

**INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY****Losar**

People in Ladakh region celebrated Ladakhi New Year, Losar on December 27.

**About:**

- Losar is a festival in Tibetan Buddhism.
- The holiday is celebrated on various dates depending on location (Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan) tradition. The holiday is a new year's festival, celebrated on the first day of the lunisolar Tibetan calendar.

**CONSTITUTION AND POLITY****Compulsory Renewal of OCI Cards Goes**

The Union Home Ministry has relaxed the provisions for Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) card holders that made it compulsory for those aged above 50 and below 20 to renew their cards on renewal of their passports.

**About:**

- Several OCI card holders were not able to travel to India due to this and many were stopped by airlines and immigration authorities at various airports due to the mismatch.
- According to a recent order, an OCI card holder is required to re-register each time a new passport is issued till 20 years of age and once after 50 years of age but re-issuance of OCI registration is not mandatory each time a new passport is issued between the ages of 21 and 50.
- In order to facilitate OCI card holders, this requirement has been relaxed till 30th June 2020 as per MHA instructions dated December 17. The OCI cardholder should carry existing OCI card along with Old and New passport.

**Related Info:**

- OCI cardholders are given benefits on a par with non-Resident Indians in financial, economic and educational fields, except in the acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties.
- OCI cardholders are given free multiple entry and multi-purpose life-long visa to visit India and are also exempted from reporting to police authorities for any length of stay in India.

**GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.****Year End Review 2019 - Ministry of Textiles**

Following initiatives are being taken by the Ministry of Textiles for promotion of this sector.

**About:**

- Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has published an Indian Standard for identification, marking and labelling of Pashmina products to certify its purity in August this year.
- Two new National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) campuses will be set up at Panchkula (Haryana) and Ranchi (Jharkhand). At present, NIFT has 16 Campuses all over India.
- The Government is implementing the Scheme for Integrated Textile Park (SITP) which provides support for creation of world-class infrastructure facilities for setting up of textile units, with a Government of India grant up to 40% of the project cost. the share is 90% in North-east and hilly states.
- The Government has approved a skill development scheme titled SAMARTH, a Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector, covering the entire value chain of the textile sector on pan India basis for a period of three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- Under Powertex India 4797 looms have been upgraded under the in-situ Upgradation Scheme for Plain Powerloom.
- For the welfare of jute farmers the JUTE – ICARE (Improved Cultivation and Advanced Retting Exercise) has been launched to promote scientific practices related to Jute Cultivation for Quality & Quantity improvements.
- The Comprehensive Handloom Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS) is targeted at development of Mega Handloom Clusters in clearly identifiable geographical locations covering at least 15000 handlooms with the Government of India.

**Aadhaar**

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) announced a new milestone achieved by the Aadhaar project – crossing of the 125 crore mark.

**About:**

- Aadhaar is a 12-digit unique identity number that can be obtained voluntarily by residents or passport holders of India, based on their biometric and demographic data.

- The data is collected by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), a statutory authority established in 2009 by the government of India, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- The data is gathered under the provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, benefits and services) Act, 2016.
- In September 2018, the Supreme court upheld the validity of the Aadhaar system.

**MyGov**

Central government's citizen engagement platform - MyGov has reached one crore registered users.

**About:**

- MyGov is a citizen engagement platform founded by the Government of India to promote the active participation of Indian citizens in their country's governance and development.
- It is aimed at creating a common platform for Indian citizens to "crowdsource governance ideas from citizens". Its users discuss and contribute to various government projects and plans.
- The website is hosted and managed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- It was launched in 2014.

**INDIAN ECONOMY****Central Repository Of Information On Large Credits (CRILC)**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed large cooperative banks to report all exposures of 5 crore rupees and more to the Central Repository of Information on Large Credits (CRILC). The move is aimed at early detection of financial distress.

**About:**

- The RBI has created a CRILC of commercial banks, all India financial institutions and certain non-banking financial companies with multiple objectives, which, among others, include strengthening offsite supervision and early recognition of financial distress.
- With a view to building a similar database of large credits extended by primary (urban) cooperative banks (UCBs), it has been decided to bring UCBs with assets of Rs. 500 crores and above under the CRILC reporting framework.

**Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)**

Union Finance Minister has said that no Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) will be applicable on transactions through homegrown RuPay and UPI platforms beginning 1st of January next year.

