

AROUND-U

CURRENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE

JULY 2017

AHEMADABAD

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MALARIA ELIMINATION

NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN (2017-2022)

MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY



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GS 1 History Culture Social issues and Geography

Lost and found: the tale of two cities - Dwaraka and Puhar

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) is looking to send robotic vehicles into the sea near Dwaraka, Gujarat, and Puhar, Tamil Nadu, to look for submerged structures.

Mains : GS 1 Indian Heritage and Culture,

Highlights of the programme

- Centre will launch underwater robots to find lost 'cities' of Dwaraka and Puhar.
- The programme, still a preliminary proposal, is expected to involve organisations such as the National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai, and the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa.

Dwaraka

- Dwaraka, a port city, finds mention in ancient Greek texts from the 1st millennium and, according to legend, was a rich city that sank into the sea.
- Excavations at Dwaraka, a coastal town in Jamnagar district of Gujarat, have a long history.
- Nearly a decade ago, the Underwater Archaeology Wing of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) found copper coins and segments of granite structures.
- Mentioned in the Mahabharata as 'Dvaraka' or 'Dvaravati,' it is also linked to the god Krishna.

Puhar

- Tamil and Buddhist literature have references to Poompuhar, or Puhar, as being the port capital of the Chola dynasty.
- Last NIO, working off the coast of Tamil Nadu, reportedly found stone remains

suggestive of an ancient port and temples, which were reportedly, buried about 30 feet into the sea.

In a similar study in October, an expert committee of geologists, archaeologists and hydrologists said it had found evidence of the course of the Saraswati, a river mentioned in the Rig Veda and in Hindu mythology.

Prelims perspective

Similar questions

Which one of the following was a very important seaport in the Kakatiya kingdom?

[UPSC Prelims 2017]

- (a) Kakinada
- (b) Motupalli
- (c) Machilipatnam (Masulipatnam)
- (d) Nelluru

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Carbon dating confirms Keezhadi site is from Sangam era

Carbon dating has confirmed that the archaeological sites at Keezhadi in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu dates back to the Sangam era and are nearly 2,200 years old.

Prelims: History of India and Indian National Movement.

Mains : GS 1 Indian Heritage and Culture, History and Geography of the World and Society.

- Unlike many other archaeological sites excavated in Tamil Nadu, Keezhadi is a major habitation site.
- The last time habitation sites were excavated in Tamil Nadu was at Arikamedu.
- A total of 72 potsherds with Tamil Brahmi script were found at Keezhadi which had several Tamil names.

Historical calendar

Carbon dating is a widely accepted tool to ascertain the age of archaeological and historical remains



- **At Keezhadi, excavations were carried out up to a depth of 4.5 metres**

- **Two samples of carbon elements from the deposits, each weighing 25 gram, were sent for Carbon dating to a lab**

in Florida, U.S.

- **Samples sent were collected from a depth of 2 metres**

- **Carbon dating suggests Keezhadi samples belong to 3rd century BC**

- **Findings could help reconstruct ancient Tamil society**

- **Findings can be compared with ancient literary texts/sources**

Sangam Age

The Sangam Age constitutes an important chapter in the history of South India. According to Tamil legends, there existed three Sangams (Academy of Tamil poets) in ancient Tamil Nadu popularly called Muchchangam. These Sangams flourished under the royal patronage of the Pandyas.

- The first Sangam, held at then Madurai, was attended by gods and legendary sages but no literary work of this Sangam was available.
- The second Sangam was held at Kapadapuram but all the literary works had perished except Tolkappiyam.
- The third Sangam was held at Madurai by Mudathirumaran. It was attended by a large number of poets who produced voluminous literature but only a few had survived. These Tamil literary works remain useful sources to reconstruct the history of the Sangam Age.

Period of Sangam Age

The chronology of the Sangam literature is still a disputed topic among the scholars. The most probable date of the Sangam literature has been fixed between the third century B.C. to third century A.D. on the basis of literary, archaeological and numismatic evidences.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to Sangam Age which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Keezhadi in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu belongs to Sangam era.
2. A total of five Sangams were held between 1000 AD and 1500 AD

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

India to host 8th Edition of Theatre Olympics

The 8th edition of the greatest carnival of Theatre in the World will take place in India for the first time ever simultaneously in various cities across the country. Established in 1993, the Theatre Olympics is the foremost international theatre festival, presenting the finest productions of well-known theatre practitioners from around the world. The Theatre Olympics, being held in India for the first time, is being organised by National School of Drama, under the aegis of Ministry of Culture. The Theatre Olympics was established in 1993 in Delphi, Greece, as the first international theatre festival. With the tagline 'Crossing Millennia', this is an initiative to connect the cultural past with the present and future, The first country to host the Theatre Olympics was Greece in 1995.

Scientists set sail to unlock secrets of lost continent

Scientists are attempting to study the "lost continent" of Zealandia off the Australian Coast.

Prelims : Indian and World Geography - Physical, Social, Economic Geography of India and the World.

Mains : GS 1 Indian Heritage and Culture, History and Geography of the World and Society.

Zealandia

- It is the huge underwater landmass east of Australia that has never been properly studied.
- Zealandia, which is mostly submerged beneath the South Pacific, was once part of the Gondwana super-continent but broke away some 75 million years ago.

- It is a distinct geological entity that met all the criteria applied to Earth's other continents, including elevation above the surrounding area, distinctive geology, a well-defined area and a crust much thicker than that found on the ocean floor. Scientists have put forward a demand to consider it as a continent.
- Covering five million square kilometres, it extends from south of New Zealand northward to New Caledonia and west to the Kenn Plateau off Australia's east.

The study

Drill ship Joides Resolution will recover sediments and rocks lying deep beneath the seabed in a bid to discover how the region has behaved over the past tens of millions of years.

Prelims Perspective

Model questions

With regard to Zealandia which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is a mostly submerged continent off the coast of Africa
2. It split away from Gondwana super continent about 75 million years ago

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions

What do you understand by the theory of continental drift? Discuss the prominent evidences in its support. *[UPSC Mains 2013]*

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

A hardy millet yields its genetic code - Ragi

In a first, Karnataka's agricultural scientists have sequenced the genetic code of ragi, or finger millet, throwing light on the exact building blocks that make it drought-resistant and nutrition-rich.

Mains : GS 3 Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country

Significance

- The key genetic information will aid further research on ragi, the main crop of dry land farmers.
- Knowledge of specific genes would now help reduce the time needed for developing new and improved varieties.
- It would also be possible to expect more productive outcomes while developing improved and drought-tolerant varieties

Ragi

- Ragi or **finger millet**, is an annual herbaceous plant widely grown as a cereal crop in the arid and semiarid areas in Africa and Asia. It is a tetraploid and self-pollinating species probably evolved from its wild relative *Eleusine africana*.
- Ragi occupies 12% of global millet cultivation area and Karnataka, which has the second largest drought-prone crop land after Rajasthan, leads in its cultivation.
- Ragi was first domesticated from a wild species in Western Uganda and the Ethiopian highlands before being introduced to India around 3,000 BC.
- With a low glycemic index, ragi is a healthier alternative to polished cereals, rich in calcium, fibre and iron besides being gluten-free.

Big push for research

Scientists say the technology can be imported to rice, wheat



- Genome sequencing of ragi done for the first time in the world
- Scientists have identified genes which are responsible for drought-tolerance and high nutrient quality of ragi
- This information serves as a base for further increasing the drought tolerance of ragi
- The information is bound to reduce the time required for developing improved crops of ragi

Image : The Hindu

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Questions related to cropping patterns and different crops in the country have been asked several times in the past. To see the questions visit our [IAS preparation page](#)

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Ahmedabad becomes India's first World Heritage City

Ahmedabad, founded by Sultan Ahmed Shah in the 15th century, has been declared as India's first World Heritage City.

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance.

Highlights

- The World Heritage Committee (WHC) of UNESCO made the announcement.
- **Ahmedabad** : The 5.5 km walled city area with an approximate population of

four lakh, living in century old wooden residences in around 600 pols or neighbourhoods, is regarded as a living heritage. The walled city of Ahmedabad on the eastern banks of Sabarmati river presents a rich architectural heritage from the sultanate period, notably the Bhadra citadel, the walls and gates of the Fort city and numerous mosques and tombs, as well as important Hindu and Jain temples of later periods

- The UNESCO had preferred Ahmedabad over Delhi and Mumbai.
- It has now joined the privileged club of heritage cities like Paris, Cairo, Edinburg and two cities in the subcontinent, Bhaktpur in Nepal and Galle in Sri Lanka.

About UNESCO

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) based in Paris.
- Its declared purpose is to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through educational, scientific, and cultural reforms in order to increase universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and human rights along with fundamental freedom proclaimed in the United Nations Charter.
- UNESCO has 195 member states and nine associate members.
- UNESCO pursues its objectives through five major programs: education, natural sciences, social/human sciences, culture and communication/information
- Encourage States Parties to the Convention to nominate sites within their national territory for inclusion on the World Heritage List;
- Encourage States Parties to establish management plans and set up reporting systems on the state of conservation of their World Heritage sites;
- Help States Parties safeguard World Heritage properties by providing technical assistance and professional training;
- Provide emergency assistance for World Heritage sites in immediate danger;
- Support States Parties' public awareness-building activities for World Heritage conservation;
- Encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage;
- Encourage international cooperation in the conservation of our world's cultural and natural heritage.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following city was added to World heritage city?

- a. Kolkata
- b. Mumbai
- c. Delhi
- d. Ahmedabad

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#) - [UNESCO](#) [UNESCO](#)

Mission Parivar Vikas

Mission Parivar Vikas will focus on 146 high fertility districts in 7 states with high TFR. Under this, specific targeted initiatives shall be taken for population stabilisation through better services delivery

Mains : GS 1 population and associated issues

GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Mission Parivar Vikas

Objective : The main objective of 'Mission Parivar Vikas' will be to accelerate access to high quality family planning choices based on information, reliable services and supplies within a rights-based framework.

Identification of target areas

- The mission will be implemented in 146 districts in the seven high focus, high TFR states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Assam that constitute 44% of the country's population.
- These 146 districts have been identified based on total fertility rate and service delivery for immediate, special and accelerated efforts to reach the replacement level fertility goals of 2.1 by 2025.

Focus of the initiative

- The key strategic focus of this initiative will be on improving access to contraceptives through delivering assured services, dovetailing with new promotional schemes, ensuring commodity security, building capacity (service providers), creating an enabling environment along with close monitoring and implementation.

Recently introduced family planning measures

The Health minister introduced the new injectable in the public health system under the "Antara" program and launched a new software – Family Planning Logistics Management Information System (FP-LMIS) – designed to provide robust information on the demand and distribution of contraceptives to health facilities and ASHAs to strengthen supply chain management.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Consider the following statements

1. Mission Parivar Vikas aims to accelerate access to high quality family planning choices
2. It will be implemented in all districts in India

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Critically examine whether growing population is the cause of poverty or poverty is the mains cause of population increase in India. [UPSC Mains 2015]

Sources: [pib](#) [pib](#)

Women technology Park

The first of its kind Women Technology Park (WTP) set up by the S.R. Engineering College with the help of government agencies is proving to be a boon for the rural poor.

Mains : GS 1 Role of women and women's organization,

Highlights

- Women are being identified and brought to the park to expose them to latest technology and entrepreneurial ideas.
- From construction technology, making of brass items, preparing yarn from banana fibre and much more are being taught to the women here.
- It is now engaged in demonstration and dissemination of rural technologies related to weaving, metal art ware, banana fibre extraction, construction and habitat services, agro and forest-based processing technologies.

Women Technology Park

- The objective of the Women Technology Park was to empower women in the region and make them financially self-sustainable with holistic and integrated development of rural technologies.
- The WTP is sponsored by Science for Equity, Empowerment and Development (SEED) Division under Department of Science and Technology (DST).

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

“Jiyo Parsi Publicity Phase-2”

Union Minister of Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi launched the “Jiyo Parsi Publicity Phase-2” at Mumbai. “Jiyo Parsi Publicity Phase-1” was initiated in 2013 for containing the declining trend of population of the Parsi community and reverse it to bring their population above the threshold level. The main objective of the “Jiyo Parsi” scheme is to reverse the declining trend of Parsi population by adopting a scientific protocol and structured interventions, stabilize their population and increase the population of Parsis in India. Ministry of Minority Affairs' scheme has two components: Medical Assistance and Advocacy/Counselling. The scheme has been successful. 101 babies have been born in Parsi community through “Jiyo Parsi” scheme.

GS 2 Indian Polity and International Relations

Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana –National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM)

An assessment of the Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana –National Rural Livelihood Mission(DAY-NRLM) was conducted keeping in view that the Mission had been under implementation for the past five years

Mains : GS 2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Highlights of study

- The report states that the Mission has largely been successful in creating sensitive support structures right up to the block level.
- The program had most impact on women's empowerment, access to microfinance, increase in livestock production and high cost debt reduction, while lesser impact on augmentation of natural resources, increase in agricultural production and infrastructure development.
- The report concludes that 'Expectations from DAY-NRLM are rightly high because it is one of the most important poverty eradication programmes. Hence, the Mission requires higher order of funding and commitment from both the implementing agencies and community based organisations'.

Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana –National Rural Livelihood Mission(DAY-NRLM)

Objective

To organize all rural poor households in the country and continuously nurture and support them till they come out of abject poverty.

How it seeks to achieve its objective?

- Through universal social mobilization by organizing at least one-woman member from each rural poor household into Self Help Groups (SHGs)
- Federating the SHGs at various levels, their training and capacity building, facilitating their micro-livelihoods plans, and enabling them to implement their livelihoods plans through accessing financial resources.
- All 29 states and 5 UTs [except New Delhi and Chandigarh] are currently implementing the Mission
- The Mission is expected to mobilize all rural poor households (about 9 crore) by 2024-25.

The way forward

- The report has also made several recommendations to improve the Mission implementation viz. The pace of promotion of federations should be increased.

- Developing value chains and the creation of sustainable enterprises
- Experience of leading agencies in livelihoods sector should be leveraged for promotion of sustainable livelihoods
- Efforts to enable the SHG members in accessing bank credit in the traditionally poorly banked areas should be increased
- Systems (HR, MIS and financial management) need be strengthened in all State Rural Livelihoods Missions.
- The experienced professional manpower also needs to be retained.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following is the objective of National rural livelihood mission?

- a. organize rural households and poverty eradication
- b. to provide health facilities in rural areas
- c. to improve infrastructure connectivity
- d. improve educational facilities

Mains Perspective

Model questions

The penetration of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas in promoting participation in development programmes is facing socio-cultural hurdles. Examine. **[UPSC Mains 2015]**

Sources: [pib](#)

Centre may partially withdraw AFSPA - Armed Forces Special Powers Act

The Centre is considering partial removal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The Ministry has asked the two BJP-ruled States for their views on AFSPA withdrawal and said that it was open to reviewing the stringent law in other States like Manipur. .

Mains : GS 3 Security challenges and their management in border areas. Linkages of organized crime with terrorism

Places where AFSPA is in force in North East

- It is effective in the whole of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur (excluding the seven Assembly constituencies of Imphal).
- In Arunachal Pradesh, it is in force in 16 police stations and in Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts bordering Assam.
- Tripura withdrew AFSPA in 2015.
- It is not in force in Meghalaya (except a 20-kilometre area along the Assam border) and Mizoram.

Armed Forces Special powers Act 1958

- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was enacted in 1958 to bring under

control what the government of India considered 'disturbed' areas.

- The Act has often faced flak from human rights groups as it gave sweeping powers and immunity to the army in conflict-ridden areas.

Highlights of the act

- **Disturbed Areas:** The Act is applicable to areas which are considered disturbed by the government (either the state or centre)
- AFSPA Act empowers the governor of the state or Union territory to issue an official notification on The Gazette of India, following which the centre has the authority to send in armed forces for civilian aid.
- **Authority:** The state governments, can suggest whether the Act is required to be enforced or not. But the final authority lies with the central government.
- **Uniformity of the act:** The act may contain different sections as applicable to the situation in different areas

Provisions of AFSPA

- The "armed forces" may shoot to kill or destroy a building on mere suspicion.
- A non-commissioned officer or anyone of equivalent rank and above may use force based on opinion and suspicion, to arrest without warrant, or to kill.
- He can fire at anyone carrying anything that may be used as a weapon, with only "such due warning as he may consider necessary".
- Once AFSPA is implemented, "no prosecution... shall be instituted except with the previous sanction of the central government, in respect of anything done or purported to be done" under this Act.

Prelims Perspective

- Details about the act such as who can declare an area as disturbed the authority that can declare an area as disturbed ... can be asked

Mains Perspective

Model questions

- "Accountability is a facet of the rule of law" Explain how this legal principle is violated by AFSPA act

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [livemint](#) [The Indian Express](#)

Coming: direct to home coaching for students, IIT aspirants- Swayam Prabha

The Centre will formally launch Swayam Prabha — a project for telecasting "high-quality educational programmes" through 32 DTH channels — at a National Convention on Digital Initiatives for Higher Education.

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

About Swayam Prabha

- The project envisages 24X7 access to educational content.

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- Every day, there will be content of four hours that will be repeated six times, thus covering all 24 hours of the day. This will allow the student to choose a time of his own convenience
- The channels will cover curriculum-based course content covering arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences, engineering, medicine, law, agriculture, etc.
- The courses will address both high school and secondary school students of Classes 9 to 12 and help them understand the subjects and prepare for competitive examinations.
- The content would also include IIT-PAL modules, aimed at helping students of Classes 11 and 12 prepare for the IITs by developing a strong conceptual understanding.
- The project will also telecast teacher-training content.

SWAYAM

- SWAYAM is a programme initiated by Government of India and designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz., access, equity and quality. The objective of this effort is to take the best teaching learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged.
- This is done through an indigenous developed IT platform that facilitates hosting of all the courses, taught in classrooms from 9th class till post-graduation to be accessed by anyone, anywhere at any time. All the courses are interactive, prepared by the best teachers in the country and are available, free of cost to the residents in India.

Prelims perspective

`SWAYAM', an initiative of the Government of India, aims at

- (a) promoting the Self Help Groups in rural areas
- (b) providing financial and technical assistance to young start-up entrepreneurs
- (c) promoting the education and health of adolescent girls
- (d) providing affordable and quality education to the citizens for free

Solution: D

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Surveys conducted by various agencies reveals the fact that majority of the graduates are unemployable. What are the factors behind this increased unemployability? Give your suggestions.

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [SWAYAM](#)

NGO regulation - Panel calls for 'light regulation' of NGOs

A high-power committee appointed by the Central government has recommended several steps to ensure the "light regulation" of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) so as to



reduce their harassment.

Mains : GS 2 Development processes and the development industry- the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders

Recommendations made by the committee

- Registration procedures be modernised so as to facilitate the seamless operation of the applicable provisions of the IT (Income Tax) Act and FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) with respect to NGOs, without the need for cumbersome and intrusive processes.
- Steps must be taken to “reduce the need for a physical interface between NGOs and public officials acting under the IT Act and the FCRA, along with reduction in mutual distrust and scope for misuse.”
- The committee has recommended a separate law for voluntary agencies engaged in activities of a charitable or “public good” nature to enable more effective and efficient regulation of the sector.
- “Regulation should be ‘light’ and consistent with the fundamental rights, so as to give effect to the objects for which voluntarism is being promoted,” the committee has said.
- It has recommended an overarching legislation with best practices that would replace various State-level and existing Central laws. Details of NGOs should be available as searchable database information.
- The new framework should enable a “national uniformity” of approach following the principle of “cooperative federalism,” the committee said.

Fresh outlook

A look at some of the measures suggested by the committee headed by former secretary S. Vijay Kumar

- Modernise registration procedures for NGOs
- Ensure seamless operation of the applicable provisions of the IT Act and FCRA
- Reduce the need for a physical interface between NGOs and public officials
- A three-tier monitoring system for NGOs receiving support from the Central government



The panel was formed as part of the Centre's response to a writ petition filed by lawyer Manohar Lal Sharma

● *Image : The Hindu*

Mains Perspective

Model questions - [UPSC Mains 2015]

1. Examine critically the recent changes in the rule governing foreign funding of NGOs under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 1976.
2. How can be the role of NGOs be strengthened in India for development works relating to protection of the Environment? Discuss throwing light on the major constraints.

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Government e-Marketplace - Six states, UT sign pact with Centre on e-Marketplace

Six states/Union Territories (UT) on formally adopted the Centre's initiative called the Government e-Marketplace (GeM)

Mains : GS 2 e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

Objective :

Government e-Marketplace (GeM) aims to transform the way in which procurement of goods and services is done by the Government Ministries/Departments, PSUs, autonomous bodies etc.

What is Government e-Marketplace gem.gov.in?

It aims to ensure that public procurement of goods and services in India is carried out

through the online platform for transparency and to eliminate corruption.

- GeM is a completely paperless, cashless and system driven e-marketplace that enables procurement of common use goods and services with minimal human interface.
- It is a one stop Government e-Marketplace (GeM) to facilitate on line procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments / Organizations / PSUs.
- The portal was developed by directorate general of supplies and disposal (DGS&D) with technical support of NeGD-*National E-Governance Division (NEGD)*- (MeitY)
- GeM will enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.
- It will also provide the tools of e-bidding and reverse e-auction as well as demand aggregation to facilitate the government users to achieve the best value for the money.

Benefits of GeM to the Government, Sellers and the Indian industry and economy

Transparency and Efficiency: Direct purchase on GeM can be done in a matter of minutes and the entire process in online

Secure and safe: All the documents on GeM are e-Signed at various stages by the buyers and sellers and antecedents of the suppliers are verified online and automatically.

Potential to support Make in India: It enables the Government buyers to procure Make in India and small scale industries' goods very easily.

Savings to the Government: The average prices on GeM are lower by at least 15-20%, and in some cases even upto 56%.

Prelims perspective

What is/are the advantage/advantages of implementing the 'Government e-Marketplace?'

1. It is a pan-India electronic trading portal for all commodities produced under in India.
2. It will make government procurements transparent and efficient

Select the correct answer using the code given below :

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Government e-Marketplace system for procurement of goods and services in an ambitious project to minimize corruption, eliminate wastage and facilitate reforms.

Comment

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [government e-Marketplace](#)

National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2017-22)

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare launched the National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2017-22)

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Highlights

- The Strategic Plan gives year wise elimination targets in various parts of the country in the next 5 years.
- It gives strategies for working towards the ultimate goal of elimination of malaria by 2030

The National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME) outlined India's commitment for eliminating malaria by 2030.

Salient features

- Strengthening malaria surveillance,
- Establishing a mechanism for early detection and prevention of outbreaks of malaria, Promoting the prevention of malaria by the use of Long Lasting Impregnated Nets (LLINs), effective indoor residual spray
- Augmenting the manpower and capacities for effective implementation for the next five years.

Malaria

- A disease caused by a plasmodium parasite, transmitted by the bite of infected mosquitoes.
- More than 1 million cases per year is reported in India.
- India has the third highest malaria burden in the world.

Details

- The severity of malaria varies based on the species of plasmodium.
- Symptoms are chills, fever and sweating, usually occurring a few weeks after being bitten.
- People travelling to areas where malaria is common typically take protective drugs before during and after their trip.
- Treatment includes antimalarial drugs.

How it spreads

- By animal or insect bites or stings.
- By blood products (unclean needles or unscreened blood).

Prelims Perspective

Model questions

Consider the following questions regarding Malaria

1. National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME) aims to eliminate Malaria by 2027
2. Malaria is a diseases caused by Plasmodium virus

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions

- The rising incidence of communicable diseases poses a challenge to health care system in India. Give your suggestions in addressing these challenges.

