds its way into the hands of the drug cartels.
- A decision has been taken by the Ministry of Home Affairs with states and Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on board to investigate illegal operations suspected to be carried out by the farmers in some states, along with other crops to conceal the prohibited activities.
- The Centre will use satellites to detect marijuana crops by penetrating the lighter foliage and drones will subsequently destroy the plants.
- Drones could be deployed to carry out spraying of chemicals to destroy the crops.
- There are reports of large-scale smuggling of marijuana from Tuticorin to Maldives and Central agencies are working with state law enforcement authorities to detect the source.
- Legal cultivation of limited crop of marijuana for medical and scientific purposes is licensed under Section 10 of the Narcotics, Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and mainly used in alternative medicine such homeopathy and ayurveda. On the other hand, illegal cultivation is an offence under Section 20 of the NDPS Act.
- In the proposed move, the NCB, Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN) along with state authorities have tasked to collecting field intelligence, destruction of illegal cultivation and arrest offenders. Central Economic Intelligence Bureau (CEIB) will procure satellite surveys of illicit cultivation and will share the images with NCB, CBN and state agencies.
- Since farmers are taking up cultivating marijuana to make large profits quickly, the government is also encouraging alternative mechanisms to wean them away by training them to grow other crops.

14. 7th Economic Census: First time digital to be complete by 2020

- The Seventh Economic Census has been launched in the National Capital Territory.
- For the first time, the entire Census is being conducted on a digital platform by the use of an application which will ensure high accuracy and data security.
- Delhi is the 26th State where the survey has been launched, while the process is already on in 20 states and 5 UTs.

National Economic Survey:

- National Economic Survey is conducted every five years and is very crucial for framing of policies and planning for the government and other organisations.
- The process of Economic Census was first held in 1978.

- This is the Seventh Census which will provide dis-aggregated information on various operational and structural aspects of all establishments in the country.
- The census will provide valuable insights into geographical spread/clusters of economic activities, ownership pattern; persons engaged etc. of the establishments engaged in economic activity.

15. India Design Council launched two initiatives

- The India Design Council (IDC) has launched two new Initiatives to promote Design Education and Standards namely the Chartered Designs of India (CDI) and the Design Education Quality Mark (DEQM).
- These two initiatives of IDC and National Institute of design, Ahmedabad will help to address the 5 challenges of scale, quality of design, quality of education for design, raising the priority for design in industry and design for public purpose.
- The DEQM will benchmark design education programmes on predetermined standards and will accord Design Education Quality Mark to institutions that meet the provisions of the published standard.
- CDI is envisaged as an institution that will establish and uphold the professional standards of design practice in India.

16. FICCI India Sports Awards 2019

- The coveted FICCI India Sports Awards 2019 were presented to the winners on 11 December 2019 at New Delhi.
- The awards are an attempt by FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry) to acknowledge and recognize contribution of sports persons and various stakeholders who deliver excellent results during the year.

Winners:

- **Sports Person of the Year:**
Female- Rani Rampal, women's hockey team captain
Male: Saurabh Chaudhary, ace pistol shooter
- **Best National Sports Federation:** National Rifle Association of India Best Company Promoting Sports (Public Sector): Railway Sports Promotion Board
- **Best Para-athlete:** Sandeep Chaudhary (javelin). Breakthrough Sports Person: Amit Panghal (boxing)
- **Breakthrough Sports Person:** Amit Panghal (boxing) Lifetime Achievement (Administrator): Govindaraj Kempareddy

- **Lifetime Achievement (Administrator):** GovindarajKempareddy Lifetime Achievement: PankajAdvani (cue sport)
- **Best State promoting sports:** Odisha Best Sports Journalist: KameshSrinivasan
- **Best Sports Journalist:** KameshSrinivasan

17. Lok Sabha passes Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2019

- The Union Cabinet has approved the Central Sanskrit Universities Bill 2019 which will now be brought in to the parliament.
- The three Sanskrit deemed to be universities that will be converted into central universities includes:
 - Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi
 - Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi
 - Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Tirupati
- The purpose of these universities is to impart Sanskrit education to students, so that they get knowledge contained in Sanskrit language-literature.
- Sanskrit language is taught in 250 universities in 100 countries across the world, including 14 universities in Germany.

18. Bill introduced in Lok Sabha to amend welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act

- The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 11 December, 2019.
- It was introduced by Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Thaawar chand Gehlot.
- The bill, among other things, seeks to remove the ceiling of ten thousand rupees as maintenance and includes the preference to dispose of applications of senior citizens, above 80 years of age.
- It also provides for the registration of Senior Citizens' Care Homes and home care service agencies and seeks to ensure that minimum standards are maintained at such homes

19. Govt authorised NHAI to set up Infrastructure Investment Trust

- The Union Cabinet approved the proposal of Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), which authorizes National Highways Authority of India, NHAI to set up Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT).
- The setting up of the Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) is approved as per Guidelines issued by **Securities and Exchange Board of India, SEBI**.
- The proposal seeks to enable NHAI to perform the functions including:

To monetize completed National Highways that have a toll collection track record of at least one year.

- NHAH reserves the right to levy a Toll on the identified highway.
- Provides greater flexibility to investors.
- Create opportunities like the generation of specialized Operation and Maintenance Concessionaires.
- Attract long-term capital to the Indian highway market and retail domestic savings.
- NHAH's InvIT will be a Trust established by NHAH under the **Indian Trust Act, 1882** and Securities and Exchange Board of India (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014.
- The objective of the InvIT Trust is to invest primarily in infrastructure projects (as defined by Ministry of Finance).
- InvIT may hold assets either directly or through an SPV or a holding.

Securities and Exchange Board of India(SEBI)

Securities and Exchange Board of India is a government authority established in 1988 which controls the securities market in India. Indian Parliament passed SEBI Act 1992 in 1992 India which made SEBI a statutory body. SEBI functions to fulfill the requirements of the following three categories.

- Issuers –It provides a marketplace in which the issuers can increase finance properly.
- Investors –It ensure safety and supply of precise and accurate information.
- Intermediaries –It enables a competitive professional market for intermediaries.

The headquarters of SEBI is situated in Mumbai. The regional offices of SEBI are located in Ahmadabad, Kolkata, Chennai and Delhi.

20. International Universal Health Coverage Day

- Every year 12th December is celebrated as International Universal Health Coverage Day across the world, as an annual rallying point for the growing movement for health for all.
- The day is promoted by World Health Organization (WHO).
- To create awareness of need for strong and resilient health systems and universal health coverage with multi-stakeholder partners.
- The day marks the anniversary of United Nations' historic and unanimous endorsement of universal health coverage (UHC) and providing affordable, quality health care in 2012. Later, on 12 December 2017, UN proclaimed 12 December as International Universal Health Coverage Day (UHC Day) by resolution 72/138.
- Theme: Keep the promise.

21. Draj Bridge for all-weather connectivity inaugurated in Jammu and Kashmir Rajouri

- Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Shri Girish Chandra Murmu dedicated the 72-metre-long Bridge to the Nation in Rajouri.
- The bridge over Drajnallah connects Draj Area with Tehsil Kotranka area under District Rajouri and is constructed to bear heavy load up to 70 tons.
- The Drajbridge is an essential bridge for the military as well as for the socio-economic development of the Rajouri District.
- This bridge will facilitate the all-weather and speedy movement of Army troops as well as locals.
- The 110 Road Construction Company of the 31 Task Force under Project Sampark of **Border Roads Organisation (BRO)**.
- BRO is involved with more projects in the area to strengthen the road network.
- The BRO is playing an essential role in the field of surface transport by connecting far-flung inaccessible remote areas along borders.
- General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Northern Command Lt Gen Ranbir Singh, 16 Corps Commander Lt Gen Harsha Gupta, and Divisional Commissioner Jammu were also present during the occasion.

Border Roads Organisation

- Functioning under the control of the Ministry of Defence since 2015, the BRO is engaged in road construction to provide connectivity to difficult and inaccessible regions in the border areas of the country.
- It is staffed by Officers and troops drawn from the Indian Army's Corps of Engineers, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Army Service Corps, Military Police and Army personnel on extra regimental employment.
- Engineering Service and personnel from the General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) form the parent cadre of the Border Roads Organisation.
- Currently, the organisation maintains operations in twenty-one states, one UT (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), and neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.
- The BRO operates and maintains over 32,885 kilometres of roads and about 12,200 meters of permanent bridges in the country.

22. Union Government formulated Rules to prevent Crime against Women

- Union Government took several initiatives for the safety of women across the Country.
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013 enacted for effective against sexual offenses.
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2018, enacted to prescribe even more stringent penal provisions, including the death penalty for rape of a girl below the age of 12 years.
- The Act stipulates completion of investigation and trials within two months each.
- Emergency Response Support System provides a pan-India, single, internationally recognized number (112) based system for all emergencies, with computer-aided dispatch of field resources to the location of distress.
- Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) launched a cyber-crime portal on 20th September 2018 for citizens to report obscene content.
- The **National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO)** to facilitate investigation and tracking of sexual offenders across the country by law enforcement agencies.
- The States/UTs, MHA on 19th February 2019, launched an online analytic tool for police called Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences' to monitor and track time-bound investigation in sexual assault cases in accordance with the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2018.
- **One-Stop Centre (OSC) scheme** is implemented across the country since 1st April 2015 exclusively designed to provide integrated services such as medical aid, police assistance, legal counseling/ court case management, psycho-social counseling, and temporary shelter to women affected by violence under one roof.
- MHA issued advisories from time to time with a view to helping the States/UTs to deal with crimes against women.
- **Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (Nirbhaya Act)** is an Indian legislation passed by the Lok Sabha on 19 March 2013, and by the Rajya Sabha on 21 March 2013, which provides for amendment of Indian Penal Code, Indian Evidence Act, and Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 on laws related to sexual offenses.

National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO)

- The registry contains key details like names, photographs, residential address, fingerprints, DNA samples, and PAN and Aadhaar numbers, of convicted sexual offenders.
- The database, which will be maintained by the National Crime Records Bureau, will also contain over 4.5 lakh cases. The cases have profiles of first-time and repeat offenders as well.

- Before India, UK, US, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and Trinidad have maintained the data record. However, in the US, documents can be accessed by the public.
- But in India, the details will be available only to the law enforcement agencies. The decision to set up the database was taken in this year (2018) following nationwide outrage over cases of sexual assault on minors.

One-Stop Centre (OSC) scheme

- Popularly known as Sakhi, Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has formulated this Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- It is a sub – scheme of Umbrella Scheme for National Mission for Empowerment of women including Indira Gandhi Matritav Sahyaog Yojana.
- Under the scheme, One Stop Centres are being established across the country to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces in phased manner.
- **Target group:** The OSC will support all women including girls below 18 years of age affected by violence, irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status.
- **Funds:** The Scheme will be funded through Nirbhaya Fund. The Central Government will provide 100% financial assistance to the State Government /UT Administrations under the Scheme.

The Centres will be integrated with a Women Helpline to facilitate access to following services:

- Emergency response and rescue services.
- Medical assistance.
- Assistance to women in lodging the FIR.
- Psycho- social support and counselling.
- Legal aid and counselling.
- Shelter
- Video conferencing facility.

23. India climbs one spot to 129th in Human Development Index

- According to a report by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** India climbed one spot to **129** among 189 countries in the 2019 human development index.
- In India, 27.1 crore people lifted out of poverty from 2005-06 to 2015-16.

- India ranked **130 last year (2018)**. The steady progress due to nearly three decades of rapid development, which had seen a dramatic reduction in absolute poverty, along with gains in life expectancy, education, and access to health care.
- South Asia is the fastest-growing region witnessing 46 percent growth during 1990-2018, followed by East Asia and the Pacific at 43 percent.
- Norway, Switzerland, Ireland are the top three nations on the index. Germany occupies the fourth position along with Hong Kong, and Australia secured the fifth rank on the global ranking.
- India's neighbours Sri Lanka and China ranked higher, at 71 and 85 positions, respectively.

Human Development Index

- HDI emphasizes that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone.
- HDI measures average achievement of a country in three basic dimensions of human development:
 - A long and healthy life
 - Access to knowledge
 - A decent standard of living
- It is published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

United Nations Development Programme

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a specialised agency of United Nation formed in 1965 to triggered global development network.
- It works in nearly 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion.
- It also helps countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and build resilience in order to sustain development results.

24. National Anti-Doping Agency appoints Actor SunielShetty as its Brand Ambassador

- Bollywood actor SunielShetty was appointed as the brand ambassador of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA).
- It is expected that the celebrity status will help NADA's efforts to clean up sports in the country from the menace.

- Earlier this year, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) had suspended NADA. This is another issue facing the country now that dope samples collected by NADA from the athletes will have to be tested outside India.
- Another raised concern is about whether India would be able to test enough number of athletes in the coming months ahead of the Tokyo Olympics 2020.

National Anti-Doping Agency

- It was set up as registered society under the Societies Registration Act of 1890 in 2005
- It has a mandate for ensuring Dope free sports in India.
- It is responsible for promoting, coordinating, and monitoring doping control program in sports in all its forms.
- Comes under Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

25. CLIMATE CHANGE PERFORMANCE INDEX 2019

The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2019 released shows that only few countries have started working towards limiting global warming below 2°C or even at 1.5°C.

About CCPI

- The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) is an annual publication by Germanwatch, NewClimate Institute and Climate Action Network Europe.
- Its aim is to put political and social pressure on those countries that have, until now, failed to take ambitious action on climate protection, and to highlight those countries with best practice climate policies.
- It evaluates the climate protection performance of 60 countries, responsible for over 90% of global energy-related CO₂ emissions.

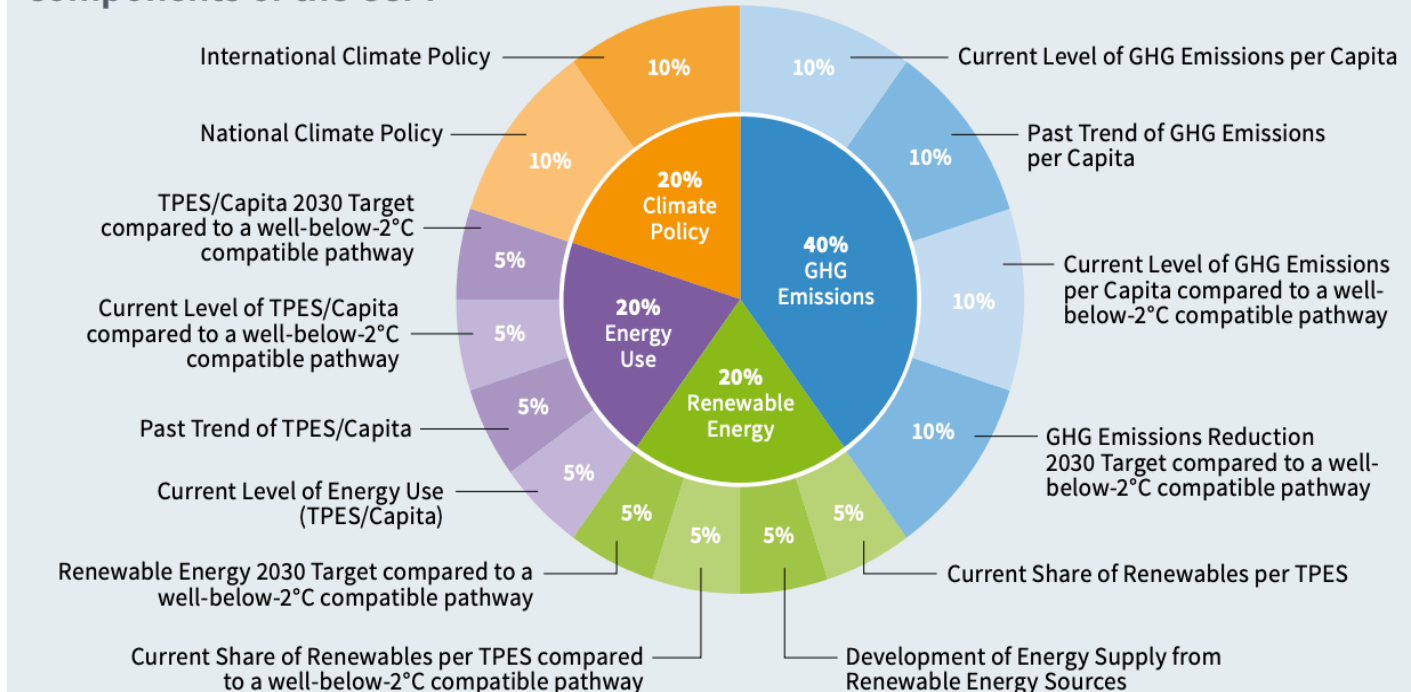
India's Performance

- India ranks 11th in this year's CCPI, improving its standing by three places compared to the previous edition.
- Most notably India improved its performance in the Renewable Energy category, joining the group of medium
- However, national experts argue that plans to build new coal-fired power plants may pose a risk of offsetting positive developments in the renewable energy sector.
- Comparatively low levels of per capita GHG emissions and a relatively ambitious mitigation target for 2030 give India an overall high rating in the emissions category.

Global Performance

- Morocco has been named the second best performing country after Sweden in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).
- With the connection of the world's largest solar plant to the grid, Morocco is on track for achieving its target of 42% installed renewable energy capacities by 2020.
- Sweden is in top position, followed by Morocco and Lithuania in the CCPI 2019.
- The bottoms five in the list are Saudi Arabia, U.S., Iran, South Korea and Taiwan.

Components of the CCPI



26. Digital Exhibition on history of Constitution of India being held in New Delhi

The 'Digital Exhibition on History of Constitution of India', was inaugurated in New Delhi by Dr. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State (M/S) for Development of North Eastern Region (I/C), Prime Minister's Office, Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space.

About 'Digital Exhibition on History of Constitution of India'

- It has been organised by Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT), Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, in collaboration with Parliament Museum and Archives of Lok Sabha Secretariat and Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC).
- Exhibition contains Replica of the Constitution, photograph of Constituent Assembly Members, Debates (audio) in Constituent Assembly, Quotes and audiospeeches of Constituent Assembly

Members, Movie on making of Constitution, Posters on- Preamble, Constitution, Fundamental Duties, Directive Principle among others.

Importance of 9th December: It is an important day from historical point of view, as the first sitting of Constituent Assembly was held on this day in 1946. The current year 2019, marks 70th Year of adoption of Constitution.

NOTE: The Constitution of India was adopted on 26th November, 1949, and the Members appended their signatures to it on 24 January 1950. In all, 284 Members (total Members-299) actually signed Constitution and the Constitution of India then came into force on 26 January 1950. The day of adoption of the Constitution is celebrated in country as 'Constitution Day'.

27. Rural areas in all States, UTs become Open Defecation Free

- Rural areas in all the States and Union Territories have become **Open Defecation Free** in the country.
- This was informed by Minister of State for **Jal Shakti Rattan Lal Kataria** in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha.
- Urban areas of all the States and Union Territories except West Bengal have been declared Open Defecation Free.
- Over 10 crore individual household latrines were constructed under the **Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)**.
- Over 60 lakh individual household latrines were constructed under the **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)**.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is one of the most popular and significant missions in the History of India. This campaign was launched on 2nd October 2014 to honor Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a Clean country.

Initially, this Swachh Bharat Abhiyan campaign was run on a national level in all the towns, rural and urban areas.

Objective

- To spread the awareness of cleanliness and the importance of it.
- To provide the basic sanitation facilities like toilets, solid and liquid waste disposal systems, village cleanliness and safe and adequate drinking water supply to each and every person.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)

- It is under the Ministry of Urban Development

- It is commissioned to give sanitation and household toilet facilities in all 4041 statutory towns with a combined population of 377 million.
- It also purposes to establish solid waste management facilities in every town.
- **Components:**
 - Individual household toilets
 - Community toilets
 - Public toilets
 - Municipal Solid Waste Management
 - Information and Educating Communication (IEC) and Public Awareness
 - Capacity Building
- The Urban Clean India mission seeks to eradicate open defecation; convert insanitary toilets to flush toilets; eradicate manual scavenging, and facilitate solid waste management.
- The mission emphasizes on ushering in a behavioural change among people, with respect to healthy sanitation practices, by educating them about the damaging effects of open defecation, the environmental dangers spreading from strewn garbage, and so on.
- To achieve these objectives, urban local bodies are being brought in and fortified to design, implement and operate systems in order to promote a facilitating environment for the participation of the private sector in terms of both capital and operations expenditure.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural)

- The Rural mission, known as Swachh Bharat Gramin, aims to make Village Panchayats open defecation free.
- Removing obstacles and addressing critical issues that affect results is the new thrust of this rural sanitation mission, which aims to provide all rural households with individual latrines; and build cluster and community toilets on public-private partnership mode.
- Considering the filth and unhygienic conditions in village schools, this programme lays special emphasis on toilets in schools with basic sanitation amenities.
- Construction of Anganwadi toilets and management of solid and liquid waste in all Village Panchayats is the object of the Clean India mission.

