

Current Affairs

"A MONTHLY MAGAZINE FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION"

Lok Sabha Vote Count

AYES	323
NOES	003
ABST	000
TOTAL	326

Rajya Sabha Vote Count

AYES	165
NOES	007
ABST	000
TOTAL	172

ECONOMIC-STATUS BASED RESERVATION



Advt.

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6

Koya Sree Harsha

6 in top 10
10 in top 20
36 in top 100
268 selections

AIR
7

Ayush Sinha

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Anubhav Singh

AIR
10

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11

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13

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20

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24

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27

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29

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AIR
31

Ankit Pannu

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34

Gaurav Kumar

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43

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AIR
47

Devesh Kr. Dhruw

AIR
49

Vishal Mishra

AIR
64

Swapneel Paul

AIR
65

Abhinash Mishra

AIR
69

Abhishek Sharma

AIR
75

Jyoti Sharma

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76

Utpal Sanyasi

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78

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79

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80

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82

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83

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NEXT IAS Centres:

Old Rajinder Nagar Centre (Delhi) :
Ph : 011-49858612, 8800338066Saket Centre (Delhi) :
Ph : 011-45124642, 8800776445info@nextias.com
www.nextias.com

MAGZTER EDITION

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Chief Editor

B. Singh (Ex. IES)

CMD, MADE EASY Group

Editor

Aniruddh Pratap Singh



MADE EASY Publications

Corporate Office: 44-A/4, Kalu Sarai, New Delhi-110016

Visit us at: www.madeeasypublications.org

Phone: 011-45124660, 8860378007

E-mail: infomep@madeeasy.in

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Message to the Readers

The February 2019 Issue of the Next IAS Current Affairs Magazine (hereafter called 'The Magazine'), covers news events from **26th December 2018 to 25th January, 2019** (hereafter called 'Coverage Period'). The Magazine has comprehensive coverage of all the topics from current affairs neatly categorized into major sections like Economy, International Issues, Polity & Governance, and so on.

The February issue of the Magazine has **in-depth analysis** of three issues from the coverage period viz. '**Economic-Status Based Reservation**', '**Electoral Reforms in India**' and '**India-China Relations in Contemporary Times**'.

The 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act gave **10% reservation to the economically weaker sections**. The absence of the criteria based on economic backwardness had historically led to resentment among the economically weaker general category population. This becomes very important issue for Civil Services Mains and Personality Test Examinations, as it is a debatable whether the reservation is an answer to all the problems that economically weaker section in India is facing.

The heart of the Parliamentary system is free and fair elections and for this we need a robust election commission and continuous improvement of electoral system to meet the needs of the changing time. **Electoral reform** is an important topic and is asked quite often Civil Services Mains and Personality Test Examinations. **It has been continuously in news for various reasons**, be it Electronic Voting Machine issue being raised by political parties or the issue of fake news acting as propaganda or data theft by Cambridge Analytica to influence voters.

India had historical relations with its Northern neighbour China, dating back to the times of the Silk Route. India shares a long border with China. Today both India and China are seen by the world as the global leaders of tomorrow not only in economic sphere but also in political and cultural spheres. India-China **relationship has been complex in recent decades**. But both nations have a historic responsibility to turn this relationship into a source of strength for each other and a force of good for the world. Thus, India-China relations become an important topic for the Civil Services Examination.

This month Issue also has two **Guest Columns**. K.P. Shashidharan (**IAS, Former Director General, CAG Office**) has contributed an informative article on **reservation for economically weaker sections**. Dr. Nanditesh Nilay (**Author, Columnist & Motivational Speaker**) has highlighted the **need of core human values for high performance in civil services**. The guest columns by such notable authors help readers to have nuanced understanding of these topics.

The Magazine works on the principle of learning by doing and testing the readers' understanding and retention via **model questions papers (included in the magazine)** based on the lines of Prelims and Mains examinations of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination.

The National and International events are covered in easy to understand manner using **simple but effective language, headings & sub-headings, engaging infographics, charts, tables and eye-catching diagrams**. The Magazine is designed for the needs of the students who are preparing for UPSC Civil Services Examinations. However, it is also helpful for Engineering Services Examinations, Banking Examinations and other government or Public Sector Enterprises examinations.

Any suggestions for further improvement of the Magazine is welcome and
may be e-mailed to academicdirector@nextias.com

Team NextIAS

Contents

In-Depth

Economic-Status Based Reservation.....	5
Electoral Reforms in India.....	8
India-China Relations in Contemporary Times.....	12

Guest Column

Reservation for Economically Weaker Sections.....	15
Leading with Human Values.....	17

Feature Articles

Unemployment in India	19
Universal Basic Income	22
Civil Aviation in India	23
Bank Amalgamation	26
Peace and Stability in Afghanistan	27
"Snooping Order" & Privacy Concerns	29
Police Reforms	30
Death Penalty in India	32
Torture: An Ethical Analysis	33
The Aadhaar & Other Laws (Amendment) Bill	35
Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019	37
Capacity Building for Women Representatives	39
Limiting the Opening of Engineering Colleges	40
ASER 2018 on Education	41
Educational Qualification for Contesting Elections	42
Climate Change Response: India at the Frontline	43

1 Economy

Trends and Progress of Banking in 2017-18 Report	45
New Data on Employment and Skilling	45
KALIA Scheme of Odisha	45
Technology Centres for MSMEs	46
E-Choupal Model	47
Factory Output at 17 Month Low: CSO	47
FDI in e-Commerce Guidelines	48
First Advance Estimates of National Income, 2018-19	49
Global Economic Prospect Report 2018	49
GST Burden Eased	50
GST Appellate Tribunal	51
Investor's Summit in India	51
Policy for Domestic Aircraft Manufacturing	51
India likely to become 5th Largest Economy	52
Right to Disconnect Bill, 2018	52
AMRIT Stores	53
Trade Unions Act, 1926	54
National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCIM) Bill	54
Panel on RBI's Economic Capital Framework	54
Gas-Based Power Projects Encouraged by Energy Committee	55
External Commercial Borrowings Norms	56
Future of Consumption in Fast-Growth Consumer Market – India	57
'Future of Work' Report by ILO	57

WESP Report of UN	58
Priority Sector Lending Trends	58
Air Cargo Policy	58
Indian Bridge Management System	59
Online Portal for MSMEs	59
North East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS)	60

2 International Issues

ASIA Reassurance Initiative Act	61
Bangladesh Elections	61
India Pak Nuclear Installation	62
Palestine to Chair G77	62
Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan	62
Sino-Indian Digital Collaboration Plaza (SIDCOP)	63
2+2: India and USA	63
Farm to Port SEZ	64
Chabahar Port	64
CPEC's Military Turn	65
Safeguards for Indian Domestic Workers in Kuwait	66
India-Central Asia Dialogue	66

3 Internal Security

India-Africa Field Training Exercise	67
IMBEX 2018-19	67
New Missile Defense Plan of USA	67
Women in Military Police	67
Exercise Sea Vigil	68
Drone Olympics	68

4 Polity & Governance

New High Court for Andhra Pradesh	69
Vote on Account	69
Democracy Index 2018	70
Voter Awareness Forum	70

5 Social Issues

Plain Tobacco Packaging	71
Lancet Study on Diet Plan	71
Lessons from Primary Healthcare in Kerala	72
Selection of Sportspersons	73
Centre Proposes to Hike Monthly Pensions	73
WHO's Ten Threats to Global Health in 2019	74
Global Housing Technology Challenge-India	75
National Policy on Domestic Workers	75
'Outbreak Readiness and Business Impact' Report	76
RTE Amendment Bill (Detention vs No-Detention Debate)	76
Scheduled Tribe (ST) Status for 6 Groups Triggers Protest in Assam	77
Tiny Targets	77
Web-Wonder Women Campaign	78

MAGZTER EDITION

Menstrual Hygiene for Adolescent Girls	78
The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018	78
First Human Rights Channel	79

6 | Environment, Disaster Management & Geography

Six New Lizards	80
Renukaji Dam Multipurpose Project	80
India's Second Biennial Update Report to UNFCCC	81
Mugger Crocodile	81
Olive Ridley Nesting Site	81
River Dolphins Go Missing in Sunderbans	82
Himalayan State Regional Council	83
Survey on Sanitation Across the Bank of River Ganga	83
Climate Time Bomb for World's Groundwater	84
Flamingo Festival	84
Irrawaddy Dolphin Census Concludes	85
Plastic Waste Imports into India May Go Up	85
Nitrogen Pollution in South Asia	85
Invasive Mussel	86
Cinereous Vulture	87
National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)	87
REDD+	88
Ganga Sagar Mela and Sagar Island	88
Tracker to Help Fight Rhino Poaching	89
Harmful impact of Desalination plant	90
India's 6th National Report to CBD	90
Leopard Poaching	92
Shola Grasslands and Invasive Trees	93

7 | Science & Technology

Trans-Fat	94
Chang'e 4	95
ISARC South Asia Regional Centre	95
Osiris Rex	96
Ultima Thule	96
Indian Science Congress (ISC)	96
Avangard System of Russia	97
BeiDou Navigation Satellite	97
India to See Two Eclipses in 2019	98
Atal Tinkering Lab Handbook	99
Microsat-R	99
Saturn's Rings	99
UNNATI—Unispace Nanosatellite Assembly	99
National Science Congress for Children	100
Young Scientist Program	100

8 | Ethics, Values & Integrity

Ethical Issues Related to Bureaucracy	101
---	-----

9 | Culture

Kala Utsav	102
Dwijing Festival	102
Sarangkheda Chetak Festival	102
Prayagraj Kumbh	103
Commemorative Coin on Sikh Guru Gobind Singh	103
Gandhi Peace Prize	104
Hunar Haat	104
Kani Tribe	104
Makaravilakku Festival Season	105
Petroglyph Site	105
75 th Anniversary of Hoisting of Tricolour	105
Adopt A Heritage Project	107
Asurgargh Fort	107
Institution of Marriage during Harappa Times	107

10 | Miscellaneous

An Open Air Lab in Seno Ballena Fjord	108
Direct-To-Home (DTH) New Regulations	108
Women of India Organic Festival	109
Gau Kalyan Cess	109
National Cancer Institute (NCI)	110
Paint Your Toilet	110
Postage Stamp for Bengal's Rosogolla	110
Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar	111
Insect Allies	111
National Museum of Indian Cinema	111
Swachh Bharat Grand Challenge	111
Kaveri Crater	111
One Family One Job Scheme	112
Oxfam Report	112
Philip Kotler Award	112
RailTel	112
SAKSHAM Vans	112
Launch of Science Channels	113
UDAAN Scheme Discontinued	113
UK Sinha Committee	113

11 | Current Affairs Questions

Multiple Choice Questions	114
Subjective Questions	124

ECONOMIC-STATUS BASED RESERVATION

The 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act, giving 10% reservation to the economically weaker sections, came into force from 14th January, 2019.

About:

- **103rd Constitutional Amendment Act:** The Act was passed by the Parliament and assented to by the President of India. The Central government also notified the same in the Gazette of India thus bringing it into force.
- **Provision:** It provides 10 per cent reservation to economically weaker general category people, in education and government jobs.
- **Criteria for Reservation:**
 - People who have an annual income of less than Rs.8 lakhs, or
 - People who own less than 5 acres of farm land, or
 - People who have a house lesser than 1,000 sq feet in a town (or 100 sq yard in a notified municipal area)
- The act inserts new clauses 15(6) and 16(6) in the Constitution, thus making provisions for providing reservation based on economic criteria.
- **No tinkering with the existing quota:** The 10 per cent quota is in addition to the 22.5 per cent reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and 27 per cent reservation for the Other Backward Classes (OBC). The fresh provision does not tinker with the existing 49.5 per cent of this quota.
- **Overall Reservation:** The total reservation in jobs and education now stands at 59.5 per cent.
- **Implementation from 2019-20:** The 10 per cent reservation for economically weaker sections among the general category will be implemented across all colleges and universities from the 2019-20 academic year.
- **Applicable to Centre and State institutions:** The amendment is also applicable to State government institutions, provided that the income criteria, for selection of beneficiaries for reservation in respect of State government institutions, will be finalized by the State governments.
- **Private education institutions also included:** As per newly inserted article 15(6), private institutes will also come under the ambit of the act.

Arguments in Favour of Economic based Reservation:

- **Equal opportunities to all:** Reservation based on income status will ensure better opportunities for poorer section of society who could not avail reservation due to their so-called upper-caste status.

Relevant Supreme Court Rulings on Reservation

- **M.R. Balaji Case (1963):** In this case, Supreme Court ruled that caste shall not be the main criteria to determine the backwardness of a community. Economic criteria should be given primacy as Constitution uses class rather than caste for backwardness.
- **Indira Sawhney Case (1992):** Here the Court held that caste can be the main criteria or even the sole criteria for reservation. Economic criteria may be there but it cannot be the most important and sole criteria. It also held that reservation should be limited to maximum 50% in normal circumstances but higher proportion may be possible in extra ordinary situation.
- The court ruled that while 50% shall be the rule, it is necessary not to put out of consideration certain extraordinary situations inherent in the country.
- **M Nagraj case (2006):** It ruled that the ceiling-limit of 50 per cent, the concept of the creamy layer and the compelling reasons, namely, backwardness, inadequacy of representation and overall administrative efficiency were all constitutional requirements. Case has also given principles on which reservation on promotion should be based viz. evidence of backwardness of class, inadequacy of representation and efficiency not being adversely affected.
- **Jarnail Singh case (2018):** Even for SC/ST reservation in promotion, the court relaxed only the condition of collection of quantifiable data about backwardness but insisted on the other two limitations — inadequacy of representation and efficiency not being adversely affected.
- **De-stigmatise reservation:** Once a large section of the economically backward start getting empowered through reservation, there would be empathy towards those who benefit from quotas. **Reservations, which were viewed as "charity", will be viewed as a tool of parity.**
- **Avoid resentment:** The absence of a criteria based on economic backwardness had historically led to resentment among the lower class of general category population.
- **Move from caste to class:** This may be a precursor to gradually shift from the divisive caste-based reservation to the more acceptable class-based reservation system.

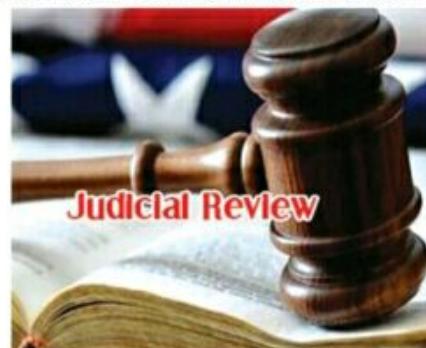
Status of Reservation in India

- **Under British Rule:** British government introduced reservation policy in India with the aim of furthering its 'divide and rule' policy. Separate electorate provision in Indian Council Act 1909 was provided for reservation of Muslims. In 1932, Communal Award sought separate electorate for Dalits as well, but was averted due to Mahatma Gandhi's fast against the move. As a compromise, reservation to depressed classes was provided within the General Hindu category under the Poona Pact of 1932.
- **After Independence:** Reservation for historically backward section of society, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) was seen as a form of social justice. It was also part of Directive Principle under article 46 of the Constitution.
- **Reservation provision in Constitution:** Article 15(4) inserted by the First Amendment in 1951, enables the state to make special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes. Article 16(4) permits reservation for any backward class if it is not adequately represented in services under the state. This, in effect, provided for 15 percent reservation to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 7.5 percent reservation to the Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- **93rd Constitutional Amendment:** After the Mandal Commission report was accepted in 1992, 27 per cent reservation was extended to the Other Backward Classes.
- **Bridging urban-rural divide:** India still lives in villages and instead of caste based reservation, income based reservation will be more beneficial because people from rural areas and low income groups will benefit.
- **People from majority communities are facing unemployment too:** Over the past few decades, India's young working population has risen while the number of jobs has fallen. Existing system has proved to be discriminatory for those belonging to the general category.
- **Educated youth will get better benefits:** The poor, educated youth will benefit from income based reservation and get a chance to access a brighter future.

Arguments Against the Move:

- **Judicially Unviable:** The proposed bill may go against the constitutional provisions and court verdicts. Even if a constitutional amendment inserts 'economic backwardness' as the basis for reservation besides existing social and educational backwardness in Article 15(4), it cannot make a persuasive case to breach the 50% cap for reservations, as the constitutional provision is clear that the scale of reservation under Article 16(4) has to be minority in nature.

- **Sacrifice of merit:** Total 59.5% quota would leave other candidates with just 40.5% of government jobs. This may amount to "sacrifice of merit" and violative of Article 14.
- **Reservation not about poverty alleviation:** Reservation was envisaged as a tool to uplift backward sections of society which were historically marginalised. It was never meant as a way to remove poverty.
- **Political move:** Critics have questioned the timing of the decision as 2019 is an election year accusing the government of using the reservation card as a tool to appease the middle-class.
- **High income ceiling:** This has also drawn criticism as the income ceiling of Rs. 8 lakh per annum makes almost 90 percent of Indian population belonging to general category as eligible for the reservation. This is because only 76 lakh Indians showed income of over Rs 5 lakh as per the recent Income Tax Return data. Therefore, this high ceiling is unlikely to benefit the poor, as reservation benefits are likely to be appropriated by the rich within this income cap.
- **Move may call for greater OBC reservation,** particularly if constitutional amendment to increase proportion of reservation from 50% has already been adopted.
- In some states, upper caste number less than 10% and this reservation may be **difficult to justify** as for 52% backward class, there is just 27% reservation.
- **Policy Escapism:** At a time when a deep institutional response is warranted, going for the easy and lazy measure of earmarking reservation amounts to policy escapism.



Judicial Challenge Ahead:

- The 103rd Amendment Act has already been challenged by a non-profit, **Youth for Equality**, which has in the past opposed caste-based quota reservations. It contends that the amendment alters the "basic structure" of the Constitution and annuls previous binding judgments of the top court.
- The Supreme Court's ruling on this petition will have enormous impact on how social justice is pursued in India.

Do You Know?**10% Quota – Central Institutes will have to bear the cost:**

- All Central Educational Institutions, to accommodate the newly-announced EWS quota, will have to increase their student intake (roughly 25%) to ensure that the existing number of seats for SC, ST, OBC and general category students do not face cuts.
- Any financial implication arising due to the increase in number of seats would be borne by the institutes out of the additional revenue generated on account of increase in seats or otherwise, and this will have no financial implication for the government.
- This is in sharp contrast to earlier introduction of 27 per cent reservation for OBC students in 2006. At that time, the CEIs were assured of financial aid for building additional infrastructure.

**Do You Know?**

These states provide more than 50 percent reservations despite ruling by the Supreme Court:

- **Tamil Nadu:** Reservation is up to **69 per cent** (SC-18 per cent, ST-1 per cent, OBC-50 per cent), and was included in the 9th Schedule.
 - Laws under this schedule are beyond the purview of judicial review, even though they violate fundamental rights enshrined under Part III of the Constitution.
- But a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court in **the I.R. Coelho case (2007)** upheld the authority of judiciary to review any law, including those put in the Ninth Schedule.
- **Maharashtra:** **52 per cent** reservation is in place for backward classes under a 2001 State Reservation Act in case of public employment.
- **Telangana:** The assembly passed a Bill on 16 April 2017, giving a 12 per cent quota for socially and economically backward classes among the Muslims in educational institutions and government jobs. The Bill hiked the quota for Muslims from four per cent to 12 per cent, and the Scheduled Tribes quota from 6 per cent to 10 per cent, thereby taking the quantum of reservations in the state to 62 per cent.
- **Haryana:** Haryana passed a law on 26 May 2016 to give 10 per cent reservation to Jats and five other communities, including Jat Sikhs, Muslim Jats, Bishnois, Rors, and Tyagis, under the special backward class category. It has given another 10 per cent reservation to economically backward persons from the general category, which took the total reservation to 67 per cent, exceeding the Supreme Court-imposed cap.
- **Rajasthan:** Rajasthan has passed a bill in 2017 for a five per cent increase in the OBC quota.
 - The bill raises reservation for Gujjars and four other backward communities in Rajasthan from 21 per cent to 26 per cent.
 - Currently, Rajasthan reserves 49 per cent of seats in educational institutes: 16 per cent for Dalits, 12 per cent for Adivasis, and 21 per cent for OBCs.
 - With this new 5 per cent category, reservation in the state now stands at 54 per cent – above the 50 per cent legal cap.
 - The Supreme Court hasn't stayed the Rajasthan OBC reservation Bill, but has asked the state to ensure the 50 per cent cap isn't crossed.