Sources: pib [Google health card](#) [Wikipedia](#)

Government takes measures to keep a check on unusual increase in C-Section surgeries reported in recent years

In a bid to combat the alarming rise in caesarean section operations in India, private hospitals are likely to be audited and asked to display the data of normal and C-section deliveries prominently.

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why C section is not advisable?

- C-section surgeries have a serious impact not only on the health of the mother but also on her ability to continue work after delivery.
- Repeated C-section surgeries will also affect the reproductive health of a woman.

Why new measures are taken?

While the recommendation of WHO suggests that deliveries through C-Section should normally be in the range of 10-15% of the total deliveries, some States are reporting extremely high percentages.

According to the latest data from the National Family Health Survey 2014-15 (NFHS-4), C-section surgeries have doubled over the last decade across India.

The increase is sharp in States such as Telangana, where the decision to not conduct a normal delivery is determined by non-medical factors, such as insurance and costs.

Stats regarding C sections

- The NFHS-4 data revealed that Telangana has the highest number of C-section deliveries in the country, with 74.9% babies born this way in private hospitals.
- Over 40% of the deliveries in Bihar were C-sections, while 58 % of the deliveries in Maharashtra were through C-section procedures.

Steps taken by the government

- All the private hospitals empanelled under CGHS Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) have been directed by the Health Ministry to prominently display the data of deliveries through C-Section vis-à-vis normal deliveries in the hospital, at the reception area.
- A report titled has been disseminated to all State Governments and UT Administrations to effectively get them to provide C-Sections only to those women who actually require it.
- The States have been directed to conduct periodical prescription audit of the health facilities specifically on this issue.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Can the rising number of C-sections reported be attributed to access to better health care systems? Critically evaluate

Sources: [The Hindu pib](#)

SC allows abortion of ailing foetus

Upholding her right to choose, the Supreme Court allowed a woman to abort her over 20-week-old foetus with severe abnormalities.

Mains : GS 2 mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

The Case

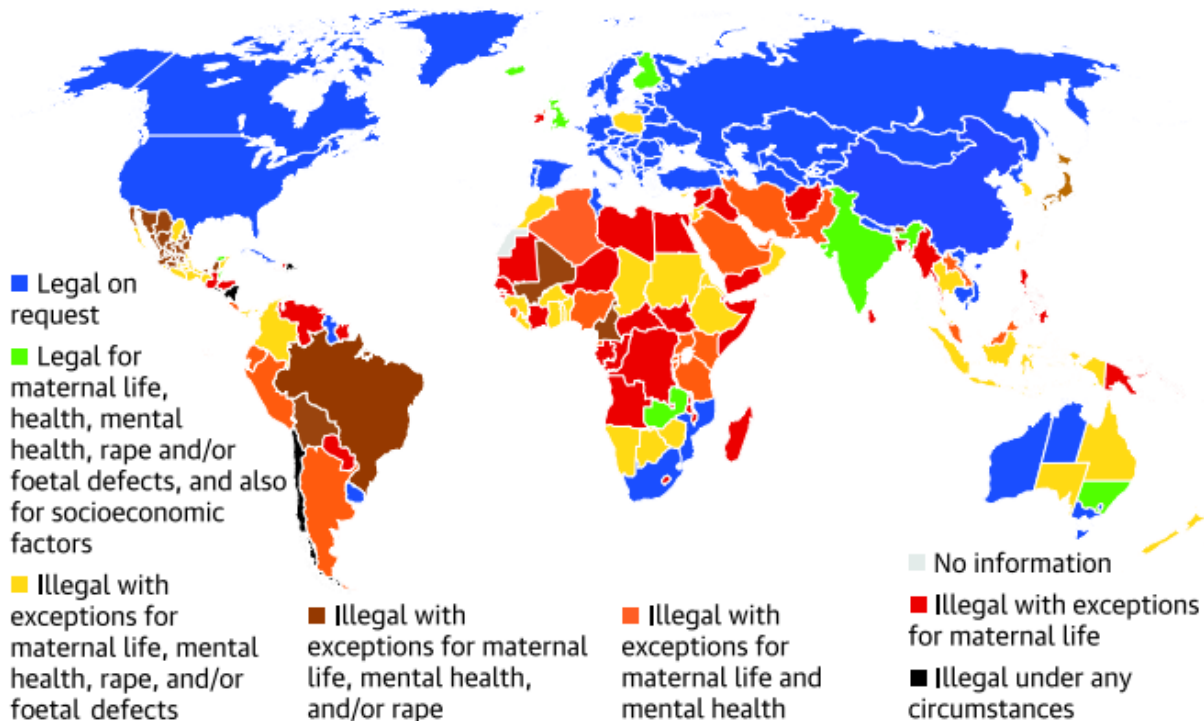
- A women from Kolkata woman has moved court after she discovered that the foetus suffered from severe cardiac impairment
- The court said every woman had a sacrosanct right to bodily integrity and allowed the abortion to be conducted at a Kolkata hospital.

What does the law says?

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act does not permit abortion if the foetus is over 20 weeks old.
- An exception to the law is made if a registered medical practitioner certifies to a court that the continued pregnancy is life-threatening for the mother or the baby.
- Court's orders regarding abortion of over 20 week old foetus have been on a case to case basis.

Abortion laws across the globe

At least 71 countries allow abortion "to preserve a woman's physical or mental health". Moreover, 50 countries permitted abortion "to save a woman's life", as per a U.N. report in 2014



SOURCE: WORLD ABORTION POLICIES, 2014, UNITED NATIONS

Image : *The Hindu*

The draft Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill of 2014

- The draft Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill of 2014 provides that the length of pregnancy shall not apply in a decision to abort a foetus diagnosed abnormalities.
- It allows a woman to take an independent decision in consultation with a registered health-care provider.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Unsafe abortion is responsible for 8% of all maternal deaths in India, which makes it the third biggest cause of women dying of childbirth-related causes in the country. Strong laws and medical services that give women the right over their bodies can prevent hundreds of thousands of these deaths. Comment

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)

The subsidy scheme under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) Urban is likely to be a

game changer as a large number of people from the middle class and youth are expected to benefit from it.

Mains : Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Highlights

A large number of corporate houses are now encouraging their employees to avail this scheme, which is live till December 31.

India's national housing shortage is estimated at 18.78 million homes and the Government is aiming to provide housing for all by 2022

Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS)


- A key scheme being implemented under PMAY (Urban) is the Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) which is aimed at reducing the burden of home loan on EWS, LIG and MIG category buyers.
- CLSS was introduced in June 2015. Initially, the scheme was available to the EWS and the LIG categories. However, in March 2017, the government extended the policy to cover MIG buyers.
- The CLSS scheme is only available for purchase or construction of new property or extension of an existing property which is situated in an urban area.


The PMAY scheme is aimed at reducing the burden of home loans among select categories


ANNUAL INCOME	INTEREST SUBSIDY	AMOUNT	TENURE (YEARS)	CARPET AREA LIMIT
EWS: up to ₹3 Lakh	EWS: 6.5%	EWS: ₹6 lakh	EWS: 20	EWS: 30 sq.m
LIG: ₹3 lakh - ₹6 Lakh	LIG: 6.5%	LIG: ₹6 lakh	LIG: 20	LIG: 60 sq.m
MIG I: ₹6 lakh - ₹12 lakh	MIG I: 4%	MIG I: ₹9 lakh	MIG I: 20	MIG I: 90 sq.m
MIG II: ₹12 lakh - ₹18 lakh	MIG II: 3%	MIG II: ₹12 lakh	MIG II: 20	MIG II: 110 sq.m


EWS: Economically weaker sections | LIG: Low income group
MIG: Middle income group

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR THE SCHEME?


 The beneficiary family should not own a pucca house in his/her name or in the name of any member of his or her family in any part of India

 The beneficiary family will comprise husband, wife and unmarried children - an adult earning member irrespective of marital status can be treated as a separate household in the MIG category

 In case of married couples, either of the spouse or both together in joint ownership will be eligible for a single subsidy

 The beneficiary family should not have availed of central assistance under any housing scheme from the Government or availed any benefit in any scheme under the PMAY

Source: Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation.
For the EWS and LIG categories, the subsidy is Rs 2.67 lakh, while for MIG I and II, it is ₹2.35 lakh and ₹2.3 lakh respectively.



The party's on the house

A large number of corporate houses are now encouraging their employees to avail this scheme, which is live till December 31

Image : The Hindu

Significance

- The scheme is helping youngsters buy a house early in life.
- An MIG category candidate can avail a maximum discount of ₹2.3 lakh for

buying a house under the scheme.

- There is no limit to the value of the property to be eligible for subsidy.
- Housing finance companies are seen aggressively promoting the scheme to benefit home buyers.
- “We are likely to see a lot of interest in the budget segment of the residential market. But there are certain challenges in implementing this scheme. Land is a challenge as any sort of budget housing needs huge land parcels,” Dr. Das said.
- On the response so far, in certain pockets, response from buyers is overwhelming, like Pimpri-Chinchwad in Pune, while in states like Kerala, Bengal it appears weak.
- Though the need for housing is imminent and opportunities are immense, private participation so far is tepid.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Consider the following statements about Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme

1. All income groups will receive same amount of subsidy
2. The Middle income group are ineligible under the scheme for getting subsidy

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions

The government's home loan interest subsidy scheme is well designed and flexible but the Government should ensure that banks don't use the new interest subsidy scheme to shore up their profits. Adequate safeguards should be put in so that the subsidy reaches the needy. Comment

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES) - Govt. clears three export infra plans

The Centre under the new scheme TIES gave its approval for three proposals.

The proposals approved are establishment of an Integrated Cargo Terminal (ICT) at the Imphal International Airport, modernisation of infrastructure facility in Karnataka for marine exports and construction of a new 'Standard Design Factory' building at Cochin Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Trade Infrastructure for Export Scheme (TIES)

Objective

To enhance export competitiveness by bridging gaps in export infrastructure, creating focused export infrastructure, first mile and last mile connectivity for export-oriented projects and addressing quality and certification measures.

Details

- It is focussed on addressing the needs of the exporters.
- The scheme would provide assistance for setting up and up-gradation of infrastructure projects with export linkages(Border Haats, Land customs stations, quality testing labs..)
- The Central and State Agencies, including Export Promotion Councils, Commodities Boards, SEZ Authorities and Apex Trade Bodies recognised under the EXIM policy of Government of India; are eligible for financial support under this scheme.
- **Funding :** The cost of projects under TIES would be equally shared between the Centre and the states. For north—eastern and the Himalayan region states, the Centre may bear 80 per cent of the cost.
- The TIES, which is being implemented from FY18 till FY20, has a budgetary allocation of Rs. 600 crore.
- The scheme's annual outlay is Rs. 200 crore.
- The commerce ministry will engage a professional agency for project monitoring on a pan India or regional basis.

Why TIES?

- There are infrastructural gaps related to export promotion like adequate testing and certification labs, cargo handling facilities and last mile connectivity.
- The number of technical regulations and standards adopted by countries has grown significantly.
- The logistic cost in India is about 14% of the GDP whereas in advanced economies like the U.S. and the European Union, it is 8% and 10% of the GDP respectively.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which one of the following is a purpose of `TIES', a scheme of the Government?

- (a) To enhance export competitiveness by bridging gaps in export infrastructure
- (b) Providing electricity to every household in the country by 2018
- (c) Replacing the coal-based power plants with natural gas, nuclear, solar, wind and tidal power plants over a period of time
- (d) Providing for financial turnaround and revival of power distribution companies

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Improvement of infrastructure can lead to improved export competitiveness. Discuss

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

Legalisation of betting

The gaming industry's representative body is making a case for legalising sports betting

Mains : GS 2 Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability,

Background

The All India Gaming Federation has presented a white paper to the National Law Commission in which it proposes the creation of a central gaming and betting law, and also making betting on sports such as cricket legal

Why betting should be legalised?

- It will bring betting out of the shadows, as well as earn the government more revenue.
- Due to the nature of the Internet and online gaming, it would make best legislative sense if the proposed gaming law is a central enactment for online activities,
- Such a central law will also help with the 'one-nation, one-tax' aspect of the Goods and Services Tax regime.
- The amount of money at stake is substantial, with the Federation referring to a FICCI study that pegged the underground betting industry at ₹3 lakh crore in 2013. Taxing this would yield the government rich dividends

Present situation

- Presently gaming is a state subject and every state has a gaming or gambling act that governs what happens in the state, including the betting
- Sport betting is not allowed in the country.
- Sikkim and Goa allow casino gaming through a licence, and only in Sikkim can some form of sport betting take place.
- All other betting is illegal.
- There are certain games the Supreme Court has deemed to be games of skill, such as online rummy, horse racing, chess, darts, and bridge. Betting on these games is also allowed.

Recommendations made by the federation

- Brick and mortar gaming set-ups, like casinos, should be under the jurisdiction of the states as these activities involve tourism, job creation, and revenue for the state.
- The AIGF has also proposed the creation of a National Gaming Council made up of a cross-section of people from the judiciary, investigative agencies and sport federations, among others.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to betting in sports which of the following is/are correct?

1. Betting is allowed for online rummy and horse racing in India
2. Lodha panel has recommended legalisation of betting in Cricket
3. Gambling is a state subject in India

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Should betting be legalised in India. Evaluate the merits and demerits of this proposal

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Gaming: a question of skill

Though gaming is gaining popularity in India the question of how it should be regulated in India moving forward remains a question.

Mains : GS 2 Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability,

What is gaming?

- Though gaming in popular parlance means computer or video games the term actually refers to competitive activities — like rummy, chess, bridge, and the like — that are not categorised as sports, as well as the betting that is done on them.
- For example, not only does horse racing come under gaming, but so does betting on what horse will win.

Legalisation of betting

- Some industry players supports designating betting as a game of skill and legalising betting on sports such as cricket
- Regulating sports betting will bring it into the light and will prevent match-fixing
- FICCI, in a report in 2013, had said that the government stands to earn about ₹7,200 crore a year from taxes from only half the ₹3 lakh crore gaming industry in India.

How is gaming treated across states in India?

- The regulation of gaming in India is fragmented, with each state currently deciding the rules applicable in its jurisdiction.
- Sikkim has the Sikkim Online Gambling (Regulation) Act, 2008 that only looks at online gaming, and not at activities conducted in brick and mortar gaming houses. The Nagaland Prohibition of Gambling and Promotion and Regulation of Online Games of Skill, Act, 2015 only permits skill-based games, defined as all games where there is a preponderance of skill over chance.

What can India learn from other countries?

- Several countries have robust gaming legislation that regulates and have

contributed to increased government revenue.

- Spain has set a tax rate of 25% on gambling revenue and the U.K. enacted an updated gambling law in 2005 that provided for the creation of a Gambling Commission, which was tasked with crime prevention, the promotion of an open and transparent gaming and gambling industry, and the protection of vulnerable people from the ills and dangers of gambling.
- India can learn from international experiences to for better regulation of sport

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Should betting be legalised in India. Evaluate the merits and demerits of this proposal

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

Aadhaar and privacy

A nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court will hear the question whether privacy is a fundamental human right and is part of the basic structure of the Constitution.

Mains : GS 2 Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary , Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;

The Case

- A bunch of petitions contending that the Aadhaar scheme is a violation of the citizens' right to privacy is pending in the Supreme court.
- The petitioners have argued that right to privacy is part of Article 21, the right to life, and interspersed in Article 19, though not explicitly stated in the Constitution.
- Two judgments of the Supreme Court — pronounced by an eight-judge Bench and by a six-judge Bench — had dominated the judicial dialogue on privacy since Independence which had concluded that privacy was not a fundamental or 'guaranteed' right.
- Smaller Supreme Court Benches have, over the years, differed and held that privacy is indeed basic to our Constitution and a fundamental right,
- The nine-judge Bench seeks to bring an end to the divergent judicial pronouncements of the past regarding whether privacy is a fundamental right under the constitution.

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Privacy is a fundamental but wholly qualified right: Centre

The Centre told the Supreme Court that privacy was indeed a fundamental right, but a "wholly qualified" one.

Centre's submission on Right to Privacy :

- “Right to privacy is a fundamental right. But not every aspect of it [privacy] is a fundamental right. It depends on a case-to-case basis.”
- The government did not consider privacy to be a single, homogenous right but rather a “sub-species of the fundamental right to personal liberty and consists of diverse aspects. Not every aspect of privacy is a fundamental right.” Some aspects of privacy were expressly defined in the Constitution, while some were not.
- Citizens could not agitate against Aadhaar as a violation of their right to privacy. The state could subject privacy to reasonable restrictions in order to preserve the right to life of the masses.
- One cannot claim that their bodily integrity would be violated by a scheme which served to bring home basic human rights and social justice to millions of poor households across the country.
- Privacy was submissive to the fundamental right to life under Article 21.
- Aadhaar was a measure by the state to ensure the teeming millions of poor in the country were not reduced to lead an “animal existence.”

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Privacy built into Aadhaar Act, says UIDAI

UIDAI the nodal agency implementing Aadhaar Act has told the Supreme court that privacy and confidentiality are non-negotiable under the Aadhaar Act.

Context

- Centre's had submitted that citizens cannot claim informational privacy when the State asks for data for a legitimate purpose like Aadhaar.
- The claim by UIDAI was made when the court expressed its apprehension regarding centre's submission

Personal data collected during Aadhaar enrolment might make its way into the hands of private players, for whom such details would transform into “vital commercial information”.

Other details

- The Supreme Court bench observed that informational privacy was the most “vexed” portion of the ongoing debate as parts of personal data were already in the public domain.
- The Center has replied that informational privacy can never be a part of fundamental rights and there was no informational privacy against compelling state interests and public utility, for which the state can ask for fingerprints.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

How far right to privacy is guaranteed under our Constitution? Critically analyse as to how mandatory Aadhaar registration would impinge an individual's privacy ?

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

BharatNet

The Union Cabinet approved the second phase of the BharatNet project.

Mains : GS 2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Highlights

- The deadline for the delay-marred project had been pushed to March 201
- The project seeks to bring high speed broadband to all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats (GPs) through optical fibre.
- **Phase I** : The Centre was still working on completing the first phase of the project. It had been able to lay optical fibre in nearly one-lakh GPs, however, only about 22,000 GPs have been provided Internet connectivity due to equipment procurement issues.
- The second phase aims at covering the remaining 1.50 lakh GPS. “

Background

- The BharatNet project, earlier National Optical Fibre Network or NOFN, seeks to bring high-speed broadband to all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through optical fibre.
- It was approved by Cabinet in 2011 and deadline was fixed by end of 2013 then deferred to September 2015 by UPA Government.
- The project is being implemented by Bharat Broadband Network Limited, (BBNL), the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) created by Govt. of India for this purpose, with the actual execution being done by its partners viz. BSNL, PGCIL and Railtel for phase-1.
- BharatNet will support e-governance services, telemedicine, tele-education, financial services, e-commerce and e-entertainment and hence be benefitted to all the people in the remote areas.

Prelims Perspective

Model Questions

The Bharatnet programme by the government pertains to

- a. welfare of fishermen
- b. improvement of coastal infrastructure
- c. providing wifi at public places
- d. Connecting panchayats through optical fibre network

Mains Perspective

Model questions

- Infrastructure alone cannot provide connectivity. The need of the hour is digital literacy. Examine

Sources: The Hindu [PIB](#)

IIITs now Institutes of National Importance

The Lok Sabha passed a Bill to declare the Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIIT) established under the public-private partnership (PPP) route as Institutes of National Importance (INIs).

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Highlights of the bill

- It will grant statutory status to the fifteen Indian Institutes of Information Technology in Public Private Partnership and declare them as Institutions of National Importance;
- It will enable these institutions to grant degrees to their students in the academic courses conducted by them.
- There is no financial implication with regard to the proposed IIIT PPP Bill, 2017
- The grant of a formal degree in Information Technology, Engineering or Ph.D will enhance the prospects of the graduating students in the job market and will also enable the Institutes to attract enough students required to develop a strong research base in the country in the field of information technology.

Why the Indian Institutes of Information Technology (Public- Private Partnership) Bill, 2017?

The Scheme of Setting up of 20 new IIITs in Public Private Partnership (IIIT PPP) didn't have a provision which empowered the Institutes to grant degrees to its students.

Institute of National Importance (INI)

- Institute of National Importance (INI) is a status that may be conferred to a premier public higher education institution in India by an act of parliament, an institution which "serves as a pivotal player in developing highly skilled personnel within the specified region of the country/state".
- INIs receive special recognition and funding.

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

Indian Institute of Management Bill, 2017

The Lok Sabha passed the Indian Institute of Management Bill, 2017

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Highlights of the Bill

- It declares the top management institutions – Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) – as Institutions of National Importance.
- These institutes will now be able to grant degrees to students, as against post-graduate diplomas that are awarded currently.
- The Board of Governors will be the executive body of each IIM comprising 19 members; The Board will have the powers to appoint its own chairperson and the

director of the institution.

- A search committee will recommend the names for the post of Director, who will be eligible for variable pay, to be determined by the board.
- There is also a provision of a 'Coordination Forum' of IIMs as an advisory body.

Why the bill?

- Till now the appointments happened through Appointments Cabinet Committee (ACC) chaired by the Prime Minister.
- IIMs were not authorised to award degrees. The PG Diplomas awarded by these institutions were considered equivalent to MBAs awarded by the universities.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Should the premier institutes like IITs/IIMs be allowed to retain premier status, allowed more academic independence in designing courses and also decide mode/criteria of selection of students. Discuss in light of the growing challenges **[UPSC Mains 2014]**

Sources: [The Hindu BusinessLine](#) [Wikipedia](#)

Privatisation of select services in district hospitals

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

The proposal

The Health Ministry and the NITI Aayog have developed a framework to let private hospitals run select services within district hospitals, on a 30-year lease.

Under proposed PPP model, private players will get 30-year leases on space in district hospitals

Highlights

- Under this Public Private Partnership (PPP), care for only three non-communicable diseases — cardiac disease, pulmonary disease, and cancer care — will be provided.
- The policy document has come under sharp criticism for the Ministry's failure to consult with key stakeholders from civil society and academia.
- Private hospitals will bid for 30-year leases over portions of district hospital buildings to set up 50- or 100-bed hospitals in smaller towns across the country.
- Further, the State governments will give Viability Gap Funding (VGF), or one-time seed money, to private players to set up infrastructure within district hospitals.
- A major concern about the policy is that under 'principles' of the financial structure, the document states that "there will be no reserved beds or no quota (sic) of beds for free services" in these facilities.



Big push According to the vision document, the aim of the project is to enhance private sector engagement to address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the country

Salient features

- Under the PPP project, the State has the option to set up either a 50-bed or a 100-bed facility in district hospitals in tier 2-tier 3 cities
- All services in the NCD facility should be invited from a single private partner or a single consortium of private partners
- Private partner will invest in upgrading/ building, and equipping the facility; will be responsible for operational management and service delivery. Government may provide viability gap funding, if required

States have to

- Provide the required physical space within the hospital premises) and other infrastructure
- Provide viability gap funding, which may be used as the bidding parameter

for selecting the private partner

- Support in establishing referral linkages with screening programmes and NCD clinics and refer patients to the PPP facility
- Provide support facilities and hospital amenities
- Ensure smooth functioning, overall coordination, monitoring of the quality of services

Despite concerted efforts at the national and State levels in establishing the NCD service delivery network, the system continues to remain constrained with a set of systemic issues
- VISION DOCUMENT

Image : The Hindu

Mains Perspective

Model questions [UPSC Mains 2015]

Public health system has limitation in providing universal health coverage. Do you think that private sector can help in bridging the gap? What other viable alternatives do you suggest?