28. Recycling of Ship Act, 2019

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for enactment of Recycling of Ships Bill, 2019 and accession to the Hong Kong International Convention for Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009.

Salient features:

- The proposed Bill restricts and prohibits the use or installation of hazardous material, which applies irrespective of whether a ship is meant for recycling or not.
- For new ships, such restriction on use of hazardous material will be immediate, that is, from the date the legislation comes into force, while existing ships shall have a period of five years for compliance.
- Restriction or prohibition on use of hazardous material would not be applied to warships and non-commercial ships operated by Government.
- Under the Bill, ship recycling facilities are required to be authorized and ships shall be recycled only in such authorized ship recycling facilities in accordance with a ship-specific recycling plan.
- India has also been decided to accede to the Hong Kong International Convention for Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009.

Background:

- India is the leader in the global Ship recycling industry, with a share of over 30% of the market.
- The ship-recycling industry is a labour-intensive sector, but it is susceptible to concerns on environmental safety.

29. Human Library

- Human Library, a concept which seeks to replace books with humans, was held in Mysuru.
- It aims to break past long-standing prejudices and stereotypes by creating a safe framework for conversation by using a library analogy of lending people rather than books.
- It intends to generate greater human cohesion across various social, religious and ethnic diversities. The readers of human library have an opportunity during a planned event to borrow Human Books and to engage in conversation with the books.

30. Mumbai Central Railway Station certified as India's first Eat Right Station

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certified Mumbai Central railway station as India's first Eat Right Station.

- It rated the station with four stars rating. The move comes under the Eat Right India initiative started by FSSAI in 2018.

Eat Right Station:

- Indian Railways (IR) launched the Eat Right Station as a part of efforts to help passengers make a healthy and right food choice.
- Mumbai Central Railway Station has been judged on the basis of compliance of food safety and hygiene, food handling at preparation, availability of healthy diet, food waste management, transshipment and retail, and serving point, promotion of local and seasonal food.
- The station aims to create awareness on food safety and a healthy diet.
- FSSAI in partnership with Western Railways (WR) and Indian Railways Catering Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has trained food handlers, both in base kitchens and canteens.
- FSSAI officials inspected catering establishments at the station as per the procedure, rated and certified the standard of food.

Eat Right India movement:

- The movement aims to engage, and enable citizens to improve their health and well-being. The movement is based on two basic foundations namely 'Eat Healthy and Eat Safe'.
- The movement was initiated by FSSAI. The collective effort ensures that both demand and supply-side interventions occur through the key stakeholders.
- On the demand side, it focuses on the behavioral and social change of the consumers. It is expected to lead them to make the right food choice.
- On the supply side, it encourages the people involved in the food business to reformulate their products. It directs them to provide more nutritional awareness to the consumers, including matters like proper water disposal, hygiene maintenance, and following safe food practices.

31. Mysore University to set up separate Department of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Studies (DDRS)

- The University of Mysore (UoM) is to set up a separate Department of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Studies (DDRS) on its campus at Manasagangotri. It was approved by the University of Mysore Academic Council.
- With this, University of Mysore became the first varsity in the state to introduce the course, as per the directives of the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Aim:

- The University aims to help the welfare of disabled persons.
- The students can study the course along with the PG departments in Psychology, Food Science and Nutrition, Physical Education and Master of Social Work (MSW).
- It encourages the studies in disabilities.

DDRS in University of Mysore:

- DDRS will come into effect from the next academic year 2019-20.
- It will be set up in the Department of Studies in Physical Education and Sports Sciences.
- The University will offer Rs.500 per month as stipend to students who join the course.

32. Woman Suraksha policy

- HDFC ERGO General Insurance Company launched “My Health Woman Suraksha Policy” to address all health-related concerns.

My health Woman Suraksha policy:

- The policy has been designed to cover women against numerous illnesses and contingencies they may face during their lifetime.
- The policies aim to provide financial aid in case of medical contingencies.
- The National Health Portal of India said that the women in India face many health issues like breast cancer, malnutrition, lack of maternal health. This policy will cover various types of cancers & related surgeries, pregnancy and neonatal complications and assaults and burns.
- The policy will also cover women from critical illnesses like Cardiac ailments, Rheumatoid Arthritis, and others along with post-diagnosis support like Molecular Gene profiling test, Second Medical opinion and counselling to support women through the illness.
- The policy provides counseling on stress management, pregnancy care, work-life balance, etc, to the new age women.
- The policy is offered to women between 18-65 years of age and offers a sum insured ranging from Rs.1 lakh to Rs.1 crore.

33. India stands as fifth worst country in terms of biometric use

- The Britain-based tech research firm Comparitech reported that India is the fifth worst country in terms of extensive and invasive use of biometric data.
- Before India, stands China, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the US. India shared the fifth position along with Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Report highlights:

- The researchers analyzed 50 countries to find out where biometrics is being taken, the reason for the collection of the biometric data, and the process of the data storage.
- The countries were marked out of 25.
- A high score secured by a country shows an extensive and invasive use of biometrics and surveillance.
- A low score shows better restrictions and regulations regarding biometric use and surveillance.
- The researchers also checked whether the country failed to introduce a law to protect biometric data.
- The report said that despite knowing the sensitiveness of the biometric data, many countries accepted as the biometric use.

India:

India scored 19 out of 25. The country ranked relatively lower in the list of worst countries for biometric data collection. India does not permit law enforcement to get access to the national biometric database known as Aadhaar.

Top 5 countries of the list:

The top 5 best countries in terms of collection, storage and use of biometric data as per the report are:

Ireland

Portugal

Cyprus

The UK

Romania

34. Law Ministry to set up fast track courts after data on POCSO from HCs

- The data from the High Courts across the country say that more than 96% of 1,66,882 rape trials registered under POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) are pending.
- After receiving the data, law ministry has drawn comprehensive plans to fast track disposal of pending rape cases within a year. The plan is to set up fast track courts to hasten the process.

Highlights

- The aim of the fast track Courts is to dispose the cases within 1 year. So far there are 1,66,882 cases that are registered as rape cases and 1,60,989 cases registered under POCSO Act.
- The government of India is also planning to propose similar fast track courts under the 15th Finance Commission (2020-2025).
- The law ministry will set up 1,023 fast track court to complete the pending cases.

- The data from the HC says that there are around 389 districts all over the country where the number of cases under POCSO act exceeded 100.

Issue

- POCSO Act mandates that the investigation of Cases registered under the Act has to be completed within a time span of 2 months.
- In spite of such strict law and policy framework, the number of rape and POCSO cases have increased.

POCSO(Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act)

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012 was formulated in order to effectively address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children.

35. 100 days of PradhanMantri Van DhanYojana

Ministry of Tribal Affairs will announce the 100 days achievements of 'Prime Minister Van DhanYojana'.

The Ministry will also launch the international fashion designer Ms.RituBeri as Chief Design Consultant for TRIFED to promote tribal arts & culture.

About Prime Minister Van DhanYojana

PradhanMantri Van DhanYojana (PMVDY) is a Market Linked Tribal Entrepreneurship Development Program. It was launched in 2018. It is a scheme of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Aim: It aims to help tribals in optimum utilization of natural resources and provide sustainable Minor Forest Produce (MFP)-based livelihood. It seeks to help increase tribal income through value addition of MFP centric products

Implementation of the Scheme:

- The scheme is implemented through the Ministry of Tribal Affairs as Nodal Department at the Central Level.
- TRIFED acts as the Nodal Agency at the National Level.
- Under the scheme, Van Dhan Vikas Kendras are set up. These centres cater to 10 Self Help Groups of and each group consists of thirty tribal gathers. They are trained and provided with working capital to add value to the products, which they collect from the jungle. The first Van Dhan Vikas Kendra was set up in Chhattisgarh.
- These SHGs can then market their products within and outside the States through a retail network. Training and technical support are provided by TRIFED.

Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)

- It was established in 1987. It functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Tribal affairs.
- The basic objective of the TRIFED is to provide good price to the products made or collected from the forest by the tribal people.

36. National Florence Nightingale Award

- The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, presented the National Florence Nightingale Awards to nursing personnel on the occasion of International Nurses Day.
- Lini PN, the 30-year-old nurse from Kerala who died of the deadly Nipah virus that she contracted while treating a patient last year during the Nipah outbreak, was posthumously awarded National Florence Nightingale Award-2019.
- Apart from Lini, 35 other nurses were also awarded this year in two slots of 18 awardees each.
- National Florence Nightingale awards were instituted in the year 1973 by the Indian government as a mark of recognition for the meritorious services rendered by nurses.

37. India ranked 73rd in the 2019 E-commerce Index Current Affairs

- India ranked 73rd in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) Business-to-Consumer (B2C) E-commerce Index 2019.
- The ranking was conducted for 152 countries. The Netherlands topped the index for the second consecutive year.
- The survey was conducted among 152 countries.
- The index measured an economy's preparedness to support online shopping.
- The index marked the readiness of the countries that are engaged in online commerce.
- The survey also included a parameter where the portion of every country's population that uses the internet and has an account with a financial institution or mobile-money-service provider.
- The least developed countries occupy 18 of the 20 bottom positions. Among the 20 economies that ranked the lowest value in the 2019 index, 18 are the least developed countries.
- Comoros, Burundi, Chad, and Niger holds the last positions in the index.
- India has slightly improved its position from 80 in 2018 and 83 in 2017. India Internet shoppers as a share of Internet users were 11% and Internet shoppers as a share of population of 3% in 2017.
- Countries are measured on the access to secure internet servers, the reliability of postal services and infrastructure.

38. Ravneet Singh took charge as the Chief of Personnel of the Indian Navy

- Vice Admiral Ravneet Singh took charge as the Chief of Personnel of the Indian Navy on 2 December 2019. He replaced Vice Admiral R Hair Kumar.
- He will be heading the Personnel Branch of the Indian Navy.
- He will be responsible for all personal issues of Service and Civilian manpower of the Navy including training, induction, discipline, career management, pay, and allowances.
- Vice Admiral Ravneet Singh is a qualified flying instructor with Master Green Instrument Rating. He was commissioned on 1 July 1983.
- He served as a Flag Officer. He has held various appointments as Assistant Controller Warship Production in the Assistant Controller Carrier Project and Acquisition at IHQ MoD(N), Flag Officer Goa Area, Flag Officer Naval Aviation at Goa, Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet at Mumbai, Chief of Staff at Headquarters Western Naval Command at Mumbai, and Director General Project Seabird at IHQ MoD(N).

39. Cipla Foundation introduced MSL to provide quality education

- Cipla Foundation has introduced a mobile science lab (MSL) under its corporate social responsibility (CSR) with its Agastya International Foundation.
- It implemented the Agastya International Foundation.
- It aims to provide quality education to the students in Sikkim.
- The initiative also aimed to create awareness of science among children and teachers.
- The mobile science lab is expected to reach out to 1,400 students across 10 schools in the periphery of the Golden Cross Unit.
- The Lab will maximize the potential of every child.
- Learning is the most important investment in one's future.
- The students can learn through the mobile science lab and use the opportunity to prepare for state-level science workshops.

40. First mega food park of Central India**About**

- Avantee mega Food Park inaugurated in MP's Dewas.
- This first food park of central India is spread over 51 acres and has been constructed at a cost of about 150 crore rupees.

- Processing of soyabean, gram, wheat and other grains and vegetables will be done in the park. Warehouses will also be opened in Indore, Ujjain, Dhar and Agar in the next phase.

Mega Food Park Scheme:

- The Scheme of Mega Food Park aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastage, increasing farmer's income and creating employment opportunities particularly in rural sector.
- The Mega Food Park Scheme is based on "Cluster" approach and envisages creation of state of art support infrastructure in a well-defined agri / horticultural zone for setting up of modern food processing units in the industrial plots provided in the park with well-established supply chain.
- The Mega Food Park project is implemented by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) which is a Body Corporate registered under the Companies Act. State Government, State Government entities and Cooperatives are not required to form a separate SPV for implementation of Mega Food Park project.

41. Law Ministry launched a drive on fundamental duties

- The Department of Justice (DOJ) has launched a programme to create awareness of their fundamental duties among the citizens.
- The year-long drive is a part of the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of Constitution Day that was celebrated on 26 November.

Drive on fundamental duties:

- The department will conduct activities such as online quizzes, essay competitions, and preamble pledge signing contest. It will be organized to educate them about their constitutional responsibilities.
- The Ministry has outlined which duties should be handled by each ministry and asked them to prepare a calendar of activities.

Fundamental Duties:

- The Fundamental Duties were incorporated in Part IV-A of the Constitution by the 42nd amendment.
- Article 51-A describes 11 Fundamental Duties. In 2002, one more duty was added by the 86th amendment. It was borrowed from USSR.

The Fundamental Duties are:

- Abide by the Indian Constitution and respect the national flag and National Anthem

- Follow ideals of the freedom struggle
- Protect sovereignty & integrity of India
- Defend the country and render national services when called upon
- Sprit of common brotherhood
- Preserve composite culture
- Preserve natural environment
- Develop scientific temper
- Safeguard the public property
- Strive for excellence
- Duty of all parents or guardians to send their children in the age group of 6-14 years to school

42. “India Ranking Society” established to rank educational institutes

- The aim of the India Ranking society is to develop methodologies and systems to rank higher educational institutions in the country.
- The proposal was approved in the 127th meeting of the AICTE Executive Council.

NIRF Ranking

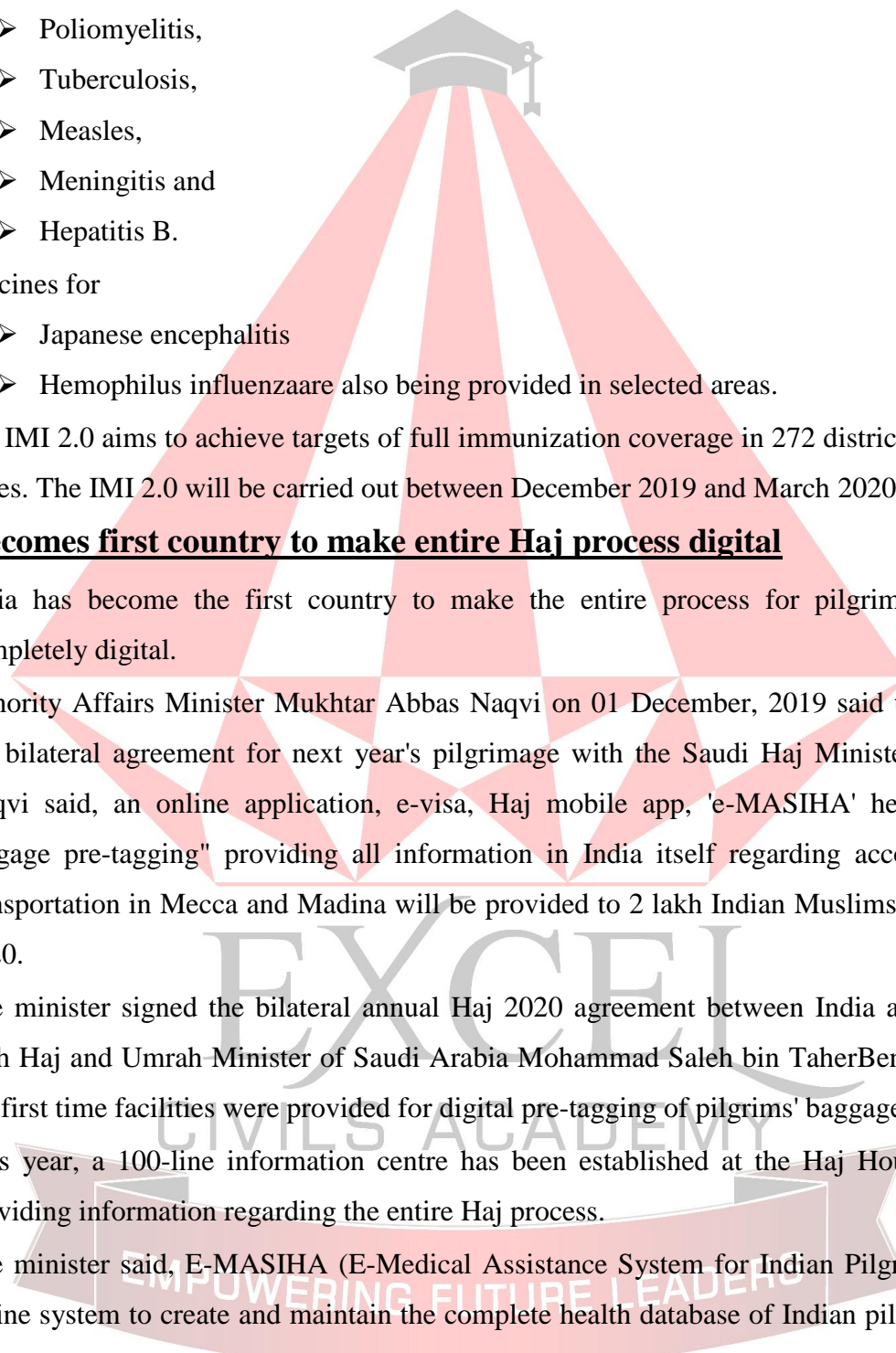
- At present, the educational institutes of the country are ranked according to the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).
- It includes 5 broad generic groups of parameters namely teaching, learning and resources; graduation outcomes; perception; outreach and inclusivity; research and professional practice. The next NIRF ranking will be released in April 2020 as scheduled.

Significance

- The Indian Ranking, 2019 ranked the higher educational institutes based on the categories Pharmacy, Engineering, management, law, architecture, medicine.
- However, the new ranking system will help bring improvement in every category and generic group parameters as well. Also, it will help to form a healthy environment.

43. Intensified Mission Indradhanush 2.0

- Centre is launching nationwide vaccination drive to prevent eight diseases under Intensified Mission Indradhanush 2.0 across the country.
- The government's flagship scheme is aimed at immunizing children under the age of 2 years and pregnant women against eight vaccine preventable diseases.
- The IMI covers vaccines for

- 
- Diphtheria,
 - Whooping cough,
 - Tetanus,
 - Poliomyelitis,
 - Tuberculosis,
 - Measles,
 - Meningitis and
 - Hepatitis B.
- Vaccines for
 - Japanese encephalitis
 - Hemophilus influenzae are also being provided in selected areas.
 - The IMI 2.0 aims to achieve targets of full immunization coverage in 272 districts spread over 27 States. The IMI 2.0 will be carried out between December 2019 and March 2020.

44. India becomes first country to make entire Haj process digital

- India has become the first country to make the entire process for pilgrims going on Haj completely digital.
- Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on 01 December, 2019 said this after signing the bilateral agreement for next year's pilgrimage with the Saudi Haj Minister in Jeddah. Mr Naqvi said, an online application, e-visa, Haj mobile app, 'e-MASIHA' health facility, "e-luggage pre-tagging" providing all information in India itself regarding accommodation and transportation in Mecca and Madina will be provided to 2 lakh Indian Muslims going for Haj in 2020.
- The minister signed the bilateral annual Haj 2020 agreement between India and Saudi Arabia with Haj and Umrah Minister of Saudi Arabia Mohammad Saleh bin TaherBenten. He said, for the first time facilities were provided for digital pre-tagging of pilgrims' baggage.
- This year, a 100-line information centre has been established at the Haj House, Mumbai for providing information regarding the entire Haj process.
- The minister said, E-MASIHA (E-Medical Assistance System for Indian Pilgrims Abroad), an online system to create and maintain the complete health database of Indian pilgrims along with doctors' preions, medical treatment as well as medicine disbursal, has been developed to deal with any emergency in Mecca and Madina.

