

24th meeting of East-Zonal Council

Union Minister for Home Affairs chaired the 24th meeting of the Eastern Zonal Council at Bhubhaneswar (Odisha).

About Zonal Councils -

- These are the statutory bodies established under the States Reorganisation Act 1956 and not constitutional bodies. They are only deliberative and advisory bodies.
- The councils aimed to promote interstate cooperation and coordination.

There are 5 five Zonal councils namely:

- The Northern Zonal Council, headquarter (HQ) at New Delhi.
- The Central Zonal Council, HQ at Allahabad
- The Eastern Zonal Council, HQ at Kolkata.
- The Western Zonal Council, HQ at Mumbai.
- The Southern Zonal Council, HQ at Chennai

Note - The North Eastern States are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972, with HQ at **Shillong**.

Composition -

- **Chairman** – The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
- **Vice Chairman** – The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
- **Members** – Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.

RAISE 2020

The government has announced the mega event, RAISE 2020- - '**Responsible AI for Social Empowerment 2020**', to be held in April in New Delhi.

What is it?

- RAISE 2020 is a first of its kind, a **global meeting of minds on Artificial Intelligence** to drive India's vision and roadmap for social empowerment, inclusion and transformation through responsible AI.
- It is India's first Artificial Intelligence summit to be **organised by the Government in partnership with Industry and Academia**.
- It is being organised by **Ministry of Electronics & IT**.
- The summit will be a global meeting of minds to exchange ideas and charter a course to use AI for social empowerment, inclusion and transformation in key areas like healthcare, agriculture, education and Smart Mobility amongst other sectors.
- It will facilitate an exchange of ideas to further create a mass awareness about the need to ethically develop and practice AI in the digital era.

India submits two nominations for World Heritage List

India has submitted two nomination dossiers namely 'Dholavira: A Harappan City' and 'Monuments and Forts of Deccan Sultanate' for inclusion in the World Heritage list for the Year 2020.

Dholavira - A Harappan City -

- It is located in **Khadir islet of the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat**.
- It has two seasonal streams: **Mansar in the north and Manhar in the south**.
- It is one of the two largest Harappan sites in India and 5th largest in the subcontinent.

- Efficient Water conservation system that supported life for more than 1200 years (3000 BCE to 1800 BCE).
- The water conservation methods of Dholavira are unique and measures as one of the most efficient systems of the ancient world.
- **Town planning** - it consisted of a bipartite 'Citadel', a 'Middle town' and a 'lower town', two 'stadia', an 'annexe', a series of reservoirs all set within a fortification running on all four sides.

Monuments and Forts of Deccan Sultanate -

- The Monuments demonstrate the convergence of national and international styles of Islamic architecture and their intersections with the Hindu architecture of the period southern Indian in present-day Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- It comprises of four components namely:
 - I. **Bahmani Monuments** at Gulbarga, Karnataka.
 - II. **Bahmani and Barid Shahi Monuments** at Bidar, Karnataka.
 - III. **Adil Shahi Monuments** at Bijapur, Karnataka.
 - IV. **Qutub Shahi Monuments** at Hyderabad Andhra Pradesh.

President of India confers 61st Annual Lalit Kala Akademi Awards

President of India has conferred the 61st annual Lalit Kala Akademi Awards on 15 meritorious artists at a function held at Rashtrapati Bhawan recently.

About Lalit Kala Akademi -

- The Akademi was inaugurated on August 5, 1954, by the then **Honourable Minister for Education, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**.
- The Akademi was given **statutory authority in 1957, under the Societies Registration Act 1860**.
- Since its establishment it has been serving the entire country by **promoting the creative endeavours of Indian artists** and bringing their arts to bear upon a large number of people, thereby playing an important role in defining and redefining the sensibility of an entire culture, falling under the visual arts spectrum.
- It is **headquartered in New Delhi**.

1000 springs initiative

Union Tribal Affairs Ministry has launched "**1000 Spring Initiatives**" and **an online portal on GIS-based spring Atlas** with Hydrological and chemical properties of the springs on the occasion.

What is a 'spring'?

A Spring is a point at which water flows from an aquifer to the Earth's surface.

What is the initiative?

The "**1000 springs initiative**" aims at improving access to safe and adequate water for the tribal communities living in a difficult and inaccessible part of rural areas in the country. It is an integrated solution around natural springs. It includes the provision of -

- Infrastructure for piped water supply for drinking;
- Water for irrigation;
- Community-led total sanitation initiatives;
- Provision for water for backyard nutrition gardens,
- Generating sustainable livelihood opportunities for the tribal people.

Significance -

It will help in harnessing the potential of perennial springs' water to address the natural scarcity of water in tribal areas.

Janaushadhi Week

Context - Janaushadhi week is being celebrated across the country from 1st March to 7th March 2020. On this occasion various activities like health checkup Camp, Jan Aushadhi Paricharcha, Jan Aushadhi ka sath are being undertaken.

About Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana -

- It was launched in the year 2015 to bring down the healthcare budget of every citizen of India through providing quality generic medicines at affordable prices.
- BPPI (Bureau of Pharma PSUs of India), under the administrative control of the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers will be the implementation agency for the PMBJP.