Redesigning Reservation and Alternative Strategies – A Possible Way Ahead:

- **Spreading the Benefit:** One strategy may be to try and spread the benefits of reservations as widely as possible within the existing framework and ensure that **individuals use their reserved category status only once in their lifetime**.
- **Skill Development:** In order to ensure that all Indians, regardless of caste, class and religion, are able to partake in economic growth, we must focus on basic skills.
- **Reducing Inequality at the first step:** The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) shows that among children aged 8-11, 68% of the forward caste children can read at Class 1 level while the proportion is far lower for OBCs (56%), SCs (45%) and STs (40%).
- This suggests that we need to focus on reducing inequalities where they first emerge, within primary schools.
- Also as per Amartya Sen, we should focus on enhancing capabilities.

Concluding Remarks:

- Given the deep inequalities prevalent in access to education and jobs based on caste and socio-economic status, affirmative action (or positive discrimination) makes a lot of sense.
- However, the system that was put in place during the early years of the Republic deserves serious re-evaluation in an era when technology has paved the way for deploying a better equipped arsenal.



ELECTORAL REFORMS IN INDIA

"The heart of the Parliamentary system is free and fair elections periodically held, based on adult franchise" – The Supreme Court.

About:

- India has the distinction of being the **largest democracy** of the world.
- Democracy can function only upon the faith that elections are free and fair and not rigged and manipulated, that they are effective instruments of ascertaining popular will. Therefore arises the need for electoral reforms.
- In this article various aspects of electoral reforms have been discussed.

I. Criminalisation of Politics:

- A significant number of **elected representatives with criminal charges pending** against them is alarming. As per Association for Democratic Reforms, out of 4896 lawmakers in parliament and assemblies, 1765 MPs and MLAs or 36% of lawmakers are facing criminal trials against them.
- NCRWC** identified problems such as **role of Mafia in elections**, black money, fraudulent voting, booth capturing, intimidation of voters, engineered mistakes in counting votes, incongruities in delimitation of the constituencies etc.
- The **Vohra Committee Report** says: "The **nexus between the criminal gangs, police, bureaucracy and politicians** has come out clearly in various parts of the country".

Judicial Efforts to Decriminalise Politics

- PUCI vs Union of India (2014)**: Introduction of **NOTA** option by SC, thus giving right to voters not to vote for any candidate.
- Association for Democratic Reforms vs Union of India (2003): **Disclosure of antecedents of candidates** – criminal records, assets and liabilities.
- In **Lily Thomas Verdict (2013)**, SC has held that legislators will now incur immediate disqualification on conviction with sentence of 2 or more years of imprisonment.

Reforms Needed for Decriminalization:

- Election Commission** has sought for more stringent punishment for concealing or providing wrong information.
- Law Commission recommended** that Framing of charges by court in respect of any offence would be a ground for disqualifying the candidate from contesting election.
- NCRWC** is of the opinion that any person convicted for any **heinous crime** like murder, rape etc. should be **permanently debarred** from contesting for any political office.

- Establishment of **Fast Track Courts** to exclusively deal with criminal cases pending against legislators/politicians.

II. Money Power in Elections:

- Vohra Committee Report** quoted that the money power thus acquired by organized crime mafia is used for building up contacts with bureaucrats, politicians, and expansion of activities with impunity.
- Unholy nexus**: The money power is used to develop a network of **muscle-power**, which is also used by the politicians during elections.
- Law commission**: The availability of large funds does ordinarily tend to increase the number of votes a candidate will receive.
- The Supreme Court**: "The limits of expenditure prescribed are meaningless and almost never adhered to".
- NCRWC**: Actual campaign expenditure by candidates is in the range of about twenty to thirty times the said limits.
- Indrajit Gupta Committee report**, found that many of the tools used for campaigning such as wall writings, rallies on public property, using loudspeakers are not only costly, but are also a **public nuisance**.

The Current Law: Summary

- Limits on Election Expenditure**: Between Rupees 50-70 lakhs for Parliamentary constituencies and Rupees 20-28 lakhs for Assembly constituencies.
- Limits on Contribution**: No limits on individual contributions. Limit on Corporate contributions to political parties has been removed.
- Public Funding of Election Campaigns**: Partial in kind subsidy in the form of free allocated air time on state owned electronic media.
- Penalties**: The candidate shall be disqualified from being a voter or standing in elections if convicted of corrupt practices or failure to lodge election expenses.

Election Finance – Reforms Needed:

- Ceiling on expenses of political parties**: There should be a ceiling on expenses that can be incurred **by political parties** during the election period.
- Transparency in function of Political parties**: More than 70 percent of Political Parties' donations are from unknown sources. There should be inner party democracy, maintenance of accounts, their auditing and submission to Election Commission.

- Bringing Political parties under RTI:** Political parties should implement CIC's order and be open for public scrutiny under the provisions of the Right to Information Act, 2005.
- Partial – State Funding of Elections should be adopted.

III. State Funding of Elections:

Arguments in Favour:

- Creates level playing field, as all candidates or parties do not have equal access to such funds. It will ensure **economic inequality doesn't transform into political inequality**.
- State funding of elections can ensure that political parties shifts their strategy from **vote buying to programmatic politics**.
- It will break the politician-bureaucrat-industrialist nexus and **reduce the corruption**.
- It will reduce role of **money power and muscle power** in elections.

Arguments Against State Funding:

- Diversion from developmental activities:** The tax payer's money is diverted to the political parties and/or candidates for the purpose of elections.
- Forcing taxpayers to support a party/candidate:** The tax payers are forced to support even those political parties or candidates, whose view they do not subscribe to.
- Maintains status quo:** Keeps the established party or candidate in power and makes it difficult for the new parties.
- Economic Non-feasibility:** Law Commission view on State funding of Election – 255th Report.
 - Presently a system of complete state funding of elections is **not feasible** given the economic conditions and development problems of the country.
 - Given the high cost of elections, the existing system of giving indirect in-kind subsidies instead of giving money via a **National Election Fund**, should continue.
 - Any reform in state funding should be preceded by **other reforms** such as the decriminalisation of politics, the introduction of inner party democracy, electoral finance reform, transparency and audit mechanisms, and stricter implementation of anti-corruption laws.

IV. Misuse of Caste and Religion for Electoral Gains:

- The Supreme Court in January 2017 ruled that no political party or contender can seek votes on the name of religion or caste in elections.
- The **Liberhan Ayodhya Commission** recommended that complaints of misuse of religion for electoral gain should be speedily investigated into by the EC.
- The Representation of People Act, 1951 should be suitably amended to give the Election Commission powers to take **deterrent actions** against those candidates and political parties who resort to it.

V. Proliferation of Small Parties:

- There are more than 1600 political parties registered with the ECI, however, only a few ever contest elections.
- The Election Commission should progressively **increase the threshold criterion for eligibility for recognition** so that the proliferation of smaller parties is discouraged.
- To check the proliferation of non-serious candidates, **increase in the security deposit** of candidates was recommended.

VI. Internal Democracy in Political Parties:

The NCRWC Suggestions:

- Structural and organizational reforms within parties:** regular party elections, recruitment of party cadres, socialization, development and training.
- Party system and governance:** Mechanisms to make parties viable instruments of good governance.
- Institutionalization of political parties:** Need for a comprehensive legislation to regulate party activities.

VII. Model Code of Conduct (MCC):

- Definition:** The MCC is a set of guidelines issued by the **Election Commission** to regulate political parties and candidates prior to elections.
- The MCC is operational from the date on which the election schedule is announced till the date on which results are announced.

Reforms in MCC:

- Provide statutory backing to MCC:** Giving the Election Commission (EC) to exercise its residuary power to enforce the Model Code of Conduct.
- Power to de-recognize political parties:** On account of violation of the MCC may be incorporated in the Representation of People Act, 1951.

VIII. FPTP to Proportional Representation:

- From First Past the Post (FPTP):** FPTP is one of the simplest forms of electoral systems, where each voter has a single vote, and where a candidate wins if he receives the highest number of votes in a constituency.
- Proportional representation:** The system of proportional representation has many variants, one of the most common being the list system. In the list system, political parties present lists of candidates in advance, who are **awarded seats in proportion to their party's vote share**, usually with some minimum prescribed thresholds.

Merit of FPTP:

- Simplicity:** The FPTP is the simplest form of the plurality/majority system, using single-member districts and candidate-centred voting.

- Stability:** The FPTP system presents the advantage of producing a majority government at a general election by being decisive, simple and familiar to the electorate.

Merit of Proportional Representation/Criticism of FPTP:

- Representativeness:** The principal criticism levelled against the FPTP system is that it leads to the exclusion of small or regional parties from the Parliament.
- Proportional representation, as the name suggests, tries to ensure that the election results are as proportional as possible, by curbing the inconsistency between the share of seats and votes.

The List System in Germany

In this, the German parliament has a minimum of 598 seats. Each voter has two votes, the first being given to a particular candidate in one of the 299 single-member constituencies. The second vote is a party vote, given to a party list at the federal state level. Candidates are allowed to compete in single-member districts as well as simultaneously for the party list.

Law Commission's Recommendations:

- India's electoral system will have to follow a **hybrid pattern** combining elements of both direct and indirect elections.
- Hybrid system:** Half the seats in the Lok Sabha would be filled by direct elections under the FPTP system, while the other half be filled by political parties in proportion to their vote share.
- This, in turn will necessitate an increase in the number of seats in the Lok Sabha, which raises concerns regarding its effective functioning.

IX. Anti Defection Law in India:

- It was passed in 1985 through the 52nd amendment, which added the **Tenth Schedule** to the Constitution.
- It laid down the process by which legislators may be **disqualified** on the grounds of the defection.
- Any question regarding disqualification arising out of defection is to be decided by the presiding officer of the house. Originally, it was provided that the decision of the presiding officer is **final** and cannot be questioned in any court.
- However, in **Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachilhu (1993)**, the SC held that the decision of the Speaker/Chairman regarding disqualification is subject to **judicial review**.

Issues:

- This has the effect of **disincentivising lawmakers** from seriously thinking, researching or for best practices to incorporate into legislation.
- It curbs the legislator right to dissent and freedom of conscience.

Recommendations:

- The Law Commission:** Vesting the power to decide on questions of disqualification on the ground of defection should be rested with the President or the Governor, as the case may be, (instead of the Speaker or the Chairman), who shall act on the advice of the ECI.
- The disqualification should be only** on the grounds that if he votes or abstains from voting with regard to a **Confidence Motion, No-confidence Motion, Adjournment Motion, Money Bill** or financial matters contrary to the direction issued in this behalf by the party to which he belongs to and in no other case.

X. Strengthening the Election Commission:

The ECI should be strengthened by:

- Equal constitutional protection:** Article 324(5) should be amended to equate the removal procedures of the two Election Commissioners with that of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- The appointment of all the Election Commissioners, including the CEC, should be made by the President in consultation with a **three-member selection committee**, consisting of the Prime Minister; the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India.
- Provide for a separate **Independent and permanent Secretariat** for the ECI.

XI. Paid News and Political Advertising:

- Definition:** Paid News is a promotional feature in the guise of an informative and meritorious piece of news.
- It threatens a free and fair election.
- Political advertising raises several serious issues with respect to **expenditure limits, falsity of the claims**.
- The **right to know** and, by extension, the right to accurate information on the basis of which to make an informed political choice is severely undermined.

The Issue of 'Paid News' and Political Advertising should be Regulated in the RPA:

- The **definitions** of "paying for news" and "political advertisement" should be inserted.
- Creating an **electoral offence** of "paying for news".
- In order to curb the practice of disguised political advertisement, disclosure provisions should be made mandatory for all forms of media.

XII. Opinion Polls:

- Current law:** The RPA, which prohibits the display of any election matter forty-eight hours before polling begins, is limited to display by means of "cinematograph, television or other similar apparatus"; and does not deal with the independence and robustness of the opinion polls themselves.
- The ban on opinion polls in the electronic media does not extend to the print media under section 126(1)(b) of RPA 1951.

Regulation of opinion polls is necessary to ensure that:

- The credentials of the organisations conducting the poll is made known to the public.
- The public has a chance to assess the validity of the methods used.
- The public is made adequately aware that opinion polls as such are liable to error.

XIII. Right To Recall (RTR):

- Definition:** Process whereby an electorate is able to recall an elected representative for under-performance, corruption, or mismanagement while still in office.

The arguments supporting the RTR:

- It emphasizes the importance of direct democracy in holding elected representatives to account by requiring them to seek post-election approval of their electorates.
- It shall cause a consequent improvement in public trust in governance.

Arguments Against:

The Law Commission is not in favour of introducing the right to recall because:

- It can lead to an excess of democracy, undermines the independence of the elected candidates.
- Ignores minority interests, increases instability and chaos.
- Increases chances of misuse and abuse
- Is difficult and expensive to implement in practice, especially given that India follows the first past the post system.

Comparative Practices

- With the exception of **Columbia**, very few countries accept the right to reject principle.
- Spanish** law permits voters to validly submit envelopes without ballot papers, which are declared as "blank votes".
- In **Sweden**, blank ballot papers permit voters to register their protest secretly.

XIV. Simultaneous Elections to Parliament and State Legislatures:**Advantages:**

- Reduce the massive expenditure** that is currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections.
- Reduce the policy paralysis** that results from the imposition of the MCC during election time.
- Reduce burden on crucial manpower** that is deployed during election time.
- Frequent elections disrupt normal public life which impacts the functioning and delivery of **essential services**.
- Having to face electorate more than once every 5 year enhances the **accountability** of politicians and keeps them on their toes.

Disadvantages:

- Operational feasibility is difficult:** Huge logistical task owing to deployment of personnel, EVMs and other material.
- Effectively, this would lead to larger national parties winning both State and Lok Sabha elections.
- Impact to voter behavior:** Indian voters may not be mature / informed enough to differentiate between the voting choices for State Assembly and Lok Sabha in case simultaneous elections are held.

Suggestion by Law Commission:

- Elections of legislative assemblies whose term ends six months after the general elections to Lok Sabha can be clubbed together.

XV. Other Electoral Reforms Undertaken:

- NRI Vote:** Parliament has approved voting rights for non-resident Indians in elections adopting the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2010.
- Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trial:**
 - VVPAT unit generates a paper slip, called Ballot Slip.
 - This paper slip contains the name, serial number and symbol of the chosen candidate.
 - The voter can see this slip through a screened window where it stays for seven seconds, and then it automatically gets cut and falls down into a sealed drop.
- Electoral Bond Scheme:**
 - Electoral bonds can be purchased by any citizen of India or a body incorporated in India.
 - Donors can donate the bonds to their party of choice.
 - Every party that is registered under section 29A of the RPA 1951 and has secured at least one per cent of the votes polled in the most recent Lok Sabha or State election will be allotted a verified account by the Election Commission of India. Electoral bond transactions can be made only via this account.
 - Maximum amount of cash donation that a political party can receive from an individual has been capped at ₹2,000 (from earlier ₹20,000).

Concluding Remarks:

- Despite landmark judgements delivered by the SC and efforts by the ECI, the Indian election system continues to be prone to mischief.
- There is dire need to strengthen the ECI to punish errant politicians and defiant political parties.
- Maintaining the sanctity of electoral process requires a multi-pronged approach, including removing criminal elements and moneybags in politics, disposing poll petitions, introducing internal democracy and financial transparency in the functioning of the political parties.



INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

With changing world order, it becomes imperative to analyse the complex relationship of two fastest growing economies.

About:

- India had historical relations dating back to the times of the Silk Route with its Northern Neighbour-China with whom it shares a 3488 km long border.
- Today both India and China are seen by the World as the **Global leaders of tomorrow** not only in Economic Sphere but also in political and cultural spheres.
- While there are many areas where we cooperate there are also few areas where our interests significantly diverge from each other.
- Under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi, there have been many developments in Indo-China Relations and China had been one of the most visited country by the Prime Minister.

Recent Developments:

- Special Representative Talks:** The 21st Round of Special Representative talks on border issues between National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and State councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi took place in November, 2018.
- No Local Currency Trade:** The commerce ministry proposed a renminbi-rupee trade with China in order to tackle the sharply depreciating rupee and a widening trade deficit. India's trade deficit with its northern neighbour stood at \$63 billion in 2017-18. However, China had rejected this 'local currency trade' offer.
- PM's Meet with Xi Jinping on sidelines of G-20:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed a wide range of regional and global issues during their meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 summit. This was the fourth such meet this year.
- Joint Military Drill "Hand in Hand":** Resumption of Military exercises named "Hand in Hand" between the Indian and Chinese armies led to the successful concluding of 7th Edition of such exercises in December.
- Russia-India-China (RIC Trilateral):** RIC Trilateral Meeting was also organised recently after a gap of 12 years.
- Platform for Diplomacy:** India and China for the first time launched a forum for high level People to People Exchange and Cultural Exchange.
- In this article,** we shall begin with a brief comparison of India and China, followed by analyzing the areas where India and China's interests converge and diverge and finally the measures which we can take for strengthening Indo-China relations.

Comparison of India and China

- Economy:**
 - According to International Monetary Fund-2018, China's GDP is \$13.45 trillion while India's GDP is 5 times lesser at \$2.68.
 - While China's foreign exchange reserves are around \$3 trillion, India's foreign exchange reserves are around \$400 Billion.
 - Chinese Liberalization by Deng Xiaoping began in 1978, 13 years before India's LPG Reforms.
- Polity:**
 - China has a Single Party led Authoritarian Communist Rule** with limited political rights and freedoms, India has a vibrant and pluralist democracy with constitutionally secured rights and freedoms.
- Socio-Economic Development Indicators:**
 - Poverty Levels:** In the recently released UN's Multidimensional Poverty Index-2018, China has only around 4% of its population multi-dimensionally poor while the figure for India is around 27.5%.
 - Literacy:** While China's literacy is around 96% in 2015, India's literacy levels as per latest Census data is only 74%.
- Military Strength:**



- The above comparison shows that China is considerably ahead in Socio-Economically and Militarily vis-à-vis India. On the other hand, India is a vibrant democracy with high regard for individual and environmental rights.

Current Status of Bilateral Relationship:

- Strategic Partners:** India currently conducts bilateral relations on the level of "strategic partners" with China with special focus on Trade and Military Cooperation.
- Renewed Push:** India-China relations got a significant boost especially after the Wuhan Informal Summit between Indian Prime Minister and Chinese President in April-2018.
- Civilisational and Cultural Links:** India and China enjoyed significant economic and cultural ties since time immemorial. Silk Route acted like a bridge between Indo-China cultures and helped in cultural diffusion.

Convergence of Interests:

Economic Sphere:

- Important Goods:** India is heavily dependent on China for few key goods like Solar Panels, Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) and Electronic Goods which support key industries like Pharmaceuticals.
- Trade:** India-China Bilateral Trade crossed \$84.44 Billion in 2017, with 40% increase of Indian Exports to China according to Chinese Customs Data.
- Infrastructure:** China with nearly \$3 Trillion Foreign Exchange Reserves can be the key for India's Infrastructure Financing. Chinese led Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank is a key step in that direction.
- WTO:** Sustaining Multilateralism is essential for the success of both Indian and Chinese economies. Thus the strengthening of WTO is a key area of convergence especially in the "age of tariff wars".
- Compatibility:** India's Software Strengths are complimentary with China's Strengths in hardware and manufacturing sector.
- Oil Companies:** India and China have joint venture in Sudan where ONGC Videsh Ltd acquired 25% stake in a Chinese Company.

Geo-Political Sphere:

- South Asian Stability:** India-China relations are the key to ensure peace in South Asia. Both of them have important stakes in Afghan Conflict Resolution, Maldives Crisis Resolution, etc.
- International Organisations:** IMF and World Bank structural reforms are a key area of convergence. Also, cooperation at the level of BRICS Bank and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.
- Cultural Sphere:** Through Buddhist Pilgrimages and Religious Tourism. Also of Late, Indian Cinema is witnessing overwhelming reception from the Chinese Public.

- Security Sphere:** As both India and China are victims of Terrorism and in the areas of Cyber Security and Border Management.
- Environmental Sphere:** India and China are actively cooperating in UNFCCC especially after USA's withdrawal from Paris Agreement.
- River-Basin Management:** With many transnational rivers like Brahmaputra, basin management is a key area where interests converge.