- The Minister said, Haj Group Organizers (HGOs) have also been connected with 100 per cent digital system which has ensured transparency in their functioning and has also ensured better facilities to Indian Haj pilgrims.

45. India's first Maritime Museum in Gujarat

- Underwater or marine archaeology in India is all set to get a boost with the government deciding to establish a National Maritime Heritage Museum at Lothal, a Harappan site on the Saurashtra coast in Gujarat.
- The museum will also be an independent research centre of underwater archaeology for reconstruction of maritime history, archaeology of boat building and materials traded.
- The museum is being set up with technical help from the Portuguese Maritime Heritage Museum.
- Lothal is the site of one of the oldest ports in India dating to the Bronze Age.
- In India, shipwreck studies were initiated in 1989 off Sunchi Reef in Goa waters.

46. DPIIT invites applications for first-ever National Startup Awards 2020

National Startup awards:

- The first ever National Startup Awards has been announced by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade(DPIIT).
- The awards seek to recognize outstanding startups and ecosystem enablers that are building innovative solutions and scalable enterprises, with high potential of employment generation or wealth creation, demonstrating measurable social impact.
- The awards for startups will be given in 35 areas classified into 12 broad sectors like agriculture, education, enterprise technology, energy, finance, food, health, Industry 4.0, space, security, tourism, and urban services.
- In addition,there are three special awards for startups from educational institutions making an impact in rural areas and women entrepreneurs.
- A cash prize of Rs 5 lakh each will be awarded to the winning startup in each area.A cash prize of Rs 15 lakh each will also be awarded to one winning Incubator and one winning Accelerator as well.

Startup India

- Startup India is a flagship initiative of the Government of India launched in 2016.
- It is intended to catalyse startup culture and build a strong and inclusive ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship in India.

- Since the launch of the initiative, Government has rolled out several programs with the objective of supporting entrepreneurs, and transforming India into a country of job creators instead of job seekers.

47. National Broadband Mission

- The **Ministry of Communications** has launched '**National Broadband Mission**' that will facilitate universal and equitable access to broadband services across the country, especially in rural and remote areas.
- The Mission is part of the **National Digital Communications Policy, 2018**.
- The vision of the Mission is to fast-track growth of digital communications infrastructure, bridge the digital divide, facilitate digital empowerment and inclusion, and provide affordable and universal access of broadband for all.
- It can be noted that through **BharatNet**, broadband services have reached in as many as 142,000 village blocks, and the latest mission aims to offer broadband for all by 2022 including remotely-located hospitals, schools and post offices.

Key Features

Some of the objectives of the Mission which are structured with a strong emphasis on the three principles of universality, affordability and quality are:

- Broadband access to all villages by 2022.
- Significantly improve quality of services for mobile and internet.
- Develop a Broadband Readiness Index (BRI) to measure the availability of digital communications infrastructure and conducive policy ecosystem within a State/UT.
- Creation of a digital fiber map of the Digital Communications network and infrastructure, including Optical Fiber Cables and Towers, across the country.
- Laying of incremental 30 lakhs route km of Optical Fiber Cable and increase in tower density from 0.42 to 1.0 tower per thousand of population by 2024.
- The Centre will work with States and UTs for having consistent policies pertaining to expansion of digital infrastructure including for Right of Way (RoW) approvals required for laying of optical fibre cable.
- Investment from stakeholders of Rs 7 Lakh Crore including Rs 70,000 crore from Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).

48. Government approves changes in Interest Subvention Scheme guidelines for MSMEs

- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Minister Nitin Gadkari has approved the changes in the Interest Subvention Scheme guidelines for MSMEs.
- The modifications are expected to boost their productivity through access to credit at reduced cost.
- The government is committed to enhancing credit to MSME sector and the implementation of the scheme is being closely monitored to help MSMEs get incremental credit of upto one crore rupees with Interest Subvention of two per cent by government.
- The Interest Subvention Scheme for MSMEs was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November, 2018.
- The modifications to the scheme include settlement of claims based on internal or concurrent auditor certificate and submission of statutory auditor's certificate once by June, 2020.
- Requirement of Udyog Aadhar Number, UAN is dispensed with for units eligible for GST. Trading activities without UAN have been made eligible.
- The improvements are set to provide momentum giving fillip to the MSME sector.

49. Minorities Rights Day

- Minorities Rights Day in India is observed on 18 December every year to remind about the rights of minorities and to educate people about it.
- It focuses on the religious harmony, respect, and better understanding of all minorities' communities in India.
- The Minorities Rights Day is celebrated by the National Commission for Minorities (NCM).
- On 18 December 1992, the United Nations adopted the Statement on the individual's Rights belonging to religious or Linguistic National or Ethnic Minorities.
- It highlighted religious linguistic, cultural, and national identity of the minorities that shall be respected, preserved, and protected by the states and within individual territories.
- It was carved out of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- The Constitutional and Statutory Bodies that are set up by the govt. of India are Central Wakf Council (CWC), National Commission for Minorities (NCM), Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities (CLM).
- Government has set up the NCM under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992.

- Six religious communities of India namely Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains have been notified as minority communities in India.
- Indian Constitution has used the word Minorities considering religion and language of a person.

50. PMGSY - Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PHASE III)

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the launch of the third phase of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY-III).
- **Length covered:** Under the PMGSY-III Scheme, it is proposed to consolidate 1,25,000 Km road length in the States.
- **Strategy:** PMGSY-III involves consolidation of through routes and major rural links connecting habitations to Gramin Agricultural markets (GrAMs), higher secondary schools and hospitals.
- **Financial Implications:** It will entail an estimated cost of Rs 80,250 crore. The funds would be shared in the ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and State for all States except for 8 North Eastern and 3 Himalayan States for which it is 90:10.
- **Implementation period:** 2019-20 to 2024-25.

About PMGS

- It is a nationwide plan in India to provide good all-weather road connectivity to unconnected villages.
- This Centrally Sponsored Scheme was introduced in 2000.
- The programme envisages connecting all eligible unconnected habitations with :
 - A population of 500 persons and above in plain areas
 - 250 persons and above in Hill States, Tribal (Schedule-V) areas, the Desert Areas (as identified in Desert Development Programme) and 82 Selected Tribal and Backward Districts under Integrated Action Plan (IAP) as identified by the Ministry of Home Affairs/Planning Commission.
 - The programme also has an Upgradation component in order to ensure full farm to market connectivity.
 - The Rural Roads is one of the six components of Bharat Nirman
 - World Bank has supported PMGSY since its inception.
 - For this scheme, 75 paise per litre has been earmarked out of cess levied on high speed diesel.
 - It considers habitation as unit for providing connectivity and not a revenue village.

- The scheme encourages use of “Green Technologies” and non-conventional materials (like waste plastic, geo-textiles, fly-ash, iron and copper slag etc) for constructing rural roads.
- **Funding pattern** : In ratio of 60:40 between Centre and State for all States except for 8 North Eastern and 3 Himalayan States (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir) for which it is 90:10.

51. Government Instant Messaging System

- Government Instant Messaging System (GIMS) is a prototype of an Indian equivalent of popular messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram for secure internal use.
- GIMS seeks to replace existing platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal which are being used by a majority of government departments and organisations.
- It will be used by employees of Central and state government departments and organisations for secure intra and inter organisation communications.
 - It employs end-to-end encryption for one-to-one messaging.
 - The server hosting GIMS is installed within the country and the information stored would be in the government-based cloud — NIC-operated data centres that are only meant for use by the government and its departments.
 - GIMS Portal will administer and monitor the working of an app.
 - Besides, one-to-one messaging and group messaging, it also provides for documents and media sharing in keeping with the hierarchies in the government system.
 - GIMS is designed and developed by the Kerala unit of National Informatics Centre (NIC).
 - The launch of the new app comes after the recent controversy over the WhatsApp breach of some Indian users’ mobile devices due to Pegasus.

52. GeM Samvaad

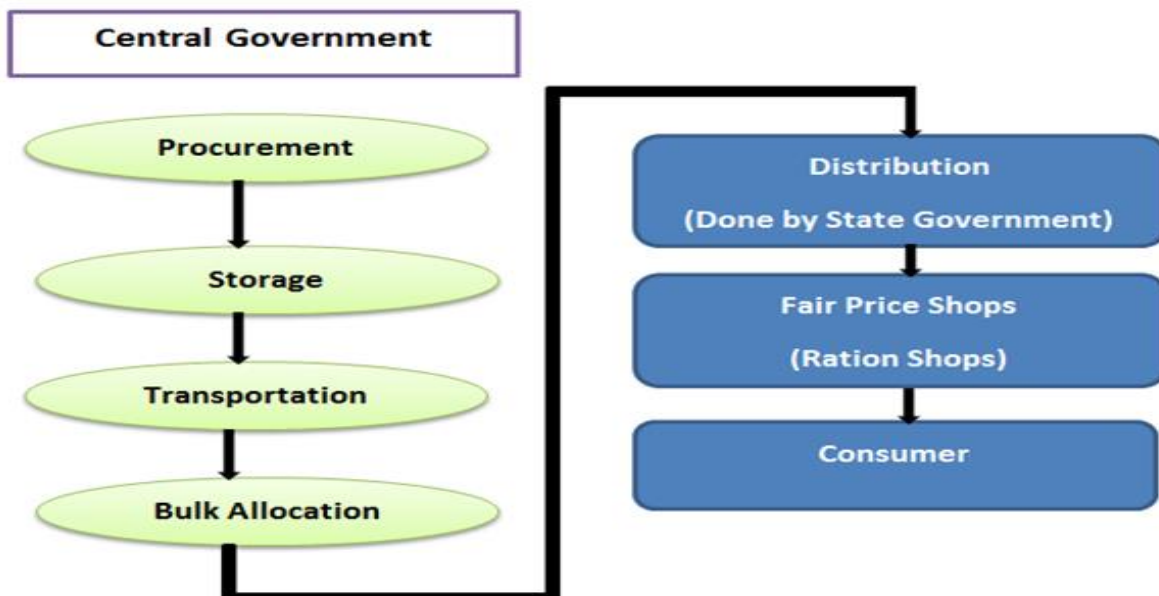
- Government e-commerce portal GeM on Tuesday launched a national outreach programme, GeM Samvaad, to bring on-board more local sellers.
- The outreach programme will take place from 19 Dec 2019 to 17 Feb 2020 and will cover all States and Union Territories (UTs) of the country.
- GeM Samvaad outreach programme will involve local sellers and stakeholders across the country to facilitate on-boarding of local sellers on marketplace while catering to specific requirements as well as procurement needs of buyers.
- Through GeM Samvaad, marketplace is also looking forward to receive feedback from users which would be used for making improvements and advancements in system.

Government e Marketplace (GeM)

- It is the national public procurement portal that offers end to end solutions for all procurement needs of Central and State Government Departments, autonomous institutions, Public Sector Units (PSUs) and local bodies.
- GeM was launched on 9 August 2016 and since its commencement, it has transformed public procurement in India by leveraging technology and making procurement contactless, paperless, and cashless.
- GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.
- It provides the tools of e-bidding, reverse e-auction and demand aggregation to facilitate the government users, achieve the best value for their money.

53. NITI Aayog: Plans to include eggs, chicken, and fish in PDS supply

- The Government of India think tank Niti Aayog announced that it is considering options to include fish, chicken, and eggs in the PDS (Public Distribution System).
- The move is expected to be included in Niti Aayog's 15-year Vision Document to be published in 2020 and be effective from April 1, 2020.
- The aim of the move is to include one or more nutritious food items under the food subsidy program.
- This will widen the list of food items along with coarse grains, rice, wheat, and pulses.
- The think tank believes that supply oils, spices, and sugar under PDS are unhealthy.



About Niti Aayog:

The NITI Aayog is a policy think tank of the Government of India, established with the aim to achieve sustainable development goals with cooperative federalism by fostering the involvement of State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach

Formed: 1 January 2015

Objectives: Foster involvement and participation in the economic policy-making process by the State Governments of India.

54. Global Gender Gap Index 2020: WEF

- India has been ranked 112th among 153 countries in the annual Global Gender Gap Index for 2020, published by the World Economic Forum (WEF).
- The WEF published its first gender gap index in 2006.
- The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks 153 countries on their progress towards gender parity in four dimensions:
 - Economic Participation and Opportunity,
 - Educational Attainment,
 - Health and Survival and
 - Political Empowerment
- The Index aims to serve as a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics. Through this annual yardstick, the stakeholders within each country are able to set priorities relevant in each specific economic, political and cultural context.
- Over the Index, the highest possible score is 1 (equality) and the lowest possible score is 0 (inequality).
- India has slipped to the 112th spot from its 108th position in the last edition. India was ranked relatively higher at 98th place in 2006 Report.
- India has been ranked below countries like China (106th), Sri Lanka (102nd), Nepal (101st), Brazil (92nd), Indonesia (85th) and Bangladesh (50th).
- **Performance on Four Indicators:** India has improved to 18th place on political empowerment but it has slipped to 150th on health and survival, to 149th in terms of economic participation and opportunity and to 112th place for educational attainment.

World Economic Forum

- The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation.
- It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. It is independent, impartial and not tied to any special interests.

- The Forum strives in all its efforts to demonstrate entrepreneurship in the global public interest while upholding the highest standards of governance.

55. Pakistan to import polio markers from India

The Pakistan Government decided to import Polio markers from India recently. The Government had suspended the trade with New Delhi for months after abrogation of Article 370.

Highlights

- There are three countries in the world where Polio is still endemic. It includes Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan.
- As of December 2019, there have been 111 documented cases of wild polio virus in Pakistan. In 2014, Pakistan had the highest number of polio cases in the world. The country has recently decided to import polio markers from India. The cabinet has provided one-time permission for the import.
- The polio markers are used to mark the fingers of the children after they are vaccinated with vaccines that are approved by the WHO.

Polio

- The disease is caused by Polio virus. In 1995, India launched Global Polio Eradication initiative of WHO that aims at 100% coverage.
- With the programme successfully implemented, India has completely eradicated Polio. The last case of Polio was reported in 2011 in India.

56. Free Wi-Fi services provided to all villages by 2020

On December 25, 2019, Union Minister of Communication and IT Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad inaugurated “Digital Village Guruwara” with the aim **to offer free Wi-Fi services to all villages by March 2020.**

Highlights

- The Government of India has so far connected 1,30,000-gram panchayats through Bharatnet. More than 50,000 Gram Panchayats are yet to be connected.
- The government is working under the current target that at least 15% of villages are to be digitalized in next four years. The free Wi-Fi services are being announced under Bharatnet project.

Bharatnet Project

The GoI in June 2018 announced that all gram panchayats will receive broadband connectivity by 2020. However, the connectivity has been made free now.

The initiative was launched in 2011. Under the initiative, 100 Mbps speed internet were to be provided to around 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats. The aim is to increase their speed to around 2 to 20 Mbps in the future to all households in rural areas.

The project is a National Optical Fibre Network project. It is seen as a major initiative in order to succeed Digital India. It is being implemented by the Ministry of Telecommunications.

57. Government launched Good Governance Index

On December 25, 2019, Government of India launched Good Governance Index on the occasion of Good Governance Day. Tamil Nadu topped in Good Governance Index.

Highlights of the report

- The States and Union Territories were divided into 3 groups namely Big states, North East and hill states and union territories.
- Tamil Nadu topped in Good Governance Index in the “Big States” category. It was followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh.
- The report also said that among the big states the poor performers were Odisha, Bihar, Goa and Uttar Pradesh. Jharkhand was ranked the last in good governance index.
- In the North East and hill states category, Himachal Pradesh ranked first. It was followed by Uttarakhand, Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim. The bad performers of the category include Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

Agricultural ranking

- In Agricultural and allied ranking, the best performing states were Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram and Daman and Diu.
- In order to frame agricultural rating parameters such as food grain production, milk and meat production, horticulture produce and crop insurance were considered.

Commerce and Industries

Under the category of commerce and industries, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand were the top performers.

58. NITI Aayog to launch SDG India Index & Dashboard 2019–20

NITI Aayog, the policy Think Tank of Government will launch the second edition of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index and Dashboard 2019–20 on 30 December 2019 at NITI Aayog, New Delhi. The first edition of SDG India Index was launched in December 2018. It was the first tool developed by any large country to monitor progress towards achieving SDGs at sub-national level.

NITI Aayog has the mandate of overseeing adoption as well as monitoring of SDGs in India, at the national and sub-national level.

About SDG India Index and Dashboard 2019–20

The SDG India Index and Dashboard 2019 documents the progress made by India's States and Union Territories (UTs) towards implementing the 2030 SDG targets. Besides indicating where the States and UTs currently are on SDG implementation, the Index and Dashboard also charts distance to be travelled to reach SDG targets.

It has been developed by Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) in collaboration with United Nations in India, and Global Green Growth Institute.

Index and Dashboard 2019 covers 16 out of 17 SDGs and a qualitative assessment on Goal 17. This marks an improvement over 2018 Index, which covered only 13 goals. On the basis of progress made, the Index ranks all States and UTs on 100 indicators drawn from MoSPI's National Indicator Framework, comprising of 306 indicators.

59. Losar Festival: Ladakhi New Year being celebrated

Losar is one of the major festivals celebrated by the Tibetan Buddhists. It is celebrated as Tibetan New Year. The term Losar, means "New Year" in Tibetan language, Lo-New and Sar-Year.

Losar is celebrated for more than 15 days in Tibet. It is also celebrated in India, where the inhabitants follow Buddhism. But in India, the celebration has been restricted for 3 days.

60. National Tribal Dance Festival begins in Raipur

National Tribal Dance Festival has begun in Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh, on December, 27. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi inaugurated the festival. The inaugural function was presided over by Chief Minister.

About festival :

The National Tribal Dance Festival is being organized in Chhattisgarh for the first time. More than 1300 participants from 25 states & UTs of the country and six countries are participating in this three-day dance fest. These folk dance teams will present their respective folk art cultures. During these three days, 29 tribal troupes will present more than 43 styles of four different dance forms.

Significance

The National Tribal Dance Festival is an annual festival celebrated by the aborigines and tribal of India in the National Capital Region, of India i.e. New Delhi. This Tribal Dance Festival annually during the month of December. It is organized by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India in collaboration with IGRMS, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

61. India's 1st transit-oriented development project in Delhi

India's first transit-oriented development (TOD) project to be a reality in the next three years! Union Home Minister recently laid the foundation stone for the country's very first TOD project, under which a state-of-the-art infrastructure zone will be constructed.

The project will include the national capital's tallest tower which will be built in East Delhi. The TOD project has been titled as '**East Delhi Hub**' and will be developed at Karkardooma spread over an area of 30 hectares.

The land at the site is owned by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). The DDA has chosen the National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC) for implementing the first phase of the TOD project.

The infrastructure project will consist of mixed-land use, with 70 per cent of land for residential area, 20 per cent for commercial use and 10 per cent for the civic amenities.

Various facilities and special aspects of the TOD project, which are as follows:

- One of the most unique aspects of the TOD project is that it will have a central and massive green lung of around 10 acres, built inside it. While the South Delhi area has several huge gardens and lawns, the East Delhi area does not have this kind of a recreational space, so it has been incorporated in the project.
- The hub has been designed with a sustainability model, and will have the provisions of vertical gardens as well as water-harvesting facilities.
- There will also be a huge plaza near the Delhi Metro stations and skywalks will be built to take people directly to the destinations without them having to step onto the streets.
- Schools, dispensaries, gymnasias, cultural centres as well as libraries will be built inside the hub.

62. Second edition of Eat Right mela

Key Points

- Eat Right Mela is organised by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).
- It is an outreach activity for citizens to nudge them towards eating right. It is organised to make citizens aware of the health and nutrition benefits of different types of food.
- The PURPLE Book, a handbook on diets for diseases was also launched.

It provides general guidelines for hospitals on suitable diets for common medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, gut disorders etc. in a simple format and has been developed and vetted by experts in the field of food and nutrition.