**About:**

- Department of Revenue (DoR) will soon notify RuPay and UPI as the prescribed mode of payment for digital transactions without any MDR.
- Now all companies with a turnover of 50 crore rupees or more will be mandated to provide the facility of payment through RuPay Debit card and UPI QR code to their customers. All banks will also start a campaign to popularise RuPay Debit card and UPI.

**Related Info:**

Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) is the cost paid by a merchant to a bank for accepting payment from their customers via digital means. The merchant discount rate is expressed in percentage of the transaction amount.

**Semi-Closed Prepaid Payment Instrument (PPI)**

To give impetus to small value digital payments, RBI has decided to introduce a new type of semi-closed PPI.

**About:**

- The PPI-MD is being modified to introduce this new type of PPI. The other instructions contained in the PPI-MD will be applicable to this type of PPI also.
- The directive is issued under Section 18 read with Section 10(2) of Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 and is effective from the date of issuance of this circular.

**Salient features:**

- Such PPIs shall be issued by bank and non-bank PPI Issuers.
- These PPIs shall be reloadable in nature and issued in card or electronic form. Loading / Reloading shall be only from a bank account.
- The amount loaded in such PPIs during any month shall not exceed Rs. 10,000 and the total amount loaded during the financial year shall not exceed Rs. 1,20,000.
- The amount outstanding at any point of time in such PPIs shall not exceed Rs. 10,000.

- These PPIs shall be used only for purchase of goods and services and not for funds transfer.
- The minimum detail PPIs existing as on the date of this circular can be converted to the above type of PPI, if desired by the PPI holder.

**Related Info:**

- Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPI) can be used to buy goods and services as well as transferring/sending money to a friend, family, etc.
- Some of the prominent PPIs include Paytm, Mobikwik (semi-closed system PPIs), Gift card (closed system PPIs), Travel/Debit/credit cards (open system PPIs).
- Semi-closed wallets have a specific contract with the issuer to accept the payment instruments but do not permit cash withdrawal or redemption by the holder and which enables the procuring of goods & services which consist of financial services at a group of clearly recognized merchant locations/ establishments.

**Western Freight Corridor**

The Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Ltd. (DFCCIL) has opened more than 300-km section between Rewari (Haryana) to Madar (Rajasthan) for commercial trial runs. This is the first section to be opened on the under-construction western freight corridor.

- The 1,504-km western freight corridor begins at Dadri in Uttar Pradesh and stretches till the country's largest container port — Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, near Mumbai — passing through Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- DFCCIL under Ministry of Railways is a special purpose vehicle tasked with planning and completion of 3,306 kms of Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs), consisting of western freight corridor and eastern freight corridor (1,856 kms). The total project cost is estimated at over Rs. 81,000 crore.
- The DFC corridor will run only freight trains. The construction of Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) project would enable the decongestion of existing over-saturated paths which, thereby, will effectively improving punctuality of passenger trains.

**Financial Stability Report: RBI**

The Reserve Bank of India has released the 20th issue of the Financial Stability Report (FSR).

The FSR reflects the collective assessment of the Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) on risks to financial stability and the resilience of the financial system.

The Report also discusses issues relating to development and regulation of the financial sector.

**Key Points**

- Credit Growth
  - Bank credit is the total amount of funds a person or business can borrow from a bank.
  - Scheduled Commercial Banks' (SCBs) credit growth remained subdued at 8.7% year-on-year (y-o-y) in September 2019, down from 13.2% in March 2019.
  - Private Sector Banks (PVBs) registered double digit credit growth of 16.5% in September 2019.
- Expected Increase in Gross Non-Performing Asset (GNPA) Ratio
  - SCB's Gross Non-Performing Asset (GNPA) ratio of banks may increase to 9.9% by September 2020 from 9.3% in September 2019.
  - Public Sector Banks' (PSB) GNPA ratios may increase to 13.2% by September 2020 from 12.7% in September 2019.
  - For private banks, the ratio may climb to 4.2% from 3.9%, under the stress scenario.
  - Foreign banks' (FB) GNPA ratio may increase to 3.1% from 2.9% in September 2019.
- All banks' Capital to Risk-weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) improved to 15.1% in September 2019 from 14.3% in March 2019, following the recapitalisation of PSBs by the government.
  - CRAR is a measurement of a bank's available capital expressed as a percentage of a bank's risk-weighted credit exposures. It is also known as the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR).
  - $CAR = \frac{\text{Tier 1 Capital} + \text{Tier 2 Capital}}{\text{Risk weighted Assets}}$
  - Tier-1 capital, or core capital, consists of equity capital, ordinary share capital, intangible assets and audited revenue reserves. Tier-1 capital is the capital that is permanently and easily available to cushion losses suffered by a bank without it being required to stop operating.
  - Tier-2 capital comprises unaudited retained earnings, unaudited reserves and general loss reserves. This capital absorbs losses in the event of a company winding up or liquidating

- Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR) of all SCBs rose to 61.5% in September 2019 from 60.5% in March 2019 implying increased resilience of the banking sector.
  - Provisioning Coverage Ratio (PCR) refers to the prescribed percentage of funds to be set aside by the banks for covering the prospective losses due to bad loans.

#### Way Forward

- The global economy confronted a number of uncertainties – a delay in the Brexit deal, trade tensions, oil-market disruptions and geopolitical risks – leading to significant deceleration in growth.
- As regards the domestic economy, aggregate demand slackened in second quarter of 2019-20 further extending the growth deceleration.
- Reviving the twin engines of consumption and investment while being vigilant about spillovers from global financial markets remains a critical challenge going forward.

### **ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**

#### SnowEx

For a better understanding of how much water is contained in each winter's snowfall and how much will be available when it melts in the spring, NASA has launched a seasonal campaign — part of a five-year programme called SnowEx, initiated in 2016-17.

#### About:

- SnowEx is a five year program initiated and funded by NASA.
- The goal is to address the most important gaps in our snow remote sensing knowledge, and thus lay the groundwork for a future snow satellite mission
- The geographical focus of SnowEx is proposed as North America, which contains the six broad snow climate categories identified in the literature: tundra (alpine or Arctic), taiga (Boreal forest), warm (temperate) forest, maritime, prairie, and ephemeral.
- Within its geographic range, SnowEx assesses where snow has fallen, how much there is and how its characteristics change as it melts.

### **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC**

#### MiG-27

The last of Indian Air Force's (IAF) MiG-27 was decommissioned at Jodhpur Air base, South West Air Command (SWAC) and entered the pages of history.

#### About:

- The Russian origin aircraft was inducted in IAF in 1985 the IAF has flown 165 MiG-27 fighters and has been the backbone of ground attack fleet for the past four decades.
- Why it has been decommissioned? Every aircraft has a life and though it had been upgraded it has completed its operational life cycle. There have been several technical issues reported by the pilots.
- IAF has been gradually retiring the Russian MiG variants of fighters from service including the MiG-23 BN & MiG-23 MF and the pure MiG 27 have already retired earlier. The MiG-29 UPG will be operated by the IAF and the Indian Navy will operate two squadrons of the MiG-29K/KUB off its aircraft carriers.

#### Related Info:

With decommissioning of the MiG-27, the number of IAF's fighter squadron has gone down to 28 as compared to the authorised 42 squadrons to fight a two-front war with Pakistan and China.

### **DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE**

**Qns. What do you understand by 'Space Internet'? Discuss the significance and challenges of the Starlink Network Project.**

Space Internet or Space-based Internet is the ability to use satellites in orbit around Earth to send and receive data. Space-based internet is much faster and can work across the globe in comparison to satellite internet that already exists. Space-based Internet systems have been in use for several years now — but only for a small number of users. It would provide low-cost and reliable space-based Internet services to the world.

#### Significance of the Starlink Network Project:

- The Starlink Network Project would ensure reliable and uninterrupted internet services. The Internet is now part of humanity's basic infrastructure and an important means of delivering a wide variety of public services to the world's people.

- The project would make the internet universally available in every part of the globe.
- Currently, more than half the world's population lacks access to reliable Internet networks. As fiber-optic cables or wireless networks are incapable of delivering internet services everywhere. The project would seek to provide reliable internet services to all.
- In many remote areas or places with difficult terrain, it is not feasible or viable to set up cables or mobile towers. Signals from satellites in space can overcome this obstacle
- Most of the existing systems use satellites that are placed in the geostationary orbit. But satellites in geostationary orbit have a major disadvantage. The Internet transmits data in (nearly) real-time. However, there is a time lag — called latency — between a user seeking data, and the server sending that data.
- A transmission from a satellite in geostationary orbit has a latency of about 600 milliseconds. A satellite in the lower orbit will bring the lag down to 20-30 milliseconds.