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

50% of HIV-infected get treatment now: UNAIDS

India's pharma sector has a major role in helping to meet global target for access to medicines, says report

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

- The latest UNAIDS report, reveals that more than half of all People Living with HIV (PLHIV) now have access to HIV treatment.
- Further, globally AIDS-related deaths have almost halved since 2005.
- Majority of the cases — nearly 95 per cent of the cases in 2016 — were concentrated in just 10 countries, India being one of them.
- India is the country where most new HIV infections are occurring in the Asia-Pacific region. While India has made big progress with new infections dropping significantly, the emergence of HIV in some locations that were earlier considered 'not high-burden' areas is a cause for concern.
- Access to medicines remains a major barrier and India plays a special role. Insufficient availability and poor affordability of essential medicines in low- and middle-income countries remain major barriers.

Persistent problem

A majority of the new HIV/AIDS cases –nearly 95% of them in 2016- were concentrated in 10 countries alone, India being one of them, according to a UNAIDS study

People infected by HIV

36.7 million

19.5 million people are on antiretroviral therapy

1.8 million

new HIV infections

1 million

deaths from AIDS-related illnesses

I N D I A

2.1 million people living with HIV

80,000 new infections annually

PEOPLE INJECTING DRUG

41% of HIV+ people know their status

In **83%** of people, treatment is suppressed virally



The toll so far (since 1980s):
76.1 million people have become infected with HIV since the start of the epidemic. 35 million infected people have died

52% of people living with HIV, who know their status, are on treatment

Image : The Hindu

The report, *Ending AIDS: Progress towards the 90–90–90 target*, is the annual scorecard for progress. The idea behind the 90-90-90 target is to diagnose 90% of people who are HIV positive; get 90% of the diagnosed HIV+ people on antiretroviral treatment, and 90% of those on antiretroviral should be virally suppressed.

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)

The Union Minister for will formally launch the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)

Mains : GS 2 Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)

- PMVVY is a Pension Scheme announced by the Government of India exclusively for the senior citizens available from 4th May, 2017 to 3rd May, 2018.
- The Scheme can be purchased offline as well as online through Life Insurance Corporation of India

Major benefits

- Scheme provides an assured return of 8% p.a. payable monthly (equivalent to 8.30% p.a. effective) for 10 years.
- Pension is payable at the end of each period, during the policy term of 10 years, as per the frequency chosen by the pensioner
- The scheme is exempted from Service Tax/ GST.
- On survival of the pensioner to the end of the policy term of 10 years, Purchase

price along with final pension instalment shall be payable.

- Loan upto 75% of Purchase Price shall be allowed after 3 policy years
- The scheme also allows for premature exit for the treatment of any critical/terminal illness of self or spouse. On such premature exit, 98% of the Purchase Price shall be refunded.
- On death of the pensioner during the policy term of 10 years, the Purchase Price shall be paid to the beneficiary.
- The ceiling of maximum pension is for a family as a whole, the family will comprise of pensioner, his/her spouse and dependants.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is exclusively for the senior citizens
2. The scheme is exempted from Service Tax/ GST.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [pib](#)

Untrained teachers get 2 years to qualify - Right to education Act

The Lok Sabha passed a Bill that offers untrained teachers teaching in schools time till March 31, 2019, to acquire B.El.Ed (Bachelor of Elementary Education) or D. El. Ed. (Diploma in Elementary Education) qualifications to hold their jobs as teachers.

Mains : GS 3 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Rationale for the Bill

- Many teachers who were hired as the number of schools increased did not have requisite degrees, some having studied only till school.
- Though time was provided for these teachers to train themselves still a large number of school teachers did not have the requisite degrees.
- As a last chance, another two years are being given to them.
- The qualifications are deemed necessary to ensure that teachers are well-qualified to ensure quality of education.

What does the amendment do?

- This will ensure that all teachers, in position as on 31st March, 2015, acquire the minimum qualifications prescribed by the academic authority to extend the period for such training for four years up to 31st March, 2019.

- This will enable the in-service untrained elementary teachers to complete their training and ensure that all teachers at the elementary level in the country have a certain minimum standard of qualifications.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009,

- The 86th Constitution Amendment Act, 2002 requires the State to provide free and compulsory elementary education to all children. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2008 seeks to give effect to this Amendment.
- All children between the ages of six and 14 years shall have the right to free and compulsory elementary education in a neighbourhood school.
- No child shall be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board examination until the completion of elementary education. Schools may not screen applicants during admission or charge capitation fees. A child who completes elementary education shall be awarded a certificate.
- Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas, Sainik Schools, and unaided schools shall admit at least 25% of students from disadvantaged and economically weaker groups.
- A person who wants to file a grievance claim shall submit a written complaint to the local authority. Appeals shall be decided by either the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights or the specified authority.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Acts, schemes and policies related to social sectors - Education and health- are important for examination. The number of questions varies but one can always expect 1-2 questions from this section. Visit our [IAS Preparation page](#) to see previous year questions.

Sources: [The Hindu](#) pib [PRS](#)

Food quality in Railways

A Comptroller and Auditor General report tabled in Parliament found severe deficiencies in the catering services of the Indian Railways,

Mains :GS 2 Important aspects of governance, citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

Highlights

- The reports point out that several stations and trains serves food items “unfit for human consumption”, unpurified tap water being used for food preparation, and food being left unprotected from insects and rats.



Catering a mess

The CAG has found serious flaws in the quality of catering services being offered on board trains

HYGIENE ISSUES

- Purified water unavailable in 21 stations in 11 zones
- Unpurified tap water was used in preparation of coffee, tea and soups in 22 trains
- Waste-bins of prescribed specification were not available on 28 stations

- Waste bins were not covered, not emptied regularly and not washed, in 23 stations in 10 railway zones
- Hand gloves and caps were not used by catering personnel in 32 stations
- Food material were kept on the floor and near the toilets on three trains

UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES

Bills were not given for food items served on the selected 80 trains. Price discrepancy was found too

FOOD ITEMS	PRESCRIBED WEIGHT	ACTUAL WEIGHT
Cottage cheese (Paneer-1 piece)	5gm	3 gm
Poori (Bread)	175 gm	130 gm
Ice-cream	100 ml	90 ml
Paratha (Bread)	100 gm	95 gm
Dal	100 gm	90 gm

** Weights of vegetable sandwich were checked and a shortage of 25 gm was found*

Image : The Hindu

- Articles unsuitable for human consumption, contaminated foodstuff, recycled foodstuff, shelf life expired packaged and bottled items, unauthorised brands of water bottles, etc, were offered for sale on stations.
- Cleanliness and hygiene standards were not being maintained in the catering units at stations and on trains.
- Unfair trade practices: Bills were not provided for the food items served on trains; the food served was less than the prescribed quantity; unapproved packaged drinking water was sold
- The weights and prices of the items sold at railway stations were different from the open market,
- Though a complaint redressal system has been put in place, there is no reduction in the number of complaints over the years. It was also seen that the major share of complaints pertained to overcharging and quality issues.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Quality has taken a backseat when it comes to delivery of public services. Is it due to the failure of the institution or failure of the personnel? Explain

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Bengaluru Declaration calls for SC/ST quota in judiciary

The Bengaluru Declaration adopted by the Karnataka government sponsored Dr. B.R. Ambedkar International Conference 2017, recommended a slew of affirmative action measures in private sector, judiciary, educational institutions, government contracts and promotions for Dalits.

Mains : **GS 2** Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations.

Highlights of the declaration

- It proposed several measures for the larger AHINDA (Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes and Dalits) community,
- It called for reservation of seats in legislature for other backward classes and setting up of a farmers' income commission.
- It called for upholding Rule of Law through police reforms and state action to prevent lynchings.
- It called for a law against gender and caste discrimination at educational institutions.
- It further recommended for SC/ST reservation in appointment of judges, promotions, government contracts up to ₹1 crore, in private higher educational institutions and private sector.
- It proposes establishment of an Equal Opportunities Commission, to oversee affirmative action.
- Much focus is also given on ensuring land ownership for SC/STs, including a proposal to establish SC/ST land bank, where government buys these lands at market prices and re-allots to the same community, to ensure non-dilution of ownership.
- It recommends allocation of 20% of the land in private housing layouts for urban poor.
- The declaration calls for a wider social security net.
- It recommended a "living wage" and comprehensive social security scheme for all labourers working in the unorganised sector and enhanced pensions of ₹1,500 per month.

Other details

- The eight-page declaration has 40 recommendations under six broad categories – safeguarding the people, strengthening democratic institutions, deepening social justice, enhancing human development, ensuring responsive governance, and promoting social security.
- The conference on the theme "Quest for Equity" was attended by scholars from across the country and abroad.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Bengaluru declaration recently in news is related to

- a. welfare of the disabled
- b. Cyber security preparedness
- c. Rising use of antibiotics
- d. welfare of dalits

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

The Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Bill, 2017

Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Bill, 2017, was passed unanimously by the upper house. The bill was earlier passed by the Lok Sabha

Mains : GS 2 Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International relations.

Objective of the Bill

- The Bill aims to establish a legal framework for consolidation of related laws to replace the age old archaic laws with modern Indian legislation
- It also confer admiralty jurisdiction on all High Courts of the coastal states of the country..
- The bill repeals five old outdated admiralty acts

Admiralty means the jurisdiction of courts of law over cases concerning ships or the sea and other navigable waters.

Highlights of the bill

- The Bill provides for prioritization of maritime claims and maritime liens while providing protection to various stakeholders.
- High Courts of all the coastal states shall exercise admiralty jurisdiction over maritime claims which include several aspects not limited to goods imported and chattel as earlier, but also other claims such as payment of wages of seamen, loss of life, salvages, mortgage, loss or damage, services and repairs, insurance, ownership and lien, threat of damage to environment etc.
- The Bill accords highest priority to payment of wages of the seafarers.
- The Bill also provides for protection against wrongful and unjustified arrest and has provision for transfer of cases from one High Court to other High Court.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to the Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Bill, 2017 which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Admiralty jurisdiction is exclusively vested with the Supreme Court.
2. It aims to replace archaic laws related to admiralty

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains perspective

Model questions

Increasing number of cases pertaining to maritime areas requires effective mechanisms to deal with. Admiralty Bill is one in such direction. Discuss

Sources: pib [PRS](#)

DNA Based Technology (Use and Regulation) Bill, 2017

The Law Commission has drafted a Bill on the use and regulation of human DNA profiling. The bill aids DNA data collection for investigation and research

Mains : GS 2 Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Why DNA profiling? - Significance

- DNA profiling is used for disaster victim identification, investigation of crimes, identification of missing persons and human remains and for medical research purposes.

Observations made by Law commission regarding DNA profiling

1. Privacy concerns and the ethics involved in this scientific collection of data are very serious.
2. The procedure for DNA profiling, if given statutory recognition, should be as per constitutional provisions.

Highlights of the bill

- The Bill provides for the setting up of a statutory DNA Profiling Board to spell out procedures and standards to establish DNA laboratories.
- It restricts DNA profiling to the specific purpose of identification of a person and not for extracting other information.
- It provides for the creation of DNA data banks, at national and regional levels, which would be responsible for storing DNA profiles received from the accredited laboratories.
- DNA experts would be notified as government scientific experts.
- Sharing of DNA profiles with various stakeholders would only be for the purpose of this Act, including identification of missing persons, disaster victims, suspects.
- Violation of the act would lead to imprisonment, and fines
- It gives the right to an under trial to request for another DNA test in case of doubts that his earlier samples may have been contaminated.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Examine the various facets of privacy when it comes to collection of citizens data. Will it impinge upon citizen's right to privacy?

Sources: [The Hindu](#)


Policy boosts care for blood disorders

People living with Thalassaemia, sickle cell anaemia and other variant haemoglobins can now look forward to better screening and treatment, based on the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry's new policy.

Mains : GS 2- Issues relating to development and management of Social

Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

- The Ministry recently released a policy on the Prevention and Control of haemoglobinopathies in India.
- The policy is supported by the National Health Mission, Blood Cell and the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram.
- Thalassaemia and sickle cell anaemia are the most frequently encountered 'rare blood disorders' in the country and impose a significant economic burden on families.
- The guidelines provide for screening of pregnant women during antenatal check-up, pre-marital counselling at college level and one-time screening for variant anaemia in children.
- The policy aims at creating treatment protocol benchmarks, to improve the quality of life of patients.
- It is also a guide on prevention and control, which includes antenatal and prenatal testing to reduce the incidence of live haemoglobin disorder births (currently pegged at 10,000-15,000 live births a year).
- The guidelines include the creation of a national registry to plan future patient services. The registry will also collect useful data, such as the location of patients to identify areas of high concentration, ethnicity or other characteristics, age distribution, records of deaths and their cause.
- Testing cannot be made compulsory and people should opt for it. A concerted effort by people as well as government will help .



The killer blood cells

A look at the two haemoglobin disorders that can turn fatal if not managed properly

A new policy has been announced for the prevention and management of the blood disorders

The policy mandates that antenatal and prenatal screening for women should be made available in all government hospitals to check for carrier status

THALASSAEMIA

the abnormal production of haemoglobin

- The abnormality leads to improper oxygen transport and deformation of RBC
- It has wide-ranging effects like iron overload and bone deformities. It can even cause heart diseases
- The disease has no cure and patients require regular blood transfusions to prolong life

SICKLE CELL DISEASE

disorder that requires lifelong management

- The disease gets its name because red blood cells of the patient look like a sickle
- It is caused by a problem in the haemoglobin-beta gene found in chromosome 11
- If both the parents carry the defective gene, their child has a 1 in 4 chance of inheriting it

Testing cannot be made compulsory and people should voluntarily opt for it. A concerted effort by people as well as the government will help

— CECIL REUBEN ROSS, St. John's Medical College Hospital, Bengaluru

THALASSAEMIA AND INDIA

1,00,000 thalassaemia majors of which 50% will not survive beyond the age of 25

₹1 lakh is the average amount a patient spends per year for treatment

₹15,000 crore is the amount India spends for thalassaemia care every year

35-40 million carriers across the country

95%

of treatment expenses are borne by the patients

Issues with the new policy

- The policy makes no reference to carrier testing for relatives of patients. Persons

with the genetic disorder unknowingly pass it on to their children, as preventive checks are not the norm in India.

- In Pakistan, a law making carrier testing compulsory for relatives of Thalassaemia patients was passed in February. A similar system is in place in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia.

Present Condition

Free treatment is given to haemoglobinopathies in States such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha and Karnataka.

Prelims perspective

Questions on Thalassaemia or Sickle Cell Disease can be asked in Preliminary Examination.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Any intervention in the public health system will be successful only if there is a concerted effort by government as well as public. Discuss.

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Medical termination of Pregnancy - What needs to be changed?

An amendment to Medical termination of pregnancy act is pending in Parliament. Several cases have come to the Supreme court asking it grant permission to abort over 20 week old foetus. Parliament needs to take up the long-pending bill on updating provisions for abortion so that decision regarding health of expectant mother and foetus is taken up by medical boards rather than Supreme Court.

The context

- The Supreme Court has rejected the plea of a 10 year old rape victim to abort her 32 week old foetus after a medical panel informed the Court that an abortion will endanger both the girl foetus.
- Court's orders regarding abortion of over 20 week old foetus have been on a case to case basis. It relies on the report of Medical experts for making decisions regarding granting permission for abortion.

What does the law says? - Medical termination of Pregnancy Act

- The Medical termination of Pregnancy acts mandates that abortion is not permitted beyond 20 weeks of pregnancy.
- An exception to the law is made if a registered medical practitioner certifies to a court that the continued pregnancy is life-threatening for the mother or the baby.
- Medical practitioners are expected to evaluate whether continuing with the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the mother or the foetus.

The issues

1. Women are forced to undertake the cumbersome process of approaching different courts, for permission to medically terminate their pregnancies which

are over 20 weeks.

2. As of now, women who have crossed the 20-week limit need a judicial order to even get medically examined on their plea for abortion.
3. The cases which have come to the Supreme Court range from child rape victims to destitute women to women with substantial foetus abnormalities.
4. The 20-week cap for abortion is somewhat arbitrary as foetal impairments often get detected at the ultrasound done between 18 to 22 weeks, when the foetus is said to have “substantially developed”.
5. WHO has noted that restricting legal restrictions on abortion do not result in fewer abortions nor in significant increases in birth rates.
6. Restricting legal access to abortion does not decrease the need for abortion, but it is likely to increase the number of women seeking illegal and unsafe abortions.
7. Legal restrictions on abortion may lead women to seek services in other countries/states.
8. Majority of expectant mothers in India seek advice from Midwives and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and ultrasounds are only done when something unusual is suspected.
9. Though the government launched Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan under which doctors at private and government facilities are required to provide free antenatal care on the ninth of every month free ultrasound scanning are not offered mostly

The draft Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill of 2014

- An amended Bill of the 1971 law which extends the bar from 20 to 24 weeks has been in Pending in the parliament for the past three years.
- The Bill provides that the length of pregnancy shall not apply in a decision to abort a foetus diagnosed abnormalities.
- It allows a woman to take an independent decision in consultation with a registered health-care provider.
- Under the draft bill a “registered health care provider”, which includes recognised practitioners of Ayurveda, Unani and homoeopathy could also perform abortions.

The way forward

- A permanent medical board be set up at State-level to examine the cases till the Bill is pending for amendment of the MTP act can lessen the burden on Supreme court.
- Laws and policies that facilitate access to safe abortion it will result in a shift from previously clandestine, unsafe procedures to legal and safe ones.
- Laws and policies on abortion should protect women’s health and their human rights.
- Regulatory, policy and programmatic barriers that hinder access to and timely provision of safe abortion care should be removed.

- Given the advancements in medical science, a lot of abnormalities can be determined by an ultrasound midway through a pregnancy.
- The long-pending amendment to the Medical termination of Pregnancy Bill needs to get passed.

Remarks

Laying down objective standards to be followed by health-care providers is the way ahead as relying on court-ordered termination of pregnancies, is not the desired route for the delivery of justice in abortion cases.

UPSC Corner

Prelims : Indian Polity and Governance - Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains : GS 2 mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Prelims Perspective

Model question

With regard to medical termination of Pregnancy Act 1971 which of the following statements is/are correct?1\

1. The act mandates that abortion is not permitted beyond 24 weeks of pregnancy.
2. The Amendment Bill to the act provides that the length of pregnancy shall not apply in a decision to abort a foetus diagnosed abnormalities.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Unsafe abortion is responsible for 8% of all maternal deaths in India, which makes it the third biggest cause of women dying of childbirth-related causes in the country. Strong laws and medical services that give women the right over their bodies can prevent hundreds of thousands of these deaths. Comment

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

UDAY covers 97% of discom debt: Centre - Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY)

The government announced that about 97% of the total outstanding debt of all state power distribution companies (discoms) has been covered under the Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY).

Mains : GS 2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

GS 3 Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Highlights

- So far, 86% of the restructurable debt has been revamped under the scheme.
- The 26 states and 1 UT which have joined the UDAY scheme account for total outstanding debt of ₹3.82 lakh crore.

Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY)

Objective of the scheme

- The UDAY scheme is to provide for the financial turnaround of power distribution companies and to find a sustainable permanent solution to the problems faced by the distribution companies.
- DISCOMs and participating states would enter into a tripartite agreement with the Government of India to achieve operational and financial targets as per the agreed trajectory.

Highlights

- States shall take over 75 per cent of discom debt outstanding as of September 2015.
- Reduction of Aggregate Technical & Commercial (AT&C) losses to 15 per cent by 2018-19.
- Reduction in difference between average cost of supply and average revenue realized (ARR) by 2018-19.
- Increased supply of domestic coal to substitute for imported coal.
- States shall take over future losses of discoms in a phased manner.
- Banks/FIs not to advance short term debt to discoms for financing losses.
- Under the UDAY scheme, state governments are to take over 75 per cent of their respective discoms' debt, and would issue bonds to pay the debt back. The remaining 25 per cent would be financed by bonds issued by the discoms themselves, guaranteed by the state government.

Prelims Perspective

Model Questions [UPSC prelims 2016]

Which one of the following is a purpose of 'UDAY', a scheme of the Government?

- (a) Providing technical and financial assistance to start-up entrepreneurs in the field of renewable sources of energy
- (b) Providing electricity to every household in the country by 2018
- (c) Replacing the coal-based power plants with natural gas, nuclear, solar, wind and tidal power plants over a period of time
- (d) Providing for financial turnaround and revival of power distribution companies

Answer: D

Sources: [The Hindu](#) Economic survey 2015-2016

MERIT app and e-Bidding portal

The Centre launched the 'MERIT app (Merit Order Despatch of Electricity for Rejuvenation of Income and Transparency)' and the e-bidding portal .

Prelims :Indian Polity and Governance - Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

e bidding portal

The portal is for providing e-Bidding solution to States to select Independent Power Producers (IPPs) for procurement of power by transferring their domestic coal under the scheme of flexibility in utilization of domestic coal.

'MERIT' (Merit Order Despatch of Electricity for Rejuvenation of Income and Transparency).

- MERIT portal has been developed by Ministry of Power in association with POSOCO and Central Electricity Authority.
- The MERIT Web portal displays extensive array of information regarding the merit order of Electricity procured by State(s) such as daily state-wise marginal variable costs of all generators, daily source-wise power purchases of respective states/UTs with source-wise fixed and variable costs, energy volumes and purchase prices.
- The web-portal also give information regarding reasons for deviation from merit order such as must run conditions, transmission constraints etc.
- Information available in the Portal shall help State Discoms to optimize their power procurement in more efficient way leading to lower cost of power to consumers.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

MERIT web portal sometimes seen in news is related to

- a. education
- b. health
- c. power sector
- d. None of the above

Sources: [pib](#) [pib](#)

'A book for every hand'

'Har haath ek kitaab' ('one book for every hand') is the new scheme set in motion by the National Book Trust. Under the scheme, people can make donations to children in the form of books with a simple method. They can transfer money to online shopping site Snapdeal with which the Trust, an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD), has formally tied up, and the money will then be transferred to NBT.

NGOs that are in touch with local communities choose the books to be distributed to children from within NBT's catalogue of children's books.

Cabinet approves revision of Indian Community Welfare Fund guidelines

The Union Cabinet approved revision of the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) guidelines. ICWF, set up in 2009, is aimed at assisting Overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency in the most deserving cases on a means tested basis. Apart from assisting Indian nationals in distress abroad, ICWF has been a critical support in emergency evacuation of Indian nationals in conflict zones in Libya, Iraq, Yemen, South Sudan and other challenging situations like assistance extended to undocumented Indian workers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the Nitaqat drive in 2013 and the ongoing Amnesty drive in 2017.

Sexual Harassment electronic-Box (SHe-Box)

Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi launched an online complaint management system titled Sexual Harassment electronic-Box (SHe-Box) for registering complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace. The complaint management system has been developed to ensure the effective implementation of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (the SH Act), 2013. This portal is an initiative to provide a platform to women working or visiting any office of Central Government to file complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace under the SH Act. Those who had already filed a written complaint with the concerned Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) constituted under the SH Act are also eligible to file their complaint through this portal.

Jute-ICARE -- An Initiative of The Government to Double the income of Jute Farmers

It is an initiative launched by government to double Jute farmers Income . Improved Cultivation and Advanced Retting Exercise for Jute (Jute – ICARE) was launched in 2015 to popularize/introduce some of the better agronomic practices and recently developed microbial-assisted retting among farmers intensively in a few blocks in West Bengal and Assam on pilot basis. In view of the encouraging results of the Jute ICare pilot project, decision for extending the reach of Jute I-Care programme has been taken.

GS 2 International Relations

India, Israel to set up \$40 mn research fund

India and Israel announced a strategic partnership between the two countries and signed seven agreements in the fields of water, agriculture, space, including a \$40

million joint fund for research and development in innovation.