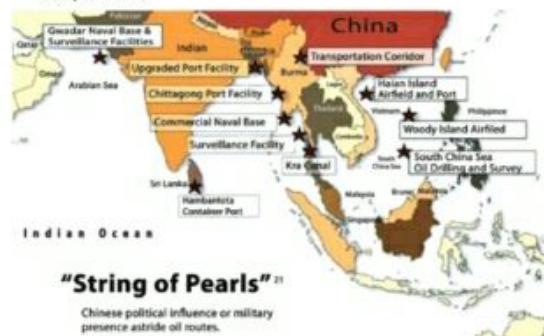
Divergence of Interests:

Economic Sphere:

- Trade Deficit:** China's refusal to give market access for Key goods like Indian Drugs has led to ballooning of Trade Deficit for India which has crossed \$63 Billion in 2017-2018.
- Dumping of Goods:** India often levies Anti-Dumping duties on Chinese goods like Steel, Solar Panels, etc.
- Competition for Resources:** Both China and India are pitted against each other in Africa.

Geo-Political Sphere:

- Proposed new Projects over Brahmaputra and its Tributaries:** Laiho Project, which China claims to be the most expensive hydro-project ever is being built on a key tributary of Brahmaputra can affect its flow into India.
- Chinese String of Pearls:** With involvement of China in creation of bases around India under the cloak of infrastructure projects like in Maldives, Hambantota, etc.
- International Organisations:** China's reluctance to India's membership in key organisations like UN Security Council, Nuclear Supplier's Group and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation.

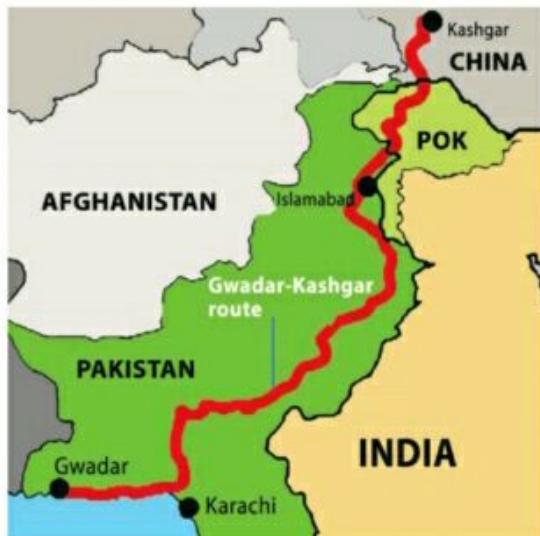


"String of Pearls"²¹

Chinese political influence or military presence astride oil routes.

Security Sphere:

- Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):** India did not support the project as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is a part of BRI violated India's sovereignty by passing through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.



- **Stapled Visas** for Arunachal Pradesh residents and Cartographic Aggressions of China continue unabated.
- **Unresolved Border Conflict:** Despite a 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question, Indo-China border is not yet demarcated. And China claims nearly 92,000 square feet of India's Area. China also rejects the 1913 McMahon Line.
- **Aksai Chin:** Aksai Chin which is a part of Jammu and Kashmir continues to be under the control of China.
- China's **covert supply of critical defence equipment** and technology to Pakistan is yet another serious concern.
- China's reluctance to allow UN to designate **Masood Azhar** as a UN Designated Terrorist.

Steps Taken to Address Issues:

- **Wuhan Informal Summit:** The following have been the outcomes of this Summit between Chinese Premier and Indian Prime Minister:
 - Joint commitment to maintain peace and tranquillity over the entire India-China border.
 - Direction given by the leaders to their respective militaries to observe restraint, and scrupulously implement Confidence Building Measures.
 - They issued strategic guidance to strengthen communication links at all levels.
- **Annual Special Representative Talks on Border Issues:** At the recent 21st Round of Talks, both sides resolved to "intensify" their efforts to achieve a "fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable" solution to the vexed boundary question at an early date.

- **Trade Deficit Reduction:** China's proposed moves to open up its markets for Indian Rice and Pharmaceuticals are steps in the right direction.
- **Proposed 2+1 Summit:** China had proposed 2+1 styled summits when dealing with countries like Nepal, where India and China together will be present at such Summits.
- **Frequent One to One Interaction:** Indian Prime Minister and Chinese President met multiple times on sidelines of key summits like G20, SCO paving way for building great rapport and trust at the highest levels.

Way Forward:

- **Institutionalizing Annual Summit level interaction** with China like those with Russia (India recently had 19th Annual Bilateral Summit with Russia in 2018).
- **Strengthening of Border Infrastructure and the deepening of our Maritime Capabilities** in the Indian Ocean through a network of security arrangements with the maritime states in our region.
 - Further, Indian government is constructing 44 'strategically important roads' along India-China border. It will cover 5 states of J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, as per Central Public Works Department report.
 - It will help in balancing the military infrastructure development by China at Indo-China border.
- **Exchanging of Scholars and Journalists**, Joint Bids for foreign Oil & Gas projects could be an important confidence building measure.
- Managing relations through a **mix of competitive and cooperative policies** and regular leadership-level interaction.
- As suggested by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi we must ensure that the differences don't become disputes. A good step in this direction would be the operationalizing of **2005 Agreement on Settlement of Indo-China Border Question**.
- In the long run, the only effective instrument for managing India-China relations will be a significant, sustained and rapid development of India's economic and security capabilities, thus narrowing the power gap between the two Asian giants.

"The World is big enough for both India and China, together and also separately to realize their developmental aspirations"



RESERVATION FOR ECONOMICALLY WEAKER SECTIONS



K.P. Shashidharan, IAS
Former Director General,
CAG Office

124th Constitution Amendment:

On 7th January, 2019, Dr. Thaawarchand Gehlot, Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment introduced the 124th Amendment Bill to Indian Constitution for 10 per cent reservation to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in the general category in government jobs and educational institutions. The Lok Sabha passed the bill with 323 votes in favour and the Rajya Sabha passed with 165 votes in favour and after the President's signature the Bill has become an Act. Once the Act is made, it will entitle for the first time reservation in educational institutions and jobs on the basis of secular economic norms. As it is an amendment to the Constitutional provisions of Article 15 and 16 by adding clauses under these articles, the amendment, as required received more than two-thirds votes of the Members of Parliament in both the Houses present and voting to support the bill to make it a law.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill states 'that the people from economically weaker sections of the society have largely remained excluded from attending the higher educational institutions and public employment on account of their financial incapacity to compete with the persons who are economically more privileged.' Article 46 of the Constitution of India (Directive Principle) urges the government 'to ensure that economically weaker sections of citizens to get a fair chance of receiving higher education and participation in employment in the services of the State'. The Preamble of the constitution also emphasises social, economic and political justice to all citizens.

In article 15 of the Constitution, after clause (5), the following clause shall be inserted, namely: "(6) Nothing in this article or sub-clause (g) of clause (1) of article 19 or clause (2) of article 29 shall prevent the State from making,—

(a) any special provision for the advancement of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the classes mentioned in clauses (4) and (5); and

(b) any special provision for the advancement of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the classes mentioned in clauses (4) and (5) in so far as such special provisions relate to their admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of article 30, which in the case of reservation would be in addition to the existing reservations and subject to a maximum of 10 per cent of the total seats in each category."

In article 16 of the Constitution, after clause (5), the following clause shall be inserted, namely:

"(6) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any economically weaker sections of citizens other than the classes mentioned in clause (4), in addition to the existing reservation and subject to a maximum of 10 per cent of the posts in each category."

Explanation:

Article 15 is amended to provide reservations to economically weaker sections for 'admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of Article 30.' Article 16 is amended to provide reservations to people from economically weaker sections in government posts. For the purpose of these articles 15 and 16 'Economically weaker sections shall be such as may be notified by the State from time to time on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage.' The reservation is capped at 10 per cent.

Beneficiaries of the Proposed Act:

The bill aims to benefit eligible citizens of India, without any discrimination except economic parameters, cutting across religions, communities, races, gender, castes and place of birth. The Bill once it becomes an act will cover about 95% of India's population. It will benefit Brahmins, Rajputs, Thakurs, Jats, Marathas, Bhumihars, Vaishyas, Patidars/ Patelis, Gujjars, Kappus and Kammas, many of whom have been demanding for reservation. The first criterion for eligibility is an annual income less than Rs 8 lakh per family, means Rs 66,666 per month, which is equivalent to identification of the creamy layer among the backward classes. The 2011-12 NSSO report indicates that per capita income of the top 5% of Indians stands at just Rs 4,481 in rural areas and Rs 10,281 in urban areas. Next criterion is landholding of 5 acres. As per the Agriculture Census 2015-16, 86% of land holdings in India are smaller than 5 acres to be eligible for the proposed quota. Third criterion of people having a residential plot of more than 1,000 square feet constitute 20% of the country's population. As per 2012 NSSO report the richest 20% of Indians lived in houses with an average floor area of only 500 sq ft. The fourth and fifth criteria are those owning a residential plot of over 100 square yards in a notified municipality and those owning a residential plot more than 200 yards in

non-notified areas will not be eligible. Those who are already benefiting from education and job reservations under the social backwardness criteria will be ineligible.

The OBCs constitute around 45%, SCs and STs 23% of India's population. As per the UNDP report, India has 364 million people living facing multidimensional poverty.

Important Cases Related to Reservation:

The 124th amendment may be subject to judicial scrutiny. A seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in PA Inamdar vs. State of Maharashtra made it clear that the government cannot impose reservations in private, unaided educational institutions 'which receive no aid from the State on any criterion except merit.' In the case of Nagaraj (2006), a Constitution Bench ruled that the concept of equality is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. It observed 50% ceiling in reservation was a constitutional requirement to ensure equality of opportunity. Reservations cannot be made to a section that is already adequately represented in public employment. There must be supporting data to prove that the lower income groups are under-represented in services. Further, reservations are meant to undo historical injustice and social exclusion suffered over a period of time.

The question whether the amendment goes against the fundamental rights guaranteed by part III of the constitution will be decided by the apex court. In 1951 in Shankari Prasad Deo vs. Union of India, the court held that the power to amend the constitution including the fundamental rights, was contained in Article 368. In Golak Nath vs. State of Punjab, the Supreme Court by a majority of six to five viewed that the fundamental rights were outside the purview of amendatory process as it constitutes the 'basic structure' of Constitution. In various judgements viz. Kesavnanda Bharati Case (1973), Maneka Gandhi Case (1978), Minerva Mills Case (1980), Indra Sawhney vs. union of India (1992), the Parliament's amending power was reviewed by the judiciary. Article 13(2) provides that 'the state shall not enact any 'law' that takes away or abridges one or more fundamental rights.' In the Keshavananda Bharti vs State of Kerala, 1973, Supreme Court held that Parliament under Article 368, can amend any part of the Constitution including fundamental rights, but it is limited to the extent of not destroying the basic structure of the Constitution.

The Supreme Court introduced the 'doctrine of basic structure' in this case only. Indian Parliament, during the emergency,

enacted 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 which tried to nullify the ruling (took away the power of judicial review) in Keshavananda Bharti case but again, Supreme Court struck down such amending changes restoring the earlier position in Minerva Mills vs Union of India, 1980. So, the current position is that Parliament can amend any part of the Constitution including fundamental rights as long as such an amendment does not destroy the basic structure of the Constitution. The doctrine of basic structure explains that parliament can amend any part of constitution including the fundamental rights, but such amendments should not alter the 'basic structure' of the Constitution. What constitutes the basic structure is to be decided by judiciary.

Constitutionality of the Act:

The Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution providing preferential treatment for socially and educationally backward classes generally do not apply to categories of people based exclusively on economic criteria. Hence, the bill proposes to amend the Constitution to ensure that the poor 'get a fair chance' in life. As the bill proposes non-caste, non-religion based reservation, a PIL was filed in the Supreme Court immediately after passing the Bill by both Houses of the Parliament, challenging the constitutionality of it. The reservation exceeds the existing 50% quota for the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) making total reservation to 60%. The Constitution does not recognise reservation for "economically weaker" people.

Earlier attempts of the Union government and some of the states including Maharashtra, Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala, and Gujarat attempted to exceed 50% of reservation quota for making reservations for economically weaker sections, but were struck down by the court. Tamil Nadu was the only exception, which opted for reservation up to 69% and placed the amendment under the 9th schedule in 1980 and continues 69% reservation. Andhra Pradesh tried to exceed limit of reservation of 50% in 2005, but was nullified by high court. Ninth Schedule law was upheld by the court. However, if any law violates Part III of the Constitution, it shall be subject to judicial scrutiny. The judgements clarified that "creamy layer" principle to identify backward classes cannot be applied to STs and SCs, as they constitute separate classes by themselves. As the government has added separate clauses under Article 15 and 16, the proposed amendment may likely to stand the test of judicial review.





Dr. Nanditesh Nilay
Author, Columnist &
Motivational Speaker

LEADING WITH HUMAN VALUES

In the world of service; value-based leadership has become a global concern. Countries are too much engrossed in technological & economic growth; which in turn is a positive sign for any society. However; this urge to become economically empowered by crossing all limits is where leadership finds a note of interrogation. In civil service, the leadership is the symbol of values.

It has been understood that leadership finds its foundation in human values and thus provides vision and victory for people in and around. Though it seems surprising that we are searching values in our life yet, we cannot ignore the fact that value statement becomes the difference between good and great individuals. In the long run, it is the core value of any institution which shapes the vision and mission of their employees with a profound impact. Ultimately; it establishes a great bonding between organisation and stakeholders and people feel victorious not only regarding numbers but reflect a sense of pride and honour.

The moment the word value appears it seems a reflection of traditional mindset something obtuse and worthy for pages but shrinking pale leave in the competitive world. However; when somebody cheats us, or we are backstabbed, we talk endlessly about values. The reason is simple. Human Values are only realised when they are snatched or violated. It has always served as a benchmark for Leadership. It has been easy to rule the country or run a company, but it has been a great challenge to lead with values.

Narayan Murthy, the founder of Infosys, writes: "Value is the protocol of behaviour that enhances the trust, confidence and commitment among the members of a community." When we go through the pages of history we find the process of transformation begins with the foundation of values. It has been said in Mahabharata "when there was neither kingdom nor king: there was neither governance nor governor, the people got protected by Dharma." For a civil servant this matter most while he or she is on duty. Their professional and personal conduct carries massive significance in the life of the common man.

Values are what we value for. The journey from the child stage to maturity stage evolves a person with basics and desired. Values belong to the first zone. It is the founding stone for becoming a human being. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru wore the west at the time of their youth, but their heart was not synthetic. It was full of compassion and concern for starving millions in India. In the imperfect society, their leadership was perfect with human values.

High Performing civil servants or individuals are built on exercising core values. In Vedanta teachings it has been confirmed that the purpose of life is to serve society and making money is a by-product of the service. In 1991 international consultants sent a report to Tata Steel that if they do not act fast, they will die soon. But B. Muthuraman always believed that leadership is all about values. He said, "There is one thing I have learnt through tough times which is, prepare your people, place trust on them, empower them, enable them to energise them, make them envision their future and they will perform beyond your expectation."

Leading with values is the higher self of awareness. As it has been rightly said by Thomas Charley, "The greatest of fault is too conscious of none. Bodhisattva retorts that the first person who gets drowned in flood is the sleeping person. Swami Vivekananda writes that to meet God one does not need to visit any place. One can meet God even in twenty-four hours. Just for a minute, one needs to be very close to oneself-Listening and Realizing." The moment we are awakened, values open the gate for leadership within and empower the leader to go with the realisation of rebirth. Transformation happens. A leader takes birth and values smile through vision.

After 1947; India had never thought of facing value crisis. India took a giant leap from colonised status to independent mindset. India was transformed into thought and was ready for action. Thanks to the first generation of leaders after independence. Gandhi was a transformed leader. He influenced all sections of society. The corporate world of that day under the leadership of TATAs, BIRLAS was ready to see values in action. But who knows that value crisis will grip even a country like India and the search will be on for those value-driven leaders. In one of his

speech Raj Ji Gopalchari said "I shudder what will happen to the country when this young generation takes responsibility of this country." Maybe the future stink he had smelled! India has witnessed corruption, venality, nepotism and greed of money and the word LOOT which became the part of British India became the TOOL of acquiring power after independence.

Whenever the definition of leadership has to be done management books speak loudest. Whatever; I have understood that leadership is being accountable to people and responsible to self. It is making people worthy of a better life and equipping them with skills for handling challenges in a better way. Leadership is nothing but to get reflected indeed in people eyes. Now the question is from where transformational leaders with values will be found? Where are those institutions in the name family, schools, colleges and professional bodies? Are they producing leaders?

The process of shaping value-based leaders must begin from home. We have to reconfirm our trust in the institution of home. Our home is not square feet and paint house; it is something

more than that. It needs to see father and mother a source of emotion and understanding. The communication pattern needs to be disciplined with parents and conduct need to be at the top. Mahatma Gandhi and Lee Quan Yew are the role models for Narayan Murthy. Both led by example, and that is the character of transformational leaders. Narayan Murthy learned hard work, commitment, kindness & integrity from his parents. He also learned from his teacher the importance of teamwork, striving for excellence and following one's dream.

Our car always gives a message to us after every 10000 kilometres that attention is required; servicing is needed. After spending years and years, we have to find our service centre where we can get away from Duryodhana envy and Ravana ego. The self needs to be served. Civil service needs those leaders who can walk with human values. In the words of Gurucharan Das, it will save us from the uncertain, vulnerable human condition like the metaphor of dice in Mahabharata. "My God, a moment of bliss. Why, isn't that enough for a whole lifetime?" Dostoyevsky writes in his story White Nights". It will be ENOUGH if life will find life in leading with values.

**“when there was
neither kingdom
nor king: there was
neither governance
nor governor, the
people got protected
by Dharma.”**

—Mahabharat

**Values
matter
most**



UNEMPLOYMENT IN INDIA

NSSO's leaked draft report on unemployment in India has once again triggered a debate on rising unemployment amid high growth.

About:

- India's unemployment rate allegedly hit a **45-year-high of 6.1 per cent in 2017-18**, as per the National Sample Survey Office's (**NSSO's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The latest data on unemployment in India, which is yet to come in public domain, is the **first comprehensive survey on employment** conducted by a government agency **after the demonetisation move** in November 2016.
- However, Union Minister for Statistics and Programme Implementation termed report as "fake".
- Even **NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar** said that the **NSSO's report is not finalised, but a draft report**. He said that the government will release its employment report by March after collating quarter-on-quarter data.

Details of the Report:

- The report further said that **unemployment was higher in urban areas (7.8%)** as compared to 5.3% in rural areas of the country.
- In a similar trend, the **labour force participating rate (LFPR) – the portion of the population working or seeking job – declined from 36.9 per cent in 2017-18 as against 39.5 per cent in 2011-12.**
- Citing 'disagreements' with the government over the functioning of the **National Statistical Commission (NSC)**, two of its non-governmental members have stepped down.

National Statistical Commission (NSC)

- The NSC was constituted in 2006 with a mandate to evolve policies, priorities and standards in statistical matters on **recommendation of the Rangarajan Commission**.
- The objective of its constitution is to reduce the problems faced by statistical agencies in the country, like the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and NSSO, in relation to collection of data.
- The NSC has four Members besides a Chairperson, each having specialization and experience in specified statistical fields.

Key Issues in Employment in India:

Issue of Unorganized Sector

- According to the survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in 2011-12, **about 83 per cent or 39.14 crore persons out of total 47.41 crore employed persons were employed in unorganised sector**.
- This means a majority of Indians are without social security provisions such as pension, insurance etc.
- Moreover, about **1.1 crore jobs were lost in 2018** According to a recent **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data**. Majority of such jobs belonged to unorganized sector.

Issue of Credibility of Data on Employment:

- Varied sets of data have led to confusion in India:** A recent UBS Securities report said that there are **two sets of data with conflicting outputs**.
- A study based on EPFO (employee provident fund) data suggests a likely **7 million formal jobs created** in financial year 2018.
- However, the CMIE index, which is household survey-based, suggests that **not many jobs have been created in this same period** and unemployment levels (formal and informal) may have started to go back up.

Fewer Jobs in the Manufacturing Sector:

- A large job creator in the country is the manufacturing sector. However, with this sector trailing, job additions have been impacted.
- A CRISIL report on the four years of the Modi government, titled '**4 years through 6 lenses**', said that GDP in construction has trailed overall growth, while **manufacturing has not shown any notable improvement**.

Issue of Complex Labour Laws:

- India has a **plethora of labour laws** which prohibit firms to recruit and retrench employees as per their requirements.
- Moreover, there also exists huge opposition from trade unions against any move to reform labour laws.

Issue of Poor Skill Development:

- Less than 5 percent of Indian workers** are skilled as per a Labour Bureau report. As a result, productivity is severely limited and hence well-paying jobs are difficult to come by.

- According to the India Skill Report 2018**, only 47 per cent of those coming out of higher educational institutions are employable.
- Allegations of Corruption:** Skill Development initiatives of government are marred by inefficiencies and corruption as highlighted by the **Sharda Prasad committee report**.
- At a time when **world is moving towards fourth industrial revolution**, poor skill development in India remains a major concern.