- Network for Scientific Co-operation for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (NetSCoFAN) was also launched. It is a network of research & academic institutions working in the area of food & nutrition along with the NetSCoFAN directory, covering detailed information of various heads/Directors and lead scientists of lead and associated partnering institutions.
- The importance of 'Save Food Share Food' was emphasised. In this context, Indian Food Sharing Alliance (IFSA) seeks to reduce food waste and hunger and to feed the needy and hungry with surplus food through structured systems.

63. South India's earliest Sanskrit Inscription found in A.P.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has discovered the earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India which is also an earliest epigraphic evidence (Epigraphy is the study of ancient inscriptions) for the Saptamatrika cult.

Saptamatrikas are a group of seven female deities worshipped in Hinduism as personifying the energy of their respective consorts.

Another inscription in Prakrit language and of Brahmi characters belonging to the 1st century A.D. was also found.

Key Points

- Inscriptions related to Saptamatrika: The found inscription records the construction of a Prasada (temple), a mandapa and consecration of images by a person named Kartika at the temple of Goddess Saptamatrika at Tambrepe, the ancient name of Chebrolou, Andhra Pradesh.
- Earlier References to Saptamatrika: Earlier references to Saptamatrika worship have been found in the early Kadamba copper plates and the early Chalukyas and Eastern Chalukya copper plates dated around 600 A.D.
- Language and Characters: All the available records proved that the found inscription (also known as Chebrolu inscription) is in Sanskrit and in Brahmi characters.
- They were Issued by Satavahana king Vijaya in 207 A.D.
- So far the Nagarjunakonda inscription of Ikshavaku king Ehavala Chantamula issued in the 4th century A.D. was considered the earliest Sanskrit inscription in South India.

64. India's first university for transgender community in UP

- The country's first university for transgender community will be opened in Uttar Pradesh's Kushinagar district to facilitate its members to study right from class one to PG and even do research and get PhD degree.

- The university, which will come up in Fazilnagar block of Kushinagar district, is being built by the Akhil Bhartiya Kinnar Siksha Seva Trust (All-India transgender education service trust).
- It is the first of its kind in the country where members of transgender community will be able to get education and the process of has already been initiated.
- From January 15 next year, two children who are brought up by the community members will get admission and from February and March other classes will start.
- It is a step forward to ensure social justice and equal treatment the trans genders.
-

65. Digital Radio to be launched in 2024

- Information and Broadcasting Minister has said that the government is bringing Digital Radio in 2024 while addressing the annual Akashvani awards function in New Delhi.

Digital radio

- It is the use of digital technology to transmit or receive across the radio spectrum. Digital Transmission by radio waves includes digital broadcasting, and especially digital audio radio services.
- The audio of digital radio will be clearer and its reach will be higher.

About All India Radio (AIR)

- AIR was established in 1936 and is officially known as Akashvani since 1956. It is the national public radio broadcaster of India and is a division of Prasar Bharati, which is India's largest public broadcasting agency.

66. 120th birth anniversary of Shaheed Udham Singh being celebrated

- Nation pays homage to the great revolutionary, Shaheed Udham Singh on his 120th birth anniversary today.
- He was born on this day in 1899 in Sangrur District of Punjab.
- Udham Singh was present in the Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar on the fateful Baisakhi Day of 13 April 1919. He avenged the massacre by killing General O'Dwyer in March 1940, and was hanged by the British in London.

67. Cabinet approves funds for updating National Population Register

The Union Cabinet has recently approved over Rs 8,500 crore for updating the National Population Register.

Key points

- The updating exercise is to commence from April next year.
- The NPR is a list of “usual residents” of the country.
- A “**usual resident**” is defined for the purposes of NPR as a person who has resided in a local area for the past six months or more or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next six months or more.
- The data for National Population Register was collected in 2010 along with the house-listing phase of Census of India 2011.
- The data was updated in 2015 by conducting a door-to-door survey.
- The digitisation of the updated information has been completed.
- Now it has been decided to update the National Population Register along with the house-listing phase of Census 2021 during April to September 2020 in all the states/union territories except Assam, according to the website of the Office of the Registrar General, and Census Commissioner.
- A gazette notification to this effect was issued in August this year.
- The NPR will be prepared at the local (village/sub-Town), sub-district, district, state and national level under provisions of the Citizenship Act 1955 and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.
- Every usual resident of India must register in the NPR.
- The objective of the NPR is to create a comprehensive identity database of every usual resident in the country.
- The database would contain demographic as well as biometric particulars.

68. Govt announces India's first Chief of Defence Staff to bring better synergy between forces

- Government has approved the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).
- The officer to be appointed as Chief of Defence Staff will be a four-star General and will also head the Department of Military Affairs.
- General Bipin Rawat, COAS who superannuated on 31-12-2019 was appointed as the first CDS.

Highlights

- CDS will have all powers of a secretary-level officer and vested with full financial powers.
- The new Chief of Defence Staff would ensure better utilisation of funds and more efficiency when it comes to procurement as well as forge synergy between the Army, Navy and Air Force.

- The Chief of Defence Staff was proposed to be a four-star General who would be first among equals vis-à-vis all the three service chiefs.

Historical background

- The post of the Chief of Defence Staff was first recommended after the 1999 Kargil conflict. A review committee set up to examine the armed forces' performance during the conflict, among other recommendations, suggested creating the post of a Chief of Defence Staff to work as a single-point advisor to the government on all matters concerning the military.
- A CDS, the committee and other analysts have argued, would better integrate the functioning of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

69. World's longest mountain tunnel under Rohtang Pass named after Atal Bihari Vajpayee

The government named the strategic tunnel under Rohtang Pass in Himachal Pradesh after former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee as a tribute to him on his 95th birth anniversary.

Highlights

- The 8.8-km-long tunnel will be the world's longest above an altitude of 3,000 metres.
- It will reduce the distance between Manali and Leh by 46 kilometres.
- Once thrown open, the tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity to remote border areas of Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh which otherwise remain cut off from the rest of the country for about six months during winters.
- The project is being implemented by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

70. CSIR develops advanced security ink to stop counterfeiting of currency notes

In a latest research, scientists from CSIR-National Physical Laboratory (NPL) in New Delhi have come up with a security ink — which can prevent duplication of printable documents and counterfeiting of currency notes.

The two colours are red and green — red at 611 nanometre (nm) is due to fluorescence, and the green at 532 nm is from the phosphorescence effect.

Dual emissive luminescent security ink

- The main task of the team was to select compounds, which do not obstruct the formation of the colours on the excitation of the wavelength.
- For the production of luminescent pigment, two chemical compounds — sodium yttrium fluoride, europium-doped and strontium aluminate with europium-dysprosium — were synthesised to emit red and green colours, respectively.

- The fluorescence property is through sodium yttrium fluoride, while the phosphorescence is by compound strontium aluminate.
- The NPL researchers used the hydrothermal synthesis method to get the red colour. In hydrothermal synthesis, a compound is crystallised from an aqueous solution at a high temperature.

Properties and applications

- Solving the problem of counterfeiting of currency notes
- The novel ink can be used in printing documents, which have a high risk of security breach and duplication. For example, the passport cover when seen under the UV light showcases covert emblem of India in green colour. With the new ink, it will emit two colours, which is hard to copy.
- It can also be used in the pharmaceutical sector where drug companies can protect the medicines from being duplicated by printing the security features through this ink. This will ensure that there is no change in the composition of the product and that consumers get the authentic drug.
- The security feature of the luminescent ink can be used in legal confidential certificates, merchandise and electronic barcodes also to avoid duplication or sale of fake products.

71. 24 December: National Consumer Day

Every Year 24th December is observed as National Consumer Day with a specific theme in India. On this day the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 had received the assent of the president. The enactment of this Act is considered as a historic milestone in the consumer movement in the country.

This day provides an opportunity for individuals to highlight the importance of the consumer movement and the need to make every consumer more aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Consumer Protection Act 2019

The Consumer Protection Act aims to protect the interests of consumers and for the said purpose, to establish authorities for timely and effective administration and settlement of consumers' disputes and for matters connected therewith.

Major Objectives

To promote and protect the rights of Consumer such as right to :

- be protected against the marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property.
- be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services, as the case may be so as to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices.

- be assured, wherever possible, access to a variety of goods and services at competitive prices.
- be heard and to be assured that consumer's interest will receive due consideration at appropriate forums.
- seek redressal against unfair trade practices or restrictive trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers.
- to consumer education.

To provide speedy and simple redressal to consumer through Central Consumer Protection Authority, (CCPA) to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers as a class.

Theme for 2019

This year the National Consumer Day is celebrated with the theme "Alternate consumer grievance/dispute redressal".

72. 'Nagpur Resolution: A Holistic approach for empowering citizens' adopted during regional conference organised by DARPG in Nagpur

The 'Nagpur Resolution- A holistic approach for empowering citizens' was adopted during the Valedictory session of the two-day Regional Conference on 'Improving Public Service Delivery – Role of Governments', in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The conference was organised by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, in collaboration with the Government of Maharashtra and the Maharashtra State Commission for Right to Public Services.

'Nagpur Resolution: A Holistic approach for empowering citizens'

The Conference unanimously adopted the 'Nagpur Resolution: A Holistic Approach for Empowering Citizens' outlined below after intensive deliberations during the sessions held over two days. The Conference resolved that Government of India, the Government of Maharashtra, the Maharashtra State Commission for Right to Public Services and the participating State Governments shall collaborate to:

- To empower the citizens by policy interventions for better service delivery through timely updation of citizens charters, implementation of enactments and benchmarking standards for continuous improvement;
- To empower citizens by adopting a bottom-up approach to bring massive improvements in quality of grievance redressal and reduction in timelines of grievance redressal;
- To adopt a holistic approach of systemic public grievance reforms through improved mapping, formulation of monitoring matrix, data collection and evaluation in quality of grievance redressal;

- To provide an enabling environment for States and Ministries/ Departments of the Government of India for creating web portals and to adopt a holistic approach for improved service delivery through digital platforms;
- To focus on dynamic policy making and strategic decisions, monitoring of implementation, appointment of key personnel, coordination and evaluation;
- To achieve a sense of common identity by exchange of technical expertise in the areas of Improved Service Delivery between the paired States under the Ek Bharat – Shresht Bharat Program;
- To work towards long-term engagements in the areas of Improved Service Delivery for Empowering Citizens through greater cooperation between the DARPG and the participating States and,
- To ensure timely publication of Good Governance Index to identify the quality of governance in 10 sectors especially those pertaining to welfare and infrastructure at the Union, State and District levels.

73. National Farmers Day 2019: Everything you need to know

- Every year India celebrates National Farmers Day on December 23 to mark former Prime Minister of India Chaudhary Charan Singh's birth anniversary.
- The government organizes many programs and debates, seminars on agriculture on this day.
- National Farmers Day is celebrated every year especially in those states which are actively engaged in farming such as Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh among others.
- Chaudhary Charan Singh was also known as a farmer's leader.

About National Farmers Day

Every Year National Farmers Day is celebrated on December 23. It was decided by the government of India to celebrate Farmers Day in 2001. It is believed that 'Zamindari Abolition Bill-1952' was passed due to Chaudhary Charan Singh's hard work.

74. FSSAI delinks front of packet labelling from general labelling

- FSSAI, the Country's apex food regulator, has decided to delink the front-of-pack labelling regulations from the general labelling requirements.
- The front-of-pack labelling requirement is largely related to the declaration of the threshold of salt, sugar and fat and its depiction. FSSAI will look into the subject of thresholds needed to be defined across the food categories

- Delinking is breaking the connection or cutting off. According to the various studies, the thresholds that the companies follow were not up to Indian Standards. Therefore, FSSAI has delinked the FoPL standards from labelling regulations.

75. Plan to build new Parliament Building

On December 21, 2019, GoI announced that the 9.5-acre plot opposite to Parliament building is to be used for the construction of new Parliament building. This officially confirms that the plan to build a new Parliamentary building is on.

Background

The Parliament House was built by the British between 1911 and 1931. After 1947, government of independent India added buildings like Krishi Bhavan, Shastri Bhavan and Nirman Bhavan. These buildings are not earth quake proof and do have modern facilities and space that are in need today.

History

The Parliament Architecture was designed by British Architects Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker in 1912. The structure includes hybrid architectural style namely Hindu, Roman and Saracenic.

76. Thiruvananthapuram–Kasargode Semi High Speed Rail Corridor

The Thiruvananthapuram–Kasargode Semi High Speed Rail Corridor is a proposed high-speed rail corridor in India that would connect the capital city of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram with Kasaragod in Kerala. The Detailed Project Report of the project is being prepared by K-Rail (Kerala Rail Development Corporation Limited), a joint Venture Company between Ministry Of Railways and Government of Kerala.

The 532 km SHSR corridor named Silver Line connecting Kasaragod and Thiruvananthapuram eases the transport between north and south ends of the state and reduces the total travel time to less than 4 hours, compared with the present 10 to 12 hrs.

The proposed rail lines is designed to run at a Semi-High Speed of 200 km/h. Kochuveli, Kollam, Chengannur, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Tirur, Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasaragod will be the stations in this corridor.

77. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Sixth Amendment) Bill, 2019

Constitutional provisions relating to reservation of seats in general elections

- Article 334 of the Indian Constitution lays down that the provisions for reservation of seats and special representation of Anglo-Indians, SC and ST in Central and state legislatures.
- Article 334 of the Indian constitution had originally provided the reservation for a period of 10 years after the commencement of constitution (i.e. Till 1960), but it has been extended continuously since then by 10 years each time.
- The period of reservation was then extended successively till 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 by the 8th, 23rd, 45th, 62nd and 79th Amendments respectively. Finally the 95th Amendment extended the period of reservation to 2020.

Who is an Anglo-Indian

Article 366(2) of the Indian constitution states: An Anglo Indian is a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not merely established there for temporary purpose.

The Ninety-fifth Amendment of the Constitution of India, 2009, extended the period of reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and representation of the Anglo-Indians in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies for another ten years, i.e. up to 25th January 2020.

So as the Reservation of seats in parliament and state legislative assemblies is coming to an end on 26th Jan 2020. Therefore the parliament passed **The Constitution (126th amendment bill), 2019** which extend the reservation provided to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes for another 10 years (i.e. till 2030).

Feature of the bill:

- The bill extend quota to SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and state assemblies by another 10 years. (I.e. till 25th Jan 2030)
- Govt also asserted that the Central government will never stop the reservation system
- The bill also repealed the provision for nomination of Anglo-Indians to the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies
- The bill would now be sent to the states for ratification by 50 per cent of the assemblies before it comes into force.

78. **Breast Milk Banks**

What is breast milk bank?

- A human milk bank or breast milk bank is a service which collects, screens, processes, and dispenses by prescription human milk donated by nursing mothers who are not biologically related to the recipient infant.
- Breast Milk Banks are established as per the “**National Guidelines on Establishment of Lactation Management Centres in Public Health Facilities**” by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Breast Milk Banks in India are known as Comprehensive Lactation Management Centres (CLMC) and Lactation Management Unit (LMU).

Comprehensive Lactation Management Centre

It is established for the purpose of collecting, screening, processing, storing and distributing donor human milk at Government Medical Colleges or District Hospitals with high delivery load and availability of newborn treatment units.

Lactation Management Unit

It has a collection and storage facility of mother's own milk in District Hospital/Sub-district Hospital with at least 12 beds.

Lactation Support Units

These are established at all delivery points to provide breastfeeding support, lactation counselling and Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) support to mothers.

KMC is a method of care for preterm infants. The method involves infants being carried, usually by the mother, with skin-to-skin contact.

Importance of breast feeding

- It is universally accepted that breast milk is the optimum exclusive source of nutrition for the first six months of life, and may remain part of the healthy infant diet for the first two years of life and beyond.
- UNICEF India mentions mothers, both in high- and low-income countries, face challenges such as poor healthcare and nutrition. Sometimes, families end up giving babies honey or sugared water as their first oral feed, referred to as prelacteal feed.
- Milk banks have a dedicated set of counsellors to answer such queries about lactation management and convince new mothers about the benefits of donating milk.

Government of India initiatives

- The first Breast Milk Bank of India was established in 1989 at Mumbai.
- The ‘**Vatsalya – Maatri Amrit Kosh**’, a National Human Milk Bank and Lactation Counselling Centre at the Lady Hardinge Medical College (LHMC) was inaugurated in 2017.
- It is a national human milk bank and lactation counseling centre that will collect, pasteurize, test and safely store milk that has been donated by lactating mothers and make it available for infants in need.
- It is the largest human milk bank and lactation counselling centre available under the public sector in North India.
- “Vatsalya – Maatri Amrit Kosh” is established in collaboration with the Norwegian government, Oslo University and Norway India Partnership Initiative (NIPI).
- As we know that the potential of mother’s milk for a child, breastfeeding rates are low in India. “In view of this, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched **Mothers Absolute Affection (MAA) programme** to create awareness regarding breastfeeding as being the most cost-effective way of enhancing the child’s immunity,”

79. Citizenship Amendment Act 2019

Background

Constitutional provisions related to citizenship

- Part 2 of the Indian constitution, from art 5 to 11 deals with citizenship.
- Art 11 empowers the parliament to make any provision with respect to the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all other matters connected therewith.
- Accordingly parliament passed citizenship act 1955 providing for acquisition and loss of citizenship after the commencement of the constitution.
- The Act provides citizenship by five ways: Birth, Descent, Registration, Naturalization, and Incorporation of the territory.

Citizenship by Naturalization

The Central Government may grant a certificate of naturalization to any person (not being an illegal migrant) if he possesses the following qualifications like:

- he or she is not a subject or citizen of any country where citizens of India are prevented from becoming subjects or citizens of that country by naturalization
- that, if he is a citizen of any country, he undertakes to renounce the citizenship of that country

- Under The Citizenship Act, 1955, one of the ways for citizenship by naturalisation is that the applicant must have resided in India during the last 12 months, as well as for 11 of the previous 14 years.

Illegal migrants

However, illegal migrants are prohibited from acquiring Indian citizenship. An illegal migrant is a foreigner who: (i) enters the country without valid travel documents, like a passport and visa, or (ii) enters with valid documents, but stays beyond the permitted time period.

Illegal migrants may be put in jail or deported under the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill was proposed for amending the Citizenship Act, 1955. By this bill, By this Bill, illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan will be eligible for Indian citizenship.
- These citizens will gain permanent citizenship after six years of residency in India instead of 11 years as mentioned in the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- The Bill allows cancellation of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) registration for violation of any law.

The Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha. Subsequently, the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha in December 2019.

Citizenship Amendment Act 2019

Parliament passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019, with Rajya Sabha passing it on 11th December. Lok Sabha passed the Bill on 9th December.

Feature of the Act

- The Act seeks to grant Indian Citizenship to persons belonging to **Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities** who have migrated to India after facing persecution on grounds of religion in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.
- The Act seeks to amend the act to allow cancellation of OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) registration if the person has violated any provision of the act or any law in force in India. A provision is also to be added where the OCIs are given opportunity to be heard in courts before the cancellation.

- The Act says that on acquiring citizenship, such persons shall be regarded as Indian citizens from the date of their entry into India, and all legal proceedings against them related to their illegal migration or citizenship will be closed.
- The Act also proposes to amend the 3rd Schedule to the Act, to make the applicants of the aforesaid religions and countries eligible for citizenship by naturalisation if they can prove **their residency in India for five years instead of the existing eleven years.**
- The illegal migrants who have entered into India up to the cut of date of 31.12.2014 shall be granted the certificate of registration or certificate of naturalisation and they may be given the citizenship of India from the date of their entry in India if they fulfil the conditions.

Exception:

Further, the Act adds that the provisions on citizenship for illegal migrants will not apply to the tribal areas of **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, or Tripura, as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. These tribal areas include Karbi Anglong (in Assam), Garo Hills (in Meghalaya), Chakma District (in Mizoram), and Tripura Tribal Areas District.**

It will also not apply to the areas under the Inner Line” under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. The Inner Line Permit regulates visit of Indians to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland.

Criticism:

- The fundamental criticism of the Act has been that it specifically targets Muslims. Critics argue that it is violating Article **14 of the Constitution (which guarantees the right to equality) and the principle of secularism.**
- India has several other refugees that include Tamils from Sri Lanka and Hindu Rohingya from Myanmar. They are not covered under the Act.
- Despite exemption granted to some regions in the North-eastern states, the prospect of citizenship for massive numbers of illegal Bangladeshi migrants has triggered deep anxieties in the states.
- It will be difficult for the government to differentiate between illegal migrants and those persecuted.
- OCI cancellation: There is no clear regulation about the nature of the laws, which when violated lead to the cancellation of OCI registration.