About BPPI -

- It got registered as an independent society in the year 2010 under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 as a separate legal entity.
- It is under the administrative control of the Department of Pharmaceuticals.

EKAM Fest

Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment inaugurated the week long Exhibition-cum-Fair “EKAM Fest” in New Delhi.

About -

- EKAM Fest is being **organised by National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation (NHFDC) under M/o Social Justice & Empowerment.**
- The term ‘Ekam’ stands for **Entrepreneurship, Knowledge, Awareness, and Marketing.**
- It also represents the **inclusiveness, oneness and unity.**
- EKAM Fest is an effort for **promoting entrepreneurship and knowledge among Divyangjan community**, generating awareness among society about potentialities of PwDs; providing a major marketing opportunity to PwDs entrepreneurs.
- Ekam Fest aims to promote Craftsmanship & Products of Divyang/Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) Artisans and Entrepreneur.

SPICe+ web form

As part of Government of India’s Ease of Doing Business (EODB) initiatives, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has notified a new Web Form christened ‘SPICe+’ replacing the existing SPICe form.

Details -

- SPICe+ would offer 10 services by 3 Central Government Ministries & Departments (**Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Ministry of Labour & Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance**) and **one State Government (Maharashtra).**
- It aims to save as many procedures, time and cost for starting a business in India and would be applicable for all new company incorporations.
- The new web form would facilitate On-screen filing and real time data validation for seamless incorporation of companies
- Registration for EPFO and ESIC shall be mandatory for all new companies to be incorporated through SPICe+
- Registration for Profession Tax shall also be mandatory for all new companies to be incorporated in the State of Maharashtra through SPICe+.

MIEWS Portal launched

Union Ministry of Food Processing has launched Market Intelligence and Early Warning System (MIEWS) Portal for Monitoring prices of Tomato, Onion and Potato (TOP) crops.

What is MIEWS Portal?

- MIEWS portal would help in planning and **timely intervention for price stabilisation and generating alerts.**
- MIEWS Portal is a 'first-of-its-kind' platform for '**real time monitoring**' of prices of (TOP) and for simultaneously generating alerts for intervention under the terms of the **Operation Greens (OG) scheme.**
- The portal would disseminate all relevant information related to TOP crops such as Prices and Arrivals, Area, Yield and Production, Imports and Exports, Crop Calendars, Crop Agronomy, etc. in an easy to use visual format.

Features -

- There would be a dashboard that would indicate low price and high price alerts as well as price forecasts for 3 month forward
- Prices and arrivals of TOP crops across the country including interactive charts and comparisons with previous seasons.
- Crop Agronomy and Trade Profile of each of the TOP crops
- This portal is a novel initiative of MoFPI leveraging IT tools and furthering the goals of Digital India.

About Operation Greens -

- It is a **price fixation scheme** that aims to ensure farmers are given the right price for their produce.
- It aims to promote Farmer Producers Organisations (FPO), Agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management of agri-produce.
- It focuses on **organised marketing of Tomatoes, Onions and Potatoes (TOP vegetables)** by connecting farmers with consumers.
- State Agriculture and other Marketing Federations, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPO), cooperatives, companies, Self-help groups, food processors etc. can avail the financial assistance under it.

Lok Sabha passes Mines and Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill

The Lok Sabha gave its nod to the **Mines and Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill** recently.

Background -

- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (1957) regulates the overall mining sector in India.
- The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 provides for the auction and allocation of mines whose allocation was cancelled by the Supreme Court in 2014. Schedule I of the Act provides a list of all such mines.
- Schedule II and III are sub-classes of the mines listed in the Schedule I.
- Schedule II mines are those where production had already started then, and Schedule III mines are ones that had been earmarked for a specified end-use.

Details -

- Currently, **companies acquiring Schedule II and Schedule III coal mines** through auctions **can use the coal produced only for specified end-uses such as power generation and steel production.**
- The Bill **removes this restriction on the use of coal mined by such companies.**
- Companies will be **allowed to carry on coal mining operation for own consumption, sale or for any other purposes**, as may be specified by the central government.
- The Bill clarifies that the companies need not possess any prior coal mining experience in India in order to participate in the auction of coal and lignite blocks.
- Further, the competitive bidding process for auction of coal and lignite blocks will not apply to mines considered for allotment to: (i) a government company or its joint venture for own consumption, sale or any other specified purpose; and (ii) a company that has been awarded a power project on the basis of a competitive bid for tariff.

130th foundation day of National Archives of India

Recently, the National Archives of India celebrated its 130th foundation day with an exhibition named ‘Jallianwala Bagh’ at its premises in New Delhi.