Poor Labour Force Participation Rate of Women:

- India's Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) rate has remained visibly low and the International Labour Organisation ranks India's FLFP rate at 121 out of 131 countries in 2013, one of the lowest in the world.

Government has undertaken a multi-pronged approach to resolve the ongoing employment crisis in India. Let us look at these approaches.

Emphasis on Entrepreneurship and Innovation:

- With an objective to create an environment for entrepreneurship and innovation, government launched the '**Start Up India**' initiatives.
- Through this initiative, government has **reduced the regulatory burden on Startups** and has promoted **self-certification**.

Skill Development Initiatives:

- Government has launched various initiatives on skill development such as **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY)** and **National Skill Development Mission** to create better trained workforce and in turn, well-paying jobs.

Simplification of Labour Laws:

- The government is working on **rationalizing 38 central labour laws** into **four codes**, namely wages, safety and working conditions, industrial relations, and social security and welfare.

Improving Female Labour Force Participation:

- The government has brought about **important legislations** like
 - Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017:** It increased the maternity leave from 12 weeks to **26 weeks for two surviving children** and **12 weeks for more than two children**, among other things.
 - Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act:** This covers all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protect them against sexual harassment at all workplaces both in public and private sector, whether organised or unorganised.

- Equal Remuneration Act, 1973** provides for payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for the same work of similar nature without any discrimination.
- Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP)** to ensure sustainable employment and income generation for marginalised and asset-less rural and urban poor women across the country.
- Stand Up India Program:** It aims to provide credit, up to 1 crore rupees, to Scheduled Cast (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women entrepreneurs.

Sector Specific Initiatives:

- Initiatives to leverage the potential of employment intensive sectors such as **textile and leather** have been undertaken by the government.
- Scheme for Capacity Development in Textile Sector (SCBTS)** in textile sector and **Placement Linked Skill Development Training** in Leather sector were among several measures taken by the government for skill development of workers in these sectors.

Encouraging MSME Sector:

- MSME sector play a crucial role in providing employment opportunities at a comparatively lower cost.
- To encourage the sector, government launched **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana** for development and refinancing activities relating to the micro industrial units.
- Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)** seeks to generate self-employment opportunities through establishment of micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector.

Improving Data Collection:

- To reduce confusion about the employment data collection in India, a **taskforce** headed by former Vice Chairman NITI Aayog, Professor Arvind Panagariya, was formed in 2017.
- The taskforce recommended **yearly survey on employment data** based on NSSO's household survey method.

Blueprint for Social Security and High-Paying Jobs:

- Since last year, the **central government** is readying a **blueprint for a social security scheme** that is specifically aimed as a safety net for workers in the informal labour sector.
- The **draft social security code**, prepared by the Ministry of Labour & Employment, **aims for universal coverage** that includes those who are outside the ambit of formal employment.
- The scheme envisages mandatory pension, insurance against disability and death, and maternity coverage, alongside optional medical and unemployment coverage.

- It is also readying a **blueprint for creating high-Incentives to employers** in the form of wage subsidies, contribution to EPFO and ESIC etc.

Way Forward:

Enhance skills and apprenticeships

- The **Labour Market Information System (LMIS)** is important for identifying skill shortages training needs and employment created. The LMIS should be made functional urgently.
- Ensure the wider use of apprenticeship programmes by all enterprises

Labour Market Information System (LMIS)

- It is a single-window online platform for labour market information through which employers will be able to access area-wise details of skilled workers across the country.
- All skilled workers trained by government-run Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and vocational institutes will be part of the registered database of the LMIS platform.

Labour Law Reforms

- Complete the codification of labour laws at the earliest is the way ahead.
- Simplify and modify labour laws applicable to the formal sector to introduce an optimum combination of flexibility and security.
- Make the compliance of working conditions regulations more effective and transparent.
- The **National Policy for Domestic Workers** needs to be brought in at the earliest to recognize their rights and promote better working conditions.

Enhance Female Labour Force Participation

- Ensure the implementation of and employers' adherence to the recently passed Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act.
- It is also important to ensure **implementation of these legislations in the informal sector** while ensuring that skills training programmes and apprenticeships include women.

Improve Data Collection on Employment

- Ensure that data collection for the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PFLS) of households initiated in April 2017 is completed as per schedule and data disseminated by 2019.
- Conduct an annual enterprise survey using the goods and service tax network (GSTN) as the sample frame.

- Increase the use of administrative data viz. EPFO, ESIC and the NPS to track regularly the state of employment while adjusting for the formalization of the workforce.

Ease Industrial Relations to Encourage Formalization

- Increase severance pay, in line with global best practices.
- Overhaul the labour dispute resolution system to resolve disputes quickly, efficiently, fairly and at low cost.
- Strengthen labour courts/tribunals for timely dispute resolution and set a time frame for different disputes.

Wages

- Make compliance with the **national floor level minimum wage mandatory**.
- Expand the Minimum Wages Act, 1948**, to cover all jobs.
- Enforce the **payment of wages through cheque** or Aadhaar-enabled payments for all.

Ease Industrial Relations to Encourage Formalization

- Overhaul the **labour dispute resolution system** to resolve disputes quickly, efficiently, fairly and at low cost.
- Strengthen labour courts/tribunals** for timely dispute resolution and set time frame for different disputes.

Working Conditions and Social Security

- Enact a comprehensive occupational health and safety legislation** based on risk assessment, employer-worker co-operation, and effective educational, remedial and sanctioning.
- Creation of workers housing on site will help to improve global competitiveness of Indian industry, along with enhancing workers' welfare.
- Enhance occupational safety and health (OSH)** in the informal sector through capacity building and targeted programmes.
- Ensure compulsory registration of all establishments to ensure better monitoring of occupational safety as well as recreation and sanitation facilities.
- Enhance transparency in the labour inspection system** by allowing online complaints and putting in place a standardized and clear mechanism.

Promote Entrepreneurship and Self-employment

- This is one of the core solutions of solving the problem of unemployment. Only, new start-ups and businesses will be able to absorb the unemployed youth, as the capacity of government and established business is limited in terms of generating new employment opportunities.



UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Amid persistent farm distress and weak wage growth across occupations, the idea of an income support scheme seems to be gaining ground once again.

About:

- Universal Basic Income (UBI) refers to an **unconditional minimum income** paid by a government to all its citizens.
- The Economic Survey 2016-17 held that UBI, based on the principles of **Universality, Unconditionality and Agency** is a conceptually appealing idea.

3 Components of UBI

- **Universality** – UBI for all
- **Unconditionality** – UBI without any conditions
- **Agency** – UBI can make a citizen move away from being a subject of government welfare programme to being agents of its own change.

Arguments In Favour of UBI in India:

- **Poverty and vulnerability reduction:** UBI has potential to reduce poverty and vulnerability to a large extent.
- **Choice:** It treats beneficiaries as agents and entrusts them with the responsibility of using UBI money as they see best.
- **Better targeting of poor:** As individuals are targeted, exclusion error (poor being left out) is zero, though there will be inclusion error (rich gaining access to the scheme).
- **Insurance against shocks:** This income floor will provide a safety net against, health, and other shocks.
- **Improvement in Financial Inclusion:** Payment-transfers will encourage greater usage of bank accounts leading to greater financial inclusion.
- **Psychological benefits:** A guaranteed income will reduce the pressures of finding a basic living on a daily basis.
- **Administrative efficiency:** A UBI in place of plethora of separate government schemes will reduce the administrative burden on the state.

Arguments Against UBI in India:

- **Fiscal Capacity:** Economist Pranab Bardhan showed that an inflation-indexed UBI of Rs. 10000 at 2014-15 prices—about 3MP of that year's poverty line—will cost about 10% of the GDP.
- **Difficult to roll back:** Once introduced, it will become difficult for the government to exit from UBI in case of failure.
- **Implementation challenges:** A UBI may put too much stress on the banking sector.
- **Conspicuous spending:** Households, especially male members, may spend this additional income on wasteful activities (eg. Liquor).

- **Moral Hazard:** A minimum guaranteed income might make people lazy and opt out of the labour market.
- **Gender disparity induced by cash:** Men are likely to exercise control over spending of the UBI in a household. This may not always be the case with other in-kind transfers.
- **Exposure to market risks:** Unlike food subsidies that are not subject to fluctuating market prices, a cash-transfer's purchasing power can be severely curtailed by market fluctuations.
- **May endanger India's food security:** A UBI would pave the way for the elimination of both state procurement of food grains, and their subsidised distribution, dealing a death blow to food security and deepening farm distress.

Feasibility of UBI in India:

- **Success abroad:** Experiments have been launched in countries of different levels of per capita income, which include Canada, Finland, Kenya, Namibia, the Netherlands, Spain and the U.S. with encouraging results.
- **Pilot schemes in India also successful:** Outcomes for pilot schemes for basic income in West Delhi and Madhya Pradesh exceeded expectations.
- **Not Unaffordable:** In the 2017 Economic Report tabled by the government, there is a chapter on how a basic income could be rolled out across India, and is affordable.
- **Ways to finance UBI:** Former Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian – and Professor Pranab Bardhan have proposed ways of paying for it — primarily by rolling back existing wasteful, distortionary, subsidies.
- **If properly planned:** It is possible to introduce a comprehensive scheme even in rural or urban low-income communities, without too much cost.

Challenges in Implementation of UBI in India:

- **Lack of clarity:** Political parties haven't clarified their stand on adopting the UBI approach.
- **Can trigger protests:** May cause resistance with respect to discontinuation of the welfare schemes.
- **Due to poor access to banks in rural and remote areas:** many of the individuals may not be able to access the money credited to their accounts.

Way Forward:

- Planning the phased implementation of basic income will be a serious but manageable challenge.
- It will require goodwill, integrity, knowledge about what will be the inevitable mistakes.



CIVIL AVIATION IN INDIA

Ministry of Civil Aviation recently released Vision 2040 document.

About:

- The document released by Ministry of Civil Aviation highlights the growth potential in different sub-sectors of Indian aviation and the key action steps to achieve the desired objective.

Highlights of the Vision 2040 document:

- Six-fold rise in passenger traffic:** As per the document the total passenger traffic (to, from and within India) in India is expected to rise nearly six-fold from 187 million in 2018 to around 1124 million in 2040.
- High annual growth expected:** The overall Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) works out to around 9% in domestic and 7% in international traffic during 2018-2040.
- Long-term plan:** Rather than having five-year plans, the document talks about India having a robust 20-year plan.
- Contribution to Indian Economy:** The civil aviation sector contributed USD8.9 billion to India's GDP in 2014 and supported 1.31 million direct, indirect and induced aviation jobs.
- It is to be noted here that the World Economic Forum's **Global Competitiveness Report 2018** ranks India as **53rd out of 140 countries** worldwide in air transport infrastructure.

Challenges for Indian Aviation Sector:

- Constraint in capacity and infrastructure:** Due to the rapid expansion of India's civil aviation sector, airspace, parking bays and runway slots will become increasingly scarce over the next few years, especially at metro airports.
- Shortage of skilled personnels:** There is shortage and gaps in availability of industry-recognised skills – from airline pilots and crew to maintenance and ground handling personnel.
- Expensive training:** Costly Aviation Gasoline coupled with a shortage of instructors, makes flying training an expensive and time-consuming exercise.
- Higher cost due to tariff structure:** The Ministry of Civil Aviation has mandated that **all airports move from a single to a hybrid till structure**, which has raised cost for airlines and passengers.
- Expensive ATF:** Due to high taxes and lack of competition among providers, Aviation Turbine Fuel is relatively expensive in India. As it is outside the ambit of Goods and Services Tax (GST), it also creates high regional disparity in its price.

Hybrid Till Structure

- Under the 'Hybrid till' model **only up to 30 per cent** of the non-aeronautical revenues, which include segments like retail, food & beverages and parking, would be used for cross-subsidisation of aeronautical charges.
- Currently, most of the airports follow 'Single till' model whereby non-aeronautical revenues are completely used to cross subsidise aeronautical charges.
- Aviation safety:** Although, the number of aviation safety violations in 2017 (337) has declined in comparison to 2016 (442), the absolute number still remains high.

Policy Suggestions by Vision 2040 Document:

- Nextgen Airports for Bharat (NABH) Nirman Fund:** Establishing a Nabh Nirman Fund (NNF) with a starting corpus of around \$2 billion to support low traffic airports in their initial phases.
- Aligning tax structure:** The tax structure for Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) and aircraft leasing may be gradually aligned with leading global jurisdictions.
- Land Pooling:** The concept of land pooling may be used to keep land acquisition costs low and to provide landowners with high value developed plots in the vicinity of the airport.
- DGCA may be made fully-independent body:** It also said Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) may be converted into a fully-independent Civil Aviation Authority, with its own sources of funding and freedom to recruit professionals at market-linked salaries.

Recent Government Initiatives for Civil Aviation:

I. NABH Nirman Initiative:

- Through this initiative, the government seeks to ensure the building of airport capacity.
- The three key aspects of NABH Nirman are
 - fair and equitable land acquisition,
 - long-term master plan for airport and regional development and
 - balanced economics for all stakeholders.

II. Easing FDI Norms:

- The FDI limit in Scheduled Air Transport Service/Domestic Scheduled Passenger Airline and regional Air Transport

Service has been raised to 100%, with **FDI up to 49% permitted under automatic route** and FDI beyond 49% through Government approval.

III. Digi Yatra Initiative:

- Digi Yatra initiative by the Ministry of Civil Aviation seeks to allow Air passengers use facial recognition technology to enter any airport in the country.
- The initiative seeks to **promote paperless and hassle-free air travel**. There would be one-time verification at the departure airport while travelling for the first time using the ID. After successful verification, facial recognition biometric would be captured and stored in the Digi Yatra ID.

IV. AirSewa 2.0:

- The government had launched Air Sewa's maiden version in 2016 as a part of its initiative, '**Digital India**', to address **customers' grievances** on a digital platform.
- The second version of the app and web portal will allow flyers to register their complaints via social media using the hashtag 'AirSewa'.
- The portal will also have an updated frequently asked questions (FAQ) section, linked with BHIM app to make payments, real-time information on flight schedules and a chat bot service to provide interactive customer service, among other features.

V. National Civil Aviation Policy 2016:

- Regional Connectivity Scheme:** It mandates charging airfare of about Rs. 2500 per passenger for a one-hour flight.
- 5/20 requirement was relaxed** to make it easy for the domestic airlines to operate international flights.

What is 5/20 Rule?

The 5/20 rule was a norm of the Indian Aviation Ministry under which national carriers are required to have five years of operational experience and a fleet of minimum 20 aircraft to fly overseas. This is applicable to all commercial aviation organisations flying passengers.

- Bilateral Traffic Rights:** Indian government will enter into '**Open Sky**' agreement on a reciprocal basis with **SAARC countries** located beyond 5000 km from Delhi.
- Ground Handling Policy:** It will be replaced by a new framework where the airport operator will ensure that there will be three Ground Handling Agencies (GHA) including Air India's subsidiary/JV at all major airports as defined in the AERA act.
- Encourage development of Airport** by Airport Authority of India (AAI), State governments, the private sector or in PPP mode.
- Aviation Security, Immigration and Customs:** Ministry of Civil Aviation will develop 'service delivery modules' for aviation security, immigrations, Customs etc.
- Helicopters and Charters:** Separate regulations for helicopters will be notified by DGCA.
- Incentivisation of Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO):** The MRO business in India is around Rs. 5000 crore, 90% of which is currently spent outside India.
- Aviation Education and Skill Building:** All training in non-licensed category will conform to National Skill Qualification Framework standards. MoCA will provide full support to the Aviation Sector Skill Council.



- **Route Dispersal Guidelines** has been provided for better organization of traffic routes.

VI. Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) Scheme:

- UDAN has a unique market-based model to **develop regional connectivity** where interested airline and helicopter operators can start operations on hitherto un-connected routes on selection after a competitive bidding.
- The selected airline operator would have to provide a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 40 UDAN Seats (at subsidized rates) on the UDAN Flights
- The fare for a one hour journey of about 500 km on an aircraft or for a 30 minute journey on a helicopter has been capped at Rs. 2,500.
- A **Regional Connectivity Fund** would be created to meet the **viability gap funding** requirements under the scheme.

Viability Gap Funding

- It is a grant provided to support infrastructure projects that are economically justified but fall short of financial viability.
- Support under this scheme is available only for infrastructure projects where private sector sponsors are selected through a process of competitive bidding.
- For **balanced regional growth**, the allocations under the scheme would be **equitably spread** across the five geographical regions of the country viz. North, West, South, East and North-east.
- The selection of airports where UDAN operations would start would be done in **consultation with State Government** and after confirmation of their concessions.

Way Forward:

- Civil Aviation sector in India has potential to take off to unimaginable heights if it overcomes some of the key challenges it confronts.

I. Enhance Infrastructure:

- Complete the planned airports under the UDAN initiative in a time-bound manner.
- Revival of 50 un-served and under-served airports/airstrips should be completed.

II. Increase Investment in the Sector:

- Reduce taxes on Maintenance, Repair, Overhaul (MRO) services and consider granting infrastructure status for MRO.
- Increase aircraft parking infrastructure and facilities at metro airports.
- Create additional parking hubs at suitable locations, accessible through short haul flights, to accommodate additional aircraft.

- Monetize vacant real estate near AAI airports in all major centres of traffic to increase non aeronautical revenues.

III. Address Skill Shortage:

- Promote collaboration between **original equipment manufacturers (OEMs)**, industry and educational institutes to teach the latest concepts in the aviation industry.
- **Formulate long-term plans** for advanced research in aviation technologies to create a manufacturing ecosystem in the country.
- Expedite commencement of courses by the National Aviation University.
- Facilitate greater involvement of the private sector in sponsoring aviation institutions, industrial training and R&D projects.
- **A further reduction in GST rates on aircraft fuel** will allow flying training organizations to make training more affordable.

IV. Promote Air Cargo Growth:

- Promote "Fly-from-India" through the creation of transhipment hubs.
- Develop an **integrated digital supply chain** or e-cargo gateway based on the National Air Cargo Community System (NACCS) platform.

V. Ease the Regulatory Environment for Airports:

- **Deregulate further** and open up the aviation market to help increase passenger and freight traffic in India.
- Adopt a consistent model for tariff determination so that it reduces passenger cost.
- Align taxation and pricing structure to global benchmarks by considering bringing aviation turbine fuel (ATF) under the rubric of GST.
- **Amend the AAI Act** to allow **commercial usage of land** with airports by liberalising end-use restrictions for existing and future airports.
- Strengthen regulatory capacity with respect to public private partnerships and streamline the judicial review process to ensure timely implementation of DGCA's decisions.
- Ensure that the **DGCA acts as a truly independent regulator**, with the Ministry of Civil Aviation focusing on policies.
- Meet the regulatory and security requirements prescribed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) at all times.

VI. Prioritize Aviation Safety:

- Shift focus to pre-empting and preventing accidents/ incidents.
- There should be **zero tolerance of safety violations**.



BANK AMALGAMATION

Cabinet approves merger of Bank of Baroda, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank.

About:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the scheme of amalgamation for Bank of Baroda, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank.
- The three banks involved consist of two strong and one Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) bank (Dena Bank).
- Earlier, 5 subsidiary banks of SBI and the Bharatiya Mahila Bank were merged with State Bank of India (SBI), catapulting the country's largest lender to among the top 50 banks in the world.
- Various committees**, including 2nd Narasimham Committee (1998) constituted by RBI, Leeladhar Committee (2008) chaired by RBI Deputy Governor, and Nayak Committee (2014) constituted by RBI, have recommended consolidation of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) given underlying benefits/synergies.

Need of the Amalgamation/Merger:

- The 2nd Narasimham Committee – 1998** had also suggested mergers among strong banks, both in the public and private sectors, and even with financial institutions and NBFCs.
- Nayak Committee (2014) constituted by RBI, have also recommended consolidation of Public Sector Banks (PSBs).
- Too many banks competing for same thing:** Several banks that are majority-owned by the government, virtually doing the same business, and competing for the same pie of customers.
- It also meant a **lower return on the capital** employed by the government which has competing demands for funds, and growing competition.
- Technological developments** in banking sector,
- Need for **raising additional capital** to meet BASEL-III norms for which government need to substantially invest in banks
- The need for **consolidation** in the sector and putting an end to fragmentation.

Benefits of Merger:

- The amalgamated bank will be **better equipped** in the changing environment to **meet the credit needs** of a growing economy, **absorb shocks** and **capacity to raise resources**.
- Economies of scale** and improved profitability, wider product offerings.
- Cost efficiency and improved risk management, and financial inclusion through wider reach.