Why there is agitation by Assam?

Most of Assam's Brahmaputra Valley erupted in spontaneous protest against the Act as the Act violates the **Assam accord**. Students, activists, writers, actors, musicians and people from all walks of life

thronged the streets to voice their angst against the Act, which they believe will pose a serious threat to not only their livelihood and political destiny but also to cultural and linguistic identity.

What is Assam Accord?

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.
- The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.

As per the Accord, those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported. The new amendment to the Citizenship Act of 1955 aims to provide Indian citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. A person belonging to any of these faiths - who entered India on or before December 31, 2014 and have lived in the country for five years - can apply for Indian citizenship. Though this provision covers refugees from three nations, the people in the North-East fear that it will primarily benefit the illegal Bengali Hindu migrants from Bangladesh who have settled in "large numbers" across the region. Taking note of the protests, the revised version of the amendment has exempted certain areas in the region- Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, almost the whole of Meghalaya, and parts of Assam and Tripura. While these exemptions have calmed down other areas of North-East, massive protests are going on in Assam, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley and in Tripura. Though the BJP has tried to hard sell the bill projecting it as a strategy to protect the Hindu identity of Assam against the influx of Muslims from Bangladesh, it failed to take into account the fear among the Assamese people of cultural hegemony of Hindu Bengalis. **The Assamese have not forgotten how British administration imposed Bangla as the state language between 1826 and 1872 at the insistence of Bangla-speaking government workers from West Bengal. The linguistic data of the Census 2011 has also widened the already existing fault lines between the Assamese and Bengalis.** According to it, the percentage of people speaking Assamese decreased from 58 per cent in 1991 to 48 per cent in 2011, while Bengali speakers in the state went up from 22 per cent to 30 per cent in the same period. In Assam's Barak Valley, dominated by Bengali Hindus, Assamese is still not accepted as the state language. What have added to this fear are campaigns, such as 'Miyah Poetry' and 'Chalo Paltai'. A section of educated Muslims of immigrant origin, who are fluent in Assamese but speak

a Bangla dialect - locally called Miyah - among themselves, have started writing poetry in that dialect. These poems talk about the pain of living as a suspect in the place where they were born.

80. Electoral Bond Scheme and the challenges associated with it.

Back ground

Lavish expenditure in the elections is one of the most critical problems in India's electoral system. According to the Report of the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) high cost of elections creates a high degree of compulsion for corruption in the public arena. The sources of some of the election funds are believed to be unaccounted criminal money in return for protection, unaccounted funds from business groups who expect a high return on this investment, kickbacks or commissions on contracts, etc. The usage of black money during elections not only allows for laundering, it also has serious economic and political costs attached to it. It leads to a political support to corruption and crony capitalism. It allows for criminal-political nexus as the extortionists and goons are able to buy party tickets and therefore, the law-breakers become the lawmakers in our country. The use of black money for campaigning during the election season creates an unequal playing field for honest, independent candidates as they heavily fall short of the funds required for extensive campaigning and advertising.

Thus the Electoral compulsions for funds become the foundation of the whole super structure of corruption. The RPA (Representation of People Act 1951) although makes it mandatory for the political parties to disclose donations over Rs 20000, there is no law which prohibits these parties from disclosing the donations below Rs 20000 but the parties lack political will hence do not disclose. The Election Commission of India had asked that the limit for reporting the donations (which is Rs 20000) should be brought down to Rs 2000, but instead the government has reduced the maximum contribution by cash to Rs 2000.

Provisions concern with political parties funding

- Section 29C of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA) mandates it for the political parties to declare donations received by them from any person or company if such donation by the person or the company exceeds Rs.20, 000. Failing to submit the report on time disentitles the party from tax relief under the Income Tax Act, 1961.
- As per Section 2(e) of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 1976, accepting a contribution from any foreign source is completely prohibited. It is punishable with imprisonment which may extend up to five years or fine or both.

- The maximum expenditure by a political party in an election is governed by Rule 90 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961.
- Section 77 of the RPA clarifies as to what comes under the purview of 'expenditures of the party'. The expenditures by a political party include all expenditures incurred by the candidate of such party or his authorized agent in connection with the election since the date of his nomination till the date the result is declared.

Electoral bonds

The Government of India has notified the Electoral Bond Scheme on 2nd January 2018. It was touted as an alternative to cash donations and to ensure transparency in political funding. As per provisions of the Scheme, Electoral Bonds may be purchased by a person who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India. A person being an individual can buy Electoral Bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals. Only the Political Parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (43 of 1951) and which secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last General Election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly of the State, shall be eligible to receive the Electoral Bonds. The Electoral Bonds shall be encashed by an eligible Political Party only through a Bank account with the Authorized Bank.

State Bank of India (SBI) has been authorized to issue and encash Electoral Bonds through its 29 Authorized Branches (as per list enclosed) in the month of May 2019.

The Electoral Bonds shall be valid for **fifteen calendar** days from the date of issue and no payment shall be made to any payee (Political Party) if the Electoral Bond is deposited after expiry of the validity period. The Electoral Bond deposited by an eligible Political Party in its account shall be credited on the same day.

Government of India has now decided to restrict the next Phase of Electoral Bonds sale to 06.05.2019 to 10.05.2019 (instead of 06.05.2019 to 15.05.2019 scheduled and notified earlier).

Criticism:

Prior to 2017, Section 182 of the Companies Act, 2013, stipulated that a company can donate only up to 7.5% of its average profit of the last three years, and must disclose this amount and the beneficiary political party.

- Now, through the electoral bonds, there is no limit to the amount companies can donate, and the requirement for such firms to have existed for the last three years on a profit-making basis has also been deleted. The implication is that even loss-making companies or shell companies can be

used to purchase electoral bonds. Essentially, then, corporate entities and individuals can now channel unlimited amounts to a political party through electoral bonds, anonymously.

- ***Companies no longer need to declare the names of the parties to which they have donated*** so shareholders won't know where their money has gone.
- The move could be misused, ***given the lack of disclosure requirements for individuals purchasing electoral bonds.***
- Further, no report is required to be submitted to ECI by receiving parties (political parties) in case of donations received via electoral bonds. In short, neither the donors nor the political parties are obliged to reveal the sources of donations.

Stand of EC on electoral bonds

In an affidavit filed before the Supreme Court, the Election Commission of India has made the following observations:

- Electoral bonds contrary to government claims, wreck transparency in political funding.
- Electoral bonds coupled with the removal of the cap on foreign funding invites foreign corporate powers to impact Indian politics.
- Electoral bonds would cause a "serious impact" on transparency in the funding of political parties.
- The Election Commission of India further criticises amendments made to various key statutes through the two consecutive Finance Acts of 2016 and 2017.

81. Global gender parity index 2020

Why in news?

The **world economic forum** has been released its annual global gender gap index which track progress on relative gaps between women and men on four dimensions i.e.

1. Health.
2. Education.
3. Economy.
4. Politics.

Global Gender Gap Index for 2020: Key findings

- India has ranked 112th among 153 countries in the annual Global Gender Gap Index for 2020, published by the World Economic Forum (WEF).
- Iceland, Norway, and Finland occupy the top three spots in the Report.

- Globally, the average (population-weighted) distance completed to gender parity is at 68.6%, which is an improvement since last edition.
- The largest gender disparity is in political empowerment. Only 25% of the 35,127 seats in parliaments around the world are occupied by women, and only 21% of the 3,343 ministers are women.
- Projecting current trends into the future, the overall global gender gap will close in 99.5 years, on average, across the 107 countries covered continuously since the first edition of the Report.
- At the current pace, gender gaps can potentially be closed in 54 years in Western Europe, 59 years in Latin America and the Caribbean, 71.5 years in South Asia, 95 years in Sub-Saharan Africa, 107 years in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 140 years in the Middle East and North Africa, 151 years in North America, and 163 years in East Asia and the Pacific.
- The analysis presented in the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 is based on “a methodology integrating the latest statistics from international organizations and a survey of executives”.

Key findings in India:

- India has slipped to the **112th spot from its 108th position** in 2018 in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index 2020.
- India has closed 66.8% of its Gender Gap and is slightly ahead of the South-Asian region. South Asian region was ranked second-lowest in the index having closed only 65 per cent of its gender gap.
- The country (India) has closed two-thirds of its overall gender gap (score of 66.8%). However, the condition of women in large fringes of India’s society is precarious.
- Among the 153 countries studied, **India is the only country where the economic gender gap is larger than the political gender gap.**
- The economic gender gap runs particularly deep in India. Only one-third of the gap has been bridged (score of 35.4%, 149th, down 7 places). Since 2006, the gap has gotten significantly wider.

It has lost four positions since the previous edition, despite a small score improvement, as some countries ranked lower than India have improved more," the report said.

GLOBAL GENDER GAO INDEX

RANKING 2020

Rank	Country	Score
1	Iceland	0.877
2	Norway	0.842
3	Finland	0.832
4	Sweden	0.820
5	Nicaragua	0.804
6	New Zealand	0.799
7	Ireland	0.798
8	Spain	0.795
9	Rwanda	0.791
10	Germany	0.787
21	United Kingdom	0.767
50	Bangladesh	0.726
53	United States	0.724
81	Russian Federation	0.706
92	Brazil	0.691
101	Nepal	0.680
102	Sri Lanka	0.680
106	China	0.676
112	India	0.668
121	Japan	0.652
151	Pakistan	0.564
153	Yemen	0.494

% AGE OF WOMEN IN COMPANIES

BOARD OF DIRECTIONS

(Top five countries in each category)

OVER ONE - THIRD

France	43.4%
Iceland	43%
Norway	42.1%
Sweden	36.3%
Italy	34%

OVER ONE FIFTH

Netherlands	29.5%
Latvia	28.8%
Australia	28.7%
United Kingdom	27.2%
Canada	25.8%

OVER ONE - TENTH

Austria	19.2%
Ireland	17.6%
Portugal	16.2%
Slovak Republic	15.1%
Colombia	15.1%
India	13.8%

Source: Global Gender Gap Report. 2020;
Scores from 0 to 1, where 0 is the lowest

EMPOWERING FUTURE LEADERS

82. National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)

Why in news?

In pursuance of judgment of the Supreme Court, The Union government has decided to set up a bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) in Chennai.

What are NCLAT/ functions?

- The NCLAT was constituted under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 for hearing appeals against the orders of National Company Law Tribunal(s) (NCLT), with effect from June 1, 2016.
- It is the Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by NCLT(s) under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC), with effect from December 1, 2016.
- The NCLAT is also the appellate tribunal that hears appeals against any direction or decision of the Competition Commission of India (CCI), as per the amendment brought to Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 by Section 172 of the Finance Act, 2017, with effect from May 26, 2017.
- The tribunal also hears appeals from orders issued by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India under Section 202 and Section 211 of IBC. It also hears appeals from any direction issued, decision made, or order passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

ABOUT NCLT

- The National Company Law Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body in India that adjudicates issues relating to Indian companies.
- The tribunal was established under **the Companies Act 2013** and was constituted on 1 June 2016 by the government of India and is based on the recommendation of **the Justice Jain** committee on law relating to insolvency and winding up of companies.
- The National Company Law Tribunal is the adjudicating authority for insolvency resolution process of companies and limited liability partnerships under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

Composition of NCLT

- Composition of the National Company Law Tribunal consists of a President and such number of other Judicial and Technical Members as may be prescribed.
- The President of the Tribunal shall be appointed by the Central Government after consultation with Chief Justice of India.

- The Members are to be appointed by the Central Government on the recommendation of a Selection Committee.

President of National Company Law Tribunal:

A person who is or has been judge of a High Court for five years is eligible to be appointed as president of National Company Law Tribunal.

Judicial Member:

A person shall not be qualified for appointment as a Judicial Member unless he:

- I. Is or has been a judge of High Court; or
- II. Is or has been a District Judge for at least five years; or
- III. Has, for at least 10 years been practicing as an advocate
- IV. “Judicial Member” includes President of the Tribunal.

83. NEFT has made available for all time 24 x 7**Why in news?**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) operationalised the National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT) availability round-the-clock (24 X 7 basis) and asked the banks not to levy any charges on NEFT transfer from savings bank account holders.

What is NEFT?

NEFT is a nation-wide payment system that allows transfer of funds from one bank account to another. Individuals, firms and corporate can transfer the money from one bank branch to any other bank account held by individual, firm or corporate in the country.

Highlights of new changes have been brought under NEFT:

- The Reserve Bank of India stated that the bank customers will be able to transfer funds through NEFT around the clock on all days including weekends and holidays from December 16, 2019.
- This will allow the bank customers to transfer the money all around the clock. **Earlier, NEFT payment system operated for customers from 8:00AM to 7:00 PM on all working days except on 2nd and 4th Saturday as banks remain close on that day.**
- There will be 48 half-hourly batches every day. The settlement of first batch will commence after 00:30 hours and the last batch will end at 00:00 hours.
- The system will be available on all days of the year, including holidays.
- NEFT transactions after usual banking hours of banks are expected to be automated transactions initiated using 'Straight through Processing (STP)' modes by the banks.

- The existing discipline for crediting beneficiary's account or returning the transaction (within 2 hours of settlement of the respective batch) to originating bank will continue.
- Member banks will ensure sending of positive confirmation message for all NEFT credits.
- All provisions of NEFT procedural guidelines will be applicable for NEFT 24x7 transactions as well.
- RBI has mandated banks to not to charge any fees on NEFT transactions done by savings account holders from January 1, 2020.
- This move is aimed at pushing savings bank account customers to transfer money using electronic modes via NEFT.

84. The Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019

Parliament passed the Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019 The Bill seeks to amend **the Arms Act, 1959**. It seeks to decrease the number of licensed firearms allowed per person and increase penalties for certain offences under the Act. It also introduces new categories of offences.

Highlights of the bill

- In addition to the limit of two guns being allowed under the latest amendments (earlier it was three), individuals would be allowed to retain ancestral guns in a deactivated state. This means that such guns may be kept as demo guns, which must not be in a condition to fire.
- Government plans to introduce bullets with serial numbers, so as to keep them accounted and traceable. Further, a portal is being developed that would house the National Database on Arms License (NDAL) and Arms License Issuance System (ALIS). This portal would be a one stop platform to access information on arms licenses issued, license holders and the ammunition used.
- The Bill seeks to enhance the punishment for existing offences like illegal manufacture, sale, transfer, etc.; illegal acquiring, possessing or carrying prohibited arms or prohibited ammunition; and illegal manufacture, sale, transfer, conversion, import, export, etc., of firearms.
- It also proposes to define new offences and prescribing punishment for them, such as for taking away firearms from police or armed forces, involvement in organized crime syndicate, illicit trafficking including smuggled firearms of foreign make or prohibited arms and prohibited ammunition, use of firearms in rash and negligent manner in celebratory gunfire endangering human life, etc.

- Further, the Bill seeks to enhance **the period of arms license from three years to five years** and also to issue arms license in its electronic form to prevent forgery.
- The amendment bill assured that the licenses and arms ownership of sportspersons would not be adversely affected because of the Bill and added that in fact the number and types of weapons allowed for sportspersons has been increased.
- And also provisions related to ownership of arms by retired and serving personnel of armed forces remains unaffected by the Amendment.
- The enhanced punishment under the Amendment prison sentence for **illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition including smuggled firearms of foreign make or prohibited bore shall not be less than 10 years which may extent to imprisonment for life.**
- The snatch of weapons from police or armed forces would carry a **punishment of shall not be less than 10 years which make extent to imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine.**
- Illegal manufacturing, sale, conversion, repair, import/export would attract a punishment of shall not be less than 7 years which may extent to imprisonment for life; acquiring, possessing, carrying prohibited arms and ammunition to get shall not be less than 7 years which may extent to 14 years imprisonment.
- Involvement in organized crime syndicate would all henceforth carry the punishment of shall not be less than 10 years but which may extent to imprisonment for life and shall also liable to fine.
- Involvement in negligent and rash use of firearms or in celebratory firing endangering human life would attract a fine of Rs. 1,00,000 or imprisonment up to 2 years or both.

85. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019

About IBS

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha on December 12, 2019. The Bill amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016. The Code provides a time-bound process for resolving insolvency in companies and among individuals.

Insolvency is a situation where individuals or companies are unable to repay their outstanding debt.

Proposed amendments to the bill

- In case of real estate projects, if an allotted (person to whom a plot, apartment, or building has been allotted or sold) wants to initiate resolution, the application should be filed jointly by at least

100 allottees of the same real estate project, or 10% of the total allottees under that project, whichever is less.

- For other financial creditors, where the debt owed is either: (i) in the form of securities or deposits, or (i) to a class of creditors, the application should be filed jointly by at least 100 creditors in the same class, or 10% of the total number of such creditors in the same class, whichever is less.
- The Code restricts certain corporate debtors from making an application to initiate the resolution process. These include:
 - corporate debtors undergoing an insolvency resolution process,
 - corporate debtors who have completed the resolution process 12 months before making the application,
 - corporate debtors or financial creditors who have violated terms of the resolution plan, or
 - Corporate debtors in respect of whom a liquidation order has been passed. The Bill clarifies that these corporate debtors will be allowed to initiate the resolution process against any other corporate debtor.
- The Bill states that any existing licence, permit, registration, quota, concession, or clearance, given by the government or local authority, will not be suspended or terminated on the grounds of insolvency. However, there should be no default in payment of current dues for the use or continuation of such grants.
- The bill provides immunity for the successful bidders against any offences committed by previous management.

86. The AP Legislative Assembly has passed the Andhra Pradesh Disha Act, 2019 (Andhra Pradesh Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2019).

Highlights of the bill:

- It has prescribed the death penalty for rape crimes where there is adequate conclusive evidence. Provision is given by amending **Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.**
- It also prescribes **life imprisonment** for other sexual offences against **children and includes Section 354 F and 354 G in IPC.**
- But before the DISHA act 2019, in cases of molestation/sexual assault on children under the POCSO Act, 2012, punishment ranges from a minimum of three years to maximum of seven years of imprisonment.

- In cases of harassment of women through **social or digital media**, it states two years imprisonment for the first conviction and four years for second and subsequent convictions. For this, **a new Section 354 E will be added in IPC, 1860.**
- It envisages the completion of investigation **in seven days and trial in 14 working days**, where there is adequate conclusive evidence, and reducing the **total judgment time to 21 days from the existing four months.** The existing judgment period as per the Nirbhaya Act, 2013 and Criminal Amendment Act, 2018 is 4 months (two months of investigation period and two months of trial period)
- **The period for disposal of appeal cases has been reduced to three months.** Amendments are being made in Section 374 and 377 of Code of Criminal Procedure Act, 1973.
- The government will constitute special police teams at the district level to be called **District Special Police Team** to be headed by DSP for investigation of offences related to women and children.
- The government will establish exclusive special courts in each district to ensure speedy trial. These courts will exclusively deal with cases of offences against women and children including rape, acid attacks, stalking, voyeurism, social media harassment of women, sexual harassment and all cases under the POCSO Act.
- As per the Bill, the Andhra Pradesh government will establish, operate and maintain a register in electronic form, to be called the **‘Women & Children Offenders Registry’.** This registry will be made public and will be available to law enforcement agencies.
- The government will also appoint a special public prosecutor for each exclusive special court.

87. NPPA invokes DPCO 2013 Ceiling prices of 21 key medicines raised by 50%

Highlights of the regulation:

- India’s drug pricing regulator **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)** has allowed an increase in the maximum retail prices of 21 drugs currently under price control by as much as 50 per cent.
- The decision has been taken to ensure supply of crucial medicines available in the market and to prevent patients opting for costlier alternatives in the face of shortage of these drugs.
- Most of these drugs are used as first line of treatment and are integral to public health programmes.
- This is the first time the NPPA, which is known to slash prices of essential and life-saving medicines but it is now has taken decision to increase prices in public interest.

- The decision by the NPPA, will apply to formulations like the BCG vaccine for tuberculosis, vitamin C, antibiotics like metronidazole and benzylpenicillin, anti-malarial drug chloroquine and leprosy medication dapsone.