Mains : GS 2 International relations.

India Israel relations recent developments

- The historic first-ever visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Israel solidified the enduring friendship between their peoples and raised the bilateral relationship to that of a strategic partnership
- India and Israel shared concerns on the issue of terror.
- India and Israel agreed to increase air linkages between the two countries

Deals and discussions

On Day Two of Narendra Modi's Israel visit, the two countries announced a strategic partnership and signed seven agreements in the fields of water, agriculture and space. The agreements include a \$40-million joint fund for research and development in innovation.

PACTS SIGNED

- An agreement in the field of water deals with increasing awareness of the need for conservation; the Israeli Water Ministry and the U.P. Jal Nigam Board signed an MoU
- Three MoUs on space cooperation included one for electric propulsion for small satellites, and for the development of an optical link, as well as cooperation on atomic clocks
- The fund of Research and Development, called the "I4F", or the India Israel Industrial Innovation Fund, will see both governments contribute \$20 million to help research scholars manufacture their inventions easily



 India and Israel live in complex geographies. We are aware of strategic threats to regional peace and stability. PM Netanyahu and I agreed to do much more together to protect our strategic interests and also cooperate to combat growing radicalisation and terrorism, including in cyberspace

— NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER

Image : The Hindu

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

Asia-Africa corridor

The guiding principles of the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), initiated by India with the backing of Japan, will be to ensure sustainability through respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as boosting regional economic connectivity through the use of responsible debt financing practices

Mains : GS 2 Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India

and/or affecting India's interests

What is Asia-Africa corridor?

- The AAGC is an attempt to create a “free and open Indo-Pacific region” by rediscovering ancient sea-routes and creating new sea corridors that will link the African continent with India and countries in South-Asia and South-East Asia.
- The project stakeholders hope the sea corridors will be “low-cost” and have “less carbon footprint” when compared to a land corridor.
- Apart from developing sea corridors , the AAGC also proposes to build robust institutional, industrial and transport infrastructure in growth poles among countries in Asia and Africa.
- The idea is to enable economies in Asia and Africa to further integrate and collectively emerge as a globally competitive economic bloc.
- **Role of India and Japan :** Japan's contribution to the project will be its state-of-the-art technology and ability to build quality infrastructure, while India will bring in its expertise of working in Africa.

Significance : The AAGC is seen as India and Japan's counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative that plans to link Asia, Europe and later even Africa by spending trillions of dollars in building infrastructure.

Where did the idea of AAGC originate?

- The proposal for an AAGC was first mentioned in the joint declaration issued by Prime ministers Modi and Shinzo Abe in November 2016.

What is the AAGC vision document? Which institutions were behind its creation?

- The AAGC vision document was unveiled by the Indian and Japanese government officials at the African Development Bank (AfDB) annual general meeting held at Gandhinagar
- It is just a broad framework for the creation of the project.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to the Asia-Africa corridor which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The project was initiated by South Africa and India is a partner to it
2. It is seen as a counter to China's Belt and Road initiative

Select the correct answer using the code below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions [UPSC Mains 2015]

Increasing interest of India in Africa has its pros and cons. Critically Examine.

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Indian Express](#)

G20 summit

The 12th G20 Summit began in Hamburg Germany amidst violent protests.

Mains : GS 2 Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

- While counter—terrorism and economic reforms will dominate the discussions, the Summit will also discuss issues like free and open trade, climate change, migration, sustainable development and global stability.
- The theme of the summit is ‘Shaping an Inter-connected World’
- The meet is taking place at a time when differences have emerged among several leaders expected to be present including on issues like climate change and open trade.
- At least 30 protests are expected to be held here ahead of the Summit that may attract thousands of people, including from anti—capitalist groups.

G20

- The G20 (or G-20 or Group of Twenty) is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies.
- It was founded in 1999 with the aim of studying, reviewing, and promoting high-level discussion of policy issues pertaining to the promotion of international financial stability.
- Purpose : Bring together systemically important industrialized and developing economies to discuss key issues in the global economy.
- Collectively, the G20 economies account for around 85% of the gross world product (GWP), 80% of world trade (or, if excluding EU intra-trade, 75%), and two-thirds of the world population.

Members

The members include 19 individual countries and along with the European Union (EU).

Meetings

The heads of the G20 nations met semi-annually at G20 summits between 2009 and 2010. Since the November 2011 Cannes summit, all G20 summits have been held annually.

Organisation

- The G20 operates without a permanent secretariat or staff.
- The group's chair rotates annually among the members and is selected from a different regional grouping of countries.
- **Troika:** The chair is part of a revolving three-member management group of past, present and future chairs, referred to as the "Troika". The incumbent chair establishes a temporary secretariat for the duration of its term, which coordinates

the group's work and organizes its meetings.

Prelims Perspective

Consider the following statements

1. The Headquarters of G20 is located at Germany
2. All ASEAN members are members of G20 group

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions

- Cooperation, Conflict and competition coexist between G20 nations. Explain the futility of having an organisation with such members.

Sources: [The Hindu BusinessLine](#) [Wikipedia](#)

Malabar exercise

The Malabar Exercise 2017 among the naval forces of India, Japan and the United States began.

Mains : GS 2 Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Significance

- The exercise comes amid increasing rhetoric between India and China over the border standoff
- Senior officers of the three navies denied that the exercise was aimed at China.
- The exercise is a demonstration of the joint commitment of all three nations to address common maritime challenges across the spectrum of operations and will go a long way in enhancing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, for the benefit of the global maritime community.

About Malabar exercise

- This is the 21st edition of such an exercise
- The MALABAR series of exercises was initiated in 1992 between the Indian and US Navies
- It is conducted in the Bay of Bengal from 10 to 17 July 2017.
- The primary aim of this exercise is to increase interoperability amongst the three navies as well as develop common understanding and procedures for maritime security operations.




PARTICIPANTS	
<p>Matching skills</p> <p>Malabar Exercise began in 1992 as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the U.S. In 2015, it was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan. The 21st edition of Malabar naval exercises is currently under way off Chennai</p>	<p> Indian Navy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aircraft carrier <i>INS Vikramaditya</i> • Guided missile destroyer <i>Ranvir</i> • Indigenous stealth frigates <i>Shivalik</i> and <i>Sahyadri</i> • Anti-submarine corvette <i>Kamorta</i> • Missile corvettes <i>Kora</i> and <i>Kirpan</i> • Fleet tanker <i>Jyoti</i> • Sindhughosh class <i>Sindhudhvaj</i> • One long-range P-8I patrol aircraft
<p> U.S. Navy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aircraft carrier <i>USS Nimitz</i> (CVN 68) with embarked Carrier Air Wing 11 • Guided-missile cruiser <i>USS Princeton</i> • Guided-missile destroyers <i>USS Howard</i>, <i>USS Shoup</i>, <i>USS Kidd</i> and <i>USS Pinckney</i> • One P-8A Poseidon aircraft • One Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine <i>USS Jacksonville</i> 	<p> Japanese SDF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helicopter carrier <i>JS Izumo</i> (DDH 183) and missile destroyer <i>JS Sazanami</i>

Image : The Hindu

Prelims perspective

With regard to Malabar exercise which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The first edition of the exercise was in 1992 between India, Japan and USA
2. Australia joined the exercise in 2017

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions

The number of bilateral exercises conducted by India has gone up in the recent past. Examine the reasons behind this increase and its implications on International relations.

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [pib](#)

Joint Interpretative Notes (JIN) Cabinet nod for clarity on investment pact with Bangladesh

The Union Cabinet approved the Joint Interpretative Notes (JIN) on the Agreement between India and Bangladesh for to bring clarity to the interpretation of the existing Bilateral Trade and Promotion Agreement (BIPA).

Mains : GS 2 India and its neighborhood- relations.

What is Joint interpretative Notes?

- The JIN would impart clarity to the interpretation of the existing Agreement between India and Bangladesh for the Promotion and Protection of Investments.
- The JIN includes interpretative notes to be jointly adopted for many clauses, including, the definition of investor, definition of investment, exclusion of taxation measures, Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET), National Treatment (NT) and Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment, expropriation, essential security interests and Settlement of Disputes between an Investor-and a Contracting Party.
- With increasing Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) disputes, issuance of such statements is likely to have strong persuasive value before tribunals
- Joint Interpretative Statements, in general, play an important supplementary role in strengthening the investment treaty regime.

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu BusinessLine](#)

E-Visa - e-visa facility for Uganda

India has added Uganda to the list of countries to which it extends the electronic visa (or e-visa) facility.

Mains : GS 2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

International Relations

The news

- At present, India offers e-visa facility to only 18 of the 54 African nations.
- Following adverse reports from intelligence agencies, Uganda had been on the list of 36 countries, which were not covered under the scheme.
- Uganda has been added to list of countries whose citizens can avail e-visa as there is a healthy trade and business relationship with the African nation.

Why evisa was granted to Uganda?

- India is currently in stiff competition with China for the Ugandan import market. The East Africa nation is also home to a 30,000-strong Indian community, mostly Gujaratis.

Electronic Visa

How e-Tourist Visa Work

- The e-Tourist Visa enables the prospective visitor to apply for an Indian Visa

from his/her home country online without visiting the Indian Mission and also pay the visa fee online.

- Once approved, the applicant receives an email authorizing him/her to travel to India and he/she can travel with a print out of this authorisation.
- On arrival, the visitor has to present the authorisation to the immigration authorities who would then stamp the entry into the country.

Eligibility

- This facility is available to Foreigners whose sole objective of visiting India is recreation, sight-seeing, short duration medical treatment, casual business visit, etc. and not valid for any other purpose/activities.
- Applicants of the eligible countries/territories may apply online minimum 4 days in advance of the date of arrival with a window of 120 days. Example: If you are applying on 1st Sept then applicant can select arrival date from 5th Sept to 2nd Jan
- It will be valid for 60 days stay in India from the date of arrival in India. It can be availed only once in a calendar year.
- Not available to Diplomatic/Official Passport Holders.
- Not available to individuals endorsed on Parent's/Spouse's Passport i.e. each individual should have a separate passport.
- Not available to International Travel Document Holders.
- At present, India offers the e-visa facility to 162 countries.
- Recently, the government increased the window for application under the e-visa system from 30 to 120 days.
- Once applied for, the e-visa is granted within 72 hours..

Benefits : The facility will encourage people to travel with short-term planning, take via routes while travelling to other countries and bring family members while on business visits

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following statements about electronic visa is/ are correct

1. Foreigners entering India can apply for e-Visa at major airports in the country
2. It is available to diplomatic and official passport holders
3. For availing this visa each individual should have a separate passport.

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a) 1 only
- b) All the above
- c) 3 only
- d) 1 and 2 only

Mains Perspective

Essay

- Tourism : Can this be the next big thing for India [*UPSC Mains 2014*]

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [pib](#) [e-touristvisa](#)

EU, India set up fund for investments - Investment Facilitation Mechanism (IFM)

European Union (EU) and India announced the establishment of an Investment Facilitation Mechanism (IFM) for EU investments in India.

Mains : GS 2 International Relations

What is the new Investment Facilitation mechanism about?

- It aims to promote and facilitate EU investment in India
- It will allow for a close coordination between the European Union and the Government of India
- The IFM has been established with the key objectives of paving the way for identifying and solving problems faced by EU companies and investors with regard to their operations in India.

Other details

- The IFM will cover new investors as well as those already established in India.
- The IFM builds on the Joint Statement of the 13th EU-India Summit held in Brussels
- As part of the IFM, the EU Delegation to India and the DIPP will hold regular high level meetings to assess and facilitate "ease of doing business" for EU investors in India.
- Invest India, the Indian government's official Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency, will also be part of the IFM. It will create a single-window entry point for EU companies that need assistance for their investments at the central or state level.

Significance

- The EU is the largest foreign investor in India and this initiative helps ensuring a more robust, effective and predictable business environment for the EU investors.
- Trade and Investment are key elements of the EU-India Strategic Partnership launched in 2004.
- EU is one of the biggest provider of foreign investment in India and there are currently more than 6,000 EU companies present in India, providing direct and indirect employment to over 6 million people.

Prelims Perspective

Similar question [*UPSC Prelims 2017*]

Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)' is sometimes seen in the news in the context of negotiations held between India and

(a) European Union

(b) Gulf Cooperation Council

(c) Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

(d) Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Answer: A

Mains Perspective

Model questions

With US policies remaining uncertain it is important for India as well as European nations to find new partners in the international arena to cooperate on various issues.

Discuss

Sources: [The Hindu pib](#)

Asia Pacific Group on Money laundering

The Asia Pacific Group on Money laundering will hold their meeting in Colombo.

Mains : GS 2 Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

GS 3 Money-laundering and its prevention

Highlights

- Policy frameworks on checking terror financing will be one of the issues to be taken at the meet,
- Representatives of 41 countries, including India, are expected to participate in the meeting
- At the meeting, the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) initiatives on curbing money laundering and terror funding in different parts of the world will also be discussed.
- The crucial meeting, which is held in the backdrop of a spurt in terrorist activities, would also be attended by representatives of the Philippines, where security forces are currently engaged in a fierce battle with Islamic State-linked militants.

About Asia Pacific Group on Money laundering

- It is an autonomous and collaborative international organisation founded in 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand
- It consists of 41 members and a number of international and regional observers.
- The Secretariat is hosted by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) on behalf of the Australian government and its offices are located in Sydney, Australia.
- APG members and observers are committed to the effective implementation and enforcement of internationally accepted standards against money laundering and the financing of terrorism, in particular the Forty Recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF).

The APG has five primary functions:

1. Mutual evaluations

2. Technical assistance and training
3. Typologies research
4. Global policy development
5. Private sector engagement

The APG also assists its members to establish national coordination mechanisms to better utilise resources to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to Asia Pacific Group on Money laundering which of the following statements are correct?

1. The organisation is headquartered in Bangkok
2. India is not a member of the organisation

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains Perspective

Model questions [*UPSC Mains 2013*]

Money laundering poses a serious security threat to a country's economic sovereignty. What is its significance for India and what steps are required to be taken to control this menace?

Sources: [The Hindu APG](#)

China holds live-fire drills opposite Arunachal amid border standoff

China held live-fire exercises in Tibet, in an area facing Arunachal Pradesh – the State which it calls South Tibet – amid the standoff between Chinese and Indian troops in Doklam area in the Sikkim section of the China-India frontier.

Mains : GS 2 India and its neighborhood- relations. Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Highlights

- The exercise was conducted by a brigade, which was part of the Tibet Military Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).
- The brigade has long been stationed around the middle and lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, which becomes the Siang and the Brahmaputra after crossing Chinese territory.
- In May 2016, China raised the status of the Tibet Military Command, as part of the overall military reforms, which included the formation of integrated tri-service regional theater commands, geared towards joint operations.

Significance

- Analysts say that China was sending several messages to India by conducting the exercise.
- China appeared willing to broaden a possible area of conflict beyond the current focus of the standoff, by including Arunachal Pradesh, the scene of the 1962 war, within its ambit.

About the drill

- The exercises per se appeared carefully calibrated, and were essentially “defensive” and in orientation,
- A video of the drills showed radar units identifying enemy aircraft and soldiers using anti-aircraft artillery to annihilate targets.
- There was no reference to the use of air power, including strike aircraft, capable of offensive operation in the drills.
- The manoeuvres also seemed essentially geared towards ground operations, including special operations, where heavy artillery and missiles were used to destroy bunkers.

Also See : [India – China Relations – Infographics 2017](#)

Mains Perspective

India and its neighborhood- relations is a very important topic for civil services examination. Questions are sure to figure from this part of the syllabus. To see the question related to India and neighbourhood relations please visit our [IAS preparation page](#)

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

RCEP and E-commerce

Members of RCEP , including India are discussing in detail norms on e-commerce as part of negotiations on the proposed mega Free Trade Agreement

Mains : GS 2 India and its neighborhood- relations.

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Highlights

- **India's position :** India has been opposing binding norms on opening up the e-commerce sector at the level of RCEP as well as the global level (WTO) talks on grounds including that India is yet to have a comprehensive national policy on the topic.
- Many RCEP nations including Australia, Japan and China, are pushing for inclusion of a host of elements for ‘Terms of Reference’ for RCEP negotiations concerning e-commerce. This is with a view to have some binding commitments from the RCEP members on liberalising e-commerce and ensures that the final pact has a separate chapter on e-commerce.

RCEP – Regional Comprehensive economic partnership

- RCEP is the proposed mega-regional Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between 16 Asia-Pacific countries including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10-member ASEAN bloc.
- **Volume of market** : The agreement will cover a market of over three billion people in these countries -- whose total GDP is more than \$17 trillion and account for 40 per cent of world trade.
- Objectives of the trade agreement : Open up trade in goods and services as well as liberalise investment policies in member countries

Prelims Perspective

The term 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' often appears in the news in the context of the affairs of a group of countries known as **[UPSC Prelims 2016]**

- a) G20
- b) ASEAN
- c) SCO
- d) SAARC

Solution: B

Mains Perspective

Model questions

For India, RCEP presents a decisive platform to influence its strategic and economic status in Asia- Pacific region. Discuss

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

India strongly rejected the resolutions of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that had expressed concern about the recent attacks on people by cow-vigilante groups.

Mains : GS 2 Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

OIC resolution

The OIC noted that incidents of violence against the Muslim community were being committed by extremist Hindu groups and said it viewed such incidents "with grave concern".

Highlights of India's statement

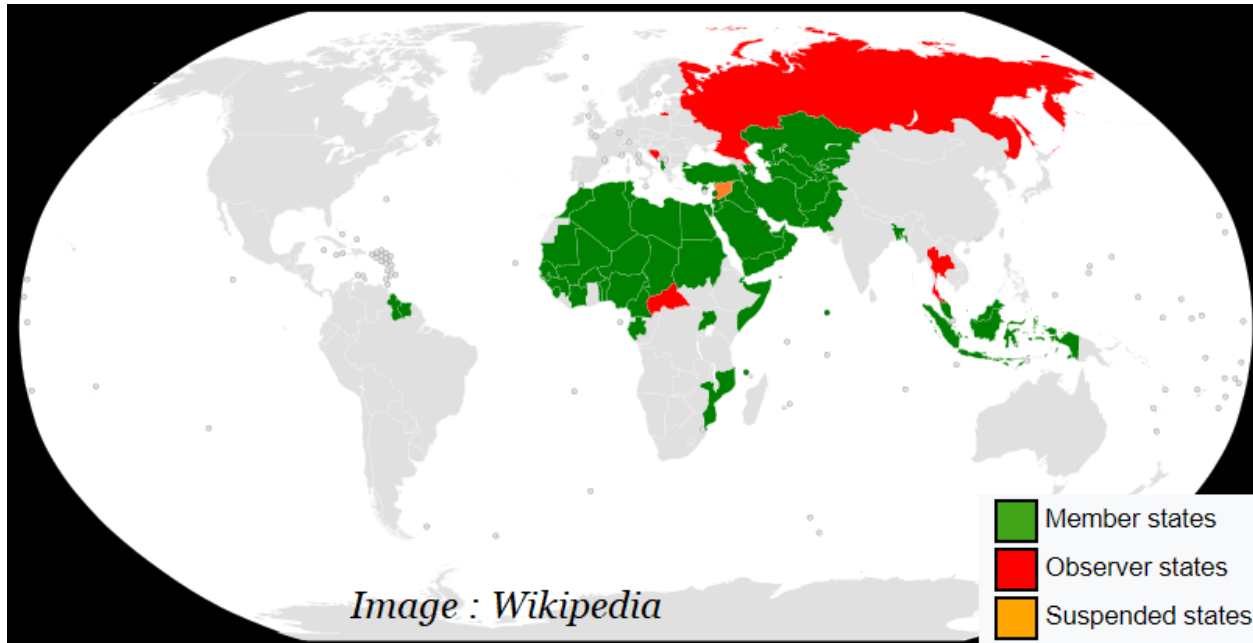
- An official statement f stated that the resolutions adopted at the Organisation's latest foreign ministers' meeting were "factually incorrect".
- The OIC has no locus standi on India's internal affairs.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has a membership of 57 states spread over four continents.
- It endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the

world.

- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union. The official languages of the OIC are Arabic, English, and French.
- It was founded in 1969
- It is headquartered in Jeddah Saudi Arabia



Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following country is not a member of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation?

1. Iran
2. Saudi Arabia
3. Qatar
4. All three countries are members of OIC

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [OIC](#) [Wikipedia](#)

JITSIC Tackling Global Tax Risks

India participated in the fourth Joint International Taskforce on Shared Intelligence and Collaboration (JITSIC) meeting reconvened in Paris to pursue the work on the Panama Papers. 30 project participant countries have continued to exchange, analyse and act on information about taxpayers and intermediaries connected to Mossack Fonseca. JITSIC members have established the capability to allow for fast, effective and coordinated multilateral responses to any future data leaks and are sharing the same. Collaboration with JITSIC has been useful for India in its fight against offshore tax evasion.

GS 3 Indian Economy

RBI says bank funding can't be substituted

The Reserve Bank of India's biannual financial stability report said that alternative sources of funding cannot replace bank loans.

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Highlights of the report

- With banks increasingly 'retrenching' credit, mutual funds, non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) and capital markets have partly offset the corporate sector's debt requirement but such alternative sources of funding cannot replace bank loans
- NBFCs, mutual funds have been partly meeting firm's' debt needs
- Banks' share in the flow of credit, which was about 50% in 2015-16, declined sharply to 38% in 2016-17.
- Retrenchment of credit by public sector banks is partly offset by NBFCs, mutual funds and the capital market.
- Aggregate flow of resources to the commercial sector was not affected owing to a sharp increase in private placements of debt by non-financial entities and net issuance of commercial papers (CPs).
- While deposit growth of scheduled commercial banks picked up, credit growth remained sluggish
- Gross non-performing advances (GNPAs) ratio of all banks rose from 9.2% in September 2016 to 9.6% in March 2017.

Mains Perspective

Model question

Can the NPA crisis faced by the public sector banks be attributed to non availability of the alternative credit mechanisms in India? Discuss

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

GST positive for India's credit profile: Moody's

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime will be positive for India's credit profile as it will contribute to productivity gains and higher GDP growth as well as support higher government revenue generation through improved tax compliance, according to global ratings agency Moody's.

Mains : GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

- GST will contribute to productivity gains and higher GDP growth by improving the ease of doing business, unifying the national market and enhancing India's attractiveness as a foreign investment destination.
- It will also support higher government revenue generation through improved tax

compliance and administration.

Improved tax compliance to be driven by:

- incentivisation of tax credits in a GST system;
- greater ease of compliance through usage of a common, shared IT infrastructure between the central government and the states;
- a reduction in the overall cost of compliance from simplified tax rates, uniform across the country

Mains Perspective

Model questions

GST will contribute to productivity gains and higher GDP growth by improving the ease of doing business, unifying the national market. Discuss.

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Commodities exchange - Two commodity exchanges merge

National Multi Commodity Exchange (NMCE), India's first de-mutualised online national multi-commodities exchange, will merge with the Indian Commodity Exchange (ICEX).

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Highlights

- The proposed merger will create the country's third-largest commodities exchange.
- ICEX is a deemed recognised stock exchange providing a nationwide online trading platform in commodity derivatives. It has put in place assaying and warehousing facilities in order to facilitate deliveries. Reliance Capital is its largest investor.
- NMCE is the first de-mutualised, online multi-commodity exchange in India, set up in October 2002.

What is a 'Commodities Exchange'?

A commodities exchange is an entity, usually an incorporated non-profit association, that determines and enforces rules and procedures for the trading of commodities and related investments, such as commodity futures. Commodities exchange also refers to the physical center where trading takes place.