About National Archives of India -

- The genesis of National Archives of India can be traced to the **report of Sandeman**, the Civil Auditor who had stressed the need of relieving the offices of congestion by the destruction of the papers of routine nature and transfer of all valuable records to a ‘**Grand Central Archive**’.
- In 1889 **Professor G.W. Forrest of Elphinstone College, Bombay** entrusted the job of examining the records of the Foreign Department of the Government of India made a strong plea for transferring all records of the administration of East India Company to a Central Repository.
- This led to the **establishment of Imperial Records Department (IRD)** on 11 March 1891 in the **Imperial Secretariat Building at Calcutta (Kolkata)**.
- In 1911 the IRD was shifted to Delhi.
- After the Independence, the **government of India rechristened IRD as the National Archives of India** with Director of Archives as its head.
- In the year 1990, the office of the Director of Archives was re-designated as Director General of Archives.
- At present **National Archives of India is an attached office under the Ministry of Culture** and has a Regional Office at Bhopal and three Records Centres at Jaipur, Puducherry and Bhubaneswar.

Deccan Queen Express

India’s Deccan Queen Express will be upgraded to German design Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches. With the up gradation to LHB coaches, the train will have better safety features and improved travelling experience – better suspension system and better riding comfort.

About Deccan Queen Express -

- Indian Railways’ Deccan Queen, which has been **running between Mumbai and Pune since 1930**, is the **country’s first superfast train**.
- Deccan Queen is the first long-distance electric-hauled train, first vestibuled train, first train to have a ‘ladies only’ car and the first train to feature a dining car.
- It is operated by the Central Railway Zone of the Indian Railways.

International Day of Yoga 2020

The main national event for the 6th International Day of Yoga (IDY) will be held on 21st June 2020 at **Leh**, the **capital of UT of Ladakh** and the event will be led by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi.

About International Day of Yoga -

- The idea of International Day of Yoga was first proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his speech at the UN General Assembly (UNGA), on September 27, 2014.
- A draft resolution on 'International Day of Yoga' introduced by India's Ambassador to UN received support from 177 nations, the highest number of co-sponsors for any UNGA resolution.
- Thereafter, the United Nations proclaimed June 21 as the International Day of Yoga.
- International yoga day coincides with the **summer solstice**.
- Yoga is inscribed in the list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of India.

International Conference on Nano Science and Nano Technology (ICONSAT)

The International Conference on Nano Science and Nano Technology (ICONSAT) **under the aegis of Nano Mission, Department of Science and Technology (DST)** is being held at Kolkata focusing on the recent advances in this frontier research field.

Mission on Nano Science and Technology (Nano Mission) -

- It was launched in the year 2007 as an “umbrella capacity-building programme”.
- The Mission’s programmes target all scientists, institutions and industry in the country.
- It seeks to strengthen activities in nano science and technology by promoting basic research, human resource development, research infrastructure development, international collaborations, among others.
- It is anchored in the Department of Science and Technology and steered by a Nano Mission Council chaired by an eminent scientist.

States to be asked to invoke Epidemic Disease Act

It has been decided that all States/UTs should be advised to **invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897** so that all advisories being issued from time to time by the Ministry/State/UTs are enforceable to tackle the spread of Novel Coronavirus outbreak.

About Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 -

- The Epidemic Act is meant "to provide for the better prevention of the spread of dangerous epidemic diseases”.
- Section 2 of the act **empower the state government** to take special measures and prescribe regulations as to dangerous epidemic disease.
- Section 2A of the Act **empowers the central government** to take steps to prevent the spread of an epidemic.
- According to Section 3 of the act, “ *Any person disobeying any regulation or order made under this Act shall be deemed to have committed an offence punishable under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code.*”

India joins Indian Ocean Commission

India has been approved as an observer state for a five-nation grouping in the Western Indian Ocean, which includes **Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius and French Reunion**.

Details -

With the decision, India will join China, which was made an observer in 2016, as well as the “International Organisation of the Francophonie” or the 54-nation French-speaking collective, the European Union (EU) and Malta, which were all admitted in 2017.

About Indian Ocean Commission -

- It is an intergovernmental organisation **created in 1982**.
- It was **institutionalised in 1984** by the **Victoria Agreement in Seychelles**.
- The Commission is composed of five African Indian Ocean nations - **Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion Islands (French territory), and Seychelles**.
- COI’s principal mission is to strengthen the ties of friendship between the countries and to be a platform of solidarity for the entire population of the African Indian Ocean region.
- The Commission has a **Secretariat** which is located in **Mauritius** and headed by a Secretary General.
- The Commission has four observers — **China, EU, Malta and International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF)**.

Lok Sabha passes Appropriation Bill

The Lok Sabha has passed the Appropriation Bill 2020-21 that empowers the government to draw over ₹110 lakh crore from the Consolidated Fund of India for its working, as well as for the implementation of its programmes and schemes.

What is 'Appropriation Bill'?

- Appropriation Bill **gives power to the government to withdraw funds from the Consolidated Fund of India** for meeting the expenditure during the financial year.
- Post the discussions on Budget proposals and the Voting on Demand for Grants, the government introduces the Appropriation Bill in the Lok Sabha.
- It is intended to **give authority to the government to withdraw from the Consolidated Fund**, the amounts so voted for meeting the expenditure during the financial year.