About NPPA:

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) is a government regulatory agency that controls the prices of pharmaceutical drugs in India.

National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) was constituted vide Government of India Resolution dated 29th August, 1997 as an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers as an independent Regulator for pricing of drugs and to ensure availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.

The NPPA regularly publishes lists of medicines and their maximum ceiling prices. The latest DPCO was released in 2013 which has a list of 384 drugs

Background:

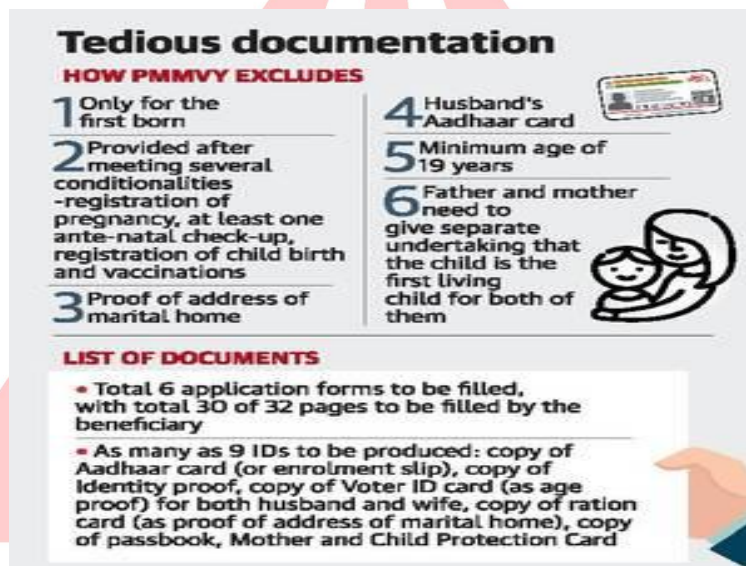
- Manufacturers have been citing difficulties in supplying these drugs as the cost of making them has gone up, and inaction by NPPA could have led to a shortage. Experts say to avoid such a situation; India has to build capabilities to manufacture the key ingredients for these medicines.
- NPPA said it has been receiving applications for upward price revision under Para 19 of DPCO, 2013, since last two years citing reasons like “increase in API (key ingredient) cost, increase in cost of production, exchange rates etc. resulting in unavailability in sustainable production and marketing of the drugs”.
- With India still dependent on China for over 60 per cent of its API (active pharmaceutical ingredient) requirement, higher API costs for price-controlled medicines eat into profits and sometimes make production of these drugs unviable.

What is Drug Prices Control Order, 2013?

Drug Price Control Orders (DPCO) are issued by the Government, in exercise, of the powers conferred under section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 for enabling the Government to declare a ceiling price for essential and life saving medicines (as per a prescribed formula) so as to ensure that these medicines are available at a reasonable price to the general public. The latest Drug Price Control Order (DPCO-2013) was issued on 15.05.2013.

As per Para 19 of the DPCO-2013, the Government may, in case of extra-ordinary circumstances and in public interest, fix the ceiling price or retail price of any drug, as it may deem fit. It also has powers to revise (either increase or decrease) the ceiling price or retail price of the drug which is already fixed and notified, irrespective of annual wholesale price index for that year (based on which companies are automatically permitted under DPCO to revise the prices annually).

88. PMMVY should be universal



Why in news?

The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) which is a pan-India maternity benefit programme has been criticised for several clauses and lengthy documentation excludes single women and young brides, say activists.

Issues of the scheme:

- The scheme deprived single women which include unwed mothers, deserted wives and widows as the scheme requires an applicant to provide her husband's Aadhaar details along with her own.
- a mother seeking benefits needs to provide proof of address of her marital home, which proves challenging for a newlywed expecting a child and often residing in her natal home during pregnancy.
- "A mother is unable to get the compensation when she needs it the most, i.e. during the nine months of her pregnancy.
- While the scheme is solely for the first living child, it ironically leaves out those who are most likely to give birth to one — a newlywed woman.

- The requirement that the applicant has to be at least 19 years old also leaves out younger brides, who hesitate in getting their marriages registered as the legal age of marriage is 18 years. “30-35% first-time mothers are under the age of 18 years.
- The application form requires separate undertakings from the woman and her husband that the child for whom they are seeking the benefit will be “the first living child for both of them”, further making it prohibitive.
- A woman has to pay a hefty bribe during the application process.
- The lengthy documentation work includes filling up six documents totalling 32 pages — an application form to be filled for each of the three instalments.

About the scheme

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), previously India Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY), is a maternity benefit program run by the government of India. It was introduced in 2016 which effect from 1st Jan 2017 and is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Highlights of the scheme

- It is a conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for the first live birth.
- It provides partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.
- In 2013, the scheme was brought under **the National Food Security Act, 2013** to implement the provision of cash maternity benefit of rs.6, 000 stated in the Act.
- the eligible beneficiaries gets Rs. 5,000/- under PMMVY in three instalments i.e
 1. first instalment of Rs 1000/- on early registration of pregnancy at the Anganwadi Centre (AWC) / approved Health facility as may be identified by the respective administering State / UT.
 2. second instalment of Rs 2000/- after six months of pregnancy on receiving at least one ante-natal check-up (ANC).
 3. And third instalment of Rs 2000/- after child birth is registered and the child has received the first cycle of BCG, OPV, DPT and Hepatitis - B, or its equivalent/ substitute.

- And the remaining cash incentive as per approved norms towards Maternity Benefit under **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)** after institutional delivery so that on an average, a woman gets Rs. 6000/-.

89. Highlights of 38th GST Council Meeting

The 38th meeting of the GST Council held on 18.12.2019, the GST Council recommended the following:

- The GOODS and SERVICES TAX (GST) Council went in for a vote on the issue of imposing a uniform tax rate of 28% for both state-run and state-authorised lottery. It is the first instance of voting in the 38 Council meetings held so far.
Prior to this, the GST rate on state run lottery was 12% and State-authorised was 28%.
- The GST Council has decided to levy a uniform rate of 18% from earlier 12% on bags belonging (woven and non-woven bags and sacks of polythene or polypropylene strips or the like. This change shall become effective from 1st January, 2020.
- To exempt upfront amount payable for long term lease of industrial/ financial infrastructure plots by an entity having 20% or more ownership of Central or State Government. Presently, the exemption is available to an entity having 50% or more ownership of Central or State Government. This change shall become effective from 1st January, 2020.
- Grievance Redressal Committees (GRC) will be constituted at Zonal/State level with both CGST and SGST officers and including representatives of trade and industry and other GST stakeholders (GST practitioners and GSTN etc.). These committees will address grievances of specific/ general nature of taxpayers at the Zonal/ State level.
- The due date of GSTR-9 and GSTR-9C are extended further till 31 January 2020 from the earlier date of 31 December 2019. It was done to allow more time for taxpayers to use the offline tool of GSTR-9C that is expected to be made available on 21 December 2019.
- The amount of Input tax credit (ITC) availed on a provisional basis restricted to 10% from the earlier 20%, where invoices or debit notes are not reflected in GSTR-2A. Hence, invoice matching must be frequently done and vendor communication becomes challenging.
- Waiver of late fee for GSTR-1 for tax periods between Jul 17 and Nov 19, if filed by 10 January 2020. If the taxpayer does not still file for more than two consecutive tax periods, then e-way bills of such taxpayer will be blocked from generation.

- The SOP is to be released for the benefit of tax officers about actions taken for non-filing of GSTR-3B. These will help in blocking or reversal of fake ITC availed.
- Due dates for GST returns extended for certain category of taxpayers the due date extension for GST returns for some North Eastern States (November 2019) to be extended till 31 Dec 2019.

Rates remained unchanged in RBI's 5th Monetary Policy

Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the apex body, released the fifth bi-monthly monetary policy statement for 2019-20. The policy was prepared by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)-led by Governor Shaktikanta Das. Both the RBI and government are working in coordination to achieve growth.

Highlights of the 5th bi-monthly monetary policy statements 2019-20:

- The repo rate remains the same as 5.15%. It was not changed due to inflation pressure.
- The regulator did not reduce the MPC rate but wait for maximum impact.
- RBI stated the initial discussions to launch its own digital currency.
- RBI is discussion to find out the directions in the case of HDFC Bank's technical glitch
- RBI lowered its real GDP growth forecast for 2019-20 from 6.1% in the October policy to 5%.
- The next meeting of the MPC is scheduled for 4-6 February 2020.

GST revenue collection crosses Rs 1 lakh crore in November

Gross GST collections stood at Rs 1.03 lakh crore in November, marginally up from the previous month, official data showed on Sunday.

- GST collections have crossed Rs 1 lakh crore mark after three months. In July, the GST collections stood at Rs 1.02 lakh crore.
- After two months of negative growth, GST revenues have witnessed an impressive recovery with a positive growth of 6 per cent in November, 2019 over the November, 2018 collections.
- Of the gross Rs 1,03,492 crore in November, CGST is Rs 19,592 crore, SGST is Rs 27,144 crore, IGST is Rs 49,028 crore (including Rs 20,948 crore collected on imports) and Cess is Rs 7,727 crore (including Rs 869 crore collected on imports), an official statement said.
- This is the eighth time since the inception of GST in July 2017 that monthly collection has crossed the mark of Rs one lakh crore. Also, November 2019 collection is the third highest monthly collection since introduction of GST, next only to April 2019 and March 2019 collections. In April this year, the GST collection was recorded Rs 1.13 lakcrore and in March, it was Rs 1.06 lakcrore.

- Gross GST revenue collected in October was Rs 95,380 crore. In September, the collection was Rs 91,916 crore and tax collection in August was Rs 98,202 crore.

90. **National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)**

Why in news?

In pursuance of judgment of the Supreme Court, The Union government has decided to set up a bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) in Chennai.

What are NCLAT/ functions?

- The NCLAT was constituted under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 for hearing appeals against the orders of National Company Law Tribunal(s) (NCLT), with effect from June 1, 2016.
- It is the Appellate Tribunal for hearing appeals against the orders passed by NCLT(s) under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC), with effect from December 1, 2016.
- The NCLAT is also the appellate tribunal that hears appeals against any direction or decision of the Competition Commission of India (CCI), as per the amendment brought to Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013 by Section 172 of the Finance Act, 2017, with effect from May 26, 2017.
- The tribunal also hears appeals from orders issued by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India under Section 202 and Section 211 of IBC. It also hears appeals from any direction issued, decision made, or order passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

ABOUT NCLT

- The National Company Law Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body in India that adjudicates issues relating to Indian companies.
- The tribunal was established under **the Companies Act 2013** and was constituted on 1 June 2016 by the government of India and is based on the recommendation of **the Justice Jain** committee on law relating to insolvency and winding up of companies.
- The National Company Law Tribunal is the adjudicating authority for insolvency resolution process of companies and limited liability partnerships under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

Composition of NCLT

- Composition of the National Company Law Tribunal consists of a President and such number of other Judicial and Technical Members as may be prescribed.

- The President of the Tribunal shall be appointed by the Central Government after consultation with Chief Justice of India.
- The Members are to be appointed by the Central Government on the recommendation of a Selection Committee.

President of National Company Law Tribunal:

A person who is or has been judge of a High Court for five years is eligible to be appointed as president of National Company Law Tribunal.

Judicial Member:

A person shall not be qualified for appointment as a Judicial Member unless he:

- I. Is or has been a judge of High Court; or
- II. Is or has been a District Judge for at least five years; or
- III. Has, for at least 10 years been practicing as an advocate
- IV. “Judicial Member” includes President of the Tribunal.

91. NEFT has made available for all time 24 x 7

Why in news?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) operationalised the National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT) availability round-the-clock (24 X 7 basis) and asked the banks not to levy any charges on NEFT transfer from savings bank account holders.

What is NEFT?

NEFT is a nation-wide payment system that allows transfer of funds from one bank account to another. Individuals, firms and corporate can transfer the money from one bank branch to any other bank account held by individual, firm or corporate in the country.

Highlights of new changes have been brought under NEFT:

- The Reserve Bank of India stated that the bank customers will be able to transfer funds through NEFT around the clock on all days including weekends and holidays from December 16, 2019. This will allow the bank customers to transfer the money all around the clock. **Earlier, NEFT payment system operated for customers from 8:00AM to 7:00 PM on all working days except on 2nd and 4th Saturday as banks remain close on that day.**
- There will be 48 half-hourly batches every day. The settlement of first batch will commence after 00:30 hours and the last batch will end at 00:00 hours.

- The system will be available on all days of the year, including holidays.
- NEFT transactions after usual banking hours of banks are expected to be automated transactions initiated using 'Straight through Processing (STP)' modes by the banks.
- The existing discipline for crediting beneficiary's account or returning the transaction (within 2 hours of settlement of the respective batch) to originating bank will continue.
- Member banks will ensure sending of positive confirmation message for all NEFT credits.
- All provisions of NEFT procedural guidelines will be applicable for NEFT 24x7 transactions as well.
- RBI has mandated banks to not to charge any fees on NEFT transactions done by savings account holders from January 1, 2020.
- This move is aimed at pushing savings bank account customers to transfer money using electronic modes via NEFT.

92. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019

About IBC

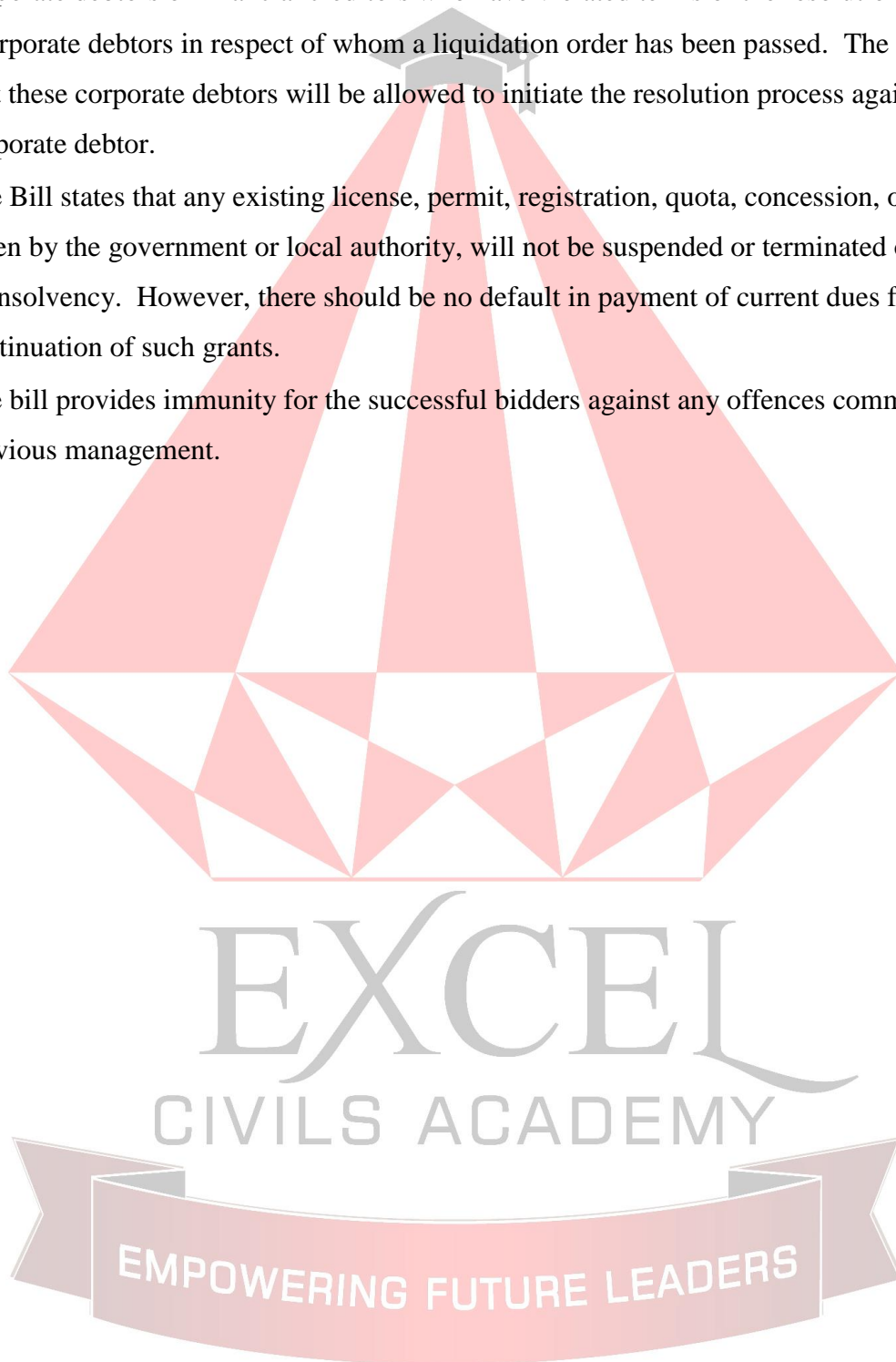
The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha on December 12, 2019. The Bill amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016. The Code provides a time-bound process for resolving insolvency in companies and among individuals.

Insolvency is a situation where individuals or companies are unable to repay their outstanding debt.

Proposed amendments to the bill

- In case of real estate projects, if an allotted (person to whom a plot, apartment, or building has been allotted or sold) wants to initiate resolution, the application should be filed jointly by at least 100 allottees of the same real estate project, or 10% of the total allottees under that project, whichever is less.
- For other financial creditors, where the debt owed is either: (i) in the form of securities or deposits, or (ii) to a class of creditors, the application should be filed jointly by at least 100 creditors in the same class, or 10% of the total number of such creditors in the same class, whichever is less.
- The Code restricts certain corporate debtors from making an application to initiate the resolution process. These include:
 - corporate debtors undergoing an insolvency resolution process,

- corporate debtors who have completed the resolution process 12 months before making the application,
- corporate debtors or financial creditors who have violated terms of the resolution plan, or
- Corporate debtors in respect of whom a liquidation order has been passed. The Bill clarifies that these corporate debtors will be allowed to initiate the resolution process against any other corporate debtor.
- The Bill states that any existing license, permit, registration, quota, concession, or clearance, given by the government or local authority, will not be suspended or terminated on the grounds of insolvency. However, there should be no default in payment of current dues for the use or continuation of such grants.
- The bill provides immunity for the successful bidders against any offences committed by previous management.



Science & Technology

93. ISRO to launch RISAT 2BR1

- ISRO has planned to launch sharp-eyed surveillance satellite **RISAT-2BR1 (Radar Imaging Satellite-2)** with **Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)**

RISAT-2BR1:

- RISAT-2BR1 is a radar imaging satellite.
- It is dubbed as a spy satellite.
- It can take pictures of the earth during day and night even under cloudy conditions.
- The satellites will help 24/7 border surveillance along with checking infiltration
- It will keep an eye on terror or anti-national activities across the borders
- ISRO also plans to launch radar imaging satellite 2BR2 with synthetic aperture radar after the launch.

India successfully test fired Prithvi II missile

- India successfully conducted a night test-trial of the indigenously developed nuclear-capable surface-to-surface Prithvi-II missile off complex-3 of Integrated Test Range in Chandipur, Odisha coast.
- The test of the short-range ballistic missile was conducted by the Strategic Forces Command.

Prithvi-II missile:

- The surface-to-surface Prithvi-II missile has a strike range of 350 km.
- It is capable of carrying 500 to 1,000 kg of warheads. It is powered by liquid propulsion twin engines.
- The missile was inducted into the Indian defence forces in 2003.
- The missile was developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) of the Ministry of Defence.

94. Punjab partnered with WEF to promote electric mobility

- Punjab State government partnered with the World Economic Forum (WEF) to design a Public-Private pilot on shared, clean and electric mobility.
- The move aims to combat the growing problem of environmental pollution in the state.

WEF Partnership:

- The state is preparing its own EV policy to support the adoption of e-vehicles.

- WEF chose Punjab, as it is well-positioned for shared EV transition.
- WEF has already housed an existing auto component manufacturing base, besides having skilled labour and being a power surplus.
- The public-Private pilot will examine how Public and Private Sectors can interplay to offer the most robust and successful EV ecosystem. It is a part of the collaboration to be formulated at the WEF annual meeting in Davos in January 2020.