BREAKING DOWN 'Commodities Exchange'

- Modern commodity markets began with the trading of agricultural products, such as corn, cattle, wheat and pigs in the 19th century. Modern commodity markets trade many types of investment vehicles, and are often utilized by various investors from commodity producers to investment speculators.
- For example, a corn producer could purchase corn futures on a commodity exchange to lock in a price for a sale of a specified amount of corn at a future

date, while at the same time a speculator could buy and sell corn futures with the hope of profiting from future changes in corn prices.

- The Forward Markets Commission (FMC) is the chief regulator of commodity futures markets in India. On 28 September 2015 the FMC was merged with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)

Prelims perspective

Which among the following statements regarding commodity markets in India is correct?

1. Indian Commodity Exchange (ICEX) is the largest commodity market in India which is owned by government of India.
2. SEBI is the commodity market regulator in India

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [The Hindu Investopedia](#)

Sovereign Gold Bonds 2017-18 – Series II

Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India, has decided to issue Sovereign Gold Bonds 2017-18 – Series II. The bond will be issued by Reserve Bank India on behalf of the Government of India

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Sovereign gold bond scheme

Sovereign gold bond scheme is designed to reduce the import the physical gold and thereby to reduce the India's current account deficit. Under the scheme citizens can hold paper gold.

How gold bonds works?

Similar to bank deposits instead of cash gold in held by people under this scheme. When gold bond is brought one pays an amount equivalent to prevailing market prices of gold. He/ she earns interest on the the same amount at a rate of 2.75% for 8 years.(Tenure of gold bond). Finally on redemption one gets the prevailing market price on redeeming time plus interest earned.

Features

- Tenure : 8 years with exit option from 5th year onwards
- Interest rate 2.5%
- The Bonds will be sold through banks, Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited (SHCIL), designated post offices and recognised stock exchanges viz., National Stock Exchange of India Limited and Bombay Stock Exchange.

- The issue price of the Gold Bonds will be Rs. 50 per gram less than the nominal value
- The Bonds will be restricted for sale to resident Indian entities including individuals, HUFs, Trusts, Universities and Charitable Institutions.
- The Bonds will be denominated in multiples of gram(s) of gold with a basic unit of 1 gram. Minimum permissible investment will be 1 gram of gold.
- The maximum amount subscribed by an entity will not be more than 500 grams per person per fiscal year (April-March)

Advantages and attractions of the scheme

- Can be used as collateral for loans.
- Capital gains tax exemption on redemption.
- Zero risk of theft/ impurities associated with handling of physical gold.
- Tradability through stock exchanges.
- Availability in DEMAT and paper form.

Prelims Perspective

UPSC prelims 2016

What is/are the purpose/purposes of Government's 'Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme' and 'Gold Monetization Scheme'?

1. To bring the idle gold lying with Indian households into the economy
2. To promote FDI in the gold and jewellery sector
3. To reduce India's dependence on gold imports

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Solution: C

Mains Perspective

Model Questions

- Craze for gold in Indians has led to a surge in import of gold in recent years and put pressure on balance of payments and external value of rupee. In view of this, examine the merits of the Gold Monetization Scheme [*UPSC Mains 2015*]

Sources: [PIB](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu Economic Times](#)

Participatory Notes - SEBI tightens P-Note rules

Continuing to tighten norms for participatory notes, markets regulator SEBI came out with guidelines for issuance of such instruments where the underlying assets are derivatives.

Mains : GS 3 Money-laundering and its prevention

The ODI (Offshore Derivative Instruments) issuing FPIs shall not be allowed to issue

ODIs with derivative as underlying, with the exception of those derivative positions that are taken by the ODI-issuing FPI for hedging the equity shares held by it, on a one to one basis,”

What are P-Notes?

- P-Notes or Participatory Notes are Overseas Derivative Instruments that have Indian stocks as their underlying assets.
- They allow foreign investors to buy stocks listed on Indian exchanges without being registered.
- The instrument gained popularity as FIIs, to avoid the formalities of registering and to remain anonymous, started betting on stocks through this route.

What are govt & regulator's concerns?

- The primary reason why P-Notes are worrying is because of the anonymous nature of the instrument as these investors could be beyond the reach of Indian regulators.
- Further, there is a view that it is being used in money laundering with wealthy Indians, like the promoters of companies, using it to bring back unaccounted funds and to manipulate their stock prices.

What has Sebi done to regulate P-Notes?

- Sebi has taken a number of steps to tighten rules on P-Notes.
- In 2007, P-Notes were banned for a while due to a surge in capital flows and excess liquidity. But a year later, all restrictions on P-Notes were removed during the financial crisis, only to be tightened again later.
- From January 2011, FIIs have had to follow KYC norms and submit details of transactions. In 2014, new rules on foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) made it mandatory for those issuing P-Notes to submit a monthly report disclosing their portfolios.
- Sebi mandated that in addition to KYC, the anti-money laundering rules (AML) will also be applicable to P-Note holders.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Foreign investment related questions were asked in the previous examinations. To know more visit our [IAS preparation page](#)

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Foreign direct investment related questions were asked in the previous examinations. To know more visit our [IAS preparation page](#)

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Economic Times](#)

‘Aaykar Setu’ - a new taxpayer service module

A new taxpayer service module ‘Aaykar Setu’, was launched by the Union Finance

Minister, Shri Arun Jaitley.

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Highlights

To enhance mobile access experience, a mobile responsive android version was also released along with the desktop version.

What is Aaykar Setu?

- The new step is an effort by the Income Tax Department (ITD) to directly communicate with the taxpayers, on a range of multiple informative and useful tax services aimed at providing tax information at their fingertips.
- The module compiles various tax tools, live chat facility, dynamic updates, and important links to various processes within the Income Tax Department in a single module.
- The tax payers will also be able to receive regular updates regarding important tax dates, forms and notifications on mobile numbers registered with the ITD.
- All taxpayers who wish to receive such SMS alerts are advised to register their mobile numbers in the Aaykar Setu module.

Benefit : This e-initiative would help in reducing physical interface between assesses and tax assessing authorities and thereby minimizing the chances of any tax harassment.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following statements about Aaykar Setu is/are correct?

1. It will help in reducing physical interface between tax payers and assesses
2. It helps the taxpayers to communication directly with the income tax officers.

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [pib](#)

NHB RESIDEX launched;

The revamped and expanded official online user friendly NHB RESIDEX was launched by the government.

Mains : GS 3 Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

What is NHB RESIDEX?

- NHB RESIDEX captures movements in the prices of residential real estate prices
- RESIDEX is the country's first official housing price index (HPI)

SELFLEARN'S MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS -JULY 2017

- It was launched in 2007 covering 26 cities and was published till March, 2015 on a quarterly basis.
- The revamped RESIDEX has been expanded to 50 cities spread over 18 States and UTs.
- Base year for the new RESIDEX has been moved from 2007 to 2012-13 to capture the changing structure of the economy
- The component of RESIDEX, called Housing Price Index@Market Prices is based on actual market information and other component of RESIDEX called as HPI@Assessment Prices is based on the information furnished by banks and other lending agencies

Recent news

The RESIDEX released recently revealed that prices during January-March, 2017 have increased over that of October-December, 2016, in about half of the cities covered under the survey while the other half have either registered a decline or remained the same.

Significance:

- NHB RESIDEX helps buyers and sellers to check and compare prices before entering a transaction.
- Users can also analyse the price trends across different cities both at composite level and product category level.
- It helps lenders in credit evaluation and provides promoters with a standardized tool to assess the housing demand.
- Government agencies can monitor trends in macro and micro markets and predict future behavior of the housing market.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to RESIDEX which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It helps buyers and sellers of residential properties to compare prices
2. It is the country's first official housing price index (HPI)
3. It captures prices of real estate in all the cities in India

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Sources: [pib](#)

Housing prices are alive and kicking

The Ministry of Housing flagged off a new index — the NHB Residex — to track housing price trends in 50 cities across India. The new index data shows that prices across most cities have risen despite oversupply, dull demand and demonetisation.



Prelims :Economic and Social Development - Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector initiatives, etc.

Mains : **GS 3** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Highlights

- Lenders' data compiled by the NHB Residex shows that as many as 32 of the 50 cities tracked reported rising housing prices
- 13 cities recorded stable trends, in the twelve months to March 2017 and only 5 cities saw declines.
- The resilient prices go against the popular perception that residential market is crippled with slower sales and stock of unsold homes.

Events that dampened demand for housing

- Demonetisation and the resulting purge of the cash component in real estate transactions.
- Capping the tax break from 'loss on house property' at ₹2 lakh a year, for second and subsequent homes.
- Cloudy job prospects, stingy increments and layoffs for the IT sector.
- Enactment of RERA (Real Estate Regulation Act) which forced developers to segregate buyer advances and deploy it only in specific projects, was expected to result in a working capital crunch for developers.

How the incidents affected housing market?

- The sales of residential homes in the top eight cities fell by 48% in the second half of 2016, compared with the previous year.
- In January-June 2017, home sales in these cities were still 11% below 2016 levels.
- Slowing sales saddled developers with large unsold inventory.

Why the price rise despite large inventory and low sales?

1. New categories of buyers may have emerged. *While 'investment' buying was muted, it is likely that lower interest rates induced more first-time home buyers to take home loans to acquire residential property. The 12% growth in bank home loan disbursements in FY17, as per RBI data, indicates this.*
2. Surge in demand of affordable homes and the lower demand for upmarket homes
Past year, the Government launched a big stimulus package for affordable housing with an upfront subsidy, with the result that the supply of low-cost homes has jumped.
3. It is also possible that, thanks to private equity or political funding, many sellers in the Indian real estate industry have staying power, allowing them to wait interminably for buyers to return.
4. The housing market is fragmented into dozens of micro-markets. Housing prices can vary widely between cities
5. It is possible that the prices culled from the reported deals were not wholly representative of the market mood.

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Prelims perspective

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3. It captures prices of real estate in all the cities in India

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Mains perspective

Model questions

List out the various initiatives brought out by the government to usher in transparency

and help consumers in the real estate market. Discuss the merits and implementational challenges regarding the same

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [pib](#)

Railway initiatives - RailCloud, NIVARAN, Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency (CTSE)

Minister of Railways Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu launched four railway initiatives

Mains : GS 2 e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;

Salient Features of the Initiatives Launched:

RailCloud

- Indian Railway has started a strategic IT initiative, christened IR-OneICT, for enterprise wide digital single platform with an aim to improve customer satisfaction, improve revenue and effective, efficient and safe operations.
- To achieve the goal of single digital platform for IR a few foundational projects need to be implemented first, establishment of RailCloud is one such project.
- Faster and on-demand deployment of applications, Optimum use of Servers and storage, Utilization of existing infrastructure as part of Cloud, Rapid scalability and elasticity, IT Security enhancement and Standardization, Cost reduction, Better User Experience are some of the benefits of the Rail cloud

NIVARAN-Grievance Portal- First IT application on RailCloud

- 'NIVARAN-Grievance Portal' is the first IT application to be launched on the RailCloud. It is the platform for resolution of service related grievances of serving and former railway employees.

Cashless treatment Scheme in Emergency (CTSE)

It will help in providing immediate care to retired employees and their dependent family members in critical time at empanelled hospitals A web based system has been developed wherein identity of the beneficiary shall be established using biometrics stored in Aadhaar (UIDAI) and eligibility shall be determined using Railway Data Base The whole system is online and even the bill processing shall be online.

Sources: [pib](#)

Rail SAARTHI

Indian Railways has just launched an integrated mobile application to cater to all kinds of passenger requirements, which includes ticket booking, inquiry, onboard cleaning and ordering a meal on a single platform. The app, called as Rail SAARTHI, was unveiled by Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu. The integrated application could give a single window interface for all services. As it is, currently there are multiple mobile apps by the Railways. To use different services, users need to search and download each

application separately. The Rail Saarthi is an abbreviation of the term, “Synergised Advanced Application Rail Travel Help and Information). This app also caters to features such as safety for women, compliant facility and suggestion for improvement, according to the minister.

First DEMU Train with Solar powered Coaches

Minister of Railways dedicated to the nation the first 1600 HP DEMU train with Solar Powered Coaches with a unique facility of Battery Bank. The entire electrical need of the coaches for Lighting, Fans and Information Display System will be met from the Solar Energy produced from the solar panels fitted in the roofs of coaches. While this train has been manufactured by the Coach Factory of Indian Railways namely Integral Coach Factory (ICF), Chennai, its Solar panels and Solar systems have been developed and fitted by Indian Railways Organisation of Alternative Fuel (IROAF) Delhi. The first rake will be put in the commercial service over the suburban railway system of Delhi division of Northern Railway.

Indian Railways Organization for Alternate Fuel (IROAF) wins Golden Peacock Award for Eco Innovation for the year 2017.

Indian Railways achieves a major landmark in the field of Eco friendly fuel technologies at Indian Railways Organization for Alternate Fuel (IROAF) which has been awarded the coveted National level “Golden Peacock Award for the Year 2017 for Eco-Innovation” for substitution of fossil fuels (Diesel) by environment friendly CNG in DEMU passenger train services. Use of CNG in Train Sets for passenger transportation has been done for the first time in the world. The CNG based dual fuel 1400 HP engine used in DEMU trains developed by IROAF has successfully substituted diesel fuel with CNG upto 20%. Golden Peacock Awards, instituted by the Institute Of Directors (IOD), India in 1991, are now regarded as a benchmark of Corporate Excellence worldwide. Golden Peacock awards have become a hallmark of excellence, both locally & globally. Based on internationally recognised criteria, the credibility of these awards lies in the transparency depth & impartiality of the assessment process.

Web nod soon for dry ports, cargo stations

The Centre will soon announce a mechanism that will facilitate online submission and processing of applications for setting up Inland Container Depots (ICD), Container Freight Stations (CFS) and Air Freight Stations (AFS).

Mains : GS 2 e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential **GS 3** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

What are the services provided by ICDs, CFS and AFS?

- ICDs (considered as dry ports), CFS and AFS provide services for handling and temporary storage of import/export laden and empty containers carried under customs control.
- Transshipment of cargo can also take place from such stations.

Why new reform that allows online submission and processing of application?

- The reform aims to boost India's foreign trade
- The demand for setting up more ICDs, CFSs and AFSs in India has risen following the Sagarmala Programme and the Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC) programme.

Present situations

- The last reform of the ICD/CFS/AFS approval process was carried out in 1992 when an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) – under the aegis of Department of Commerce (DoC) – was constituted for the purpose.
- Though the IMC is virtually a single window clearance mechanism, the process is now considered cumbersome

The new proposal

- the reform is aimed at enabling the developer to submit applications online and track their status on a real-time basis
- It will enable automation of the submission of applications, editing, updating of the applications by the promoter.
- There will be automated parallel processing of applications and display of status of the proposal both to the promoter and the IMC members.
- It will ensure greater transparency and accountability in the IMC mechanism, and is expected to lower entry barriers.

What are dry ports?

- A dry port (sometimes inland port) is an inland intermodal terminal directly connected by road or rail to a seaport and operating as a centre for the transshipment of sea cargo to inland destinations.
- In addition to their role in cargo transshipment, dry ports may also include facilities for storage and consolidation of goods, maintenance for road or rail cargo carriers and customs clearance services.
- The location of these facilities at a dry port relieves competition for storage and customs space at the seaport itself.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to dry ports which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is mainly used for ship building and maintenance
2. It operates as a centre for the transshipment of sea cargo.
3. It relieves competition for storage at nearby seaports

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

IBBI notifies rules for bankruptcy probe

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has powers to start probe against service providers registered with it without intimating them, according to new regulations.

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Highlights

- IBBI, which is implementing the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), has notified the regulations for inspection and investigation of service providers registered with it.
- Insolvency professional agencies, professionals, entities and information utility are considered as service providers under the Code.
- The Code, which provides for a market-determined and time-bound resolution of insolvency proceedings, became operational in December 2016.
- As per the regulations, the investigation authority has to serve a notice intimating the entity concerned about the probe at least ten days in advance.

Also Read : [The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 – Explained](#)

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Hybrid Annuity Model

Introduced in January 2016 to revive investments in road infrastructure projects, HAM has seen good initial success.

Mains : GS 3 Investment models.

Highlights

About 30 highways projects have been awarded under HAM by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) at a total cost of about Rs. 28,000 crore.

Half the projects awarded in 2016-17 were under HAM.

Different models of Public Private partnerships

- As the name suggests, HAM's a hybrid — a mix of the EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) and BOT (build, operate, transfer) models
- **EPC model.** : Under the EPC model, NHAI pays private players to lay roads. The private player has no role in the road's ownership, toll collection or maintenance (it is taken care of by the government).

- **BOT :** Under the BOT model though, private players build, operate and maintain the road for a specified number of years before transferring the asset back to the government. Under BOT, the private player arranged all the finances for the project, while collecting toll revenue or annuity fee from the Government, as agreed.
- **BOT Annuity :** The annuity fee arrangement is known as BOT-Annuity; essentially, the toll revenue risk is taken by the government, while the private player is paid a pre-fixed annuity for construction and maintenance of roads.

What is Hybrid Annuity model?

- HAM combines EPC (40 per cent) and BOT-Annuity (60 per cent).
- NHA releases 40 per cent of the total project cost in five tranches linked to milestones. The balance 60 per cent is arranged by the developer.

The developer usually invests not more than 20-25 per cent of the project cost (as against 40 percent or more before), while the remaining is raised as debt.

Significance

- Private players were not forthcoming to invest in The BOT model as they had to fully arrange for its finances, banks becoming wary of lending and due to risk of low passenger traffic.
- HAM spreads the risk between developers and the Government.
- Infra investments are key for economic growth. So, it's important that these projects take off – HAM a big help here.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following statements regarding Hybrid annuity model is/are correct?

1. It spreads the risk between the developers and the government
2. Government pays 40% of project cost upfront to the developers.
3. HAM is a mixutre of EPC and BOT models

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3only
- d. All of the above

Mains Perspective

Model questions [*UPSC Essay 2012*]

Is the criticism that the Public-Private- Partnership(PPP) model for development is more of a bane than a boon in the Indian context, justified?

Sources:[The Hindu Businessline](#)

WCO lauds India's trade facilitation plan - National Trade Facilitation Action Plan

India's national trade facilitation action plan has been described by the World Customs Organisation (WCO) as a 'best practice' other nations can adopt.

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Highlights

The WCO was impressed by the fact that as many as 51 of the 76 activities mentioned in the NTFAP "go beyond" the implementation requirements of the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).

About World Customs organisation

- The WCO is the international body supporting the uniform implementation of the TFA across the globe
- It has 182 member nations (including India) that manage more than 98% of world trade.

What is national trade facilitation action plan?

- The Plan aims to transform cross border clearance ecosystem through efficient and technology driven procedures which are supported by state-of-the-art sea ports, airports and land borders.
- The action plan is aimed at ensuring compliance with WTO's trade facilitation agreement that had entered into force last February.
- The NTFAP, is to be implemented between 2017 and 2020, and is also part of India's efforts to improve its ease of doing business ranking. .

Objectives

- Improvement in ease of doing business by reduction in cargo release time and cost
- Move towards paperless regulatory environment
- Transparent and predictable legal regime
- Improved investment climate through better infrastructure.

Formulation on actions plan

- Earlier, under Article 23.2 of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), a National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) headed by the Cabinet Secretary was constituted.
- The NCTF comprises of stakeholders from the Government and the private sectors including trade community.
- The NCTF has adopted 76 point National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP) which is a reflection of the Government's commitment to implement the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).

Other details

- The Action Plan covers the activities that go beyond the ambit of TFA per se,

which have been defined as TFA Plus category

- The Action Plan covers many activities in the areas of infrastructure augmentation, Land Customs stations...
- All actions covered under the plan have been categorized by prioritizing the activities into short term, midterm and long term.
- The National Plan would be monitored by the Steering Committee (the operational arm of the NCTF)

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following statements regarding National Trade Facilitation Action Plan today is/are correct?

1. It contains measure to implement trade facilitation agreement only
2. It aims to make introduce technology driven solution in border clearance points
3. The National Plan would be monitored by the Steering Committee - the operational arm of the NCTF

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Sources: The Hindu [pib](#)

Payments bank: for the informal sector

All you want to know about payment banks

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment. Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

How is a payments bank different from a commercial bank?

- There are two kinds of banking licences that are granted by the Reserve Bank of India - universal bank licence and differentiated bank licence.
- Payments bank comes under a differentiated bank licence since it cannot offer all the services that a commercial bank offers.

What are the services offered by Payment bank?

- A payments bank cannot lend.
- It can take deposits upto ₹1 lakh per account.
- It can issue debit cards but not credit cards.

Commercial banks in India like State Bank of India or ICICI Bank, do not have any such restrictions.

What is the objective of a payments bank?

The main objective is to further financial inclusion by providing small savings accounts

and payments/remittance services to migrant labour workforce, low income households, small businesses and other unorganised sector entities.

Besides remittance, can payments bank undertake any other activity?

- A payments bank can work as a business correspondent (BC) of another bank.
- They can also distribute simple financial products like mutual fund units and insurance products.

How many payments banks have commenced operations?

Out of the 11 entities that received in-principle licence for opening payments bank, 7 entities received the final licence. Four payments banks have started operations

Other details

- Minimum paid-up equity capital requirement: ₹100 crore.
- Funds deployment : Apart from maintaining Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR), these entities have to invest a minimum 75% of demand deposit balances in Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR)-eligible government securities or treasury bills with maturity of up to one year
- It can hold a maximum of 25% in current and time/fixed deposits with other commercial banks for operational purposes and liquidity management.

Who all are eligible to set up a payments bank?

- RBI permits non-bank Prepaid Payment Instrument (PPI) issuers, individuals and professionals, non-banking finance companies (NBFCs), corporate business correspondents (BCs), mobile telephone companies, super market chains, companies, real sector cooperatives that are owned and controlled by residents and public sector entities to apply for a payments bank licence.
- Setting up of a joint venture by a promoter with an existing commercial bank is also allowed.

Prelims Perspective

Model questions [*UPSC Prelims 2016*]

The establishment of 'Payment Banks' is being allowed in India to promote financial inclusion. Which of the following statements is/are correct in this context?

1. Mobile telephone companies and supermarket chains that are owned and controlled by residents are eligible to be promoters of Payment Banks.
2. Payment Banks can issue both credit cards and debit cards.
3. Payment Banks cannot undertake lending activities.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Mains Perspective

Model questions

- How far India's financial institutions have been able to cater to the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Explain how institutional credit can play a major role in achieving inclusive growth.

Sources: The Hindu RBI

Opposition seeks scrutiny of Banking Regulation Bill

Union Finance Minister introduced the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2017, in the Lok Sabha.

Prelims :Economic and Social Development - Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector initiatives, etc.

Mains : Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

What is the bill about?

- The Bill seeks to authorise the RBI to resolve the problem of stressed assets
- The Bill seeks to amend the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, and replace the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance promulgated in May.

Major Provisions

- It allows the RBI to open an insolvency resolution process in respect of specific stressed assets.
- The RBI will also be empowered to issue directives for resolution and appoint authorities or committees to advise the banking companies on stressed asset resolution.
- The central government may authorise the Reserve Bank of India to direct banks to initiate recovery proceedings against loan defaulters.
- The recovery proceedings will be under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

Current Mechanisms for expeditious resolution of stressed assets are

1. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016
2. The SARFAESI Act
3. Debt Recovery Tribunal

RBI's loan restructuring schemes

1. Corporate debt restructuring (CDR)
2. Formation of joint lenders' forum (JLF)
3. Flexible structuring for long-term project loans to infrastructure (or 5/25 Scheme)
4. Strategic debt restructuring (SDR) scheme
5. Sustainable structuring of stressed assets (S4A)

Other Options Proposed are

1. The finance ministry and RBI are also considering setting up of a "bad bank" to deal with the problem of non-performing loans, as suggested by chief economic

adviser Arvind Subramanian in the Economic Survey.