- It would also enable creation of a bank with scale comparable to global banks and capable of competing effectively in India and globally.
- Strengths of individual banks will merge – such as Dena Bank's relatively higher access to **low-cost CASA (Current Account Savings Account) deposits**, Vijaya Bank's profitability and availability of capital for growth, and the extensive and global network and offerings of BoB will translate into advantages in terms of market reach, operational efficiencies and the ability to support a wider offering of product and services.
- Access to a **wider talent pool**, and a large database.
- Wider reach and distribution network** and reduction in distribution costs for the products and services through subsidiaries.
- Public at large shall benefit** in terms of **enhanced access to banking services** through a stronger network, the ability to support a wider offering of product and services, and easy access to credit.

Challenges Involved in Amalgamation:

- The real reasons for low lending are not dealt:** The sluggishness in corporate lending has not been as much because of the smaller size of banks as due to wilful default, stressed assets and the macro-economic environment.
- As the net non-performing assets (NPA) ratio of the amalgamated entity will be higher (than the present NPA ratio of BoB and Vijaya Bank individually) at 5.71 per cent, it remains to be seen how this will lead to a better lending scenario, going forward.
- The challenge is integration in a new entity, whether in operations or culture.
- Human resources can often be a deal breaker:** contrasting HR practices and aligning these with employee expectations or aspirations will also test the new management.
- The other major test will be leadership — choosing one of the CEOs to head the new bank and with a reasonable tenure, addressing the concerns of unions and shareholders.

Way Forward:

- Governance issues in the banks should be addressed.
- PSBs should be given the autonomy in their operation.
- Reforms as per Indradhanush Plan should be carried out.



PEACE AND STABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN

There is ongoing US-Taliban talks which can bring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

About:

- The United States is engaging in direct talks with Taliban representatives. The special peace envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, appointed by the US, is leading the talks with the Taliban.
- It is speculated that the purpose of the talks is to make a deal in which the US would withdraw troops from Afghanistan in return for a pledge by the Taliban not to allow terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, to establish their base in Afghanistan.
- The Afghan government on other hand is said to believe that, any concessions granted to Taliban would be hard to uphold once the American forces withdraw from the scene.
- It is also stated that the role of special peace envoy of the US should be to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table with the Afghanistan government and not to engage in bilateral deals.
- Neutral observers also report that the Afghan military, in its present state, will not be able to stand against Taliban without the American support.

India's Stand on talks with Taliban:

- Traditionally, India's policy has been for an 'Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled' peace talks.
- India was also not a big supporter of talks with Taliban as the National Unity Government of Afghanistan had maintained that 'no organisation that has ties with "terrorist networks" will be allowed to join the political process'.
- Nonetheless, for the first time India participated in a dialogue process where the Taliban was also represented. India was represented unofficially by former diplomats in the recently held Moscow talks for re-stabilising peace in Afghanistan.

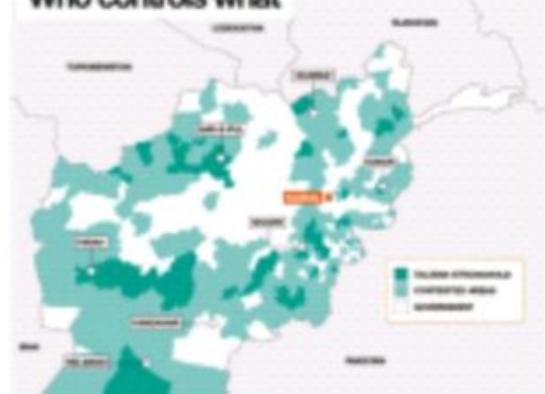
NOTE TO READERS
The issue of historical peace
process in Afghanistan was
Asia's in January 2019.
Issue of our magazine.
Kindly refer that column for
comprehensive ANALYSIS on
this issue.

- It is also said that the foremost driver of India's Afghanistan policy is its desire to strike a strategic balance between Afghanistan and Pakistan. India's main concern is Pakistan's role in supporting Taliban.
- India wanted to ensure that Pakistan does not manipulate the terms of reconciliation between the Afghan Taliban and Kabul against India's favour.

Background of Instability in Afghanistan

- US-led war in Afghanistan began in 2001 as a reaction to September 2001 US attacks.
- US' Present Policy (reversal from US' South Asia/War on Terror Policy of 2017):
 - Reduce its military presence in foreign states i.e. in Afghanistan and Syria.
 - Wants the regional players like India, China and Pakistan to play more active role in Afghanistan by sending their troops to Afghanistan, as it considers these players to be direct beneficiaries of Afghanistan stability.
 - In contrast with its criticism of Pakistan, US recently praised Pakistan for its stabilizing efforts in the region.

AFGHANISTAN Who controls what



- Russia, China and Iran did not have positive ties with the Taliban earlier but have come around to engage it now.
- Moreover, high chances are there that Taliban will become at least a part of Afghan government. Thus India would have to engage with it then. Even its former President Hamid Karzai says that Taliban is part of Afghan people.

Stand of Other Major Powers on the Issue:

- China is engaging with Taliban** because of attacks of Uighur Muslims from Afghan territory. Moreover, geopolitics demand its participation
- Russia held a meeting on 'Moscow Format'** in November 2018 to discuss future of Afghan polity. Taliban's role in it and Taliban's acceptability among world leaders in which India was represented unofficially by former diplomats, which marks a drastic shift **from rejection to unofficial talks** with Taliban
- Afghan government did not send any officials, but 4 members of the Kabul-based High Peace Council (HPC) attended the event
- Pakistan had engineered a meeting of the Taliban with Saudi Arabia and the UAE while a Taliban delegation was in Iran.

Arguments in Favour of Talking with Taliban:

- Only talks will provide a solution to end the 17 year Afghan conflict. Effective governance is difficult to achieve without the support of Taliban, as **many parts of Afghanistan are under its control**.
- Seemingly changed nature of Taliban:**
 - Taliban has indicated to sharing power unlike their 1998 regime when they out rightly rejected this proposal.
 - In recent years, Taliban has shown signs of moderate but important change, like **adhering to its first ceasefire with Afghan forces in June**, and even allowing **women and minorities to play a larger role** in the organization
- Geopolitical stability in South Asia** can be ensured only when there is peace in Afghanistan and reconciliation with Taliban is seeming to be the most effective way for this in present circumstances.
- Security forces could concentrate on fighting other terrorist groups like the Islamic State** if Afghanistan is stable.

Arguments Against Talking with Taliban:

- There is the question of **whether Taliban can be trusted** with adhering to the peace treaty as they are presently in position of strength e.g. failed peace talks in 2015.
- Structurally and operationally, the Taliban remains a jihadist movement.** They've never developed a political wing.
- Afghan polity's capacity** to accommodate them in the wake of infighting is doubtful. Political parties in Afghanistan are terribly underdeveloped; factions revolve around regional personalities, rather than policies. Taliban's entry can exacerbate pre-existing tensions across ethnic, regional, tribal and political lines.

Way Ahead and Conclusion:

- US should avoid the strategy it used to get out of Iraq**, rushing a political settlement while leaving critical details to be determined later. Doing so will only work to the advantage of the Taliban, which is hoping to gain international legitimacy without having to reform significantly.
- By abandoning SAARC in favour of BIMSTEC and BBIN to isolate Pakistan, India faced the collateral damage of distancing Afghanistan too in the process. Hence **India needs to strengthen its bilateral engagements with Afghanistan**.
- As part of the "**India-China plus**" initiative, New Delhi and Beijing have identified Afghanistan for implementing joint development projects. Similar initiatives should be explored with other like-minded countries like Russia for Afghan growth and development.
- Be open to the idea of the Afghan Taliban entering mainstream political life with or without Pakistan's support — and eventually resolve its own bilateral issues with its western neighbour
- Even the Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai** said that Delhi must engage with Taliban, while opposing any U.S.-Pak deal outside Kabul.



"SNOOPING ORDER" & PRIVACY CONCERN

Ministry of Home Affairs issued a notification authorising 10 Central Agencies with interception, monitoring powers.

About:

- Ministry of Home Affairs promulgated an order authorising 10 Central agencies to monitor, intercept and decrypt information which is transmitted, generated, stored in or received by any computer.
- The 10 agencies include Intelligence Bureau, Narcotics Control Bureau, Enforcement Directorate, Central Board of Direct Taxes, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Central Bureau of Investigation, National Investigation Agency Cabinet Secretariat (RAW), Directorate of Signal Intelligence and Commissioner of Police, Delhi.
- The order was issued in pursuance of powers stipulated in Section 69(1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which enables government agencies to intercept personal information of citizens under certain conditions.

Arguments in Favour:

- No new powers conferred:** The government clarified that "no new powers" had been conferred to agencies and that the same rules were brought in by the UPA government in 2009
- Right to privacy is not unbridled or absolute,** and reasonable restriction can be placed on grounds of National Security, unity and integrity of country and maintaining public order.
- Fake news and illegal activities (Cyber terrorism)** on dark web are on rise, and state should have necessary control over the digital footprints of the Citizens in order to prevent malicious use of technology.
- Speedy Approvals and Decentralisation:** It reduces the burden on the Home Secretary and de-centralises such data access and surveillance powers, thus helping in expeditious action.

Criticisms:

- Ambiguous Surveillance regime:** Under Section 69 of the IT Act, the grounds of surveillance have been simply lifted from Article 19(2) of the Constitution, and pasted into the law. They include very wide phrases such as "friendly relations with foreign States" or "sovereignty and integrity of India".
- Coercive in Nature:** An individual who fails to assist these government agencies with technical assistance or extend all facilities can face up to 7 years of imprisonment or fine.
- Wide Scope:** Only data in motion could be intercepted earlier. But now data revived, stored and generated can also be intercepted as powers of seizure have also been given.

- Against the spirit of Supreme Court Judgement in K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India, 2017:** For restrictions under Section 69 allowing for interception of personal data on a computer to be constitutionally valid after the judgement, it would not only have to pursue a legitimate state aim (say, for instance, national security) but also be proportionate.
- Lacks Checks and Balances:** The actual notification does not clearly require the Union Home Secretary to pre-approve such surveillance orders thus denuding the competent authority of such powers setting up the stage for mass surveillance.
- No public views taken:** The notification was not preceded by any public discussion, consultation or parliamentary debate.
- Inherent Problems with Section-69:** It falls short of meeting the principles of natural justice by failing to accommodate pre-decisional hearings compelling people to give up personal information without being given an opportunity to be heard.

Way Forward:

- There is a need for widespread public consultation.
- Surveillance infrastructure needs to be revamped by providing for Parliamentary Oversight like in the UK and Germany.
- Only a comprehensive **Privacy Act** which will specifically address issues of surveillance and interception can satisfy the dual objectives of Privacy and National Security.

Supreme Court (SC) on Judicious Use of Surveillance Powers

The SC in '**PUCL vs Union of India**' 1996 has given a set of guidelines for exercise of surveillance power while intercepting telephones.

- If a telephone needs to be tapped, then the home secretary of the Union government or the respective state government can issue an order to this effect.
- Such an order shall be subject to review by the Cabinet, law and telecommunication secretary in 2 month's time of the date the order has been passed.
- Strong reasons have to be specified to issue such a directive.
- Such an order shall be in force only for two months unless there is another order, which will give the home secretary the right to extend it by another six months only.
- Records relating to phone tapping should be used and destroyed within two months.
- The order shall be specific in nature. The invasion of privacy shall be minimum in nature and a strong justification to the act shall be mentioned. A justification to the effect that the phone is being tapped as they were unable to collect information through other means.



POLICE REFORMS

Proposals of several states approved for implementation of Mahila Police Volunteer Scheme.

About:

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoW&CD+MHA) has envisaged engagement of **Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs)** in the States/UTs who will act as a link between police and community and help women in distress.
- The Haryana government has recruited nearly 1,000 women as police volunteers.
- Haryana is the first state to adopt the initiative** on a pilot basis under **Nirbhaya Fund** during the financial year 2016-2017.
- Other States:** The proposals of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh have also been approved for implementation of MPVs.

Benefits of Mahila Police Volunteers:

- Aim:** It is to have a gender responsive police service with increased presence of female personnel within the police force and in community outreach.
- Public-police interface:** A Mahila Police Volunteer will serve as a public-police interface in order to fight crime against women.
- Community watch groups:** Under the scheme, the Mahila Police volunteer is required to mobilize community to form **Mahila and Shishu Rakshak Dals (MASRD)** to act as community watch groups.
- Open to all:** A Mahila Police Volunteer could be any woman who is socially and voluntarily committed towards empowerment of women and girls, willing to raise her voice against gender-based violence and support the police in creating a gender just society free from violence.
- Requirements:**
 - A Mahila Police Volunteer should be minimum 21 years of age and possess at least 12th pass certificate.
 - A Mahila Police Volunteer must be from the same geographical area and conversant with the local dialects.
 - No criminal proceedings must have been instituted against her and she must not have been convicted or imprisoned for the violation of any criminal law.
 - A Mahila Police Volunteer should not be a member of any political party.

- There will be one Mahila Police Volunteer per Gram Panchayat.

Challenges Faced by Police in India:

- Shortage of manpower:** After accounting for vacant positions, there are only 137 police personnel per 100,000 citizens in India (17.3 lakh in all). The UN recommends 222 police personnel per 100,000 citizens.
- Obsolete and Outdated Law:** The police organization is still governed by the Indian Police Act, 1861, which has now become obsolete and outdated and not reflecting current realities.

The Mahila Police volunteer is an example of much needed reforms in Indian police system. The need for reforms in Indian police system cannot be overstated. Accordingly, an analysis of the Indian police system becomes imperative as it is essential in ensuring law and order and a healthy society.

Political Interference: Political interference in the working of the police is growing day-by-day. It starts right from the recruitment of the police officials.

Poor Infrastructure: Modern policing requires a strong communication support, state-of-art or modern weapons, and a high degree of mobility.

- Further, police or law and order is a state subject**, falling under List II of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India. In a federal set up like ours, this makes policy reform a rather sticky issue.
- Police-Public relations:** Police requires the confidence, cooperation and support of the public to prevent crime and disorder. A police-public relation is an important concern in effective policing. The 2nd ARC has noted that police-public relations are in an unsatisfactory state because people view the police as corrupt, inefficient, politically partisan and unresponsive.

Some Committees Related to Police Reforms

Since 1971 there have been six major reform committees:

- The Gore Committee (1971-73) on Police Training** was set up to review the training of the state police from constabulary level to IPS level.
- The National Police Commission (1977-81)** was the first commission to exhaustively review the Indian police system.

- **The Ribeiro Committee** was set up in 1998 on the order of the Supreme Court following a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on police reforms.
- **Padmanabhaiah Committee on Police Reforms 2000** inspected the recruitment to the police force, training, duties and responsibilities, police officers behaviour, police investigations, prosecution, amongst others.
- **Group of Ministers on National Security 2000-2001** worked on four tasks namely
 - the intelligence system
 - internal security
 - border management and
 - the management of defence.
- **Malimath Committee on Reforms of Criminal Justice System 2001-2003** addressed the principles of the Criminal Justice System, investigation, prosecution, judiciary, crime and punishment.

Way Forward and Suggestions:

- **Effective implementations** of Supreme Court directives in Prakash Singh case, 2006 which are as follows:
 - Constitute a State Security Commission.
 - Provide a minimum tenure to DGPs and other state key officials.
 - Separation of investigation and law and order wing among police departments.
 - Setup Police Establishment Board.
 - Setup Police Complaints Authority.
 - Setup National Security Commission.
- **Status of implementation:** Some of the states are yet to implement this such as:
 - 27 of 29 states constituted SSCs, J&K and Odisha have not constituted SSC.
 - 23 states ignored guidelines on appointment of DGPs.
 - Separation of investigation and law and order wings not undertaken by 12 states.
 - **Only Andhra Pradesh complied with all directions** while constituting Police Establishment Board
- **Model Police Act of 2015:** It can serve as the basis for legislative reform as it modernizes the mandate of the police, puts in place a governance mechanism that swathes the police from political interference and provides for the measurement and tracking of police performance.
- **Outsourcing:** A task force may be created under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to skill personnel and identify non-core functions that can be outsourced to save on staff.
- **Encourage women participation:** States should be encouraged to ensure greater representation of women in the police force. For example, **Bihar (35%) and Gujrat (33%)** have reserved quota for women in police.

- **A common nation-wide emergency contact number** to attend to emergency security needs of citizens.
 - **For example,** a Pan-India single-number emergency mobile application '112 India' has been launched.
 - It will have a special women safety feature to get immediate assistance from police and volunteers.
- **Community policing:** Steps should be taken to build up friendly relations between the police and the public through meetings for discussing public problems, etc. for e.g. **Mahila Police volunteer scheme**.
- **Integrate the Lokpal and Prevention of Corruption Acts** into police reforms to enhance accountability.
- **Transparency in transfers/postings:** Transfers/postings of police personnel should be made more transparent and the involvement of police in prosecution needs to be looked at more closely.
- **Remodeled training modules:** It is important to consider introduction of remodeled training modules, refresher courses and continuing education for police personnel including live-streaming of training modules on e-platforms.
- **Reform in FIRs:** Introduce reform of the First Information Report (FIR) lodging mechanism, including introducing filing e-FIRs for minor offences.
- **Use of technology:** Besides, police challans, investigation reports, etc., should be made available through the online portal of each police station. For example
 - Kothagudem Police (Telangana) launched **e-challan system** to collect penalties from those violating traffic rules.
 - **Traffic violators in Nagpur** will have to pay the challans online, this move is aligned with "**one nation one challan**" system.
- A **separate cadre** for exclusively looking into cyber-crimes, cyber threats and fraud needs to be developed.
- **National Cyber Security Division:** A separate National Cyber Security Division may be considered to support and coordinate initiatives of state governments in handling cyber-crimes.
- **Big Data:** Besides, big data analytics may be utilized in a big way. The Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems project may be completed along with the launch of Phase 2 for linking of crime, prosecution, court and prison databases.
- **A technology centre** may be considered for benchmarking and identifying suitable technologies for the police under BPR&D in collaboration with IITs.
- Finally, the direction of the recent **Supreme Court regarding the appointment of chiefs of police in States through UPSC** is a welcome move towards police reforms in India but much more needs to be done.



DEATH PENALTY IN INDIA

A recent report on the sharp rise in number of death sentences awarded in 2018 has triggered once again the debate for the need of death penalty in India.

About:

- The number of death sentences awarded by trial courts in India rose sharply in 2018, according to **'Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics Report 2018'**.
- This report was prepared by Project 39A at the **National Law University, Delhi**. The 162 death sentences by trial courts last year are the highest in a calendar year since 2000.

Reasons for the Spike in Death Sentences:

- It could be the result of a legislative intervention last year that extended **capital punishment to non-homicide crimes**.
- In August, Parliament amended the Indian Penal Code to provide for **death as a possible punishment in cases of rape and gang rape of girls below the age of 12**.
- Reward scheme introduced by states such as Madhya Pradesh for public prosecutors who seek the death penalty.

Developments against the Discourse of Death Penalty:

- In **Chhannu Lal Verma vs State of Chhattisgarh**, where the court commuted the death sentence to life, Justice Kurian Joseph, now retired, wrote that **a time has come where it is necessary to re-examine the need for death penalty**.
- In **Mohd Arif vs The Registrar**, the SC held that **review petitions in death sentence cases will mandatorily be heard in open court**.
- The Supreme Court (SC) also recognised the **right of death row prisoners** for meeting mental health professionals at a reasonable frequency and for reasonable lengths of time.
- The approach of the Supreme Court, especially its **scepticism towards the manner** in which lower courts have handed out death penalties, is also an important development in the debate around capital punishment. The apex court's approach is in contrast to the enthusiasm in the government for legislative expansion of capital punishment.

Developments Supporting the Death Penalty in India:

- The Government amended the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to grant **death penalty in child sex assault cases** in wake of national outrage over the rape and murder of a minor girl in Kathua.
- The Government amended the POCSO Act to introduce **death penalty for penetrative aggravated sexual assault on children below the age of 18**.
- In Aug. 2018, a bill, providing for the **death penalty or life imprisonment for crimes involving piracy at sea**, was introduced.
- India also **voted against** the UN General Assembly's draft resolution proposing a **ban on the death penalty**.

Why should the Death Penalty be Abolished?