#### Challenges of the Starlink Network Project:

- The Starlink Network Project will place the satellites in the Low Earth orbit. Owing to the lower height of the orbit, their signals cover a relatively small area. As a result, many more satellites are needed to reach signals to every part of the planet.
- Satellites in the Low Earth Orbit travel at more than double the speed of satellites than in geostationary orbit to balance the effects of gravity. Many more satellites are needed in the networks so that there are no breaks in the transmission of data.
- Three issues have been flagged increased space debris, increased risk of collisions, and the concern of astronomers that these constellations of space Internet satellites will make it difficult to observe other space objects, and to detect their signals.
- Astronomers have also shown concern about the increased “light-pollution” that is reflected by these man-made satellites. These on many occasions interfere with the light coming from the other heavenly bodies.

#### Conclusion:

- Several other private companies like Amazon, OneWeb, O3B (Other Three Billion) have plans for space-based Internet services. These projects are smaller as compared to the Starlink Network Project. Though the Starlink Internet Project is expected to change the face of Internet services such as autonomous car driving are expected to be revolutionized, etc. We should also take precautionary steps so as to address the challenges faced by space internet effectively.

### **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs**

1. With reference to the Indian Air Force's (IAF) MiG-27, consider the following statements:
  1. The Russian origin aircraft was inducted in IAF in 1985.
  2. Recently the last of Indian Air Force's (IAF) MiG-27 was decommissioned at Jodhpur Air base, South West Air Command (SWAC) and entered the pages of history.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
2. With reference to the Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) card, consider the following statements:
  1. OCI cardholders are given benefits on a par with non-Resident Indians in financial, economic, educational fields and also in the acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties.
  2. OCI cardholders are given free multiple entry and multi-purpose life-long visa to visit India and are also exempted from reporting to police authorities for any length of stay in India.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
3. Which of the following is the Tibetan New Year?  
(a) **Losar**      (b) Yugādi      (c) Gudi Padwa      (d) Bohag Bihu
4. With reference to the Aadhaar, consider the following statements:
  1. Aadhaar is a 12-digit unique identity number that can be obtained voluntarily by residents or passport holders of India, based on their biometric and demographic data.
  2. The data is collected by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), a statutory authority established in 2009 by the government of India, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.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

5. With reference to the Central Repository of Information on Large Credits (CRILC), consider the following statements:
1. The RBI has created a CRILC of commercial banks, all India financial institutions and certain non-banking financial companies.
  2. It has been decided to bring primary (urban) co-operative banks (UCBs) with assets of ₹ 2500 crores and above under the CRILC reporting framework.
- 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
6. With reference to the initiatives are being taken by the Ministry of Textiles, consider the following statements:
1. The Government is implementing the Scheme for Integrated Textile Park (SITP) which provides support for creation of world-class infrastructure facilities for setting up of textile units, with a Government of India grant up to 95% of the project cost.
  2. SAMARTH, a Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector, covering the entire value chain of the textile sector on pan India basis for a period of three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- 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
7. With reference to the SnowEx, consider the following statements:
1. It is a five year program initiated and funded by European Space Agency.
  2. The goal is to address the most important gaps in our snow remote sensing knowledge, and thus lay the groundwork for a future snow satellite mission.
- 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
8. Which one of the following best describes the term "Merchant Discount Rate" sometimes seen in news?
- (a) The incentive given by a bank to a merchant for accepting payments through debit cards pertaining to that bank.
  - (b) The amount paid back by banks to their customers when they use debit cards for financial transactions for purchasing goods or services.
  - (c) **The charge to a merchant by a bank for accepting payments from his customers through the bank's debit cards.**
  - (d) The incentive given by the Government to merchants for promoting digital payments by their customers through Point of Sale (PoS) machines and debit cards.
9. With reference to the MyGov, consider the following statements:
1. It is a citizen engagement platform founded by the Government of India to promote the active participation of Indian citizens in their country's governance and development.
  2. The website is hosted and managed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- 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
10. With reference to the semi-closed Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPI), consider the following statements:
1. It shall be issued only by a commercial bank.
  2. The amount loaded in such PPIs during any month shall not exceed Rs. 10,000 and the total amount loaded during the financial year shall not exceed Rs. 1,20,000.
- 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