2. Reserve Bank deputy governor Viral Acharya has also floated the twin concept of Private Asset Management Company (PAMC) and National Asset Management Company (NAMC) for resolution of stressed assets.

Prelims perspective

A question about any of the RBI loan restructuring schemes OR Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 can be asked. So read up on related topics thoroughly.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

The recent enactment of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016 has opened up new possibilities for time bound resolution of stressed assets. Compare the Insolvency Code with existing mechanism.

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [PRS](#)

NIFTY, NSE

The 50-share Nifty of the National Stock Exchange (NSE) breached the 10,000-mark for the first time ever

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Highlights

- The index breached the 10,000 mark during intra-day trading and closed almost flat at 9,964.55.
- The 30-share Sensex closed at 32,228.77, down 17.60 points.
- As per data from the National Securities Depository Ltd, foreign investors have put in nearly ₹56,000 crore in Indian equities in the current calendar year.

What is the 'National Stock Exchange Of India Limited - NSE'?

The National Stock Exchange Of India Limited (NSE) is India's largest financial market. Established in 1992, the NSE has developed into a sophisticated, electronic market, which ranks third in the world for transacted volume. The NSE conducts transactions in the wholesale debt, equity and derivative markets.

What is NIFTY?

- A stock index endorsed by Standard & Poor's and composed of 50 of the largest and most liquid stocks found on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) of India.
- It is commonly used to represent the market for benchmarking Indian investments.
- Similar to other major stock indexes like the S&P 500, companies must meet certain requirements in terms of market capitalization and liquidity before they can be considered for inclusion in the index.
- It is also known as "Standard And Poor's CNX Nifty

BREAKING DOWN 'Standard And Poor's CNX Nifty'

- CNX stands for the Credit Rating Information Services of India Limited (CRISIL) and the National Stock Exchange of India (NSE). These two bodies own and manage the index within a joint venture called the India Index Services and Products Ltd. (IISL). Without the additional abbreviation to S&P CNX, the index name would be S&P CRISIL NSE Index.
- As of July 2007, the stocks in the S&P CNX Nifty represented well over 50% of the total market capitalization of all stocks in India's stock exchanges.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to NSE which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The NSE conducts transactions in the wholesale debt, equity and derivative markets.
2. NIFTY is composed of 50 of the largest and most liquid stocks found on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) of India.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Investopedia](#)

CAC adopts Codex norms for three spices

In a significant move, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) adopted three Codex standards for black, white and green pepper, cumin and thyme paving the way for an universal agreement on identifying quality spices in various countries.

Mains : GS 3 Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.

Key Points

- The adoption of Codex standards for the three spices will help evolve a common standardisation process for their global trade and availability.
- With the adoption of Codex standards, member-nations would now have reference points and benchmarks to align their national standards for spices with Codex.

'Food code'

- The Codex Alimentarius or "Food Code" is a collection of standards, guidelines and codes of practice adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.
- The Commission, also known as CAC, is the central part of the joint FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations)/WHO (World Health Organisation) Food Standards Programme.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

A question can be expected on “What is Codex Alimentarius”?

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Mission Indradhanush

The Centre's 'Indradhanush' scheme to recapitalise public sector banks (PSBs) based on their performance was not implemented in a manner envisaged, according to Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)

Mains : GS 3 Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Highlights of CAG report

- As per the scheme, a portion of the recapitalisation was to be based on the bank's performance which was not followed during disbursement of funds. *capital was disbursed without considering performance.*
- Gross NPAs with PSBs had risen sharply in recent years.
- The parameters used to determine whether banks required capital changed from year to year and in some years the rationale for capitalising banks was not even recorded.
- The scheme's target of raising ₹1.1 lakh crore from the markets by 2018-19 was not likely to be met.

Indradhanush

- The scheme is envisaged revamping the health of public sector banks through seven-point revival plan.
- The seven elements include appointments, board of bureau, capitalisation, de-stressing, empowerment, framework of accountability and governance reforms

Appointment : Government implemented split in Chairman and MD/CEO post to improve the governance standard in the public sector banking space

Bank Board Bureau: The BBB will be a body of eminent professionals and officials, which will replace the Appointments Board for appointment of Whole-time Directors as well as non-Executive Chairman of PSBs.

Capitalization: The GOI will infuse 70000 Cr rupees into public sector banks in different stages.

De-stressing banks: Government will continue to work towards solving problems of sectors, which are contributing major stress to the banking sector at this point of time. Further, the Government is also planning to take several steps to improve legal and risk management controls for banks.

Empowerment: Government issued a circular stating that it will not interfere in the functioning of public sector banks and encouraged them to take decisions independently, keeping the commercial interest of the organization in mind.

Framework of Accountability: New standardized “Key Performance Indicators” for measuring performance of public sector banks in place of earlier Statement of Intent has been set up.

Governance Reforms: Government has indicated that it will continue to pursue the governance reform and to discuss the same. Further, the government is plans to give higher independency to the board, which will drive the bank’s strategy going forward. GOI is also looking to launch ESOP scheme for top management of the public sector banks.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following is not a component of Indradhanush scheme for banking sector?

1. Governance reforms
2. Formation of Bank boards bureau
3. Complete Independence and autonomy in functioning

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Despite several measures undertook by the government the banking sector continues to be under stress. What factors can be attributed to this? Give your suggestions

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Financial Express](#) [pib](#)

First Edition of WINGS 2017 – “Sab Uden, Sab Juden”

The First edition of WINGS 2017 – “Sab Uden, Sab Juden”- Expanding Regional Connectivity was hosted in New Delhi by the Ministry of Civil Aviation. This event brought together the key stakeholders of the Aviation Sector such as States, Tourism Departments and Tour Operators as a Group representing airline consumers to facilitate interaction with various airlines, airport operators, cargo operators and other ecosystem players at a common forum.

AirSewa 2.0

The Ministry of Civil Aviation held a meeting of all stakeholders last week to invite suggestions for designing AirSewa 2.0, the upgraded version of the AirSewa web portal and mobile app. The portal was launched to make air travel convenient and hassle-free. AirSewa -e-portal includes a mechanism for grievance redressal, back office operations for grievance handling, flight status/schedule information, airport Information and

FAQs. AirSewa is a one-stop solution for grievance redressal as passengers can now register any grievance on tlar airport.

GS 3 Environment and Ecology

Aerosols 'shrinking' India's monsoon

Greenhouse gases cause concern, but scientists are more worried about particulates

Mains : GS 3 Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

While greenhouse gases, or GHGs, are causing concern about the long-term fate of the Indian monsoon, researchers now think aerosols from vehicular exhaust, half-burnt crop residue, dust and chemical effluents may be weakening the life-giving rainy season even more than GHGs.

THE LIKELY IMPACT

- Aerosols and changes in forest and agricultural cover was affecting the strength of the monsoon
- New simulations suggest that aerosols may be a far more important factor than GHGs
- Dust clouds shield the earth from the sun's rays, depressing land and sea temperatures and reducing the variation between the two.

The scientist and his team used an upgraded forecasting model that was used this year by the India Meteorological Department for forecasts.

The model will help prepare India's first home-grown forecast of climate change from global warming, and be part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports, which are considered the global scientific consensus on the role of man-made pollution in climate change.

Van Mahotsav

Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, will lead a month-long drive to plant saplings to mark Van Mahotsav starting on July 5.

Mains : GS 3 Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Van Mahotsav

- Van Mahotsav began in 1950, with a tree plantation drive, in which national leaders participated. The festival of tree plantation was started by
- Dr. K.M. Munshi, the then Union Minister for Agriculture and Food to create enthusiasm among masses for forest conservation and planting trees. The festival was simultaneously celebrated in other states in India.

- Van Mahotsav is usually observed in the first week of July every year and is celebrated on different days in different parts of India.
- The objective behind celebrating Van Mahotsav is to keep local people involved in plantation drives and spread environmental awareness.
- Programmes like screening of short films and documentaries, seminars and exhibition, painting and poster competitions are also organised to mark the occasion.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following statements about Van Mahotsav is/ are correct?

1. Van Mahotsav is usually celebrated in the first week of July
2. Its aim is to spread environmental awareness.
3. It was celebrated for the first time in 2015

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Sources: [pib](#)

Biological hotspot - Western Ghats

Scientists have recorded a major section of Rare Endemic and Threatened plants and trees in the Western Ghats, some of which have not been assessed by international conservation bodies for nearly two decades.

Mains :GS 3 Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Highlights

- A Team from Botanical Survey of India gathers research evidence on rare, threatened plants in the Southern Western Ghats
- The Botanical Survey of India (BSI) project on endemic tree resources in the southern Western Ghats, including Kerala and Tamil Nadu, has now documented about 250 'RET' species.
- The assessment of some of these conducted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature for the IUCN Red List puts them under vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered categories based on literature from 1998.
- The BSI is undertaking a three-year programme to document economically important endemic trees nationally.

Why Western Ghats

- The Western Ghats has been recognised as one of the 34 hotspot ecosystems in the world in terms of species and endemism. Among the 5,500 flowering plants there, 2,015 species are endemic
- The Southern Western Ghats consisting of southern parts of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are the richest in terms of bio-diversity
- In terms of plant diversity, over 4,500 flowering plants are present, of which 1,500 are endemic to the Ghats

Image : The Hindu

Prelims perspective

Questions related to Western Ghats [UPSC prelims 2017]

From the ecological point of view, which one of the following assumes importance in being a good link between the Eastern Ghats and the Western Ghats?

- (a) Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve
- (b) Nallamala Forest
- (c) Nagarhole National Park
- (d) Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve

Answer: A

2 Consider the following statements: [UPSC prelims 2017]

1. In India, the Himalayas are spread over five States only.
2. Western Ghats are spread over five States only.
3. Pulicat Lake is spread over two States only.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1 and 3 only

Answer: B

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Eco-bridges for the movement of tigers

In a first of its kind, Telangana State will have eco-friendly bridges over a canal cutting across the tiger corridor linking the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra with the forests in Telangana's Kumram Bheem Asifabad district.

Mains : GS 3 Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why bridges?

- The bridges are constructed to camouflage fragmentation of reserve forests.
- Large-scale destruction of pristine forest along tiger corridors corridor, which would result in cutting off tiger movement between TATR and Bejjur was a concern

How it will help?

The intervention requires the laying of fertile soil to grow grass and plants over the bridges constructed.

Other details

- The 'eco-bridges' will be constructed at key spots along the 72 km-long, and at some places over a kilometre wide, right flank canal of the Pranahita barrage
- The Telangana Irrigation Department has given its consent for the construction of the eco-bridges. Recommendations on the size and locations of the bridges are awaited from the National Board of Wildlife

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following statements regarding Eco bridges is/are correct?

1. These bridges camouflage fragmentation of forests.
2. First ecobridge in India was built in Meghalaya.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below/

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

World's northernmost coral reef bleached

Bleaching has damaged the world's northernmost coral reef in Japan,

Mains : GS 3 Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Highlights

- The bleaching is attributed to high ocean temperatures.
- About 30 percent of the coral reef off the coast of Tsushima island in Japan, which lies in the temperate zone some 1,000 kilometres southwest of Tokyo, suffered bleaching when
- Since 2015, all tropical coral reefs have seen above-normal temperatures, and more than 70 percent experienced prolonged high temperatures that can cause bleaching

What are corals ?

- Corals are formed by huge colonies of tiny organisms called polyps. They secrete calcium carbonate to form a protective crust around their soft bodies. When they die their outer skeletons remain as a platform for others to continue building the coral.
- The colour of Corals comes from zooxanthellae - tiny single celled algae that live inside the tissues of polyps. The algae produce food through photosynthesis in return for the home provided by the polyps.

Coral Reefs and their importance

- Coral reefs are diverse underwater ecosystems held together by calcium carbonate structures secreted by corals. Coral reefs are built by colonies of tiny animals found in marine waters that contain few nutrients..
- Most reefs grow best in warm, shallow, clear, sunny and agitated waters.
- Often called "rainforests of the sea", shallow coral reefs form some of the most diverse ecosystems on Earth. They occupy less than 0.1% of the world's ocean surface, yet they provide a home for at least 25% of all marine species
- Healthy coral reefs protect shores from storms and offer habitats for fish and other marine life, including ecologically and economically important species.

What is Coral bleaching?

- Bleaching occurs when abnormal environmental conditions, such as warmer sea temperatures, cause corals to expel tiny photosynthetic algae, draining them of their colour.
- The loss of algae makes the host vulnerable to disease may eventually lead to their death.

Recovery

Coral can recover if the water temperature drops and the algae are able to recolonise them.

Prelims Perspective

A question can be expected from any of the following areas

- ✓ Questions like what are corals, which organism provides colour to corals ... can figure in the examination

Mains Perspective

To see how Environment and ecology questions are asked in the examination visit our

[IAS preparation page](#)

Sources: [The Hindu](#) Wikipedia- , [Coral Reef Environmental Studies From Crisis to Cure](#)

National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change

The Environment Ministry approved three projects for climate change adaptation in three states.

Mains : GS 3 Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

The National Steering Committee on Climate Change (NSCCC) approved the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) submitted by Governments of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Sikkim for funding under the National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC).

National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change

- NAFCC is a flagship Scheme of Government of India, which provides 100 per cent grant to the State Governments for implementing climate change adaptation projects
- The Scheme is designed to fulfill the objectives of National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and to operationalize the State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs).
- The projects address vulnerabilities in climate sensitive sectors like agriculture, animal husbandry, water, forests and coasts among others.
- The project outcomes are expected to increase resilience and adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities and ecosystems against climate change impacts.

Prelims perspective

Similar Question [*UPSC Prelims 2015*]

Which of the following statements regarding 'Green Climate Fund' is/are correct?

1. It is intended to assist the developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices to counter climate change.
1. It is founded under the aegis of UNEP, OECD, Asian Development Bank and World Bank.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [pib](#)

Mount Abu scales new peak

Rajasthan's only hill station, Mount Abu in Sirohi district, received an unprecedented 770 mm of rain in 24 hours. Statistics show that until 2010, the 100-year record for a

single-day of rain in Mt Abu was 653 mm in 1992. A rise in extreme rainfall events, according to experts, is the consequence of a spike in temperatures across India in recent decades, and its effect on the monsoon.. As incessant rains created chaos in the hill station, a large number of people were marooned

Rare sand snake sighted in Seshachalam hills

Wildlife biologists have sighted an Indian Sand Snake (*psammophis condanarus*) in the Seshachalam forests, the first in South India in the last 70 years. The snake is widely distributed in the eastern, northern and central India including parts of the Himalayan foothills, Bengal, Indo-Gangetic plains, north-western arid desert zones including Pakistan and northern parts of Deccan plateau, but not seen in the south. The snake is a smooth and glossy-bodied species with a fairly large head and protruding snout. It was about 53 cm in length, of which its tail alone measured 8 cm.

GS 3 Science and Technology

Anti-aircraft missile QR SAM

Defence Minister Arun Jaitley has congratulated the scientists of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for the successful launch of the Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QR-SAM).

Prelims :Current events of national and international importance.

Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QR-SAM)

- The induction of the Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile into the armed forces will greatly boost the capabilities of the unit.
- The air defence arm of the army suffers obsolescence rate of 97 percent as per a letter which was written to the then Army Chief General VK Singh to the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2012.
- Although the Air Force is responsible for safeguarding the airspace of the country, the army's air defence corps is responsible for providing air defence for important installations and for providing air defence to the army's offensive formations during times of war.
- The QR-SAM is an all-weather weapon system capable of tracking and firing and has a strike range of 20 to 30 kms.

Sources: [Financial Express](#) [pib](#)

Drug-resistant TB higher among children than expected: report

Multi-Drug Resistant (MDR) TB is higher among children than expected. This has been described as a "worrying trend" by the Union Health Ministry.

Mains : **GS 3** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life .**GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

- As many as 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine cities have been diagnosed with TB.
- Nine per cent of these paediatric TB cases have been diagnosed to have MDR TB, according to the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) that conducted the tests in collaboration with the Central TB Division under the Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP).
- In 2016, the proportion of children among new TB patients reported was 6%.
- Absence of appropriate samples coupled with decentralised capacity to get good samples from children to test for TB remains a challenge in paediatric TB case detection

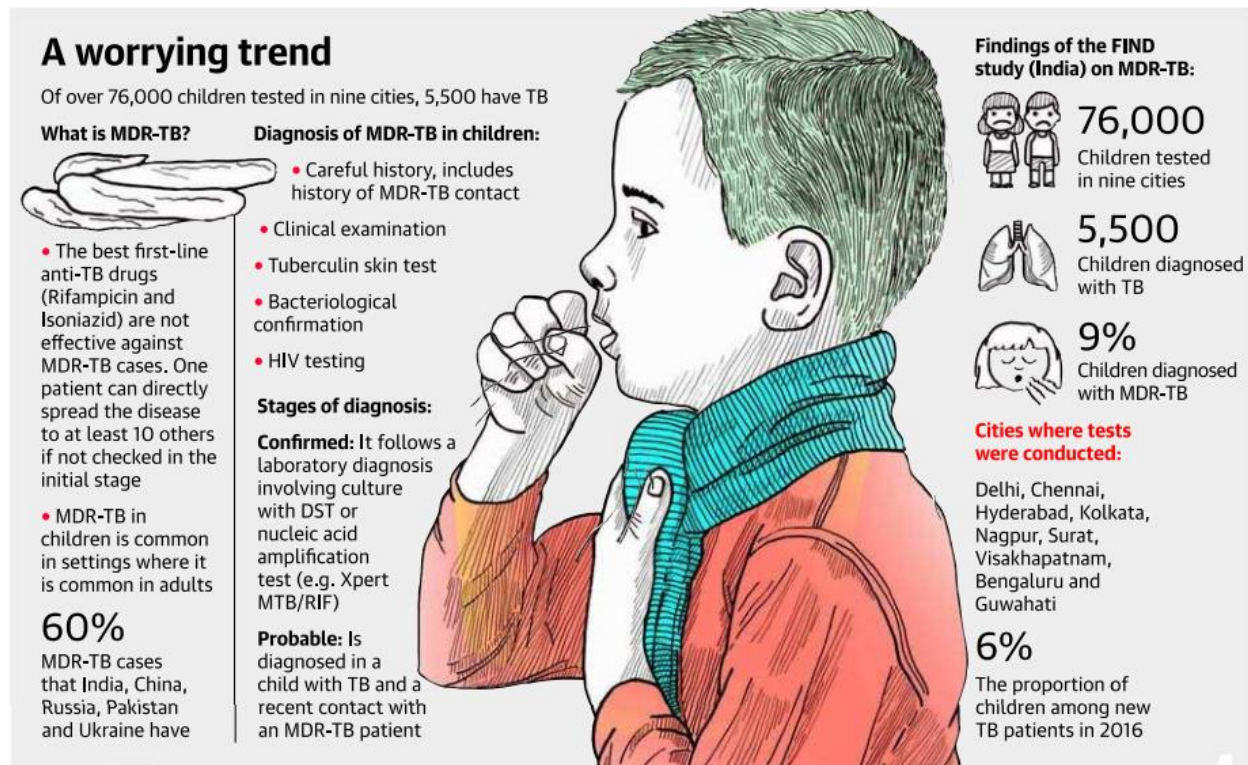


Image : The Hindu

India's TB burden

- Nearly 5 lakh patients died due to TB last year.
- The tuberculosis epidemic affects 28 lakh Indians
- India is home to the most serious 'hotspots' of MDR-TB transmission, especially overcrowded cities such as Mumbai.
- India shoulders the highest TB burden in the world, and accounts for the most drug-resistant patients.

About Tuberculosis

- Tuberculosis is a contagious infection caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis
- It usually attacks the lungs.

- It can spread to other parts of the body like the brain and spine.
- Tuberculosis is contagious and spreads through the air, much like cold or flu.

Efforts to eliminate TB burden

- The Health Ministry set itself the target of eliminating tuberculosis (TB) by 2025,
- Two new TB drugs, Bedaquiline and Delamanid are being used in Europe and the U.S. for several years. But they are yet to be made available in India's national healthcare system. The drug is available only in six sites across the country,

Prelims Perspective

Model questions

Delaminid & Bedaquiline are drugs used in the treatment of

a) Tuberculosis

- b) HIV aids
- c) Malaria
- d) None of the above

Mains Perspective

Similar questions

Can overuse and free availability of antibiotics without Doctor's prescription, be contributors to the emergence of drug-resistant disease's in India? What are the available mechanisms for monitoring and control? Critically discuss the various issues involved. *[UPSC Mains 2014]*

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

Curcumin nanoparticles found to shorten TB treatment time

Curcumin, the basic ingredient of turmeric, when administered in a nanoparticle formulation has several favourable properties in the treatment of tuberculosis in mice, researchers have found.

Mains : GS 3 Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life .

Highlights

- Basic ingredient of turmeric - curcumin,, is understood to be five times more 'bioavailable' for treatment of tuberculosis in mice.

Bioavailable means the proportion of drug that enters circulation after introduction into the body

- Treatment of TB with isoniazid along with 200 nanometre curcumin nanoparticles led to "dramatically reduced" risk of disease reactivation and reinfection.
- Treatment with anti-tuberculosis drugs takes about six-nine months in the case of drug-sensitive TB and 12-24 months for drug-resistant TB.
- Besides improper use, the long duration to complete treatment substantially increases the risk of TB bacteria developing resistance.

- Because of the increased bioavailability of curcumin, the duration of treatment to achieve complete eradication of the bacteria is reduced significantly.
- It was able to drastically reduce liver toxicity induced by TB drug isoniazid. *Quite often, patients stop taking anti-TB drugs for a few days due to liver toxicity.*

How curcimin works?

- Curcumin is a host-directed therapy, where the body's immune system is manipulated, rather than targeting the cause of the disease directly.
- Besides reducing inflammation, curcumin nanoparticles were found to enhance the immune system.

Significance : Curcumin nanoparticles are stable and can be administered both orally as well as intraperitoneally and, therefore, have greater potential for therapeutic use under different conditions.

Curcumin

- Curcumin is a bright yellow chemical produced by some plants.
- It is the principal curcuminoid of turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), a member of the ginger family (Zingiberaceae).
- It is sold as an herbal supplement, cosmetics ingredient, food flavoring, and food coloring.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following statements about curcumin is/are correct?

1. It is a chemical naturally produced by some plants
2. It is used in food colouring

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#)

H1N1 medicines, Fears of drug resistance

Doctors feel misuse of drugs will lead to a situation of anti-viral medications turning ineffective

Mains : **GS 3** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life .**GS 2** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

The Issue

- Two drugs to treat swine flu — Oseltamivir and Zanamivir — were taken off the restrictive Schedule X of the Drugs and Comestics Rules.

SELFLEARN'S MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS -JULY 2017

- Now under Schedule H1, the drugs can be stocked by all chemists.
- Central health authorities have also advised doctors to prescribe the drugs based on strong symptoms, without opting for the swab test.
- Medical experts say these decisions could lead to misuse and eventually, severe drug resistance.