95. Government to introduce AI as a subject in the next academic year

- Centre is has introduced **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** as a subject in class IX from the session 2019-20 in the schools affiliated with the **Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)**.
- Centre has also launched a twelve hours Inspire module in which schools can take up with the students of class VIII. The announcement was made by the **Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'**.

Aim:

The move aims to enhance the multidisciplinary approach in teaching-learning and to sensitize the new generation.

AI for students:

- The study material for teaching AI in classes VIII and IX has already been provided to schools through the CBSE's website <http://cbseacademic.nic.in/ai.html>.
- To implement the idea, CBSE has collaborated with several organizations such as IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Private Schools, etc.
- Centre conducted 41 training programmes in schools affiliated with CBSE in various parts of the country. Around 1690 participants including principals and teachers were trained.
- Artificial Intelligence has been introduced in classes VIII, IX and X in schools affiliated with CBSE.
- The decision to introduce Artificial Intelligence in the States and Union Territories will be taken by the respective Boards.

96. World's first fully electric commercial aircraft was successfully tested in Canada

- The Australian company, Harbour Air and magniX flight-tested an all-electric powered seaplane.
- It has taken flight in Vancouver, Canada. The company aims to electrify its entire fleet by 2022.

- It was described as the world's first for the aviation industry.
- The test involved a six-passenger DHC-2 de Havilland Beaver with a 750-horsepower (560 kW) magni500 propulsion system.
- The invention is aimed to boost the electric which will help to reduce the carbon emissions in the high-polluting aviation sector.

97. ISRO to set up third rocket launchpad

- ISRO has begun preparatory works for setting up a 3rd rocket launchpad in Kulasekharapattinam in the Thuthukudi district of Tamil Nadu.
- At present, ISRO has two launch pads at Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.
- The demand for additional launch pads arose as a result of the increase in the number of satellite launches from India, both for domestic and international customers.

98. India to Host 36th Geological Congress

- India will host the 36th International Geological Congress (IGC) in the Delhi in March, 2020.
- The theme of the forthcoming conference is 'Geosciences: The Basic Science for a Sustainable Development'.
- The IGCs are a prestigious global geoscientific events held once in four years and participated by around 5000-6000 geoscientists from all over the world.

99. NASA select site Nightingale for observation

- Nightingale's regolith or rocky surface material is dark, and images show that the crater is relatively smooth.
- NASA has finally selected a sample collection site on asteroid Bennu after the arrival of OSIRIS-REx spacecraft in December 2018.
- The OSIRIS-Rex mission team has selected the site designated Nightingale, which is located in a crater high in Bennu's northern hemisphere. The team has also selected site Osprey of Bennu as a backup sample collection site.
- OSIRIS-REx spacecraft mapped the entire asteroid in order to identify the safest and most accessible spots for the spacecraft to collect a sample so far.
- The team evaluated close-range data from four candidate sites in order to identify the best option for the sample collection. After the complete study and analysis of the four candidate sites, the

team selected a site that has the greatest amount of fine-grained material and how easily the spacecraft can access that material and keep the spacecraft safe.

- Site Nightingale is located in a northern crater 460 feet wide of the asteroid.
- As the site is located so far north, the temperatures in the region are lower than elsewhere on the asteroid and the surface material is well-preserved.
- OSIRIS-REx sample collection has been scheduled for the latter half of 2020.
- The spacecraft is expected to return the asteroid samples to Earth on 24 September 2023.

100. CSIR and CNRS signed MoU to promote Scientific and Technological Research

- Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), France on 17th December 2019.
- The aim of the MoU is to establish a framework for cooperation between India and France towards promotion and support of scientific and technological research.
- CSIR and CNRS plan to strengthen their cooperation to foster joint innovation and transfer of technologies applicable to India or/and France and to other nations.
- It aims to benefit potentially and increase synergistic cooperation possibilities for translating science into technology
- The cooperation includes promoting technology transfer, sharing good practices, and enhancing industry-academia cooperation.
- The research areas of mutual interest include biotechnology including plant and marine biotechnology, environment and climate change studies, engineering science and technology, energy science and technology, health research, material science and technology, and water research.

101. DRDO successfully test-fired a BrahMos supersonic cruise missile

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on test-fired a BrahMos supersonic cruise missile off the coast of Odisha successfully on 17th December 2019. The target of the missile was a ship.
- The land-attack version of the missile was test-fired from a mobile autonomous launcher at Launch Complex-3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur near Balasore, Odisha.

- The BrahMos missile is a medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missile capable of being launched from submarines, ships, fighter jets or land.
- BrahMos was described as the world's fastest supersonic cruise missile with a high rate of precision and accuracy. It can be fired from land, sea, and air.
- BrahMos is a joint venture between the DRDO and the NPO Mashinostroyeniya (NPOM) of Russia.
- The speed at which the BrahMos cruise missile travels is Mach 2.8, nearly three times that of sound.
- It has the ability to strike from large stand-off ranges on any target at sea or on land with pinpoint accuracy by day or night and in all weather conditions.

102. **International Astronomical Union names a star after Indian Woman**

Scientist

- The International Astronomical Union (IAU) has accepted to name a white-yellow star in Sextans constellation and its Jupiter-like exoplanets. Until now, the stars were called HD 86081 and 86081b.
- The star will be named Bibha and the orbiting exoplanet will be named Santamasa, a Sanskrit term for clouded.
- The move by IAU is aimed to bring the attention of the global countries to exoplanet research.
- Bibha: Bibha Chowdhuri is a 20th-century Indian woman physicist.

103. **Pinaka guided rocket system**

- India had successfully test-fired two missiles from Chandipur in Odisha.
- The upgraded version of Pinaka guided rocket system was test-fired from the DRDO's Proof and Experimental Establishment firing test range while the all-weather tracked-chassis Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QR-SAM) tested from a mobile launcher at a launch complex of the Integrated Test Range.
- The indigenously developed Pinaka and QR-SAM weapon system test achieved the desired accuracy by hitting the intended target with a high degree of precision and met all mission objectives.
- Pinaka system has a maximum range of 75 km for Mark-II variant and can fire a salvo of 12 rockets in less than 45 seconds.

- QR-SAM system can also engage multiple targets within a range of around 25 to 30 km with two vehicle configurations for area air defence.
- The specificity of QR-SAM missile is that it intended to defend Army formations operating in plains and semi-desert areas, including those enemy missiles that suddenly appear at close range.
- The successful test of missiles will boost India to strengthen its security position.

104. **Ethiopia launches its first satellite**

- Ethiopia launched its first satellite on 20th December, 2019, a landmark achievement for the country's space program that caps a banner year for the African space industry.
- The launch of the Ethiopian Remote Sensing Satellite (ETRSS) took place at a space station in China.
- The live broadcast was watched by a group of Ethiopian and Chinese officials and scientists who had gathered at the Entoto Observatory and Research Centre outside the capital, Addis Ababa.
- According to Temidayo Oniosun, managing director of Space in Africa, a Nigeria-based firm that tracks African space programs, this was the eighth launch of an African satellite this year, topping the previous record of seven in 2017.
- The launch makes Ethiopia the eleventh African country to put a satellite into space. Egypt was the first in 1998.
- Data provided by Ethiopia's satellite is expected to paint a fuller picture of the country's agriculture, forestry and mining resources and improve responses to flooding and other disasters.

105. **New laser-based system to spot space junk**

Researchers in China have improved the accuracy of detecting space junk in the Earth's orbit, providing a more effective way to plot safe routes for spacecraft. They have developed space junk identification systems.

A unique set of algorithms for laser ranging telescopes, described in the Journal of Laser Applications, has significantly improved the success rate of space debris detection.

Space Junk

- Space Junk, also called space debris, artificial material that is orbiting Earth but is no longer functional.
- This material can be as large as a discarded rocket stage or as small as a microscopic chip of paint.

- Much of the debris is in low Earth orbit, within 2,000 km (1,200 miles) of Earth's surface; however, some debris can be found in geostationary orbit 35,786 km (22,236 miles) above the Equator.
- Kessler syndrome postulates that crashes would first be seen between fragments and larger objects like satellites and would eventually be between two fragments. Crashes will continue till the debris becomes very small.
- There is almost 7,000 tons of active space debris—from old satellites and spacecraft to lost components and spent rocket parts—orbiting Earth at any given moment. While some of the space junk in orbit decays with time, debris that is located at a higher orbit can take years to disintegrate.

106. NTPC to add 10GW solar capacity

- NTPC is planning to add 10GW of solar energy generation capacity by 2022, which entails an investment of around Rs 50,000 crore.
- At present, NTPC has installed renewable energy capacity of 920 MW, which includes mainly solar energy.
- It has formulated a long term plan to become a 130 GW company by 2032 with 30 per cent non-fossil fuel or renewable energy capacity.

107. China successfully launches largest carrier rocket

- China has successfully launched the largest carrier rocket of the country, Long March-5, from Wenchang Space Launch Center in south China's Hainan Province.
- The rocket, also known as CZ-5, blasted off with more than 1,000 tonnes of thrust at 8.45 pm.
- The Chinese space authorities declared the mission a "complete success" just over half an hour after the lift-off when the Shijian-20 satellite it carried entered its designated orbit. It is the country's third attempt to launch the rocket.
- The first attempt was made in 2016. However, during the first attempt, the rocket failed to reach the speed required for the early phase of the flight. The second attempt also failed.

108. Russia inducts first Avangard hypersonic missiles into service

- Russia inducted first Avangard hypersonic missiles into service.
- Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu has conveyed President Vladimir Putin about the induction.

- Quoting Defence Ministry, the first missile regiment equipped with latest strategic missiles with the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle entered service at 10 am Moscow time.

109. ISRO is planning to launch satellite Aditya to study Sun

- ISRO is planning to launch a satellite called Aditya to study the sun.
- India is quite advanced in the field of astronomy and ISRO has taken path-breaking initiatives in this field.
- That India has many powerful telescopes around the country including a giant meter-wave telescope near Pune and other powerful telescopes located in Kodaikkaanal, Udagamandala, Guru Shikhar and Hanle Ladakh.
- The citizens should strive to understand India's ancient knowledge in astronomy and modern achievements in this field.

110. Astronaut Christina Koch created a record

- NASA Astronaut Christina Koch created a record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman, surpassing the earlier record of 288 days in space.
- When she arrives back on Earth in February 2020, she will have spent more than 300 days in space.

111. Global Bio-India Summit

- First Global Bio-India Summit-2019 was organized in New Delhi
- This Summit was organized by the Department of Biotechnology under the Ministry of Science and Technology and co-organized by the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council.
- The summit provides a platform to exhibit the potential of India's Biotechnology sector to the Global Forum.

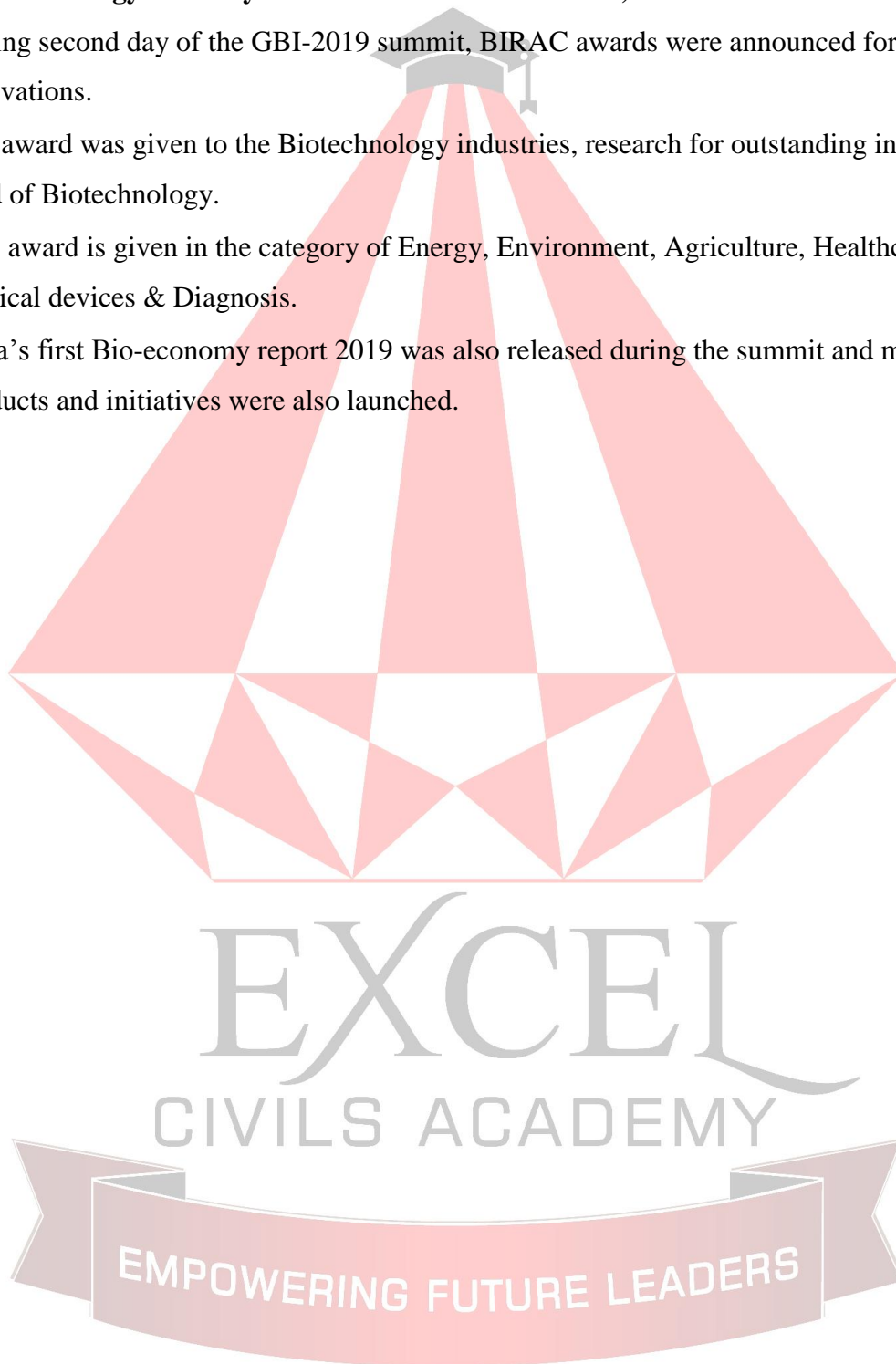
Summit Preview

- The summit will acts as a medium to investment flow to the country in the field of Biotechnology.
- It brings all the stakeholders of Biotechnology to include innovators, researches, startups and big companies across the world together to strengthen the Biotechnology sector in India.
- Challenges related to BioPharma, Agriculture, Biotechnology, Bioenergy, and Bioscience were identified and given an opportunity to technology innovation from all the stakeholders.

- The main objective of the GBI-2019 summit was to boost Biotech research, Technologies and companies for innovative products to develop the nation.

BIRAC(Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council) Award

- During second day of the GBI-2019 summit, BIRAC awards were announced for Biotechnology innovations.
- The award was given to the Biotechnology industries, research for outstanding innovations in the field of Biotechnology.
- This award is given in the category of Energy, Environment, Agriculture, Healthcare, Bio-medical devices & Diagnosis.
- India's first Bio-economy report 2019 was also released during the summit and many biotech products and initiatives were also launched.



Environment

112. Government launched the Operation Clean Art

- Government launched the **Operation Clean Art** across India.
- The operation aimed to crackdown illegal trade in the mongoose hair. This is the first time such an operation is happening in India.
- It was initiated by the **Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)**.

Mongoose:

- The mongoose is a small carnivore found in southern Eurasia and mainland Africa. It is listed in Schedule II (Part II) of the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.
- As per the act, smuggling Mongoose or possession of its body part is a non-bailable offence.
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has placed Mongoose on the Least Concern category in the Red List.

Operation Clean Art:

- The operation included raid and check on organized factories that make paintbrushes with mongoose hair.
- Raids were carried in Uttar Pradesh, Jaipur, Rajasthan, Mumbai, and Pune in Maharashtra, and in Kerala.
- Under the operation, 54,352 brushes and 113 kg of raw hair were recovered.

Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB):

- **Formed on:** 2006
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi, India
- WCCB was established by the Government of India. It functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). It combats against the organized wildlife crime.

113. 1.5° C is almost impossible: UNEP gas emissions reports

- **UN Environment Programme (UNEP)** released the 2019 Emissions Gap Report, stated that even if the current climate commitments are met, the world is on course to exceed 3°C in global temperature rise.
- The report assesses the emissions gap, focuses on energy transition. The report was released in the **UN Climate Change Conference (COP-25)**.

Report highlights: The report said that in order to limit temperature rise, annual emissions in 2030 should be maintained at 15 gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent lower than current unconditional Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) imply for the 2°C goal.

- It stated that **Green House Gas (GHG)** emissions continue to rise, despite scientific warnings and political commitments
- Many countries have announced net-zero GHG emission targets for 2050. But only a few countries have formally submitted long-term low-emission development strategies to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) so far.

Recommendation of UNEP:

- The report highlighted that renewable and energy efficiency along with electrification of end users are key to a successful energy transition. It will drive down energy-related CO₂ emissions.
- Strengthening of the NDCs is needed in 2020. All the countries are recommended to increase their NDC ambitions threefold to achieve the well below 2°C goal and more than fivefold to achieve the 1.5°C goal.
- Note: Emissions gap: The gap between anticipated emission levels in 2030 and levels consistent with a 2°C/1.5°C target.

114. Karnataka govt. and NDMA conducts workshop on 2020 Heatwave

- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), in collaboration with the Government of Karnataka, organized a two-day national workshop titled on Preparedness, Mitigation, and Management of Heat Wave in Bengaluru, Karnataka.
- The workshop is conducted to emphasize the importance of Climate Change that has led to the rise of average summer temperature by 0.5 deg C in the past five years.
- A range of topics from the impact of Climate Change to emerging technologies, and from lessons learnt from the past to inter-agency co-ordination will be discussed in the meeting.

115. World Soil Day is observed on 5 December

- World Soil Day is observed on 5 December 2019. It highlights the problem due to population expansion.
- It raises the profile of healthy soil. The day encourages governments, organizations, communities, and individuals to work towards improving soil health and its conservation.
- The day aims to encourage people around the world to engage proactively to improve the health of the soil. The day aims to create awareness about the importance of soil on Earth.

- The theme for the 2019 World Soil day is **Stop Soil Erosion, Save our Future**. The day raises awareness on the importance of human well-being and sustaining healthy ecosystems.
- It focuses on the growing problem regarding soil as the Earth's population continues to expand.
- In 2002, the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) recommended the observation of the World Soil Day annually on 5 December.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) supported the institution of the day with the support of the Kingdom of Thailand.
- In June 2013, the day was endorsed by FAO. In December 2013, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) designated 5 December 2014. The first World Soil Day was observed in 2014.
- 5 December was chosen it corresponds with the official birthday of the late H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, King of Thailand. He was one of the main proponents of this initiative.

116. **Four medium intensity earthquakes hit J&K**

- Four medium intensity tremors with magnitudes ranging between 4.7 and 5.5 hit Jammu and Kashmir in a span of less than two hours last night.
- The National Centre for Seismology said, the first quake with a magnitude of 4.7 hit at 10:42 PM, followed by one measuring 5.5 six minutes later.
- The two occurred at a depth of 10 kilometres.
- The third quake measuring 4.6 hit at 10:58 PM, followed by the fourth one at 11:20 PM with a magnitude of 5.4.
- The third and fourth quakes occurred at the depth of 36 kilometres and 63 kilometres.
- There was no immediate report of casualty and damage to properties.
- Separately, a quake with a magnitude of 5 hit the Andaman and Nicobar islands at 10:29 PM.

117. **Swachh-Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan**

- Swachh-Nirmal Tat Abhiyaan is launched under the **Union Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)** to create awareness about drive and cleanliness program in 50 identified beaches.
- The beaches were identified from 10 coastal States/UTs these are Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Odisha, Gujarat, Daman and Diu, Maharashtra and Pondicherry.

Overview

- The main objective of the program is to make coastal areas clean across the country.