Constitutional Provisions -

- As per the **Article 114 of the Constitution**, the government can withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund only after receiving approval from Parliament.
- The government introduces **the Appropriation Bill in the lower house of Parliament** after discussions on Budget proposals and Voting on Demand for Grants.
- The Appropriation Bill is first passed by the Lok Sabha and then sent to the Rajya Sabha.
- The **Rajya Sabha has the power to recommend any amendments in this Bill**. However, it is the prerogative of the Lok Sabha to either accept or reject the recommendations made by the upper house of Parliament.

RS nod for 'Vivad se Vishwas Bill'

The Parliament has approved the Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Bill, 2020, which will give taxpayers a chance to settle tax disputes by paying their dues without any interest or penalty till March 31.

About Vivad se Vishwas Bill -

- The Bill provides **a mechanism for resolution of pending tax disputes** related to income tax and corporation tax.
- The Bill **defines an appellant** as the income tax authority, or the person, or both, whose appeal is pending before any appellate forum as on January 31, 2020. These appellate forums are the Supreme Court, the High Courts, the Income Tax Appellate Tribunals, and the Commissioner (Appeals).
- The Bill proposes **a resolution mechanism** under which an appellant can file a declaration to the designated authority to initiate resolution of pending direct tax disputes.

How the matters are resolved?

- **Once the designated authority issues the certificate, appeals pending before the Income Tax Appellate Tribunals and the Commissioner (Appeals) will be deemed to be withdrawn.** In case of appeals or petitions pending before the Supreme Court and High Courts, the appellant is required to withdraw the appeal or petition.
- The **amount payable** by the appellant for resolution of disputes **is determined based on whether the dispute relates to payment of tax, or payment of interest, penalty, or fee.** Further, he is required to pay an additional amount if such payment is made after March 31, 2020.
- **Once a dispute is resolved, the designated authority cannot levy interest or penalty in relation to that dispute.** Further, no appellate forum can make a decision in relation to the matter of dispute once it is resolved. Such matters cannot be reopened in any proceeding under any law, including the IT Act.

GreenCo Rating System

GreenCo has been acknowledged in India's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) document, submitted to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2015.

About GreenCo Rating System -

- It is developed by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
- It is a proactive voluntary action of Indian industry / private sector towards combating climate change.
- It helps the industrial units in identifying and implementing various possible measures in terms of energy conservation, material conservation, recycling, utilisation of renewable energy, Green House Gases (GHG) reduction, water conservation, solid and liquid waste management, green cover etc.

Abortion till 24 weeks for special categories

The Lok Sabha has passed a Bill to extend the upper limit for permitting abortions from 20 weeks to 24 under special circumstances. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which seeks to amend the MTP Act, 1971 has made for the provisions of such abortion.

Special categories -

The “special categories of women” include rape survivors, victims of incest, the differently abled and minors.

Salient features of Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 -

- Proposing requirement for opinion of one provider for termination of pregnancy, up to 20 weeks of gestation and introducing the requirement of opinion of two providers for termination of pregnancy of 20-24 weeks of gestation.
- **Enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for special categories of women** which will be defined in the amendments to the MTP Rules and would include '**vulnerable women** including survivors of rape, victims of incest and other vulnerable women (like differently-abled women, Minors) etc.
- **Upper gestation limit not to apply in cases of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by Medical Board.**
- **Name and other particulars of a woman** whose pregnancy has been terminated **shall not be revealed** except to a person authorised in any law for the time being in force.

Government brings masks and hand sanitisers under the Essential Commodities Act

In view the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 (Corona Virus) and concern of the logistics for COVID-19 management, the Government has notified these items as Essential Commodities by amending the Schedule of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

What happens now?

Under the E.C Act, after discussions with the manufacturers, States can ask them to enhance their production capacity of these items, to make the supply chain smooth, while under the Legal Metrology Act the States can ensure sale of both the items at MRP.

About Essential Commodities Act -

- The ECA was enacted way back in 1955.
- It has since been used by the Government to regulate the production, supply and distribution of a whole host of commodities it declares 'essential' in order to make them available to consumers at fair prices.
- The list of items under the Act include drugs, fertilisers, pulses and edible oils, and petroleum and petroleum products.
- The Centre can include new commodities as and when the need arises, and take them off the list once the situation improves.
- A State can, however, choose not to impose any restrictions. But once it does, traders have to immediately sell into the market any stocks held beyond the mandated quantity. This improves supplies and brings down prices.

- The recent amendment to the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules 2011 is linked to the ECA. The Government can fix the retail price of any packaged commodity that falls under the ECA.

Major Port Authorities Bill 2020

Major Port Authorities Bill 2020 was introduced in the Lok Sabha to replace the Major Ports Trusts Act, 1963.

Objective -

The Bill seeks to provide for **regulation, operation and planning of Major Ports in India** and to vest the **administration, control and management of such ports** upon the Boards of Major Port Authorities and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Salient Features -

- The Bill is **more compact in comparison to the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963** as the number of sections has been reduced to 76 from 134 by eliminating overlapping and obsolete Sections.
- The new Bill has proposed a simplified composition of the Board of Port Authority which will **comprise of 11 to 13 Members from the present 17 to 19 Members** representing various interests. A compact Board with professional independent Members will strengthen decision making and strategic planning
- **The role of Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP) has been redefined.** Port Authority has now been given powers to fix tariff which will act as a reference tariff for purposes of bidding for PPP projects.
- An **Adjudicatory Board has been proposed to be created** to carry out the residual function of the erstwhile TAMP for Major Ports, to look into disputes between ports and PPP concessionaires, to review stressed PPP projects and suggest measures to revive such projects and to look into complaints regarding services rendered by the ports/ private operators operating within the ports would be constituted.
- **Provisions of CSR & development of infrastructure** by Port Authority have been introduced.
- Provision has been made for **safeguarding the pay & allowances and service conditions including pensionary benefits of the employees** of major ports and Tariff of Major Ports.