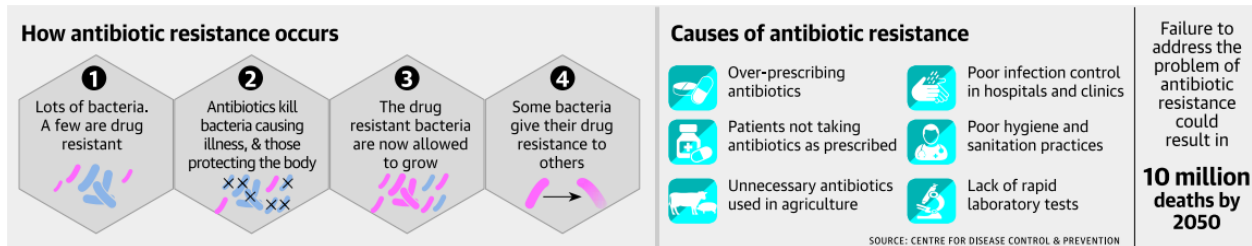


Image : Hindu

On the trail of H1N1

A look at the causes and management of H1N1

At risk

- Pregnant women
- Children below six years
- Senior citizens
- Patients with co-morbid conditions

What is H1N1?
Commonly known as swine flu, H1N1 is a respiratory disease caused by Type A influenza known as H1N1 (A). It is an airborne infection

Watch out for:
Nasal congestion, sore throat, high grade fever, cough, breathlessness, body ache, vomiting, and diarrhoea

Treatment:
Oseltamivir is the medicine that works against H1N1. It is available under various brand names like Tamiflu, Antiflu etc.

Advisory

- Consult doctor immediately if symptoms such as fever, cough, cold, throat infection persist
- Take medicines only as prescribed by the doctor
- Drink plenty of liquids, consume food rich in vitamin C (lime, olive, orange)

H1N1 vaccine

- H1N1 influenza virus vaccine is a "killed virus" vaccine
- The virus vaccine works by exposing a subject to a small dose of the virus, which helps his/her body to develop immunity to the disease

Image : The Hindu

Prelims Perspective

Model questions [UPSC Prelims 2015]

H1N1 virus is sometimes mentioned in the news with reference to which one of the following diseases?

a) AIDS

- b) Bird Flu
- c) Dengue
- d) Swine Flu

Mains Perspective

Similar questions

Can overuse and free availability of antibiotics without Doctor's prescription, be contributors to the emergence of drug-resistant disease's in India? What are the available mechanisms for monitoring and control? Critically discuss the various issues involved. *[UPSC Mains 2014]*

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Creative India; Innovative India

'Scheme for IPR Awareness – Creative India; Innovative India' has been launched by Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) under the aegis of the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion.

Prelims : Economic and Social Development - Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector initiatives, etc.

Mains : GS 3 Issues relating to intellectual property rights.

About the scheme

- **Aim :** The Scheme aims at raising IPR awareness amongst students, youth, authors, artists, budding inventors and professionals to inspire them to create, innovate and protect their creations and inventions across India including Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 cities as well as rural areas in the next 3 years.
- The Scheme for IPR Awareness aims to conduct over 4000 IPR awareness workshops/seminars in academic institutions (schools and colleges) and the industry ,including MSMEs and Startups, as also IP training and sensitization programmes for enforcement agencies and the judiciary.
- Workshops will cover all vital IP topics including international filing procedures, promotion of Geographical Indications and highlighting the ill effects of piracy and counterfeiting.
- The Scheme for IPR Awareness would be implemented through partner organizations to promote innovation and entrepreneurship

Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM)

- Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) has been created as a professional body under the aegis of DIPP to take forward the implementation of the National IPR Policy.
- CIPAM is working towards creating public awareness about IPRs in the country, promoting the filing of IPRs through facilitation, providing inventors with a platform to commercialize their IP assets and coordinating the implementation of

the National IPR Policy in collaboration with Government Ministries/Departments and other stakeholders.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It works under Department of Science and Technology
2. It is mandated with coordinating the implementation National IPR policy
3. CIPAM implements Scheme for IPR Awareness – Creative India; Innovative India

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Sources: [pib](#)

JIGYASA” - Student-Scientist connect programme

Jigyasa, a student- scientist connect programme was officially launched in the national capital.

Prelims :General Science.

Mains : **GS 3** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life .

JIGYASA - Key points

- The focus of the programme is on connecting school students and scientists so as to extend student’s classroom learning with that of a very well planned research laboratory based learning.
- The program will also enable the students and teachers to practically live the theoretical concepts taught in science by visiting CSIR laboratories and by participating in mini-science projects.
- Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), has joined hands with Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) to implement this programme.
- The “JIGYASA” would inculcate the culture of inquisitiveness on one hand and scientific temper on the other, amongst the school students and their teachers.
- The Programme is expected to connect 1151 Kendriya Vidyalayas with 38 National Laboratories of CSIR targeting 100,000 students and nearly 1000 teachers annually.

“JIGYASA” is one of the major initiative taken up by CSIR at national level, during its Platinum Jubilee Celebration Year.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

'JIGYASA' sometimes seen in news pertains to

- a. raise awareness about Intellectual property rights
- b. improve primary education standard
- c. connect students with scientists
- d. None of the above

Sources: [pib](#)

'Human first' approach to test malaria vaccine, Malaria

Experts at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and labs affiliated to the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), will conduct ethics meeting to discuss the feasibility of conducting human trials in India for Malaria Vaccine.

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why human trials?

- Because vaccines involve injecting the body with a mild strain of a parasite, the traditional approach — for drugs and vaccines — has been to test it in animals and only then, if safe and effective, check them in humans.
- This approach however has meant that several promising candidates, after tons of investment, fail to live up to expectations and consequently wasted money.
- Moreover, there are situations where the dosage requirements in people or, the manner in which disease manifests is different from that in animal models.

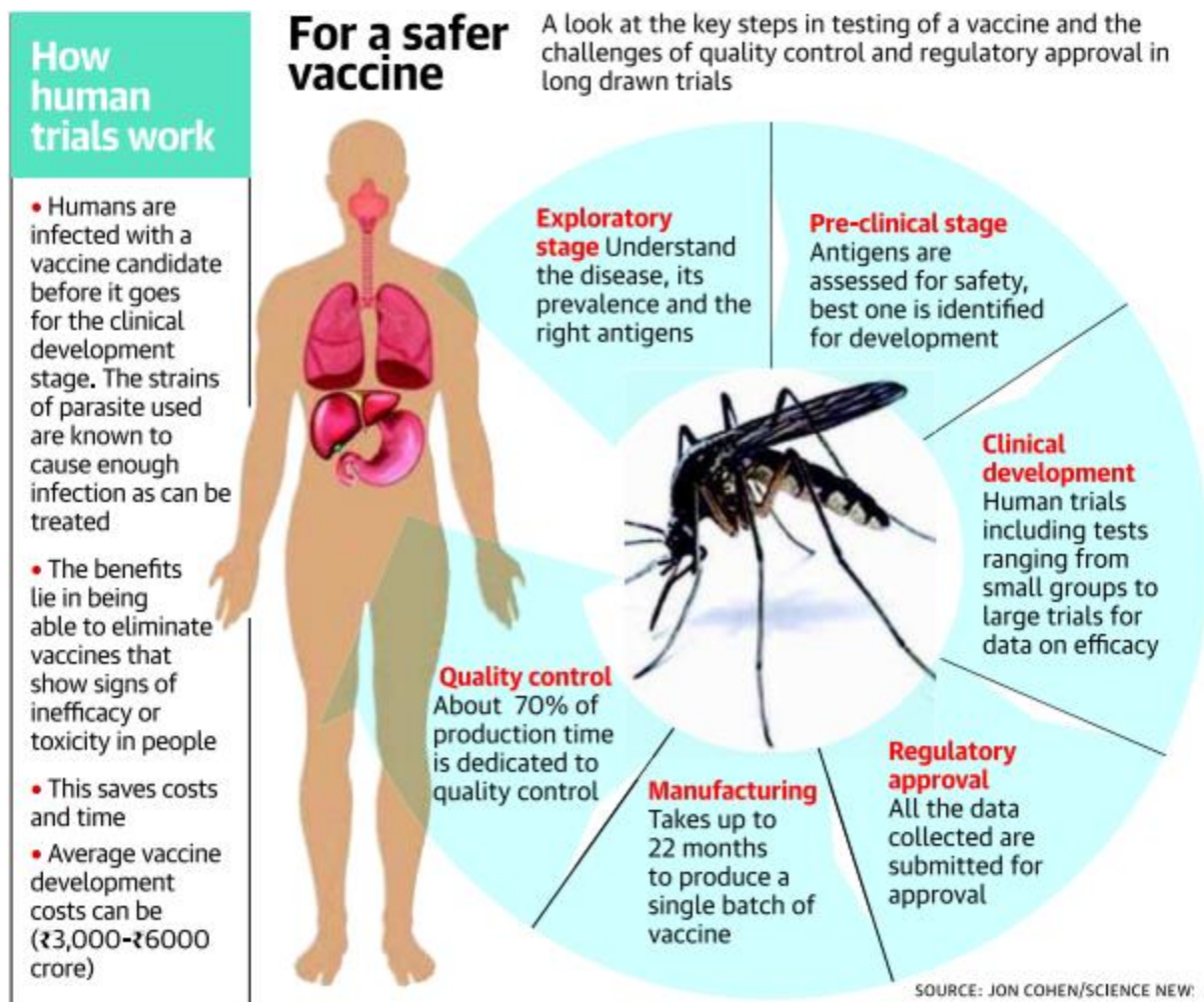


Image : The Hindu

Malaria

A disease caused by a plasmodium parasite, transmitted by the bite of infected mosquitoes.

More than 1 million cases per year (India)

Details

- The severity of malaria varies based on the species of plasmodium.
- Symptoms are chills, fever and sweating, usually occurring a few weeks after being bitten.
- People travelling to areas where malaria is common typically take protective drugs before during and after their trip.
- Treatment includes antimalarial drugs.

How it spreads

- By animal or insect bites or stings.
- By blood products (unclean needles or unscreened blood).

Prelims Perspective

A question can be expected from any of the following areas

- ✓ Details about Malaria disease

Mains Perspective

Model questions

- ✓ Several of India's neighbouring countries have been able to achieve better health prospects despite not having achieved India's level of economic development.
Explain

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Google health card](#) [Wikipedia](#)

Juno - NASA Jupiter Mission

The NASA spacecraft in orbit around Jupiter - Juno began transmitting data and images from the closest brush with the Great Red Spot, a flyby of the colossal, crimson storm.

Prelims : General Science.

Mains : GS 3 Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Highlights

- Scientists hope the NASA exercise will help unlock mysteries as what forces are driving the mammoth cyclone
- Juno probe had found earth-sized storms in Jupiter earlier. The churning cyclone ranks as the largest known storm in the solar system, measuring about 16,000 km in diameter with winds clocked at hundreds of miles (km) an hour around its outer edges. It appears as a deep, red orb surrounded by layers of pale yellow, orange and white.
- The big cyclones that cover the highest latitudes of the planet are only now being seen in detail because previous missions to the planet never really got to look from above and below — certainly not at such a high resolution.
- A greater understanding of the Great Red Spot may yield clues to the structure, mechanics and formation of Jupiter as a whole.
- The storm is believed to be powered by energy oozing from Jupiter's interior combined with rotation of the planet,

Juno Mission

- Juno is the space probe orbiting the planet Jupiter launched by NASA
- Juno will study the gas giant's gravitational and magnetic fields, and explore the swirling clouds that form Jupiter's colorful, trademark atmosphere.
- The spacecraft will also reveal what Jupiter is made of – and how much of it is water.

Prelims Perspective

Similar question UPSC prelims 2016

What is 'Greased Lightning-10 (GL-10)', recently in the news?

- (a) Electric plane tested by NASA
- (b) Solar-powered two-seater aircraft designed by Japan
- (c) Space observatory launched by China
- (d) Reusable rocket designed by ISRO

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#) [Mission Juno](#)

Bitcoin trade may come under SEBI

The government is considering the introduction of a regulatory regime for virtual or crypto currencies, such as Bitcoin, that would enable the levy of the Goods and Services Tax on their sale.

Mains : GS 3 Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Basics of cyber security

Why Bitcoins needs to be regulate?

- Currently, neither illegal nor legal in India, Bitcoin affords anonymity, in grey area
- The new regime may possibly bring their trading under the oversight of the stock market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).
- The idea is to treat such currency in a manner similar to gold sold digitally, so that it can be traded on registered exchanges in a bid to "promote" a formal tax base, while keeping a tab on their use for illegal activities such as money laundering, terror funding and drug trafficking.

What are cryptocurrencies?

- Crypto-currency is a digital currency which allows transacting parties to remain anonymous while confirming that the transaction is a valid one.
- There are multiple such currencies – bitcoin, ethereum, ripple are some of the popular ones.
- Currently, they are neither illegal nor legal in India.

The issues

- Bitcoins were in the news recently when during the two global cyber ransomware attacks – WannaCry and Petya – attackers sought about \$300 in bitcoin as ransom.
- Crypto-currency can also be used for a lot of legal activities too – such as booking tickets, buying coffee or fast food, depending of which retailers accept such currency.
- The government is wary that regulation will provide legitimacy to "what is currently ambiguous," and may lead to further rise in its valuation and end up contributing "to the investment bubble".

What is a bitcoin?

It is an electronic or digital currency that works on a peer-to-peer basis. . A bitcoin is not

printed currency but is a non-repudiable record of every transaction that it has been through. All this is part of a huge ledger called the blockchain.

- It is decentralised and has no central authority controlling it.
- It can be sent from one person to another
- Online payments can be sent without either side knowing the identity of the other.

How is a new bitcoin generated?

- A bitcoin is generated when an entity, i.e. a person or a business, uses software power to solve a mathematical puzzle that makes the blockchain more secure.
- The system depends on cryptography to control the creation of the currency
- The blockchain system is designed such that at its maximum only 21 million bitcoins can be produced and in circulation. Presently about 15.2 million bitcoins have been mined (or produced).

Where do you get bitcoins?

- Bitcoins are available in bitcoin exchanges. You could also purchase bitcoins from other users.

Unocoin is a Bengaluru-based company that allows users to buy, sell, store or use bitcoins.

How does the payment system work?

When you send a bitcoin to a receiver, the transaction is included in the blockchain and broadcast to the network. The blockchain ensures that the same bitcoin is not spent twice by the same user. A computer network validates the transaction using algorithms so that the transaction becomes unalterable. Once validated, the transaction is added to others to create a block of data for the ledger.

Prelims Perspective

With reference to 'Bitcoins', sometimes seen in the news, which of the following statements is/are correct? **[UPSC 2016]**

1. Bitcoins are tracked by the Central Banks of the countries
2. Anyone with a Bitcoin address can send and receive Bitcoins from anyone else with a Bitcoin address.
3. Online payments can be sent without either side knowing the identity of the other.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Solution: B

Mains Perspective

What are bitcoins and what do you mean by blockchain technology? Will the emergence

of cryptocurrencies pave the way for new methods of financing subversive activities?

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC)

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) signed an Institutional agreement with the Punjab State Council of Science and Technology to establish India's first Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC) at Patent Information Centre, Punjab

Mains : GS 3 Issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Technology and Innovations Support Centre

- It provides innovators in developing countries with access to locally based, high quality technology information and related services, helping them to exploit their innovative potential and to create, protect, and manage their Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs).
- The objective of the TISC is to stimulate a dynamic, vibrant and balanced Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) system in India to foster creativity and innovation, thereby promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing social, economic and cultural development by establishing a network of TISCs in India.
- It will be set up under the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) TISC program.

Services offered by TISCs include:

- Access to online patent and non-patent (scientific and technical) resources and IP-related publications;
- Assistance in searching and retrieving technology information;
- Training in database search;
- On-demand searches (novelty, state-of-the-art and infringement);
- Monitoring technology and competitors;
- Basic information on industrial property laws, management and strategy, and technology commercialization and marketing.

Other details

- The Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM) is designated as the National Focal Point for the TISC national network.
- As the national focal point, CIPAM shall identify potential host institutions, assess their capacities and support them in joining the TISC program.
- CIPAM will also act as the main intermediary between WIPO and TISC host institutions and coordinate all the activities of the national TISC network.

Prelims Perspective

Model questions

Consider the following statements with regard to Technology and Innovations Support Centre.

1. It will help innovators in developing countries with access to locally based, high quality technology information and related services.
2. It is a program under World Intellectual property organisation
3. India has partnered with WIPO and established TISC in all districts.

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Sources: [pib](#)

Saraswati - a supercluster of galaxies

A group of Indian astronomers discovered a massive supercluster of galaxies, and have named it Saraswati.

Mains : GS 3 Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology

About Saraswati Supercluster

- The supercluster is about 4 billion light years away and spreads over a “great wall” about 600 million light years across.
- It is one of the largest superclusters to be discovered and also the furthest.
- The astronomers belong to Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) and Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISER) in Pune, besides NIT, Jamshedpur and Newman College, Thodupuzha.
- The first supercluster of galaxies, the Shapley Supercluster, was discovered in 1989, and the second, the Sloan Great Wall in 2003.
- The Milky Way galaxy is part of the Laniakea Supercluster, which was discovered in 2014.

What are galaxy clusters? How big are they?

- Galaxies are like the building blocks of the universe, they contain a huge number of stars, something like 100 billion at a count.
- Galaxy groups can have three to 20 galaxies, the richest systems are called clusters (like the Virgo cluster) which can have several hundred galaxies.
- Superclusters are clusters of clusters. They can have as few as two clusters, and superclusters with two to four clusters are common. Saraswati has 42.
- Within superclusters, clusters are connected by filaments and sheets of dark matter with galaxies embedded in them.

It is supposed that the galaxies are born in the filaments and then migrate towards the intersection of the filaments where they are assimilated into clusters.

What are superclusters?

These are the largest coherent structures seen in the universe. There are clusters of galaxies together with associated gas and dark matter. Large groups of such clusters, linked by filaments, separated by voids together form the superclusters.

How does the Saraswati supercluster compare with the Milky Way?

The newly discovered Saraswati supercluster is 600 million light years across. The Milky Way is 150,000 light years across.

Where does the supercluster Saraswati lie in the sky?

The supercluster Saraswati lies in the Stripe 82 of the Sloan Digital Sky Survey. It is about 4000 million light years away from us. It is in the constellation of Pisces.

What is “Stripe 82 region of SDSS”?

- SDSS stands for the Sloan Digital Sky Survey. This is an ambitious plan to make a digital 3D map of the universe.
- Started in 2000, it has, over eight years, mapped more than a quarter of the sky.
- The central stripe is known as Stripe 82.

What is the significance of this discovery? Is there a puzzle posed by the discovery of Saraswati?

- Spotting a supercluster which is 4000 million light years away means that you are looking at light that has come in from four billion years ago (*a light year is the distance travelled by light in one year*).
- Since the universe is believed to be 13.8 billion years old, this means we are looking at light from when the universe was about 10 billion years old, just about 70% of its present age.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Consider the following statements

1. Saraswati is the first supercluster to be discovered
2. Sloan Digital Sky Survey is a project led by ISRO to make a 4D map of universe.
3. The Milky Way galaxy is part of Sarswati Supercluster

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. None of the above

Mains Perspective

Model questions

What do you understand by the term superclusters and galaxy with regard to space?

What is the significance of these in the study about universe?

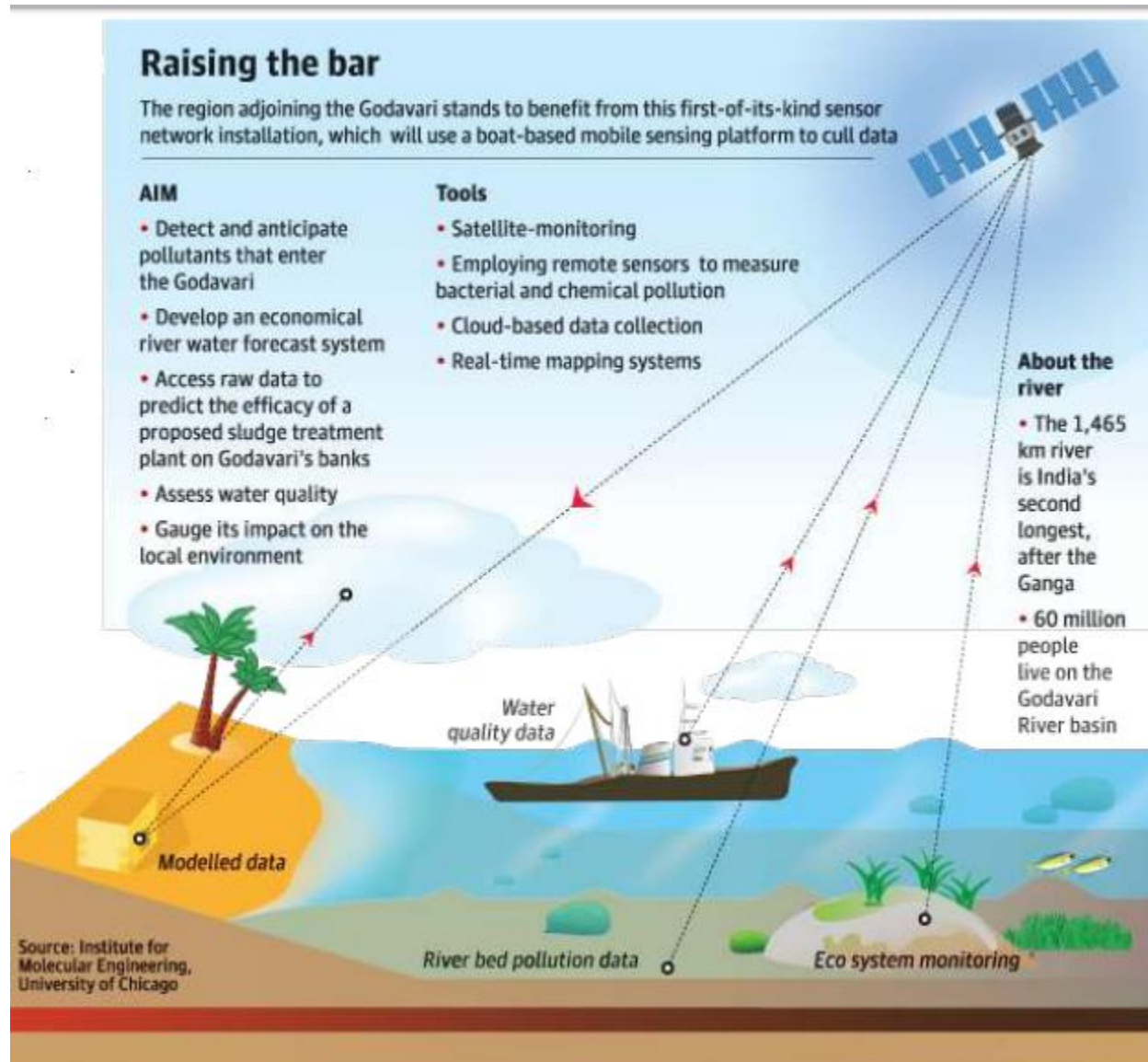
Sources: [The Hindu](#) [The Hindu](#)

Sensor network to map and predict pollution, effluents in Godavari

A group of U.S. researchers is working on a system to map undulating pollution trends in the Godavari, India's second longest river.

Mains : GS 3 Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life .

- The system uses multiple methods including satellite-monitoring, traversing stretches of the river to collect water samples and using special sensors to measure bacterial and chemical pollution.



The team's long-term objective is to be able to inform State officials and citizens of a probable spike in, say, levels of dangerous microbes or effluents, similar to weather and air pollution forecasts.

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Malaria drug shields foetus from Zika

Commonly used malaria drug hydroxychloroquine can effectively block the Zika virus from crossing the placenta and getting into the foetus and damaging its brain. The drug already has approval for use in pregnant women.

Mains : GS 2 Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

How it works?