- Creating awareness among the citizens to save Marine creatures, Oceans from plastic, Industrial waste and harmful substances.
- After consulting the state governments the campaign will be organized on the beaches.
- Local school/college students of Eco clubs volunteers, district Administrators, and local communities will be participating in the program.
- Environment ministry official will be monitoring the implementation of the program.
- Environment Education Division of the Ministry and Society of Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM) will coordinate the program in 50 beaches.
- Cleanliness cleaning activity will be held in one kilometre stretch of the beach in 2 hours a daily basis.
- The best three beaches will be awarded and the certification of appreciation for all the participating Eco-clubs.
- Society of Integrated Coastal Management (SICOM)
- It was established under the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
- The main objective is to support the integrated coastal zone management activities in India.
- To promote R&D initiatives in management of coastal areas.

118. Plastic Waste in Development of Roads

- Non-Biodegradable plastic waste is one of the biggest threats to the environment and human health.
- To tackle the challenges of plastic waste the Ministry of Road Transport and Highway converting plastic waste with the Bitumen to build green, all-weather sustainable roads and Highways across the nation.

Overview

- Plastics can be classified into two categories; these are thermosetting plastics and thermoplastics.
- Thermosetting plastic cannot be remodelled once they shaped.
- Thermoplastics can be remodelled by applying heat and pressure can change the desired shape with solidifying and cooling them.
- Four types of thermoplastics can be used in the construction of roads they are High-Density Poly Ethylene, Low-Density Poly Ethylene, Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) and Polyurethane.
- Adding 6 - 8 % of plastic waste to the bitumen aggregate hot mix can improve stability, strength, increase the lifespan of roads and reduce maintenance costs.

- Molten plastic is a good binder, Bitumen and plastic binding is stronger than others.
- Hot aggregate, shredded plastic and hot Bitumen will mix at 140°C-175°C of temperature for the construction of roads.
- Plastic and Bitumen have good diffusion characteristics, it allows them to mix well and stick to the surface of the stone aggregates.
- Since 2015 there is a mandate to use Bitumen with plastic for the roads of 50 kilometres Periphery of urban areas with over 5 lakh people.
- 10 kilometre pilot stretches in every state.
- Nodal officers also deployed across the country
- The Swachhta Hi Seva campaign has been launched with an action plan to tackle plastic waste.

Benefits

- Two-lane Road uses two tonnes of plastic waste per kilometre.
- Plastic roads are environmentally friendly; they help in reducing plastic waste.
- Plastics are water resistance, so the roads which are made with Plastic are more resistant to water.
- plastic roads have increased durability
- They have improved fatigue life.

119. **Sambhar Lake**

- Sambhar Lake is India's biggest inland salt water lake and UNESCO world heritage site located at Jaipur district in Rajasthan.
- It is protected under the **Ramsar Convention** which has a global recognition to conserve wetlands. It is host to lots of migratory birds mainly **Flamingos**.
- Sambhar Lake is second largest breeding ground for Flamingos in India.

Overview

- Sambhar Lake spreads over 230km.
- Most of the birds which have died are the migratory birds.
- The bird species include Flamingos, Ruddy Shelduck, black-winged stilt, Ruddy turnstone, Northern shoveler and common coot.
- Over 1500 bird species found died at the India's biggest salt water lake "Sambhar" Salt Lake named Ratan Talab.
- This could be a cause of poisoning of water/contamination of water or could be any avian disease.

- An international Treaty was signed in 1971 for global conservation and sustainable use of wetlands among 170 countries.
- The convention held in the city called Ramsar in the Iran.
- 2nd February is a world wetlands day.
- Maximum number of wetlands is present in the Europe.
- On October 1981, India became a member of Ramsar convention, Chilika Lake in Odisha and Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan became first two sides under the convention.

Wetlands

- Wetlands found in low lying areas are in the form of coastal and inland, swamp & marshes, mangroves, flood Plains, and deltas.
- Wetland is a place covered by water throughout the year is a intersection point between the Terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem.
- It is a home to aquatic plants mammals fishes insects etc. wetlands are freshwater, saltwater and brackish (both salt and fresh).
- Wetland supports wide diversity of life these are important to many animals and plants.
- It reduces floods, soil erosion and helps in increasing soil fertility.

120. Mangroves of Sundarbans Wetland

- The mangroves are considered as salt tolerant plants being adaptable to harsh conditions in climatic conditions in coastal regions.
- Mangroves can withstand higher temperature; higher humidity and can stand strong winds. It provides protection to the coastal communities.

Importance of Mangroves

- They are important for Ecology and Economic of the country.
- They protect from land erosion.
- They stand strongly against cyclones and have a rich source of biodiversity acting as a breeding ground for many marine lives.
- They are ecologically important.
- Mangroves are the best example of Eco-tone which is the transition between two biomes these mangroves are located between Terrestrial and Marine ecosystem.
- The total geographical cover of mangroves accounts for 0.14 % of total area of India.

- West Bengal, Gujarat, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha are the states having maximum mangrove cover.

Sundarbans Wetlands

- Sundarbans are one of the largest mangrove forests in the world.
- It accounts for 50 % of the mangrove cover in India.
- It covers area of 10,200 km².
- It is one of **UNESCO World Heritage site**.
- Sundarbans spread across India and Bangladesh.
- Sundarbans are rich flora and fauna.
- It is a home to Royal Bengal Tigers, Northern River Terrapin which is critically endangered in **IUCN List**, and Irrawaddy Dolphin which is in endangered in IUCN. Fishing Cat which is the vulnerable in IUCN.

121. Tiger Conservation in Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem and Andhra Pradesh

- The number of tigers in Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve (NSTR) in Andhra Pradesh has increased by efforts taken by Tiger Conservation Foundation (TCF).
- Nagarjuna-Srisailem Tiger Reserve is also the largest tiger reserve and it spreads over five districts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- These 5 Districts are **Kurnool, Guntur, Prakasam, Mahbubnagar and Nalgonda**.

Nagarjuna Sagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve

- This tiger reserve works under the ministry of Environment and Forest.
- Multipurpose reserve like Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar are located in this reserve.
- It is situated at Nallamala hill ranges which are considered as a part of Eastern Ghats.
- This Tiger reserve was established in 1983.
- It is having a total area of 3,728 Km².
- River Krishna flows through it in North part of the reserve.
- Chenchu tribal population is a major inhabitant in this region.
- After the bifurcation of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh the northern part after tiger reserve falls under Telangana state is called as Amrabad Tiger Reserve.

Tiger Conservation Foundation

- Under the Wildlife Protection Amendment Act 2006, the state government established Tiger conservation Foundation.

- The Andhra Pradesh state government established Tiger Conservation Foundation under **Wildlife Protection Act 1972**.
- TCF is a statutory body.
- It supports to conserve the Tiger population and it facilitates ecological, economic, social and cultural development. It promotes Eco tourism and provides financial, technical, social and legal support.
- It encourages the Research, Environmental education and training.
- At present in India, there are 41 Tiger conservation foundations.

Tiger Population in India

- India is home to 80 % of the total World Tiger population and it is one of the biggest and most secure habitats of the tigers.
- Tiger population in India had significantly risen from 2,226 in 2014 to 2,967 in 2018.
- Government initiatives like ban on hunting, awareness and conservation programs had help in increase of the Tiger population.
- Top performing States which include Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers (526) among all the states followed by Karnataka (524) and Uttarakhand (442).
- Chhattisgarh and Mizoram stands in worst performing states as far as Tiger population is concerned.

Tiger Sanctuaries

- There are 50 Tiger sanctuaries in India. Pench sanctuary of Madhya Pradesh and Periyar sanctuary in Kerala are the best in Tiger reserves in the country.
- Mizoram's Dampa and Rajaji reserve of Uttarakhand is the bottom in list of Tiger count.
- Tamil Nadu's Satyamangalam tiger reserve had improved its maximum cover, since 2014.
- Buxa in West Bengal, Palamu in Jharkhand and Dampa in Mizoram had no Tiger population.

Global Tiger Day

- International Tiger Day is celebrated annually on 29 July to promote the protection of natural habitat of tigers and to increase awareness about the conservation of tiger.
- Global Tiger day came into picture since 2010 at Saint Petersburg Tiger summit in Russia. 13 Tiger range countries made a commitment to double The Tiger number by 2022.
- India had already achieved the target set in 2010 St Petersburg Declaration of doubling tiger population by 2022.

Sports

122. South Asian Games begins in Kathmandu

On December 1, 2019, the President of Nepal Bidya Devi Bhandari opened the South Asian Games in Kathmandu. The event is scheduled to be conducted for 10 days. Around 487 athletes are participating from India.

South Asian Games

The South Asian Games is a biennial multi-sport event that is held among the South Asian countries. It is being conducted since 1983. Currently there are eight members in the event. It includes India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Maldives.

The governing body of the event is South Asia Olympic Council

South Asia Olympic Council

The Council was formed in 1983 at Islamabad, Pakistan. The country hosting the South Asian games holds the president-ship of the council. The current President of the council is Nepal.

The Council holds South Asian Beach Games and South Asian Winter Games. The Beach Games are usually conducted in the month of September every year and predominantly includes water sports. The South Asian Winter Games includes athletics, skating, swimming, etc.

123. National Code for Good Governance in Sports

Union Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (MYAS) has constituted a 13-member expert committee to review the **Draft National Code for Good Governance in Sports, 2017**.

Key Highlights

Members: The committee will be chaired by Retired SC Justice Mukundakam Sharma and member includes former Indian football team captain Baichung Bhutia, Pullela Gopichand, Anju Bobby George, Olympic medalist Gagan Narang, among others. Moreover, Joint Secretary of Sports will act as coordinator in committee.

Expert Committee: Terms of Reference

The committee will be required to suggest measures for making Draft National Code for Good Governance in Sports, 2017 acceptable to all stakeholders so that a balance is struck between autonomy of National Sports Federations (NSF).

Committee's recommendations are needed for accountability and transparency and would also help bring government as well as all stakeholders on the same page as far as code is concerned.

Committee will also examine comments received from Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and others on draft of National Code for Good Governance in Sports, 2017 and will be required to review draft of national code with present code.

124. South Asian Games: India leads with 214 medals

In athletics, India won 49 Medals that comprised of 23 gold, 20 silver and 6 bronze. India also won two gold and five silver medals in table tennis category. Different cities of Nepal are hosting the event namely Kathmandu, Pokhara and Janakpur.

This year Cricket has also been included after a gap of 8 years. Around 2,715 athletes participated in the event.

South Asian Games

The official mascot of the South Asian Games is a pair of Black bucks. Blackbucks is an endangered species that is found in the southern region of Nepal.

Black Bucks

The Black Bucks are also known as Indian Antelope. It is extinct in Bangladesh. It is mainly found in India. The population of Blackbucks declined in 20th century due to excessive hunting, habitat degradation and deforestation. It has been introduced in Argentina and United States recently.

In India, hunting of Blackbucks is prohibited under Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Wildlife Protection Act, 1972

This act prohibits the capturing, killing, poisoning or trapping of wild animals. It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir. India only had five designated national parks. This was the first umbrella act which established schedules of protected plant and animal species. There are six schedules which give varying degrees of protection.

125. Ballon d'Or awards(Golden Ball)

Winners of the Ballon d'Or awards ("Golden Ball") which recognises the best footballer in world for 2019, were announced by France Football magazine in Paris on 2 December 2019. This year was the 64th annual ceremony of Ballon d'Or, presented by France Football. The nominees for awards were announced on 6 November 2019.

A total of 176 international journalists voted for 2019 edition of Football Awards, with journalists from Europe and Asia voting for van Dijk, while journalists from Africa, Oceania and North and South America voted for Messi.

Ballon d'Or awards winners

Ballon d'Or: Lionel Messi of Argentina and Barcelona FC. He won the award for a record 6th time in his career. He won previous award in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2015.

Ballon d'Or Féminin: Megan Rapinoe of United States and Regin FC. She won the 2019 Ballon d'Or Féminin for best female player in world.

Kopa Trophy (for best player in world under age of 21): Matthijs de Ligt of Netherlands

Yashin Trophy (for best goalkeeper in the world): Alisson Becker of Brazil and Liverpool FC won the inaugural Yashin Trophy as the best goalkeeper in the world in 2019.

126. South Asian Games concluded in Nepal: India finish on top

South Asian Games 2019 concluded on 10 December in Nepal, with India finishing on top with a best-ever medal haul of 312 medals comprising of 174 gold, 93 silver and 45 bronze. Host Nepal remained second and Sri Lanka got third place in the regional multi-sporting. The year 2019 marks the 13th edition of South Asian Games.

Key Highlights

India finished on top, continuing its undisputed domination in regional multi-sporting event by finishing on top for the 13th time-in-a-row. India has topped the medal tally of every South Asian Games since its establishment in 1984.

In this 13th edition India surpassed its 309 medal tally (189 gold, 90 silver and 30 bronze) it had won in the previous edition in Guwahati and Shillong in 2016. However, the number of gold India won this time was 15 less than 2016 edition. India had sent 487 athletes in this edition.

Hosts Nepal stood 2nd with 206 medals (51 gold, 60 silver and 95 bronze) while Sri Lanka was 3rd with 251 medals (40 gold, 83 silver and 128 bronze).

Basketball: Indian cagers fetched both the men's and women's basketball gold by defeating host Nepal (127-46) and Sri Lanka (101-62) in their respective summit clashes.

Squash: In squash, India won a gold and a silver in women's and men's team events respectively.

Boxing: Indian boxers brought home a rich haul of 12 gold, 3 silver and 1 bronze. 2014 Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Pinki Rani (women's 51kg category) and Commonwealth Games (CWG) gold medallist Vikas Krishan (men's 69kg category) guided India to 6 more gold medals. Other boxers among men who bagged the gold were, Sparsh Kumar (52kg), Narender (+91kg). While Sonia Lather (57kg) and Manju Bamboriya (64kg) also contributed to India's gold medal tally among women.

Rank	Participating Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	India (IND)	1/4	93	45	312
2	Nepal (NEP)	51	60	95	206
3	Sri Lanka (SRI)	40	83	128	251
4	Pakistan (PAK)	31	41	59	131
5	Bangladesh (BAN)	19	32	87	138
6	Maldives (MDV)	1	0	4	5
7	Bhutan (BHU)	0	7	13	20

127. World Anti-Doping Agency imposes 4-year ban on Russia

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has slapped Russia with a four-year ban from international sports events, over longstanding doping scandal. The ban includes next summer's Tokyo Olympics (which opens 24 July 2020) and 2022 Beijing Winter Games. However, Russia's anti-doping agency can appeal decision to Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) within 21 days.

Highlights: WADA Ruling

The sanctions are harshest punishment yet for Russian state authorities who were accused of tampering with a Moscow laboratory database. WADA investigators and International Olympic Committee (IOC) agreed that evidence showed Russian authorities corrupted data from Moscow lab that was long sealed by security forces. As a result, hundreds of potential doping cases were deleted and evidence falsely planted to shift blame onto whistle-blowers.

The WADA ruling means that Russia's flag, name and anthem will not appear at Tokyo Games, and the country also could be stripped of hosting world championships in Olympic sports. Although Russia's athletes will still be able to compete in major events only if they can show that they are not implicated in positive doping tests or if their data was not manipulated.

For soccer's 2022 World Cup, as per WADA ruling, the Russian team will play under its name in qualifying program in Europe. But, if it qualifies to play in Qatar, the team name must be changed to something neutral that likely would not include the word 'Russia.'

128. Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik clinch gold at National Wrestling Championships

- Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik registered convincing wins in the finals to claim gold medals at the Senior Wrestling National Championships in Jalandhar.
- While Phogat beat 20-year-old Haryana's Anju 7-3 in the 55kg category, Olympic bronze medallist Malik defeated Radhika of Haryana 4-2 in the 62kg category yesterday.
- In the 68kg category, 35-year-old Haryana wrestler Anita Sheoran stunned Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Divya Kakran.
- Punjab's 35-year-old Gursharan Kaur, a single mother of a five-year-old girl, claimed the title in the 76kg category, with a 4-2 win over Pooja of Haryana.
- In the 50kg category, Meerut's Sheetal Tomar dominated Nirmala to post a 7-3 win.

129. World Rapid Chess Champion

- Indian grandmaster **Koneru Humpy** has become the 2019 Women's World Rapid Champion.
- She defeated China's Lei Tingjie in a dramatic final in Moscow, Russia.
- Tingjie finished with a silver, while Turkey's Ekaterina Atalik won bronze.
- Norwegian grandmaster and also classical chess champion **Magnus Carlsen** won men's title in space of a few minutes

About World Rapid Chess Championship

- It is a chess tournament held since 1987, to determine world champion in chess played under rapid time controls.
- Prior to 2012, the FIDE (international organization that acts as the governing body of international chess competition) gave such recognition to a limited number of tournaments.
- However, since 2012, FIDE has held an annual joint rapid and blitz chess tournament and called it as Word Rapid & Blitz Chess Championship.

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Personalities

130. Angela Merkel tops 2019 Forbes' List of World's most-powerful women

- **German Chancellor Angela Merkel** has topped the Forbes' 2019 edition of 100 World's Most Powerful Women for the ninth consecutive year.
- She was joined in top spots by fellow prominent female political leaders. The 65-year-old German leader has made 14 appearances in list's 16-year history of Forbes magazine which releases a wide-ranging list intended to celebrate 100 most influential females.
- **Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman** was ranked **34**.

Miss Universe 2019

- Miss South Africa Zozibini Tunzi was crowned as Miss Universe 2019 at the event held at Tyler Perry Studios in Atlanta, United States.
- The 26-year-old Zozibini Tunzi was presented the crown by Philippines' Catriona Gray, who was the Miss Universe winner in 2018.
- **Runner Up:** Miss Universe Puerto Rico Madison Anderson was declared first runner up and Miss Universe Mexico was the second-runner up.

131. Finland youngest-ever Prime Minister

- Finland's Sanna Marin is to become the world's youngest prime minister at the age of 34.
- The transport minister was picked by her Social Democratic party after its leader, Antti Rinne, quit as PM. She will be sworn in this week.
- She will lead a centre-left coalition with four other parties, all headed by women, three of whom are under 35.

132. National Stock Exchange gets a new Chairman

- The National Stock Exchange of India Ltd or NSE on Friday received Securities and Exchange Board of India (sebi) approval to appoint **Girish Chandra Chaturvedi**.
- Retired IAS Officer and former Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, as the new Chairman of NSE.

133. Ripu Daman Bevli named as Plogging Ambassador of India

- Ripu Daman Bevli was appointed as Plogging Ambassador of India by Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) on the 50th Fit India Plogging Run held in Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

- The minister also launched the Plogging Ambassador Mission to nominate Indians who have been running and cleaning their cities, towns or districts as Plogging Ambassadors of their region.
- Plog run is a unique way of picking up garbage while jogging, it was added to the Fit India Movement as an initiative to combine fitness with cleanliness like combining the Fit India Movement and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

134. Prithviraj Singh Roopun elected as new President of Mauritius by parliament

- The National Assembly of Republic of Mauritius has unanimously elected Prithvirajsing Roopun, as new President of the island nation, a largely ceremonial post.
- He was former arts and culture minister of country. The motion for his election as new President was presented by Prime Minister, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Defence, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity.
- In Mauritius, Prime Minister is head of government and holds most political power while president is head of state but has no executive role and is considered guardian of constitution.

135. Soma Roy Burman appointed new Controller General of Accounts

- Government has appointed Soma Roy Burman, as 24th Controller General of Accounts (CGA) of India with effect from 1 December 2019.
- With this appointment she has now become 7th woman to hold this position.

136. Shivangi became the first Naval Woman Pilot in India

- Sub-Lieutenant Shivangi of the Indian Navy became the first naval woman pilot in India. She joined operational duties at the Kochi Naval base on 2 December 2019.
- Shivangi received the qualification wings from Vice Admiral AK Chawla, the chief of Southern Naval Command. She will fly the Naval Dornier.

137. Sub-Lieutenant Shivangi:

- Sub-Lieutenant Shivangi is from Muzzafarpur in Bihar. She was inducted into the Indian Navy as Short Service Commission (SSC) (pilot).
- It is a part of the 27 NOC course in the Indian Naval Academy (INA), Ezhimala. She was commissioned in June 2018.