Central Sanskrit Universities Bill 2020

The Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2020 has been passed by the Parliament after it was passed by Rajya Sabha today. The Lok Sabha had already passed the Bill on 12th December 2019.

Details -

- This bill will convert **(i) Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, (ii) Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi, and (iii) Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Tirupati** into Central Sanskrit Universities.
- This is one of the landmark Bills passed by the Parliament which has fulfilled the aspirations and long standing wish of many Sanskrit lovers, scholars and Sanskrit speaking people in the country.

Features of the Bill -

- The Central University status awarded to these 3 Universities will enhance the status of these Universities and will **give boost to Post Graduate, Doctoral and Post-doctoral education and Research in the field of Sanskrit and Shastraic education.**
- This will pave way for many people from abroad to learn Sanskrit and Shastraic lore from these prestigious Central Sanskrit Universities in our country
- Now the universities will: (i) disseminate and advance knowledge for the promotion of Sanskrit, (ii) make special provisions for integrated courses in humanities, social sciences, and science, and (iii) train manpower for the overall development and preservation of Sanskrit and allied subjects.

- **Powers and functions** - These include: (i) prescribing courses of study and conducting training programmes, (ii) granting degrees, diplomas, and certificates, (iii) providing facilities through a distance education system, (iv) Conferring autonomous status on a college or an institution, (v) providing instructions for education in Sanskrit and allied subjects.
- **Some of the authorities that the universities will have - A court**, which will review the policies of the university and suggest measures for its development. **An Executive Council**, which will be the principal executive body. The 15-member council will include the Vice-Chancellor appointed by the Centre, who will be the chairperson. The council will, among other functions, create teaching and academic posts and their appointment, and manage the revenue and property of the university. An Academic and Activity Council, which will supervise academic policies. A Board of Studies, which will approve the subjects for research and recommend measures to improve standards of teaching.
- Like at all central universities, **the President of India will be the Visitor of the central Sanskrit universities**. He may appoint persons to review and inspect the functioning of the University. The Executive Council may take action based on the findings of the inspection.

[NCC Certificate holders to join paramilitary forces](#)

Union Minister for Home Affairs, Shri Amit Shah has taken an unprecedented decision to give NCC Certificate holders Bonus Marks in direct entry examinations for in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), as prevalent in Armed forces examinations.

Details -

The provisions are as below:

- NCC 'C' certificate holders will be given 5% of the maximum marks of the examination as bonus marks.
- NCC 'B' certificate holders will be given 3% of the maximum marks of the examination as bonus marks.
- NCC 'A' certificate holders will be given 2% of the maximum marks of the examination as bonus marks.

About NCC -

- NCC is a **tri-service organisation** comprising of the Army, Naval and Air wings.
- The motto of the organisation is '**Unity and Discipline**', following which it prepares youth as disciplined and patriotic citizens.
- NCC was formed under the **National Cadet Corps Act, 1948**.
- Cadets are given basic military and weapons training in NCC, by serving officers of the Armed forces.
- It is a **voluntary organisation** which recruits cadets from **high schools, higher secondary, colleges and universities** all over India.
- The officers and cadets have **no liability for active military service** once they complete their course.
- It can be traced back to the '**University Corps**', which was created under the **Indian Defence Act 1917**, with the objective to make up for the shortage in the Army.
- The NCC is headed by a **Director General with the rank of Lieutenant General**.
- NCC falls under the domain of **Ministry of Defence**.

[NCRB celebrates 35th inception day](#)

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) celebrated its 35th Inception Day, on March 12, 2020. The Union Minister of Home Affairs launched the National Cybercrime Training Centre (NCTC) for professional quality eLearning services on cybercrime investigation on large scale to police officers, judges, prosecutors and other stakeholders.

What is CCTNS project?

- Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) is a project initiated in June 2009 which aims at creating a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of policing at the Police Station level.

- This will be done through adoption of principles of e-Governance, and creation of a nationwide networked infrastructure for evolution of IT-enabled state-of-the-art tracking system around “investigation of crime and detection of criminals”.
- CCTNS is a Mission Mode Project (MMP) under the National e-Governance Plan of Government of India.

Lok Sabha passes bill on national importance tag for IITs

The Lok Sabha passed a bill to confer the status of Institution of National Importance (INI) on five more Indian Institutes of Information Technology.

Details -

- The bill proposes to bring the five institutions- located in **Surat, Bhopal, Bhagalpur, Agartala, and Raichur** - under the Indian Institutes of Information Technology (Public-Private Partnership) Act, 2017, similar to the other 15 IIITs established under the scheme through Public-Partnership.
- These five IIITs, along with the 15 others, will be able to use the nomenclature of Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) or Master of Technology (M.Tech) or Ph.D degrees.
- The status will also help the institutes attract students required to develop a strong research base in information technology.