- No study has shown that the death penalty deters murder more than life imprisonment. The evidence is all to the contrary. For deterrence to work, the severity of the punishment has to coexist with the **certainty and swiftness** of the punishment.
- The death penalty is **error-ridden**. Between January 1, 2000 and June 31, 2015, the Supreme Court imposed 60 death sentences. It subsequently admitted that it had erred in 15 of them.
- The death penalty **unfairly targets the poor** and marginalised.
- The Supreme Court has repeatedly admitted that it has arbitrarily imposed this most extreme punishment.

Why Death Penalty should not be Abolished?

- Its constitutionality has not only been upheld in India but also in the bastion of liberal democracy that is the United States. The retention of the death penalty is not a reflection of "uncivilised" polity in theocratic states that have come to be defined by violence but a creation of the **individual geopolitical circumstances** of each state.
- The Law Commission of India 262nd Report could not recommend the punishment's absolute abolition despite a rather desperate attempt to do the same.
 - The exception to abolition came in cases of terror.
 - India's neighbourhood is not peaceful, unlike Scandinavia.
 - It does not form a supranational conglomerate of nations that facilitate common growth, unlike the European Union.
 - Cases of violent terror are constant reminders of the need to protect national stability by ensuring appropriate responses to such actions, and the **death penalty forms part of the national response**.
- There are certain acts which the society so essentially abhors that they justify the taking of the most crucial of rights – **the right to life**.
- The punishment is not arbitrary because it comes out of a judicial process. In the cases of the death penalty, the courts are conscious of its irreversibility and have therefore restricted it to only **rarest of rare cases**.

Way Ahead

- In 1980, in **Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab**, a Constitution Bench articulated the "**rarest of rare**" threshold stating that "judges should never be bloodthirsty".
- Death must only be imposed where the alternative option is unquestionably foreclosed.



TORTURE: AN ETHICAL ANALYSIS

The Supreme Court directed the chief secretaries of all State governments to give, within three weeks, their feedback on the Centre's draft law to Prevent custodial torture and inhuman treatment.

About:

- The SC's directive was in response to the fact that the Center's draft law, to prevent custodial torture and inhuman treatment, had been circulated among all States, but only seven states have given their feedback till now.
- The center has created this draft law as India is a **signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Torture**, which mandates the country must have a **standalone anti-torture law**.
 - Passing of the bill is required for India to ratify the UN convention on torture.
 - **It is to be noted** that though India had signed the U.N. Convention Against Torture in 1997, **it is yet to ratify it**.
- **The Prevention of Custodial Torture bill aims** to amend sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to make torture a punishable offence.
- Feedback of the states is solicited as the matter of **Criminal Law** is mentioned in the **Concurrent List** of the Constitution of India.
- Considering the importance that the present government and the courts are giving to torture, let us analyze torture from an ethical perspective.
- **Definition:** In the most basic sense, Torture is inflicting physical, mental or emotional pain on a person so as to make them compliant, break their will or for any other reasons like sadism, pleasure, etc.

Global Conventions on Torture:

- **UN Convention Against Torture** allows no exceptions, even in circumstances such as war or while fighting terrorism.
- Torture is also prohibited under **international criminal law** and can amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- **Geneva Conventions** also prohibit the use of torture and cruel and degrading behavior.
- **What do the people feel about torture?**
 - The poll for the BBC World Service showed that **59% of the world's citizens say 'no'**: they are unwilling to compromise on the protection of human rights.
 - 32% of people in India believe that some degree of torture should be allowed if it provides information that saves innocent lives.

Is Torture Justified in Certain Cases?

- A pure utilitarian view says that an act is right if it brings about the greatest good for the greatest number.
- For example, if someone has kidnapped a child and left him/her to die somewhere, and you need to find out where, and torturing someone till they talk is the only way to find out, it might be the right thing to do.
- In such a case, **it'll be better for the child, and even for the criminal**, as it might prevent a murder charge on the criminal.
- In similar case, if torturing a terrorist uncovers a plot, it might save thousands of lives.

Ethical Arguments against Torture:

- **Categorical Imperative:** As per Immanuel Kant's theory, not hurting others is a categorical imperative, which all human beings must follow throughout their lives.
 - Torture is unjustified as it consists of **intentional infliction of severe physical, mental or emotional suffering** on the other person.
 - Here the word '**Intentional**' is the defining parameter as **ethical reasoning is applicable only when** the actions of the moral agents are out of their **free will**.
- **Human Rights approach:** Torture of human beings consists of curtailment of individual autonomy. Given the **moral importance of autonomy**, torture is also unjustifiable on this account.
 - Torture is sometimes also used to suppress independent thought and make people comply with the more accepted beliefs of the society.
- **Immanuel Kant** also said you should never treat people merely as instruments; never just as means to your own goals.
 - **E.g. 'there's a difference between a tape recorder and a person.** If you're having trouble getting information out of a tape recorder you can pound on it or kick it. This may not be very effective, but it isn't immoral.'
 - But if you want to get information out of a person, **you should convince them to tell you what you want to know**.
 - **Torture treats the victim as a means to an end and not an end in themselves.**
 - **Torturers often explicitly dehumanize their victims** to make it easier to torture them.

TORTURE

MAGISTERED

"There's a difference between a tape recorder and a person. If you're having trouble getting information out of a tape recorder you can pound on it or kick it. This may not be very effective, but it isn't immoral."

- Torture violates the rights and human dignity of the victim, including the **legal right to remain silent when questioned**.

Some Consequentialist Arguments against Torture:

- **Torture is a slippery slope** – each act of torture makes it easier to accept the use of torture in the future.
- **Torture is an ineffective interrogation tool** as there is no guarantee that the person who is being tortured will give the correct information because under torture a prisoner will eventually say anything to stop the pain. More effective methods of interrogation that don't involve torture are available.
- Also, if a suspect is tortured it may be impossible to prosecute them successfully as many countries law, including India, **excludes involuntary statements or confessions** on the ground that such evidence is inherently unreliable.
- **Torture damages the humanity of the torturers:** Those who carry out torture are likely to become brutalised by their acts, and desensitised to humanity.
- **Institution:** Torture damages the institution that carries it out.
 - It damages the reputation and moral authority of the institution.
 - Its use is likely to produce internal dissent among the members and so damages the integrity of the institution.
- Using torture provides '**the enemy**' with something they can exploit for propaganda.

For example, the terrorist organizations like ISIS use state brutalities as an excuse to radicalize the youths to pick up arms.

Way Forward:

- Though, torture is unjustified from many ethical perspectives, but **there may be situations** when the unity and integrity of the State is under threat or the lives of innocent people may be in danger.
- Under such situations, a law enforcement officer or a person with noble intentions **might feel compelled to undertake any means necessary** to protect the country or to save the lives.
- It is important to note here that the actions of the officer in such a scenario are **guided by the supreme value of nationalism and saving lives**. Thus, it would be unjustified to conclude that the person undertaking such an action is ethically wrong.
- Thus, the issue of torture is complicated and needs to be discussed in public domain to evolve a consensus on the same. The feedback of the states on the draft prevention of custodial torture bill will be the first step towards developing consensus. Later, views of the civil society and legal and ethical experts should also be solicited.
- A model set of check to scrutinize or punish any act of torture may be as follows:
 - Torture is always wrong, and it should always be illegal.
 - Those who torture put themselves at risk of legal punishment.
 - But there may be cases where they can show good reasons why torture was necessary.
 - If a court agrees with them then they may either be acquitted of the crime (presumably because they didn't have a 'guilty mind')
 - Hence, custodial torture must always be done as per rule of law. It should be used as tool in order to ensure safety and security of citizens and nations.



THE AADHAAR & OTHER LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL

A Bill in the Lok Sabha has been passed that will allow individuals to voluntarily offer biometric ID Aadhaar as a means of identity verification for obtaining services like opening a bank account.

About:

- The Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018 has been passed by Lok Sabha. The Bill amends the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.
- The Aadhaar Act provides targeted delivery of subsidies and benefits to individuals residing in India by assigning them unique identity numbers, called Aadhaar numbers.

Background:

- The changes follow the recent Supreme Court's verdict in regards with Aadhaar.
- Verdict upheld Aadhaar, but limited its use for only certain subsidies and schemes funded by the Consolidated Fund of India. The court disallowed private companies from asking for Aadhaar for authentication.
- The amendments now seek to work on some of the restrictions imposed by the court.
- Over 122 crore Aadhaar numbers were issued over the period. So, given the widespread use of Aadhaar, it is essential to have a regulatory framework for its operation.
- Also, UIDAI needed to be empowered to take enforcement actions against errant entities.

The Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018:

- Offline verification of Aadhaar number holder:** The bill allows offline verification of identity, without authentication (submission of biometric or demographic information to data servers) through modes specified by UIDAI by regulations.
- Voluntary use of Aadhaar to verify identity:** According to the bill, an individual may **voluntarily use** his Aadhaar number to establish his identity, by authentication or offline verification.
- The Bill further states that authentication of an individual's identity via Aadhaar, for the provision of any service, **may be made mandatory only by a law of Parliament.**
- Amendment to Telegraph and PMLA Act:** Telecom companies, banks and financial institutions **may verify the identity** of their clients by authentication or offline verification of Aadhaar, or passport, or any other documents notified by the central govt.
 - The person has the choice to use either mode to verify his identity and no person shall be denied any service for not having an Aadhaar number.

- Deletion of Section 57:** Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, which enabled private authentication, has been deleted.

- Aadhaar number of children:** The bill provides an option to children who are Aadhaar number holders to **"cancel their Aadhaar number on attaining the age of eighteen years".**

- Complaints:** The original Act did not allow courts to accept complaints filed by individuals, only permitting the UIDAI or officers authorised by it to make complaints in case of violations. According to the new amendment, individuals will be able to register complaints in certain cases, which can include impersonation, or if their Aadhaar information is disclosed without their consent.

- UIDAI's powers:** UIDAI has been given the **power to issue directions to entities in the Aadhaar ecosystem.**

- The penalties to be decided by an adjudicating officer appointed by UIDAI for violations of the laws by any entity in the Aadhaar ecosystem.
- The Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal** has been made the Appellate Tribunal for such cases.

- Use of Virtual IDs:** Provision for use of virtual IDs to conceal the actual Aadhaar number of an individual has been provided.
- Disclosure of Information in Certain Cases:**

- The Bill provides disclosure of information in certain cases only for orders by High Courts (or above).
- Previously as per section 33(2) of Aadhar Act, an officer not below the rank of a Joint Secretary could issue directions for disclosing information in the interest of national security. The Bill amends this section to allow such disclosure on directions of officers not below the rank of a Secretary.

Criticism of the Bill:

- Amendment has been proposed despite government's abject failure to enact comprehensive legislation protecting data and privacy.
- Although, Pre legislative consultative policy places onus on ministry to publish draft of any proposed law to invite public comments. Yet bill was introduced without any prior consultation.
- Making Aadhaar voluntary:** Critics argue that the bill doesn't commit itself to making sure Aadhaar is purely voluntary as it still enables the government to make Aadhaar mandatory for "provision of any service" if it is "required by a law made by parliament.

CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

The Lok Sabha has passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

About:

- Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016**, was introduced in Lok Sabha in July 2016, which referred to Joint Parliamentary committee in August 2016.
- Joint Parliamentary Committee** submitted its report on 7th January 2019 and bill has been passed by Lok Sabha on 8th January, 2019

Provisions/Features of the Bill:

- Amendment in definition of illegal migrants:** The **Citizenship Act, 1955** prohibits illegal migrants from acquiring Indian citizenship. The Bill amends the Act to provide that the following minority groups will not be treated as illegal migrants: **Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.**
- Citizenship by naturalisation:** It seeks to reduce the minimum years of residency in India to apply for citizenship to be lessened from 12 years to 7 years for such migrants.
- Cancellation of registration of OCI cardholders:** The Bill provides that the registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders may be cancelled if they violate any law.
- The Bill will apply to all States and Union Territories of the country.

Positive Aspect of the Bill:

- The Citizenship Bill is an **attribution of the wrong** that was done during **India's Partition**. It will safeguard all who had been **victims of the Partition**.
- The exception in the bill has been created because these **minorities are fleeing persecution and have no other option** aside from coming to India illegally.
- It is clear that this Bill, in spirit, addresses the problem refugees, people who are forced to **move out of a well-founded fear for their lives, and not immigrants**, people who voluntarily move often seeking **economic opportunities**.

Criticism of the Bill:

- Violation of Right to Equality:** The bill violates the **Right to Equality (Article 14)** as it seeks to grant citizenships to illegal migrants on the basis of religion:
 - It fails the test of reasonability contained in Article 14. This is because it does not provide any concrete reasons for limiting eligibility of **citizenship to 6 minorities of only 3 countries**.

- For example: **Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, Ahmadis from Pakistan and Uighur Muslims from China** who face religious persecution have been overlooked.
- Against the Basic Structure of the Constitution:** The bill undermines secularism and is thus against the Basic Structure of the Constitution.
- Violation of Assam Accord:** Bill would undermine the rights of indigenous Assamese people and would be in violation of **Clause 6 of Assam accord** which ensures constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.
- Section 6A of the Citizenship Act** relates to provisions for citizenship of people covered by the Assam Accord. The Act fixes **March 25, 1971** as the cut-off date for granting citizenship to Bangladeshi migrants in Assam. However, the Bill makes **December 31, 2014** as the cutoff date.

Assam Accord

- The Assam Accord (1985)** was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in **New Delhi on 15 August 1985**.
- As per this accord:**
 - All those foreigners who had entered Assam **before 1967** were to be given full citizenship including the right to vote.
 - Migrants those **who had done so after 1971** were to be deported.
 - Those who **entered between 1966 and 1971** were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship.
- Conflict with NRC:** There is an apprehension that the Bill would be in conflict with the ongoing exercise to update the National Register of Citizens in Assam, for which the cut-off date is March 25th, 1971.
- Vague procedure to cancel OCI registration:** The Bill allows cancellation of OCI registration for violation of any law. But the offences covered under this have not been mentioned, hence, OCI can be cancelled for petty offences.
- Fails on the tenets of international refugee law:** Although India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, granting refuge based on humanitarian considerations is arguably a norm of customary international law.

- **Amendment to Telegraph and PMLA Act:** The bill seeks to amend the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, to provide for the voluntary use of Aadhaar authentication. Critics argue that this is a violation of SC order to strike down Section 57 and completely prohibit private players to use Aadhaar numbers and poses risk of Aadhaar related frauds and thefts.
- **Disclosure of Information:** The SC had declared Section 33(2) of Aadhaar Act which allowed disclosure of information in the interest of national security, as unconstitutional. However, the bill has put forward a refurbished form of the section thus violating SC order.
 - Further, the SC had ordered for a judicial officer to be associated with the process of disclosure. However, the Bill only substitutes the words "Joint Secretary" with "Secretary" in Section 33(2), completely disregarding the Supreme Court's order demanding inquiry by a judge.
- **Privacy and Security concerns inadequately addressed:** Though the bill has taken steps to ensure privacy by regulating entities in Aadhaar ecosystem, the critics argue that it's not adequate to tackle the problem of Aadhaar-related fraud.
- **Allowing children to delete their Aadhaar number:** The provisions to allow children to opt out of Aadhaar once they are adults makes less sense as it overlooks the fact that Aadhaar is ***de facto*** mandatory for all adults as it still required to be linked to one's PAN card.

Significance of the Bill:

- **Individual:**
 - Easy hassle free access to services (banking, LPG, phone number, etc).
 - **Migrants:** Provides identification to large number of migrant labors to avail services.
 - **Financial inclusion:** The identification enables easy opening of bank account leading to financial inclusion

of rural folks and ease of operations for banks through Banking Correspondent.

- **Administrative:**

- Online cost effective verification of beneficiaries leads to Good Governance (minimum government maximum Governance).
- Unique and robust platform to check duplication and ghost cards.
- Subsidy costs can be hugely reduced by cutting down intermediaries and eliminating ghost cards.

- **Reduction in fake identity:**

- As only one identity card is provided to a person (linked to individual biometrics), there is incentive to be genuine.

Way Forward:

- Government should move immediately to **designate UID as critical infrastructure** and set up a **dedicated Computer Emergency Response Team** to monitor attacks or intrusions on the database.
- **Crafting an encryption policy** that specifically addresses encryption for Aadhaar-enabled apps.
- Working with the private sector at forums like the International Electronic and Electrical Engineers (IEEE) and the Internet Engineering Task Force to **create interoperable security standards for platforms relying on national identity databases**.
- **Comprehensive national data privacy law**, which enshrines internationally accepted principles of privacy, must be the citizens' insurance policy to prevent mass surveillance and other excessive use of Aadhaar.
- **Smart Cards as a national ID:** A smart card is like any other debit or credit card, made of plastic with embedded chips which could be RFID compatible. The chips in these smart cards house the personal data of the user, which can only be read by an authorised authenticating machine.

VOLUNTARY
AADHAAR

National Register of Citizens of India

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a register containing names of all genuine Indian citizens residing in Assam. The **register was first prepared after the 1951, Census of India.**
- The NRC is now being updated in Assam to include the names of those persons (or their descendants) who appear in the NRC, 1951, or in any of the Electoral Rolls up to the **midnight of 24 March 1971** or in any one of the other admissible documents issued up to **mid-night of 24 March 1971.**
- **Concerns over Insurgency:** The North Eastern states have vehemently opposed the bill over the concerns that citizenship to illegal migrants would pose a threat to their cultural and linguistic identity and put a strain on resources and economic opportunities.
 - There have already been widespread protests in NE states which further arise concerns over insurgency.
- **Violation of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP):** The bill particularly violates Clause 1 of the Declaration which states that indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.
- **Others:**
 - Anachronistic and reverse the process of globalisation
 - The bill has potentially interesting implications for asymmetric federalism.

Do You Know?

Citizenship Act, 1955:

- The Act provides for acquisition and loss of citizenship after the commencement of the constitution. **The Citizenship Act, 1955** prohibits illegal migrants from acquiring Indian citizenship.
- According to the Act, **an illegal migrant** is a foreigner who enters the country without valid travel documents, like a passport and visa, or enters with valid documents, but stays beyond the permitted time period
- This act mentions four ways in which a person may be Indian citizen viz. by birth, by descent, by registration and by naturalization.

Citizenship by Birth:

- Every person born in India on or after Jan 26, 1950 is a citizen of India provided his/her father is not an enemy alien or representative of a diplomatic mission.

Citizenship by Descent:

- A person born outside India on or after Jan 26, 1950 shall be a citizen of India by descent if his father or mother is a citizen of India at the time of his birth; provided such birth is registered in any of Indian consulates.

Citizenship by Registration:

- A person can acquire citizenship by registering themselves with prescribed authority.

Citizenship by Naturalization:

- A foreign citizen not covered by any of the above methods can get Indian citizenship on application of Naturalisation to the Government of India; with the following conditions.
 - Belongs to a country where the citizens of India are allowed to become subjects or citizens of that country by naturalization.
 - Renounces the citizenship of his country and intimated the renunciation to the Government of India.
 - Has been residing in India or serving the government for 12 months before the date of making application for naturalization.
 - Possess a good character
 - Possess working knowledge of Indian Languages
 - Intends to reside in India after naturalization.
- Further, Government of India can waive any or all of the above conditions in case of a person who has rendered distinguished service in the cause of Philosophy, science, literature, arts, world peace etc.

Way Ahead:

- Government should **formulate policies** and take appropriate measures to **provide education**, employment and a decent living to the concerned migrants.
- Necessary steps should be taken in order to ensure that the rights and socio-cultural identity of indigenous people is not affected.
- The bill should have laid down some **general secular criteria** (persecution history, history of migration etc.) which could, in principle, at least, be applied to all groups.
- It would have been appropriate if the Bill had used the term "persecuted minorities" instead of listing out non-Muslim minorities in three countries. This act would have been in conformity with the spirit of religious and linguistic rights of minorities guaranteed under our Constitution.
- There should be accommodation of **Ahmadiyyas, Uyghurs and Rohingyas** who are persecuted minorities and have approached India to seek refuge in time of need.



CAPACITY BUILDING FOR WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

The Government of India has initiated the Capacity Building Programme for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

About:

- The programme aims at empowering elected women representative by developing leadership capacities so that they serve as catalysts for social change and function as peer facilitators in the field, become vocal for their rights and participate effectively in the governance processes.
- State Governments have been actively involved in imparting these trainings. Mainly, State Institute of Rural Developments (SIRDs) and State Resource Centres (SRCs) are actively collaborating with Ministry of Women and Child Development in conducting training programmes across the States.