- The placenta acts as a barrier to protect the developing foetus from disease-causing organisms.
- It prevents pathogens from reaching the foetus through a form of a garbage recycling system that removes some components of cells, termed autophagy.
- The Zika virus actually manipulates the garbage recycling system to its own advantage. The Zika infection ramps up autophagy. So when we use a drug that inhibits or suppresses this ramping up, we can block the virus from infecting the foetus
- Treating the cells with drugs that inhibit autophagy resulted in significant decrease in Zika virus replication about two days after infection.
- On the other hand, when drugs that promote the cell recycling process were administered, the virus multiplied and caused increased viral infection.

Human trial are not yet carries out as trial on pregnant women is always challenging. But given that the drug is already approved and Zika infections have such terrible consequences, there may be more chances of going forward

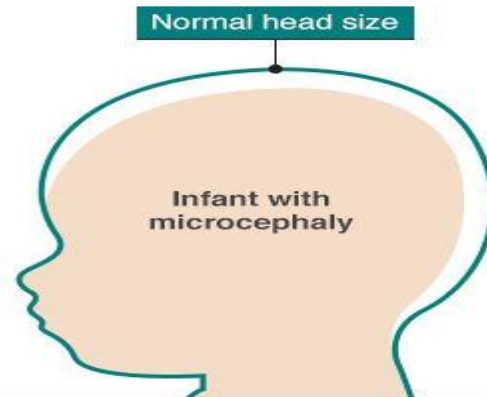
Zika Virus

- Zika virus disease is caused by a virus transmitted primarily by *Aedes* mosquitoes.
- People with Zika virus disease can have symptoms including mild fever, skin rash, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, malaise or headache. These symptoms normally last for 2-7 days.

- There is scientific consensus that Zika virus is a cause of microcephaly and

Microcephaly

- Symptoms include below-average head size
- Often caused by failure of brain to grow at normal rate
- Head circumference measuring **less than 31.5-32cm** at birth
- Affects **25,000 children** in US each year



Source: ADAM, WHO

BBC

Guillain-Barré syndrome. Links to other neurological complications are also being investigated.

Guillain-Barré syndrome

Guillain-Barré syndrome is a condition in which the immune system attacks the nerves. A rare nervous system disorder, Guillain-Barré syndrome, can cause temporary paralysis has been linked to the infection.

Prelims Perspective

Similar Question [UPSC Prelims 2017]

Consider the following statements:

1. In tropical regions, Zika virus disease is transmitted by the same mosquito that transmits dengue.
2. Sexual transmission of Zika virus disease is possible.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [BBC](#) [WHO](#)

“Sohum”- An innovative Newborn hearing screening Device

The indigenously developed newborn hearing screening device – SOHUM was formally launched

Mains : GS 3 Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

About Sohum

- Sohum is a low cost and unique device which uses brainstem auditory evoked response, the gold standard in auditory testing to check for hearing response in a newborn.

- The technology is prohibitively expensive and inaccessible to many and with this innovation the technology is made appropriate for the resource constrained settings.
- The newborn hearing screening device is developed by School of International Biodesign (SIB) startup M/s Sohum Innovation Labs India Pvt. Ltd.
- The battery-operated device is non-invasive, which means babies do not need to be sedated, which is the current, and risky, testing in process at present.

School of International Biodesign (SIB)

- SIB is a flagship Program of the DBT aimed to develop innovative and affordable medical devices as per unmet clinical needs of India
- It also aims to train the next generation of medical technology innovators in India,
- The Program is implemented jointly at AIIMS and IIT Delhi in collaboration with International partners.
- Biotech Consortium India Limited manages techno-legal activities of the Program.

Congenital hearing loss

- One of the most common birth disorders – congenital hearing loss – is a result of both genetic and non-genetic factors.
- Early detection is necessary as when it is discovered at 4+ years, it's too late to reverse the damage and this leads to a host of problems.
- Globally, 8,00,000 hearing impaired babies are born annually of which, nearly 1,00,000 are in India.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The programme 'School of International Biodesign (SIB)' aims to develop innovative and affordable medical devices
2. SOHUM is an indigenously developed newborn vision screening device

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [Business Standard](#) pib

Solar flare Proxima Centauri

AstroSat, along with other space and earth-based observatories, has detected a powerful solar flare sent out by the star Proxima Centauri.

Mains : GS 3 Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-

technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Proxima Centauri

- Proxima Centauri is the sun's closest star neighbour and is a cool dwarf star situated a little over four light years away,
- Proxima Centauri b is a planet orbiting Proxima Centauri and lying in its habitable 'Goldilocks' zone — had set everyone wondering if it could host life.
- The presence of solar flare on Proxima Centauri makes it quite improbable for Proxima Centauri b to host a life

What are solar flares?

- A solar flare is an intense burst of radiation coming from the release of magnetic energy associated with sunspots. Flares are our solar system's largest explosive events. They are seen as bright areas on the sun and last from mere minutes to several hours.
- Scientists classify solar flares according to their x-ray brightness.
- There are 3 categories: X-, M- and C-class. X-class flares are the largest of these events. M-class flares are medium-sized; they can cause brief radio blackouts that affect Earth's polar regions. Compared to X- and M-class, C-class flares are small with few noticeable consequences on Earth.

Sunspots are temporary phenomena on the photosphere of the Sun that appear as dark spots compared with surrounding regions. They are areas of reduced surface temperature caused by concentrations of magnetic field flux that inhibit convection. Sunspots usually appear in pairs of opposite magnetic polarity.

Why is it important?

- Solar flares might have devastating effect on power grids, interrupt broadcasts and electricity, affect electronic instruments, and cause excess UV radiation in space
- Solar flares strongly influence the local space weather in the vicinity of the Earth.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Which of the following is/are correct about solar flares?

1. Solar flares originate from planets
2. It can have devastating effects on power grids, local space weather etc.

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [NASA](#) [Wikipedia](#)

Global Conference on Cyber Space 2017

India will be hosting the 5th Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS) in 2017, one of the world's largest conference on Cyber Space and related issues

Prelims :Current events of national and international importance.

Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS)

- The GCCS is taking place outside OECD nations for the first time
- The theme for the GCCS 2017 is 'Cyber4All: An Inclusive, Sustainable, Developmental, Safe and Secure Cyberspace'
- The two-day conference will see participation of around 2000 delegates from senior Government officials, industry leaders, academia and civil society from over 100 countries.
- GCCS will congregate and deliberate on issues relating to promotion of cooperation in cyberspace, norms for responsible behaviour in cyberspace and to enhance cyber capacity building.
- GCCS is a prestigious international conference that aims at encouraging dialogue among stakeholders of cyberspace, which has been taking place since 2011.
- Incepted in 2011 in London, GCCS witnessed a participation of 700 global delegates.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With reference to 'Global Conference on Cyber Space, consider the following statements:

1. The first GCCS was held in India on the theme 'Cyber4All: An Inclusive, Sustainable, Developmental, Safe and Secure Cyberspace'.
2. The conference is an initiative by European Union and NATO.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Sources: [pib](#)

Outer space treaty

The Outer Space Treaty, which laid the foundation for an international space law, came into force in October 1967, following a decade-long space race between the Cold War rivals, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

Mains : **GS 2** International relations **GS 3** Awareness in the fields of IT, Space,

What is Outer space treaty?

- The Outer Space Treaty, formally the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, is a treaty that forms the basis of international

space law.

- The Treaty was opened for signature by the three depository Governments (the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) in January 1967, and it entered into force in October 1967.
- The Outer Space Treaty provides the basic framework on international space law,

Principles

- the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all mankind;
- outer space shall be free for exploration and use by all States;
- outer space is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means;
- States shall not place nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies or station them in outer space in any other manner;
- the Moon and other celestial bodies shall be used exclusively for peaceful purposes;
- astronauts shall be regarded as the envoys of mankind;
- States shall be responsible for national space activities whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental entities;
- States shall be liable for damage caused by their space objects; and
- States shall avoid harmful contamination of space and celestial bodies.

Why it was signed?

- During the period of cold war a fight for supremacy in space became a matter of pride for USA and USSR
- The space race left a wider impact in the field of technology, spawning pioneering efforts to launch artificial satellites and unmanned space probes.
- The space programmes undertaken by both countries were not just for civilian purposes but were aimed at military supremacy also.
- At this point, the United Nations had to step in, in order to ensure that outer space didn't become a battleground for these superpowers, and the Outer Space Treaty was born.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

With regard to Outer Space treaty which of the following is/are correct?

1. It entered into force in 1967
2. The Outer Space Treaty provides the basic framework on international space law.
3. States shall be responsible for national space activities whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental entities;

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only

- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Sources: [The Hindu](#) [Wikipedia](#) [UNOOSA](#)

Tampered computers gave NEET applicants a lifeline

The Delhi Police has filed a charge sheet against officials of Prometric Testing Pvt Ltd, hired by the National Board of Examinations (NBE), to conduct the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admissions to post graduate medical courses.

Mains : **GS 3** basics of cyber security.

GS 4 Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude

Highlights

Nearly one lakh students appeared for the PG entrance examination, competing for 35,117 post graduate seats across the country.

What is the case about?

- Computers at the examination centres managed by Prometric were compromised.
- In some cases, select computers were remotely accessed by outsiders to select the correct answers for the students.
- In other instances, officials deployed by Prometric tampered with the security system and ensured that select candidates got access to the Internet

How it happened?

- The NBE contracted Prometric, which then sub-contracted the conducting of the tests to yet another company, CMS IT Services Pvt Ltd for engineering and support staff.
- CMS IT Services further contracted out the hiring of local vendors for staff at various examination centres.
- The selection of suitable staff for the exam seems to be compromised and the security and sincerity of the exam was breached

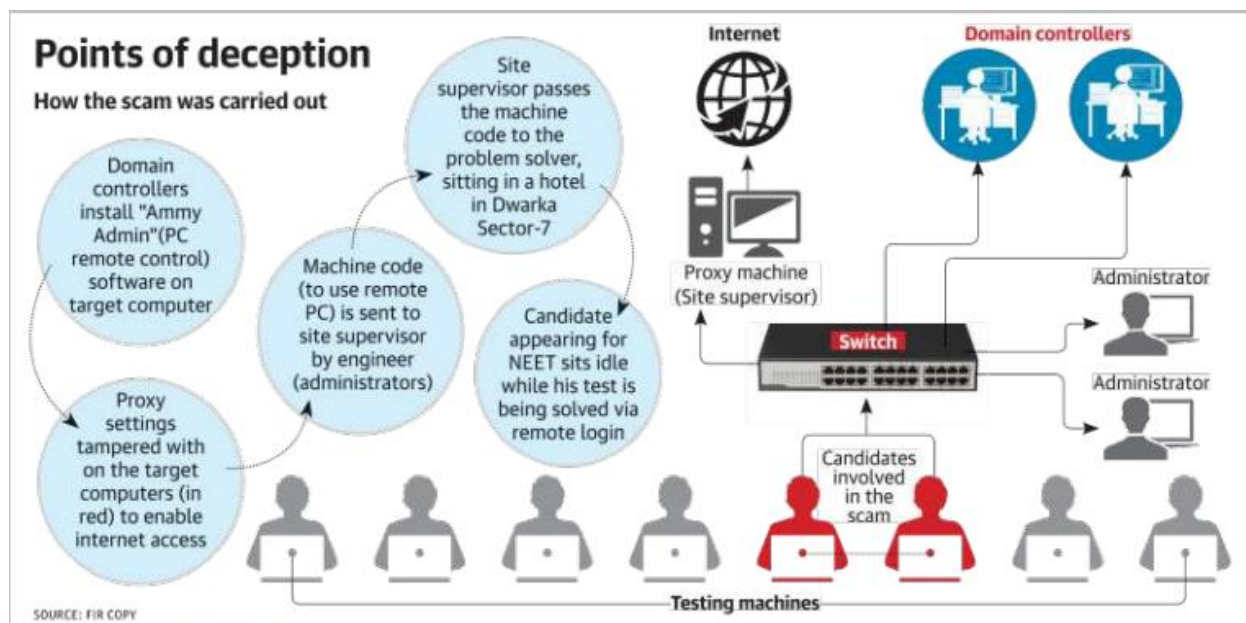


Image : The Hindu

Sources: [The Hindu](#)

Achievements in Space Sector

During the last three years (June 2014 to June 2017), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully accomplished 41 missions, which includes 19 launch vehicle missions, 19 satellite missions and 3 technology demonstrator missions.

Mains : GS3-Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

Applications of Space Technology

The areas which are benefitted/ likely to be benefitted with the utilization of space technology and its applications include –

1. resource monitoring
2. weather forecasting
3. telecommunication
4. broadcasting
5. rural connectivity
6. health & education
7. governance
8. disaster management support
9. location based services
10. space commerce including host of societal applications.

The space science and planetary missions, viz. Mars Orbiter Mission and ASTROSAT renew the interest of young minds towards space science.

Major achievements

SELFLEARN'S MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS -JULY 2017

1. Operationalisation of GSLV-MkII with home-grown Cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS) with indigenous capability for launching 2-tonne class satellites.
2. Successful launch of first developmental flight of GSLV-MkIII, which validated new version of Indigenous Cryogenic Engine. With this capability, it will be possible to launch upto 4-tonne class of communication satellites into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbits (GTO).
3. Launch of 14 flights of PSLV, which includes launch of 104 Satellites in a single PSLV (PSLV-C37) mission – Maximum satellites launched in a single launch mission till date.
4. Realisation of South Asia Satellite to enable South Asian countries to establish SATCOM based services such as Television/DTH, VSAT, e-governance, banking, tele-medicine & tele-education etc., with coverage over South Asia.
5. Realisation of 7-satellite NavIC (Navigation – Indian Constellation) to provide Position, Navigation and Timing Services, with five satellites launched during the last three years.
6. Augmentation of Satellite Communication capability with 7 more satellites viz. GSAT-6, GSAT-9, GSAT-15, GSAT-16, GSAT-17, GSAT-18 & GSAT-19.
7. Successful Technology Demonstration missions viz. Crew Module Atmospheric Re-entry Experiment (CARE), Re-usable Launch Vehicle (RLV-TD) and Scramjet Air-breathing Engine.
8. INSAT-3D & 3DR together are providing meteorological data every 15 minutes for enabling weather forecasting. Ocean surface wind vector data from SCATSAT-1 are
9. Augmentation of earth observation capability with 4 satellites viz., 3 High Resolution Cartographic and 1 Resource monitoring satellites.
10. Placing a unique multi-wavelength observatory 'Astrosat' in orbit, carrying instruments realised through Indian academic institutes to enhance understanding of universe and astronomical phenomena.
11. Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) completed 1000 days in the orbit. Earlier, Mars Orbiter Spacecraft was successfully placed in Martian orbit on September 24, 2014 making India the first country to do so in its first attempt.
12. Enabling host of applications using synergy of earth observation, communication and navigation satellites in governance and development.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Questions on any of the above missions can be asked.

Mains Perspective

Model questions

Indian Space Research Organisation has carved a niche for itself in space communication projects and is playing a significant role in the development and



progress of the nation. Elucidate with examples.

Sources: [pib](#)

“Sagar Vani” - An Integrated Information Dissemination System

Minister of Science & Technology, launched an app “Sagar Vani”

Mains : GS 3 Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Highlights

- Sagar vani provides ocean information services for the benefit of various user communities in the country.
- The ‘Sagar Vani’ is a software platform where various dissemination modes will be integrated on a single central server.
- It will disseminate information from directly from the lab to the end user
- The ‘Sagar Vani’ includes Multi Lingual SMS, Voice Call / Audio Advisory, Mobile Apps , Social Media, Email, GTS etc.
- The system also has facility to provide access to various stakeholders (NGOs, State Fishery Departments, Disaster Management Authorities, etc.)
- It s developed by ESSO(Earth System Science organization)-Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) under Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) through the Industry M/s. Gaian Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
- The ‘Sagar Vani’ will serve the coastal community, especially the fishermen community with the advisories and alerts towards their livelihood as well as their safety at Sea.

Prelims perspective

Model questions

Sagar vani sometimes seen in news pertains to

- a. Development of coastal areas
- b. App to facilitate implementation of Sagarmala Project
- c. Provide ocean information services to fisherman
- d. None of the above

Sources: [pib](#)

‘India Quake’ – An App for Earthquake Parameter Dissemination

Union Minister of Science & Technology, launched an app “India Quake”. It is a Mobile App developed by the NCS (National Centre for Seismology) for automatic dissemination of earthquake parameter (location, time and magnitude) after the occurrence of earthquakes. The App will make information dissemination faster. Citizens can get real time earthquake location information through this.

'Heat-resistant' cows of the future

Scientists are developing a breed of genetically-modified 'cows of the future' that will be more heat-resistant and have superior ability to adapt to hot living conditions. More than half the cattle in the world lives in hot and humid environments, including about 40% of beef cows in the United States, researchers said.

By using genomic tools, researchers aim to produce an animal that can adapt to hot living conditions and produce top-quality beef.

Mobile app "GST Rates Finder"

CBEC Mobile app "GST Rates Finder" which is available on android platform and soon will be available on ios platform as well. There may be many more apps available with similar names. The user has to download the app with CBEC Logo i.e. The user can search for any goods and services by typing the name or chapter heading of the commodity or services. Any person who has been billed by a hotel or restaurant or for footwear can cross verify the rates through this mobile app. It will increase transparency and truly empowers every citizen of the nation and serves as a ready reckoner for one and all.

3D-printed, functional heart made

Scientists have developed a 3D-printed soft silicone heart that closely resembles and functions like the human organ. The soft artificial heart weighs 390 grams and has a volume of 679 cubic centimetres. It is a silicone monoblock with complex inner structure. The artificial heart has a right and a left ventricle, though they are not separated by a septum but by an additional chamber. This chamber is inflated and deflated by pressurised air and is required to pump fluid from the blood chambers.

Super-flexible and strong artificial silk developed

Scientists from the University of Cambridge have developed super-stretchy and strong artificial silk, composed almost entirely of water, which may be used to make eco-friendly textiles and sensors. The fibres, which resemble miniature bungee cords as they can absorb large amounts of energy, are sustainable, non-toxic and can be made at room temperature, researchers said.

The fibres are spun from a soupy material called a hydrogel, which is 98% water. The remaining 2% of the hydrogel is made of silica and cellulose, both naturally available materials. The extremely thin threads are a few millionths of a metre in diameter. After the hydrogel is stretched for roughly 30 seconds, the water evaporates, leaving a strong fibre.

A smart glove that can translate sign language

Scientists have created a low-cost smart glove that can wirelessly translate sign language into text and control objects in virtual reality games. The device, called "The Language

of Glove”, was built for less than \$100 using stretchable and printable electronics that are inexpensive, commercially available and easy to assemble.

Guardian UAV deal with U.S. still a work in progress

An American approval for the sale of 22 Guardian maritime surveillance has come India's way, but the actual deal is a long way off as India is evaluating the options available. The U.S.-India joint statement issued at the end of the Prime minister's visit said Washington had “offered for India's consideration the sale of Sea Guardian Unmanned Aerial Systems” which would enhance India's capabilities and promote shared security interests. The Navy currently operates Israeli Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) UAVs and is keen on acquiring High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) to augment its maritime surveillance capabilities.

Global rice processing facility to come up in Mysuru

Mysuru-based Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), a premier CSIR laboratory, in the process of establishing a state-of-the-art global rice processing facility on its premises. It will be Asia's first institution where the best practices of rice milling with a focus on dealing with by-products, mainly bran, to prevent its waste, will be taught. The institute aims to create skilled manpower in the area of rice processing with the new facility, which is similar to International School of Milling Technology (ISMT) that started functioning over three decades ago.

E-Portal for online sales of steel products in North Eastern Region

Union Steel Minister Shri Birender Singh launched a dedicated e-portal for online sales of steel products by RINL through MSTC Metal Mandi, in North Eastern Region of the country. The portal provides information regarding the different products available, their specifications, pricing, etc. Delivery at the doorstep is one of the attractive features of this initiative. The entire process is transparent and the interaction is enabled by a user-friendly

'BillionAbles' app tracks disabled-friendly spaces

A Delhi-based start-up has launched a smartphone app that can assist people with special needs to find disabled-friendly restaurants, tourist locations and other public places across India. The app, called BillionAbles, is India's first lifestyle app for persons with disabilities and special needs, says its founder Sameer Garg.



First Two NOPVs Shachi and Shruti Launched by RDEL at Pipavav, Gujarat

Reliance Defence and Engineering Limited (RDEL) launched the first two Naval Offshore Patrol Vessels (NOPVs) at their shipyard in Pipavav, Gujarat. The ships are part of a five ship project being constructed for the Indian Navy. The primary role of NOPVs is to undertake surveillance of the country's vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) besides operational tasks such as anti-piracy patrols, fleet support operations, maritime security of offshore assets, coastal security operations, and protection of shipping lanes. The NOPVs would increase the ocean surveillance and patrolling capabilities of the Indian Navy. These two NOPVs are the first warships to be launched by a private sector shipyard in India.

Current events of National and International importance

Petroleum Minister to represent India at 22nd World Petroleum Congress at Istanbul, Turkey

Minister of State (I/C) for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan will represent India at the 22nd World Petroleum Congress (WPC) International Conference. The tri-annual WPC Conference is widely recognized as the `Olympics` of the oil and gas industry. It attracts Ministers, CEOs of Oil and Gas MNCs, experts and academics from the hydrocarbon sectors and provides an ideal forum to showcase potential of India's hydrocarbon sector, highlight the recent policy reforms to international investors and interact with policy makers, technologists, scientists, planners and management experts, entrepreneurs, service providers and vendors in order to attract foreign investments into India's growing oil and gas sector.

U-19 Football Hunt Tournament concludes, with Punjab Boys team clinching OORJA Champions Trophy

'OORJA' CAPF U-19 Football Talent Hunt Tournament concluded. Golden Glove Award for best goal keeper was bagged by Karanvir Singh of Punjab in boys segment and Linthan Gamb of Manipur in girls section. The coveted Golden Boot award was won by Arjun Sharma of Punjab who had scored 3 goals. In girls category, the Golden Boot award was won by N. Rathanbala, Manipur who scored 15 goals in the tournament.

OORJA by CAPFs-2017 was jointly organized by CAPF and Assam Rifles under the aegis of All India Police Sports Control Board (AIPSCB) in which more than 12,500 footballers both Boys and Girls from 35 states/UTs played more than 1200 matches in three phases.

Ram Nath Kovind next president

NDA nominee Ram Nath Kovind has been elected as 14th President of India. Ram Nath Kovind would be the next occupant of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Ram Nath Kovind will be the second Dalit President of India after KR Narayanan.

Magsaysay Award winners

Yoshiaki Ishizawa, a Japanese historian who helped Cambodians preserve the Angkor temples, and Gethsie Shanmugam, a Sri Lankan teacher who counseled war widows and orphans to overcome their nightmares, Abdon Nababan, an Indonesian working for the return of large tracts of forest land to indigenous communities, a Singaporean businessman Tony Tay, who leads the cooking of 6,000 meals a day for the destitute, a Philippine theater group which stood up to a dictatorship and Lilia de Lima, a Filipino who oversaw the opening of job-generating export processing zones are the winners of this year's Ramon Magsaysay awards regarded as Asia's version of the Nobel Prize. The Ramon Magsaysay Awards' is an annual award established to perpetuate former Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay's example of integrity in governance, courageous service to the people, and pragmatic idealism within a democratic society.

Maiden Participation of Indian Navy Band in Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo 2017

The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo is an international event of military music performance undertaken by the Armed Forces. It is the largest tattoo performed in the world in the majestic, sprawling stretch of Edinburgh Castle Esplanade, Scotland.

The Indian Navy Band will participate and perform in this prestigious event. The participation of the Naval Band would further cement the ties between the two countries, more so, when the Govt of India and UK have announced 2017 as the India-UK Year of Culture to celebrate cultural ties and the 70th year of Indian independence.