About Institutes of National Importance -

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

Scheme for Promotion of manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors

The Union Cabinet has approved to offer financial incentive of 25% of capital expenditure for the manufacturing of goods that constitute the supply chain of an electronic product under the **Scheme for Promotion of manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS)**.

Details -

The scheme will **help offset the disability for domestic manufacturing of electronic components and semiconductors** in order to strengthen the electronic manufacturing ecosystem in the country.

Benefits -

The proposal when implemented will lead to the development of electronic components manufacturing ecosystem in the country. Following are the expected outputs/outcomes in terms of measurable indicators for the scheme:

- Development of **electronic components manufacturing ecosystem** in the country and deepening of Electronics value chain.
- **New investments in Electronics Sector** to the tune of at least Rs. 20,000 crore.
- **Direct employment** of approximately 1,50,000 is expected to be created in the manufacturing units supported under the scheme, including indirect employment of about three times of direct employment as per industry estimates. Thus, total employment potential of the scheme is approximately 6,00,000.
- **Reducing dependence on import of components** by large scale domestic manufacturing that will also enhance the digital security of the nation.

Background -

The vision of **National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019)** is to position India as a global hub for **Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM)** by encouraging and driving capabilities in the country for **developing core components, including, chipsets, and creating an enabling environment** for the industry to compete globally.

Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme

The Union Cabinet has approved financial assistance to the Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme for development of world class infrastructure along with common facilities and amenities through Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs).

Details -

- The Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme would **support setting up of both Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs) and Common Facility Centres (CFCs)**.
- For the purpose of this Scheme, an Electronics Manufacturing Cluster (EMC) would set up in geographical areas of certain minimum extent, preferably contiguous, where **the focus is on development of basic infrastructure, amenities and other common facilities** for the ESDM units.
- For Common Facility Centre (CFC), there should be a significant number of existing ESDM units located in the area and the focus is on upgrading common technical infrastructure and providing common facilities for the ESDM units in such EMCs, Industrial Areas/Parks/Industrial corridors.

Benefits -

The Scheme will create a robust infrastructure base for electronic industry to attract flow of investment in ESDM sector and lead to greater employment opportunities. Following are the expected outputs/outcomes for the Scheme:

- Availability of ready infrastructure and Plug & Play facility for attracting investment in electronics sector:
- New investment in electronics sector
- Jobs created by the manufacturing units;
- Revenue in the form of taxes paid by the manufacturing units

Background -

To build and create requisite infrastructure ecosystem for electronics manufacturing; Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) notified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC) Scheme which was open for receipt of applications upto October, 2017.

Cabinet approves recapitalisation of Regional Rural Banks

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for continuation of the process of recapitalisation of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) by providing minimum regulatory capital up to 2020-21 for those RRBs which are unable to maintain minimum Capital to Risk weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of 9%, as per the regulatory norms prescribed by the Reserve Bank of India.

Background -

Consequent upon RBI's decision to introduce disclosure norms for Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of RRBs with effect from March 2008, a committee was set up under the Chairmanship of **Dr. K.C. Chakrabarty**. Based on the Committee's recommendations, a Scheme for Recapitalisation of RRBs was approved.

Implications -

- A financially stronger and robust Regional Rural Banks with improved CRAR will enable them to meet the credit requirement in the rural areas.
- As per RBI guidelines, the RRBs have to provide 75% of their total credit under PSL (Priority Sector Lending)

- RRBs are primarily catering to the credit and banking requirements of agriculture sector and rural areas with focus on small and marginal farmers, micro & small enterprises, rural artisans and weaker sections of the society.

What are Regional Rural Banks?

- Regional Rural Banks are local level banking organisations operating in different States of India. They have been created with a view to serve primarily the rural areas of India with basic banking and financial services.
- Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) were set up as government-sponsored, regional based rural lending institutions under the **Regional Rural Banks Act, 1976**. RRBs were configured as hybrid micro banking institutions, combining the local orientation and small scale lending culture of the cooperatives and the business culture of commercial banks
- These were set up on the recommendations of the **M. Narasimham Working Group** during the tenure of Indira Gandhi's government with a view to include rural areas into economic mainstream since that time about 70% of the Indian population was of rural orientation.

Functions of Regional Rural Banks -

- Providing banking facilities to rural and semi-urban areas.
- Carrying out government operations like disbursement of wages of MGNREGA workers, distribution of pensions etc.
- Providing Para-Banking facilities like locker facilities, debit and credit cards.

National Supercomputing Mission

The year 2020-21 is an important year for India's National Supercomputing Mission (NSM).

Details -

The mission is set up to provide the country with supercomputing infrastructure to meet the increasing computational demands of academia, researchers, MSMEs, and startups by creating the capability design, manufacturing, of supercomputers indigenously in India.