Background:

- Although women constitute approximately **44% of total elected representatives in PRIs**, they face numerous challenges such as:
 - Lack of leadership skills
 - Male domination:** Even after getting elected **most of their work in panchayats is done by their husbands.**
 - General absence of EWRs from panchayat's meetings due to discouraging attitudes of the family members.
 - Illiteracy, lack of awareness about the structure and functions of PRIs and lack of prior exposure to participation in political processes also hinders the growth and development of women as leaders.
- Low Political representation:** Lok Sabha has a meagre 12% female representation. India ranks 20th from the bottom in terms of representation of women in Parliament.

Significance of Capacity Building Programme:

- Political empowerment:** It would pave the way to the achievement of political justice to women as promised in Preamble and Article 38 of the Constitution of India.
- Social empowerment:** It will give them a level playing ground/equal opportunities as their male counterparts.
- To attain Equality:** It would help women belonging to the SC/ST communities to enable them to have fair competition with women belonging to the forward classes.
- True Democratization:** It is needed to make the democratic process inclusive. Representation of women in policy making machineries is critical to the nation building process.
- Women are also likely to bring welfare issues such as violence against women, childcare, provision of public goods like health, education, etc. into decision making at different level.

Challenges Ahead:

- Reservation of seats** in parties committee is not there. Women are not integrated in any local political process, women leaders are prone to inefficiencies because of lack of education and leadership training.
- The Economic survey for 2017-18** said that factors such as domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding roles of women in society and lack of support from family, prevents women from active political participation.
- Lack of education and leadership training** create a vicious cycle where socio-economic disadvantages lead to reduced opportunities for women to participate in the political process, leading to weakened representation.
- Panchayat Pati:** Role of women as proxies at local level is highly prevalent.
- There are **fewer opportunities for women** to get involved in organizations to gain leadership skills.

Steps Taken

- Mission Poorna Shakti:** It aims to achieve holistic empowerment of women through convergence of schemes/programmes of different Ministries/Department of Government of India as well as State Government.
- NARI:** It is an online portal developed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The portal will provide women citizens with easy access to information on government schemes and initiatives for women.
- e-Samvad:** It is an online portal to provide a platform for NGOs and Civil Societies to interact with the Ministry of Women and Child development.

Way Forward:

- Recognising the significance of **roles of women in decision making process** in the society is critical to strengthen women's agencies for building a progressive society with equality of opportunities among all citizens.
- Women's leadership and communication skills** need to be enhanced through bridging gaps in education, renegotiating gender roles.
- Women's Reservation Bill** which reserves 33% of seats for Indian women at the legislatures should be passed soon.
- Give skill building** and leadership training to EWRs.
- Encourage political parties to include women in committees.



LIMITING THE OPENING OF ENGINEERING COLLEGES

**AICTE will not permit new engineering colleges to be set up from 2020, says review
will take place every two years.**

About:

- The All Indian Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has decided to not permit the creation of new engineering colleges from the academic year 2020-21 and review creation of new capacity every two years after that.
- The Council has accepted the recommendation of the government committee headed by IIT-Hyderabad chairman BVR Mohan Reddy.
- **Recommendations of BVR Mohan Reddy Committee:** The BVR Mohan Reddy Committee recommended that:
- **No additional seats** should be approved in traditional engineering areas such as mechanical, electrical, civil and electronics and electronics.
- Only requests from existing engineering institutes to either start programmes in new technologies or convert current capacity in traditional engineering disciplines to emerging new technologies should be entertained from next year.
- **Introduce undergraduate engineering programmes** in new fields like artificial intelligence, blockchain, robotics, quantum computing, data sciences, cyber security and 3D printing and design.
- **AICTE should only give approvals** based on the capacity utilization of concerned institute.
- While the committee has recommended no new engineering institutes should be set up from 2020, it has said that **concessions should be made for applications already in the pipeline.**

All India Council for Technical Education

- It is a statutory body and a national-level council for technical education, under Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- Established in November 1945, AICTE is responsible for proper planning and coordinated development of the technical education and management education system in India.
- The AICTE accredits postgraduate and graduate programs under specific categories at Indian institutions as per its charter.

Reasons behind the Decision:

- **Poor utilisation of existing capacities:** There were no takers for 51 per cent of the 15.5 lakh B.E/B.Tech seats in 3,291

engineering colleges in 2016-17, according to an Indian Express report.

- **Gaps in regulation:** Glaring gaps is found in regulation, including alleged corruption. For instance, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in 2009 caught former AICTE member-secretary K Narayan Rao accepting a bribe from the owner of an engineering college in Andhra Pradesh.
- **Poor Infrastructure:** There is a vicious circle of poor infrastructure, labs and faculty.
 - **A study by Aspiring Minds** found that less than three of the ten top engineering graduates are aware of the research that is happening in their particular areas of engineering. This was particularly due to paucity of quality infrastructure and faculty shortages in many colleges.
 - **The quantum of faculty shortages is huge** as India faces a shortage of more than 1.5 lakh teachers in its engineering colleges, according to a government report in 2011.
- **Poor linkages with industry:** Non-existent linkages exist with industry and there is absence of a technical ecosystem to nurture the classroom.
- **Low employability:** A McKinsey report found that only a quarter of engineers in India were actually employable.
 - In specific fields such as mechanical engineering, the employability stood at a mere five per cent.
 - Aspiring Minds, an employability assessment firm, recently reported that **95 per cent of Indian engineers cannot code.**

Way Forward:

- The freeze on colleges is not a solution. The reason engineering seats remain vacant despite the growing number of science students is the **low quality of education**. The solution lies in addressing the situation.
- For this, **AICTE announced an updated syllabus in 2016**, and all colleges were asked to incorporate at least 60 per cent of the changes stipulated. But in the absence of an enforcement mechanism, there was no real change on the ground.
- The AICTE has also made it **mandatory** for engineering college teachers to attend the **six-month training programmes**.
- Additionally, the AICTE is recommending setting up an **innovation cell** in every engineering institution for entrepreneurs-in-the-making.
- The bottom-line is, we don't need engineers in such mass quantities. However, there is still a demand for good engineers, who are a rarity.



ASER 2018 ON EDUCATION

Lower primary students in rural India have shown an improvement but class VIII students register a fall in basic reading and arithmetic skills: ASER 2018.

About:

- The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018 shows that there has been some improvement in the reading and arithmetic skills of lower primary students in rural India over the last decade.
- However, the skills of Class VIII students have actually seen a decline in terms of numerical and reading abilities.

ASER

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a yearly survey that NGO Pratham has been carrying out since 2006.

Encouraging Trends Revealed from the Report:

- The findings are encouraging at the Class III level, where there has been gradual improvement since 2014.
- However, even in 2018, less than 30% of students in Class III are actually at their grade level, that is, able to read a Class II text and do double-digit subtraction.
- In an encouraging trend, it found that enrolment is increasing and the percentage of children under 14 who are out of school is now less than 4%.
- The gender gap is also shrinking, even within the older cohort of 15- and 16-year-olds. Only 13.6% of girls of that age are out of school — the first time the figure has dropped below the 15% mark.
- The percentage of out-of-school girls aged 11-14 has fallen significantly over time.
- In most states, school facilities have been improving over time, especially the provision of toilets.

Discouraging Trends Revealed from the Report:

- More than half of the students of Class VIII cannot correctly solve a numerical division problem and more than a quarter of them cannot read a primary-level text.
- These figures are worse than they were a decade ago. In 2008, 84.8% of Class VIII students could read a text meant for Class II and by 2018, that percentage had fallen to 72.8%.
- These overall percentages also camouflage wide differences in skill level between States, or even between students in a single classroom.
- The gap between boys and girls in arithmetic learning levels grows wider as the schoolchildren grow older.

Do You Know?

Reasons for gender gap in arithmetic levels with increasing age of children:

- Increasing household responsibilities for girls.
- The onset of menstrual cycle.
- Social pressure and resulting lack of confidence among girls.

PISA yet to be Undertaken:

- It should be noted that India did not participate in PISA assessment after 2009, when it was ranked at 72nd out of a total of 74 countries.
- This poor ranking invited sharp criticism from academics and experts on how Indian education is impacting the country's competitiveness to become a global powerhouse.
- Subsequently, Indian government blamed "out of context" questions for the poor results in 2009 and decided it won't participate in 2012, 2015 and 2018.
- Recently, it was decided that India will participate in PISA 2021. Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas, and all schools, private and government, in Chandigarh will apply for the 2021 assessment cycle.
- The ASER findings serve as a warning ahead of India's participation in the rigorous Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) to be conducted by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2021.

Do You Know?

Why did India Leave PISA?

- Indian authorities perceive a socio-cultural disconnect between the questions and Indian students' education.
- India authorities blamed that the questions were not understandable or relatable for the Indian students and the test did not capture a true picture.

Why Participate Again?

- OECD has been requested to draft questions that fit the Indian socio-cultural context.
- Also, the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan recommended participation in the assessment.
- An improved ranking in the PISA 2021 may highlight the transition in India's learning paradigm, from 'rote learning' to 'competency based learning'.



EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION FOR CONTESTING ELECTIONS

As Rajasthan scraps the education criteria for contesting local elections, it is time to look at the debate on making education criteria compulsory for contesting elections at the grass-root levels.

About:

- The recently formed government in Rajasthan has **scrapped the minimum educational qualification criteria** for candidates contesting **local body elections**.
- This decision of the Rajasthan government has once again revived the debate on the fairness of having such restrictions.

Background:

- In 2015 Rajasthan and Haryana governments introduced minimum education qualification as prerequisite to contest panchayat and urban bodies' elections.
- In December 2015, a two-judge Bench of the **Supreme Court in Rajbala v. State of Haryana** held that **prescription of educational qualification was justifiable** for better administration and it did not violate the right to equality enshrined in the Constitution.

Not Just Education

Apart from education requirement till Class 10, Haryana government has also imposed other limitations on contesting panchayat elections in the state including:

- Lack of functional toilets
- Criminal conviction
- Pending electricity bills

Need for Education Criteria for Elections at Local Level:

- To bring **qualitative improvement** in the working of the local bodies, as education helps in better decision making.
 - This is because governance is becoming extremely complex in recent times.
 - The economic reform of 1991 has unleashed global market forces, new technologies and also new challenges from which even local government cannot escape.
- Without **adequate amount of education**, the elected members of the local bodies remain **dependent on the government functionaries or their relatives** or friends, which can manipulate the representatives to suit their own agenda.
- In a country with high number of dropouts and low levels of illiteracy, **educational criteria for elections could incentivise people to study** or continue with studies, with a motive of running for local government.

Challenges in Prescribing Educational Qualifications:

- It unduly **restricts** a citizen's **right to contest** elections and thereby challenges the basic premise of a republican democracy.
 - Denying the right to contest effectively restricts the right of a citizen to vote for a candidate of her choice since more than half the population is restricted from contesting.
 - As per UNESCO's **Global Education Monitoring report**, 35 per cent of the world's illiterate population lives in India.
- Further, it **disproportionately disenfranchises** the more marginal sections of society: **women, dalits and poor**.
 - This is antithetical to the aims of the 73rd and 74th amendment act i.e. to increase the representation of these communities in governance.
 - The 2011 Census report highlighted widespread disparity in educational qualification of men and women, and among various caste groups.
- It is **cruel to blame citizens for the failure of the state to fulfil its obligations** to provide education to its citizens.
- Unfair treatment:** Such restrictions do not exist for those contesting parliamentary or Assembly elections. In fact, in the present Lok Sabha, 13% of Member of Parliaments are under-matriculates. This goes **against the idea of equality**.
- There is no conclusive proof that those with formal education will be better in running panchayats. Even **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar** held that literacy doesn't necessarily import a higher level of intelligence or knowledge than what the illiterate possesses.
- There is **no international precedent** to support the decision of excluding people from contesting elections.
- It is also contested that the work of political representative is less to do with knowledge, and more to do with championing values such as leadership, empathy, commitment and so on.

Way Ahead:

- In a liberal democracy, governments must desist from putting bars on who may contest, **except in exceptional circumstances**, such as when a candidate is in breach of particular laws.
- To mandate what makes a person a 'good' candidate goes against the spirit of the attempt to deepen democracy by taking self-government to the grassroots.
- To conclude, although education is important for governance, the ability to understand people's concerns, aspirations and to represent their interests are the key traits one looks for in a political representative.



CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSE: INDIA AT THE FRONTLINE

With the Paris Agreement's ambitious targets, India's response today will determine the success of global climate change action plan.

About:

- The **Accord de Paris** under the UNFCCC signed at the 21st Conference of Parties, Paris in 2015 deals with green house gas emissions mitigation, adaptation and finance.
- It aims to keep global temperature rise under 2°C above preindustrial levels.
- Paris Agreement will come into force in 2020.
- Of all the most polluting nations— US, China, Japan and the EU bloc, only India's carbon emissions are rising (around 4.7% in 2016). Rest all have either stabilised or declining.
- While building the new India, whether we rely on coal and oil or clean, green energy will be a major factor in controlling global warming.

India's Development Needs:

- India's population is yet to peak. We will be first to cross 1.5 bn (by 2030) and will peak at 1.7 to 1.8 bn in 2050.
- With growing urbanization, 200 million more people are expected to become city dwellers by 2030. They will all use new buildings, roads, electricity and vehicles.
- Despite one of the lowest per capita emissions (1.7 MT/year), India's total emissions will rise and form a major chunk of future global emissions as standard of living gets better and more people are pulled out of poverty.

Why India Should Worry About Climate Change:

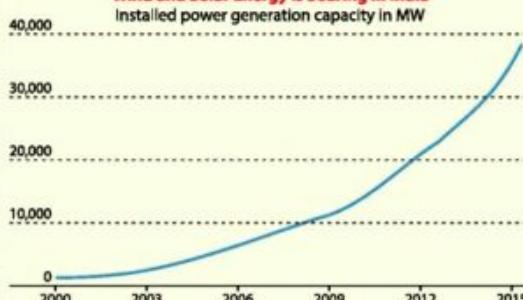
- Climate change is a **most complex and long-term problem** facing the development community.
- Higher temperatures, variable precipitation and extreme weather events impact economic activity besides direct losses:**
 - As per recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report "Global Warming of 1.5°C", climate change will disproportionately affect disadvantaged and vulnerable populations through food insecurity, higher food prices, income losses, lost livelihood opportunities, adverse health impacts, and population displacements.
- India has a vast number of poor people (27% or 364 million suffer from multidimensional poverty; and about 19.5% are vulnerable to becoming poor).
- Thus, half of the country faces a direct threat of climate change impact, due to loss of job or falling ill of a family member.
- Major Pain Points:**
 - Reliance of rural people on natural resource for livelihood.

- High monsoon dependence of Indian agriculture.
- Heat wave kills thousands each year. Huge labour class and economic activity is affected by increasing heat waves, e.g. in construction sector.
- Large coastline of India with major cities face threat of tsunamis, increased frequency and intensity of cyclones and sea level rise.
- Rising level of air pollution creates health risk and accompanying medical costs. (14 of world's 20 most polluted cities are in India)
- India faces imminent water crisis for its vast population.

What India Has Done:

- India has set ambitious **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC)** under the Paris Agreement:
 - Reduce emission intensity of GDP by 33-35% from 2005 levels by 2030.
 - 40% electricity from non-fossil fuel based energy resources by 2030 (with help from Green Climate Fund).
 - Create additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonne CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover.
- India's thrust toward cleaner transportation is reflected in:**
 - Aggressive rollout of clean Bharat Stage vehicle emission norms. (BS IV rolled out; BS V will be skipped and directly shift to BS VI in 2020).
 - Thrust to mass rapid transport metro-rail under Smart Cities Mission.
 - Plans to completely replace diesel locos by electric ones in Railways by 2022.
 - 2030 set as target year by NITI Aayog and Ministry of Heavy Industries beyond which no petrol and diesel cars will be sold. Impetus is on electric vehicles instead.

Wind and Solar Energy is Soaring in India



India is moving towards clean energy:

- Target of 100 GW solar power by 2022.
- Energy efficient LED lighting under UJALA scheme has benefitted 500 million.
- India is 4th largest wind power producer in the world (34046 MW).
- International Solar Alliance has been established by India during Paris Agreement to tap solar power efficiently and economically, 121 countries have joined it so far.

Do You Know?

- **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):** Established at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, it aims to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. It does not have an enforcement mechanism and sets non-binding targets. Major outcomes of UNFCCC include Kyoto Protocol (1997) and Paris Agreement (2015).
- **Nationally Determined Contributions or NDC** (Earlier Intended NDCs or INDC): Under Paris Agreement, contributions that each country should make to achieve global targets. These self-determined targets are non-binding with no penalty.

Challenges:

- **Research and development** in the field of transformative innovation, e.g., battery storage capacity of solar power, need large amounts in **international funding**.
- The **Green Climate Fund**, established in 2010 under UNFCCC, has regularly **missed its target commitments** to get funds.
- While solar power prices are dropping, coal-based thermal power is still more reliable, easily available.
- The coal lobby also influences policy. Plans for no addition of coal-based power plants in the period 2017-2027 under **National Electricity Plan** was modified and additional capacity was allowed till at least 2022.
- There has not been sufficient impetus to electric vehicle sector to achieve the ambitious targets set by India. The automotive industry lobby is a crucial factor.

What More Needs to Be Done:

- India needs to **adopt a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches** to achieve energy efficient, sustainable development.
- While much has been done in the area of policy-making and top-down approach of "greening" the economy, it is time to **work with over 65% of India's rural populace** to reach those who will be most impacted by the adverse effects of climate change.

- The up and coming rural India will inevitably create high energy demand, leading to higher emissions.
- "**Low-carbon rural development**" can lift millions of Indians out of poverty, simultaneously addressing climate change, food and energy security.
- **Low-carbon rural development can include:**
 - Household and community biogas units.
 - Replace wood burning stoves with LPG (under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana).
 - Renewable-based microgrids and rooftop solar power generation. Jharkhand which has 249 remote villages powered by solar microgrids is considering expansion to villages that are already grid-connected.
 - Promoting scientifically and economically sound, climate-smart farming techniques like zero budget natural farming of Andhra Pradesh's Rayalseema region.
 - Community management of forests as illustrated in the Mendha-Lekha village (Maharashtra).

Zero Budget Natural Farming

It replaces fertilisers and pesticides with concoctions of cow dung, cow urine, jaggery and pulse flour, and ensure perfect soil conditions for plant growth.

- Top soil is covered with crop residue to increase water retention.
- **Beejamrutham:** Coating of seeds with cow dung and cow urine.
- **Jeevamrutham:** Concoction of dung, urine, jaggery and pulse flour to multiply soil microbes.
- **Kashayam:** Concoction with lilac and chillies to protect plants from pests.

Adopt Traditional Practices:

- The traditional Indian way of life has always been in harmony with the environment.
- Many platforms like Vikalp Sangam compile and document such alternative, traditional ways of meeting human need and aspiration without harming the planet.
- Such practices need to be replicated with context-relevant modifications.
- India's initiative can not only provide new jobs in the renewable energy sector and ensure livelihood security, but also lead other developing nations like Indonesia and Nigeria to follow eco-friendly path to development.



Chapter**MAGZTER EDITION****ECONOMY****TRENDS AND PROGRESS OF BANKING IN 2017-18 REPORT**

Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in its annual 'Trends and Progress of Banking in 2017-18 report, pointed out to the revival in credit growth in the first half of current financial year.

Positive Findings of the Report:

- RBI Report indicates that the non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks have begun to stabilise, albeit at an elevated level;
- There is revival in credit growth augurs well for the growth prospects of the banking sector.
- Enhanced recapitalisation:** The recapitalisation of public sector banks for 2018-19, which was enhanced to ₹ 1,06,000 crore from ₹ 65,000 crore, was aimed at meeting regulatory capital requirements.
- Bad Loans:** The RBI said while gross NPA ratio of public sector banks reached 14.6% in 2017-18, there was a significant decline in fresh slippages across bank groups during the first half of 2018-19.

Major Challenges as Highlighted in the Report:

- Continuing with the progress made under the new resolution framework with the IBC as the focal point;
- The need for adequate recapitalisation of public sector banks;
- Firming up of corporate governance mechanisms to address the growing complexity of the Indian financial system; and
- Strengthening the asset-liability framework for NBFCs** to bring it on par with that of banks and harmonising it across different categories of NBFCs.

NEW DATA ON EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLING

Facing criticism for jobless growth, government has called for accurate data collection on employment and skilling.

About:

- Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has estimated loss of 1.1 crore jobs in 2018 due to Note ban and GST roll-out.
- In response, the government has called for accurate data collection on employment and skilling. Available data are not inclusive and does not cover many sectors and many new age industries like taxi aggregators who are reportedly engaging a million people today

Do You Know?**Employment data in India provided by:**

- Annual and Quarterly surveys of the Labour Bureau.
- Surveys by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE).
- Data on social security enrolment from Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- Employment-Unemployment surveys of NSSO.