About National Supercomputing Mission -

- A first of its kind attempt to boost the country's computing power, the National Super Computing Mission is steered **jointly by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) and Department of Science and Technology (DST) and implemented by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.**
- The target of the mission was set **to establish a network of supercomputers ranging from a few Tera Flops (TF) to Hundreds of Tera Flops (TF) and three systems with greater than or equal to 3 Peta Flops (PF) in academic and research institutions of National importance** across the country by 2022.
- This network of Supercomputers envisaging a total of 15-20 PF was approved in 2015 and was later revised to a total of 45 PF (45000 TFs), a jump of 6 times more compute power within the same cost and capable of solving large and complex computational problems.
- With the revised plan in place, the first supercomputer assembled indigenously, called **Param Shivay**, was **installed in IIT (BHU)** and was inaugurated by the Prime Minister. Similar systems **Param Shakti and Param Brahma** were installed at **IIT-Kharagpur and IISER, Pune**. They are equipped with applications from domains like Weather and Climate, Computational Fluid Dynamics, Bioinformatics, and Material science.

Companies Fresh Start Scheme, 2020

In pursuance of the Government of India's efforts to provide relief to law abiding companies and Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) in the wake of COVID 19, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), has introduced the "**Companies Fresh Start Scheme, 2020**" and revised the "**LLP Settlement Scheme, 2020**" which is already in vogue to provide a first of its kind opportunity to both companies and LLPs to make good any filing related defaults, irrespective of duration of default, and make a fresh start as a fully compliant entity.

Details -

- The Fresh Start scheme and modified LLP Settlement Scheme **incentivise compliance and reduce compliance burden** during the unprecedented public health situation caused by COVID-19.
- The USP of both the schemes is **a one-time waiver of additional filing fees for delayed filings** by the companies or LLPs with the Registrar of Companies during the currency of the Schemes, i.e. during the period starting from 1st April, 2020 and ending on 30th September, 2020.
- The Schemes, apart from giving **longer timelines for corporates to comply with various filing requirements** under the Companies Act 2013 and LLP Act, 2008, significantly reduce the related financial burden on them, especially for those with long standing defaults, thereby giving them an opportunity to make a “fresh start”.
- Both the Schemes also contain **provision for giving immunity from penal proceedings**, including against imposition of penalties for late submissions and also provide additional time for filing appeals before the concerned Regional Directors against imposition of penalties, if already imposed.
- However, the immunity is only against delayed filings in MCA21 and not against any substantive violation of law.

What is a limited liability partnership?

- LLP is an alternative corporate business form that gives the benefits of limited liability of a company and the flexibility of a partnership. Hence LLP is called a hybrid between a company and a partnership.
- **Legislation in India** - All limited liability partnerships are governed under the limited **liability partnership act of 2008**. The Corporate Affairs Ministry implements the Act.
- **LLP vs Traditional partnership firm** - Under “traditional partnership firm”, every partner is liable, jointly with all the other partners and also severally for all acts of the firm done while he is a partner. Under LLP structure, liability of the partner is limited to his agreed contribution. Thus, individual partners are shielded from joint liability created by another partner’s wrongful acts or misconduct.

Principal Scientific Adviser to Government of India

A Science and Technology Empowered Committee for COVID-19 response was constituted to examine the response to the pandemic.

Details -

The committee is chaired by Prof. Vinod Paul, Member, NITI Aayog and Prof. K Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, and is responsible for coordination amongst science agencies, scientists, industries and regulatory bodies, and to take speedy decisions on research and development to implementation related to the SARS-COV-2 virus and the COVID-19 disease.

About the Office of Principal Scientific Adviser to Government of India -

- The Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) is the **chief advisor to the government** on matters related to scientific policy.
- It is currently a **Secretary level position** created in 1999 by the AB Vajpayee government. At the time, the position was a Cabinet rank position, with the **first PSA being APJ Abdul Kalam**.
- This was followed by **Rajagopala Chidambaram** who held the rank of a Minister of State and was the PSA for 16 years.
- The current PSA is **K. Vijay Raghavan**.
- The 'Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser', through the **Prime Minister’s Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC)** helps scientific cross-sectoral synergy across ministries, institutions and the industry.

Objective -

The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India advises the government in science and technology policies and interventions that are of strategic socio-economic importance to the country. This is done in collaboration with various ministries, institutions, academia and industry. The PM-STIAC is one of the catalysts for such tasks and also oversees the implementation of the tasks.

About PM-STIAC -

- Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) is an overarching Council that facilitates the PSA's Office to assess the status in specific science and technology domains, comprehend challenges in hand, formulate specific interventions, develop a futuristic roadmap and advise the Prime Minister accordingly.
- PSA's Office also oversees the implementation of such interventions by concerned S&T Departments and Agencies and other government Ministries.

Business Immunity Platform

The Invest India Business Immunity Platform hosted on the website of Invest India, India's National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is working 24X7 as a comprehensive resource to help businesses and investors get real-time updates on India's active response to COVID-19.

What is Business Immunity Platform (BIP)?

- The Business Immunity Platform (BIP) is the active **platform for business issue redressal**, with a team of dedicated sector experts who respond to queries at the earliest.
- Invest India has also announced a partnership with SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) for responding and resolving queries for MSMEs.
- This dynamic and constantly updating platform keeps **a regular track on developments with respect to the virus**, provides latest information on various central and state government initiatives, gives access to special provisions, and answers and resolves queries through emails and on WhatsApp.
- BIP has launched '**Joining the Dots**' campaign to procure essential healthcare supplies. It is also facilitating matchmaking to fill the demand-supply shortages of essential equipment to combat COVID-19.

About Invest India Programme -

- Invest India was formed in 2009 under **Section 25 of the Companies Act 1956** for promotion of foreign investment with 49% equity of the then Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (now Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) , Ministry of Commerce and Industry and **51% shareholding by FICCI**.
- The current shareholding pattern of Invest India is **51 % of Industry Associations (i.e. 17% each of FICCI, CII & NASSCOM)** and the **remaining 49% of Central and 19 State Governments**.
- It is the National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency of India and act as the first point of reference for investors in India.

Increase in the usage of SWAYAM

The access to the National Online Education Platform SWAYAM and other Digital Initiatives has tripled in the last one week.

Details -

Ministry of HRD has said that the growth has been seen after provision of free access to best teaching learning resources at SWAYAM while earlier the courses of SWAYAM were time bound for which registration needed to be done in advance.

About SWAYAM -

- SWAYAM stands for **Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds**.
- This is a program under the **Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)**.

- SWAYAM is a **free online education program** started by the Government of India.
- It is conducted through a platform that facilitates the hosting of all courses.
- Courses included are **from Class 9 till post-graduation**.
- It was started to achieve 3 important principles of education policy - **Access; Equity, and; Quality**.

PM-CARES

Keeping in mind the need for having a dedicated national fund with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, like posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide relief to the affected, a public charitable trust under the name of '**Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund**' (**PM CARES Fund**)' has been set up.

Details -

- Prime Minister is the **Chairman** of this trust and its Members include **Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister**.
- Donations to this fund will be exempted from income tax under section 80(G).

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana

The Union Finance & Corporate Affairs Minister Smt. Niramla Sitharaman has announced Rs 1.70 Lakh Crore relief package under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana for the poor to help them fight the battle against Corona Virus.

Details of the package -

- Insurance cover of Rs 50 Lakh per health worker fighting COVID-19 to be provided under Insurance Scheme.
- 80 crore poor people will to get 5 kg wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for free every month for the next three months. (**PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana**)
- 20 crore women Jan Dhan account holders to get Rs 500 per month for next three months.
- Increase in MNREGA wage to Rs 202 a day from Rs 182 to benefit 13.62 crore families.
- An ex-gratia of Rs 1,000 to 3 crore poor senior citizen, poor widows and poor disabled.
- Under **PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, gas cylinders, free of cost**, would be provided to 8 crore poor families for the next three months.
- Government to front-load Rs 2,000 paid to farmers in first week of April under existing **PM Kisan Yojana** to benefit 8.7 crore farmers.
- Wage-earners below Rs 15,000 per month in businesses having less than 100 workers are at risk of losing their employment. Under this package, government proposes to pay 24 percent of their monthly wages into their PF accounts for next three months.
- Central Government has given orders to State Governments to use **Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund** to provide relief to Construction Workers.
- The State Government will be asked to utilise the funds available under **District Mineral Fund (DMF)** for supplementing and augmenting facilities of medical testing, screening and other requirements in connection with preventing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic as well as treating the patients affected with this pandemic.

About District Mineral Fund -

- DMFs were instituted under the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Amendment Act 2015**.
- They are **non-profit trusts** to work for the interest and benefit of persons and areas affected by mining-related operations.
- **They aim** to work for the interest of the benefit of the persons and areas affected mining related operations in such manner as may be prescribed by the State Government.
- Its manner of operation comes under the **jurisdiction of the relevant State Government**.

- **The fund is collected at the district level.** There are certain high-priority areas identified in all states' DMF rules, where at least 60 per cent of the fund must be used. These include vital and pressing concerns, including healthcare.

About Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana -

The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana was a retailored version of Income Declaration Scheme with a black money declaration option from December 17, 2016 to March 31st 2017. Money mobilised from the PMGKY Income Declaration Scheme was to be utilised to finance the welfare programme for the poor which is called in the same name -Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY).

Force Majeure

Keeping in view Ministry of Finance advisories inter alia citing "A force majeure (FM) means extraordinary events or circumstance beyond human control such as an event described as an Act of God (like a **natural calamity**)" clarifying that spread of corona virus should be considered as a natural calamity and Force Majeure clause may be invoked, Ministry of Railways has decided that the period from 22.03.2020 to 14.04.2020 shall be treated under force majeure.

Impact -

Railways will not apply several charges that it levies on users and clients to collect money for deferred payment or cancellation of tickets/rescheduling of tickets.

What is Force Majeure?

It is an unforeseeable circumstance that prevent someone from fulfilling a contract. There are dozens of circumstances or events that we class as **examples of force majeure**. War, riots, earthquakes, hurricanes, lightning, and explosions, for **example**, are **force majeure** events. The term also includes energy blackouts, unexpected legislation, lockouts, slowdowns, and strikes.