Need for Accurate Data for Jobs:

- Labour Statistics play an essential role for the formulation and evaluation of policies, which helps to increase understanding of problems and explain actions related to employment in the country.
- There is scarcity of data relating to the unorganised sector for which NSSO conducts non-periodic surveys.
- Better data will encourage high quality research on the Indian labour market.

Creating New Jobs:

- Skilling after accurate data collection is very important in order to develop robust models on the lines of those followed internationally.
- There is a need to focus on sectors like tourism, health care and transportation which has the potential to create huge job opportunities in the country.
- Women should be encouraged to develop livelihood in the changing landscape of jobs and opportunities

Women Participation in Labour

- With Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) of 27 percent, India has one of the lowest female LFPR among the emerging market economies and developing nations.
- LFPR for women** is calculated as the share of women that are employed or are seeking work as a proportion of the working age female population.
- There is a need to utilise the available capacity for skilling and also expand the 'on the job' skilling through apprenticeship and other models.
- Encouraging more start-ups can help generate employment.

KALIA SCHEME OF ODISHA

The recently launched KALIA scheme seeks to accelerate agricultural prosperity and to reduce poverty in Odisha.

About:

- The Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme was recently announced by the Odisha government.
- The purpose of the scheme is to accelerate agricultural prosperity and to reduce poverty in Odisha.
- It will cover 92% of the cultivators, loanee and non-loanee farmers, sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers.

Provisions of KALIA Scheme:

- Land-owning small and marginal farmers:** Each family will get Rs 5,000 separately in the kharif and rabi seasons, for five cropping seasons between 2018-19 and 2021-22.
- Tenants and agri-labourers,** who have no land records will get one-time payment of Rs 12,500/family.
- Vulnerable families** (i.e. elderly, sick and differently abled persons) will get one-time payment of Rs 10,000/family.
- The KALIA scheme also includes a life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh and additional personal accident coverage of the same amount for 57 lakh households.
- There are provisions of Crop loans up to Rs 50,000 free of interest.
- The final list of all beneficiaries of the scheme will be prepared in the next phase from the gram Panchayat level.

KRUSHAK ASSISTANCE FOR LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME AUGMENTATION (KALIA) **BUDGET ₹10,000 CR**

SUPPORT FOR CULTIVATION	₹10,000 per family in Rabi & Kharif seasons, covering 30 lakh small & marginal farmer families benefitting 92% of all cultivators in the state
SUPPORT FOR LIVELIHOOD	₹12,500 to 10 lakh landless agriculture households for livelihood activities
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	₹10,000 per annum to 10 lakh vulnerable agriculture household & landless labourers
LIFE INSURANCE COVER	Life insurance cover of ₹2 lakhs and additional Personal Accident Cover of ₹2 lakh to 57 lakh households of cultivators and landless agri labourers
INTEREST FREE CROP LOANS	All loans up to ₹50,000 now interest free

Benefits of the Scheme:

- It will greatly benefit sharecroppers and cultivators, most of whom own little or no land.
- Landless Agri-labourers will be supported with a unit cost of Rs 12,500 for activities like goat rearing, mushroom cultivation, beekeeping, poultry farming and fishery, with which he is familiar.
- It is said to be comparatively better than farm loan waiver.
 - Farm loan waiver will reduce credit available to farmers in the long term as banks become more averse to lending to farmers who have availed loan waivers.

- On the other hand income support schemes (like KALIA) can provide a sustainable solution by enabling farmers to make repayment of their loans.
- Also, periodically receiving income support by farmers directly in their bank account will encourage them to maintain an active bank account, which is in line with effective financial inclusion.

Concerns:

- There is the major challenge of identifying who is a tenant and who is an agri-labourer, as tenancy is not legally allowed in Odisha. So, no legal record exists.
- Given that it is just a one-time payment for them, it will have only a limited impact.

Way Forward:

- It is important to track and evaluate the performance of these two schemes (Rythu Bandhu and KALIA) as they have not only important budgetary implications but are also a pointer towards a new policy innovation.

TECHNOLOGY CENTRES FOR MSMEs**MSME ministry to set up 20 technology centres****About:**

- Technology centres:** The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) will develop 20 technology centres, along with extension centres across the country in three to five years.
- These centres will have modern technology machinery and testing equipment. They will offer technical services to MSMEs at a competitive price.
- Investment:** These centres would come up at an investment of ₹200 crore each. There are plans to have about 100 extension centres, each at an investment of ₹20 crore.
- Present status:** 18 tool rooms are operational in the country and 15 more are in different stages of development or have started functioning. These tool rooms are specific to electronics, general engineering and high-end engineering sectors.

Do You Know?

- Virtual Reality:** This technology immerses users in a completely virtual environment that is generated by a computer. Example – Oculus Rift, Google Cardboard etc.
- Augmented Reality:** In augmented reality, users see and interact with the real world while digital content is added to it. E.g. Pokémon Go.

Need for Technology Centres for MSMEs:

- Need to catch-up:** With the development of technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality, the manufacturing units in the MSME sector need to have access to these.
- Training manpower:** The Ministry is creating trained manpower in virtual reality through the **National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC)**. It has also developed training modules that use virtual reality and these will be launched across the country through the NSIC in a couple of months.

National Small Industries Corporation Limited (NSIC)

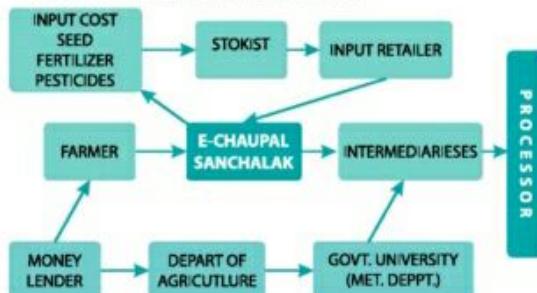
- NSIC is a Public Sector Enterprise that falls under Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises of India.
- NSIC has been working to promote aid and foster the growth of micro, small and medium enterprises in the country.
- In addition, NSIC has set up Training cum Incubation Centre managed by professional manpower.

E-CHOUPAL MODEL

ITC set to launch mobile version of E-Choupal (E-Choupal 4.0) to leverage smart phone reach and cheaper data.

About:

- E-Choupal:** It is a two-decade old initiative from the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) conglomerate ITC. It enables farmers to overcome challenges related to information access and procurement with the help of internet.
- Under this system, ITC helps build village internet kiosks. These kiosks enable farmers access information in their local language on the weather and market prices, besides knowledge on scientific farm practices and risk management.
- E-Choupal 4.0:** It is a new model for the expansion of the e-Choupal network which is planned to be launched by the middle of 2019.
- The desktop based e-Choupal will become mobile assisted services with a different cost structure.



Benefits of e-Choupal Model

- Output in tune with market demand:** With real-time information, farmers are able to align their farm output with market demand.
- Reduces transaction cost:** The system also helps reduce transaction costs by eliminating the need for intermediaries as farmers are virtually linked to the mandi (agricultural market) system for price discovery.
- More procurement:** Net cost of procurement gets reduced for ITC by eliminating costs in the supply chain that do not add value. This encourages higher procurement.
- More services to be offered:** In its fourth generation, the e-Choupal will assume the role of an 'Aggregator of Agricultural Services' and offer a bouquet of farm focused services in areas including crop management, farm mechanisation, healthcare, banking and insurance.

FACTORY OUTPUT AT 17 MONTH LOW: CSO

Factory output growth measured on the basis of IIP slips to a 17-month low in November, as per CSO

About:

- Data released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) recently showed that factory output growth had slipped to a 17-month low in November.
- This growth is measured on the basis of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).
- IIP is a composite indicator that measures changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products over a period of time, with respect to a chosen base period.
- IIP is compiled and published monthly by the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO), under Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, with a time lag of six weeks from the reference month.

Importance of IIP:

- It provides a single representative figure to measure the general level of industrial activity in the economy on a monthly basis.
- Used by government agencies including the Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank of India etc, for policy purposes.
- It forms a crucial input for compilation of Gross Value Added (GVA) of the manufacturing sector in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on a quarterly basis. However, it is to be noted that for annual revised estimate CSO has replaced IIP with Annual Survey of Industries (ASI).

Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)

ASI is the principal source of industrial statistics in India providing information on important characteristics of registered manufacturing sector.

- It is also used extensively by financial intermediaries, policy analysts and private companies for various analytical purposes.

Change in Base Year of IIP:

- The change in the base year to 2011-12, which happened in 2017, was the ninth revision of base year of the all-India IIP since the beginning of its dissemination.
- A number of items were introduced or deleted which helped to check the volatility of the index that was earlier seen especially for capital good.
- New series had 809 items from manufacturing sector as against 620 from old 2004-05 series.

Comparison with ASI

Index of Industrial Production (IIP)	Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)
IIP is a monthly indicator based on items and factories selected from ASI.	ASI is the main source of long term industrial statistics.
IIP is based on a fixed set of items and factories chosen in the base period.	ASI is a record-based survey of establishments registered under the Factories Act, 1948 in which the sampling frame and the sampled establishments undergo significant changes. As a result, the ASI captures information of new items and factories whereas the IIP does not.
Growth rates in IIP are based on volume of production.	Growth rates in ASI are derived on the basis of Value Added (Output – Input).
Establishments selected in IIP are generally larger in size.	ASI establishments cover both large and smaller units.
The growth rates in IIP are lower as the smaller units that have a thinner base and hence show higher growth.	This is not the case with ASI.

FDI IN E-COMMERCE GUIDELINES

A recent guideline on FDI in e-commerce is likely to impact online discounts, dilute consumer experience.

About:

- The government recently launched stricter guidelines that govern foreign direct investment (FDI) in e-commerce firms.

Changes to the FDI Norms Covering e-Commerce:

- No exclusive tie-ups:** The new norms bar exclusive tie-ups between e-commerce firms that follow the 'marketplace model' and vendors using their platform. Now, E-commerce firms cannot hold stake in, or control over vendor selling through their platforms.
- A cap of 25%:** A vendor cannot sell more than 25% of its wares through an e-commerce marketplace.
- E-commerce marketplace will not force any seller to sell any product exclusively on its platform.

Models of e-commerce

- Marketplace model:** It means providing an information technology platform by an e-commerce entity on a digital & electronic network to act as a facilitator between buyer and seller. In India, FDI is allowed in marketplace model.
- Inventory model:** It means an e-commerce activity where inventory of goods and services is owned by e-commerce entity and is sold to the consumers directly. In India, FDI is not allowed in inventory model.
- No deep discounts:** The marketplaces will not be allowed to offer deep discounts through their in house companies listed as sellers.
- Maintain level playing field:** E-commerce entities providing marketplace will not directly or indirectly influence the sale price of goods or services and shall maintain level playing field.
- Need to furnish certificate:** E-commerce marketplace entity will be required to furnish a certificate along with a report of statutory auditor to Reserve Bank of India, confirming compliance of the guidelines.

Rationale behind the Change:

- Demand from offline traders:** Offline traders have been complaining that e-commerce platforms with access to FDI are able to give deep discounts and other incentives through related-party vendors, which they cannot match.
- E-commerce entity shouldn't directly or indirectly **influence sale price** of goods and services.
- All vendors on e-commerce should be provided services in a fair and non-restrictive manner.

Impacts on Different Stakeholders:

- E-Commerce companies:**
 - Nearly 35-40% of e-retail industry sales could be impacted due to the tightened policy, as estimated by CRISIL.

- It would impact back end operations, as group entities would have to be removed from e-commerce value chain.
- Big market place retailers:** Ex. Cloutail, appario etc would be impacted in which e-commerce firms like amazon holds majority equity stakes.
- Electronics and Apparel Sector:** The highest impact is expected on electronics and apparel segments that account for a bulk of their revenues, according to Crisil.
- Employment:** With threat to disruption of supply chain, significant job losses may take place.
- Retailers:** Offline retailers expected to benefit with revenue soaring up to Rs. 12000 crore as per Crisil, while in-house brands of the e-retailers likely to get hit.
- Customers:** Deep discounts and exclusive offerings may no longer be available for customers.

Concerns:

- E-commerce companies claim they have not been consulted before the policy was updated. Some expect Amazon to offload its equity in Cloutail and Appario to continue using those seller entities.
- With new guidelines coming into force from February 1, 2019, e-Marketplaces need to change their business model and begin to look at franchise channels, rather than equity investments channels, to do business in India.
- Guidelines may hurt the foreign investment coming into e-commerce sector in future.
- From deciding how much discount can be offered to consumers, to decide, how, where and at what price a producer is to sell his goods is certainly not the government's job.

Way Forward:

- Government should consult all stakeholders and ensure that its guidelines do not harm ease of doing business in India.
- Government could have waited for recommendation of National e-commerce Policy task force set up in April, 2017.

FIRST ADVANCE ESTIMATES OF NATIONAL INCOME, 2018-19

The first advance estimate of gross domestic product (GDP) growth for 2018-19 released recently paints a mixed picture of the economy.

About:

- Central Statistics Office (CSO)** recently released the first advance estimate of GDP growth for 2018-19.

- It projects the GDP growth rate for the full year to be at 7.2%, which is significantly higher than the growth rate of 6.7% achieved last year.

GDP Estimate of India for 2018-19

- RBI retains GDP growth forecast at 7.4% for 2018-19.
- World Bank pegs India's fiscal 2019 growth at 7.3%.
- Gross fixed capital formation** as a percentage of GDP is expected to reach 33%, the highest in three years.

Risks to Indian Economy:

- Regime uncertainty** associated with the election may put a halt to the nascent pick-up witnessed in investments as corporations might decide to hold back on big ticket investments until things clear up.
- Absence of meaningful structural reforms** that are necessary to increase economic productivity.
- Populist policies** which can harm the economy.
- Over-dependence on imported oil**, which makes growth heavily dependent on external events often beyond the control of the government.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC PROSPECT REPORT 2018

World Bank's Global Economic Prospects Report 2018 expects India to remain the fastest growing emerging market economy.

About:

- The World Bank in its recently released Global Economic Prospects Report - January 2019, has sketched a gloomy outlook for the global economic growth in the coming years, reiterating the fears of global slowdown.
- However, it expects India to remain the fastest growing emerging market economy.

Details of the Report:

- Worries over **trade war**, weak global growth and financial stress in the developing economies are likely to put pressure on global growth outlook.
- For 2018, the global growth estimate has been revised downwards by 0.1 percentage point from 3.1 per cent as per June 2018 report to **3 per cent** in January 2019 report.
- In 2019, the global economic growth is projected to grow by 2.9 per cent.

On India's Performance:

- India is expected to remain the fastest growing emerging market economy and its growth forecast has been kept unchanged at **7.3 per cent in financial year 2019** while the economy is expected to grow at 7.5 per cent in the next 3 years.

Drivers of Optimism:

- Growing domestic demand in India due to structural reforms undertaken.
- Revival of credit growth.
- Strengthening of investment .
- Private consumption is expected to remain robust.

Risks to Indian Economy:

- The risks to the projected growth could arise from:
 - Fiscal slippages,
 - Rising inflation and
 - Possibility of delays in structural reforms to address the weakness in the balance sheets of banks and non-financial corporates.
- The **external risks** pertain to a further **deterioration in current accounts** and a faster than expected tightening of global financial conditions.
- As per the World Bank's estimates, current account deficit is expected to widen to 2.6 per cent of GDP and the inflation is projected to rise somewhat above the midpoint of the Reserve Bank of India's target range of 2-6 per cent, mainly owing to energy and food prices.

Way Forward:

- Improved labour market reforms, education and health reforms as well as relaxing investment bottleneck will further help improve India's prospects for growth.
- India has a favourable demographic profile which is rarely seen in other economies, but it needs to improve its female labour force participation rate.

Do You Know?

- **Important Reports published by World Bank:**
 - Ease of Doing Business
 - World Development Report
 - Global Economic Prospects
- **Important Reports published by International Monetary Fund:**
 - World Economic Outlook
 - Global Financial Stability Report

GST BURDEN EASED

GST-exemption limit for businesses in most States doubled to ₹40 lakh; small firms allowed to file annual returns; Composition Scheme extended to small service providers.

About:

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council took a slew of decisions aimed at reducing the tax and compliance burden on small and medium enterprises.

Small and Medium Enterprises

- A small enterprise is an enterprise where the investment in plant and machinery is more than Rs. 25 lakh but does not exceed Rs. 5 crore (For Service sector, this limit is Rs 10 lakh - 2 crore)
- A medium enterprise is an enterprise where the investment in plant and machinery is more than Rs.5 crore but does not exceed Rs.10 crore (For Service sector, this limit is Rs 2 crore - 5 crore)

Decisions taken by GST Councils:

- Raising the annual turnover limit under which Businesses would be exempt from GST to ₹40 lakh for most States and ₹20 lakh for the North Eastern and hill states, from the earlier limit of ₹20 lakh and ₹10 lakh, respectively.
- The limit for eligibility for the Composition Scheme has been raised to an annual turnover of ₹1.5 crore from ₹1 crore earlier.
- So far, only manufacturers and traders were eligible for this scheme. Now it has been extended to small service providers with an annual turnover of up to ₹50 lakh, at a tax rate of 6%.
- Companies opting for composition scheme would be allowed to file the annual returns and pay taxes quarterly.
- The GST Council decided to allow Kerala to levy a cess of up to 1% for up to two years on intra-State supplies to help finance the disaster relief efforts following the recent floods in the state.

Benefits:

- It is a step towards tax simplification and will ensure ease of compliance.
- The Composition Scheme simplifies the tax regime and takes a big burden of compliance off the MSME sector. This would eventually lead to lower costs and higher competitiveness for MSME.
- Initiating a composition scheme for the services enterprises will integrate these enterprises with their manufacturing counterparts.
- The composite turnover limit is a welcome move, as the small traders and businesses will pay a small tax based on turnover rather than value-addition.

Concerns:

- For service providers keeping a limit of ₹50 lakh for availing composition scheme and the same time increasing exemption threshold to ₹40 lakh does not make much sense.
- Decision to allow 1% cess for Kerala may set wrong precedent and similar demands may emanate from other states.

GST APPELLATE TRIBUNAL

GSTAT will act as the forum for second appeal in GST-related litigation and the common forum for dispute resolution between states and Centre.

About:

- The Union Cabinet recently approved setting up of the national bench of the **Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)**.
- The national bench of the GSTAT is the **forum of second appeal** in GST laws and the **first common forum of dispute resolution between Centre and states**.
- The first appeal against the orders of adjudicating authority shall lie before the appellate authority of the states.
- The national bench of the GST Appellate Tribunal will be located in **Delhi**.
- Composition:** The National Bench of the Appellate Tribunal shall be situated at New Delhi. GSTAT shall be presided over by its President and shall consist of one Technical Member (Centre) and one Technical Member (State).
- Section 109 of CGST Act empowers the Central Government to constitute GST Appellate Tribunal, on the recommendation of GST Council.

Need for GSTAT:

- It will ensure that there is **uniformity in redressal of disputes** arising under GST, and therefore, in implementation of GST across the country.
- It will also help in **resolving the confusion created by contradictory rulings** given by Appellate Authority for Advance Rulings (AAAR) on the same or similar issues in different states.
- The industry has been demanding a centralised appellate authority that could reconcile the contradictory verdicts of different AAARs.
- Tax experts said the formation of GSTAT will help prevent any unwarranted delays in the future.

Appellate Authority for Advance Rulings (AAARs)

- The Central GST Act provides for the formation of the AAAR.
- As per the Act, appeal to the AAAR shall be filed within a period of 30 days from the date on which the ruling sought to be appealed against is communicated to the concerned officer, the jurisdictional officer and the applicant.



INVESTOR'S SUMMIT IN INDIA

India reaches out to Africa to enhance mutual economic, business and cultural relations in the Vibrant Gujarat Summit.

About:

- Recently **Vibrant Gujarat Summit** was held in Gandhinagar.
- For the Africa Day event in the summit, representatives of over 50 African countries participated.
- To mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and the 100th birth anniversary of iconic African leader Nelson Mandela, it was for the first time that India dedicated an entire day to a continent during the investors' meet.
- This highlights Africa's importance to India.

Africa's Economic Importance to India

- Growing trade:** The trade between India and Africa stood at USD 62.66 billion for 2017-18, which reflects a nearly 22% increase over the previous year. India is ranked **third largest export destination** in Africa.
- Duty Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme:** India has accorded DFTP Scheme to 38 African countries. The recent signing of the **African Continental Free Trade Area agreement** will further boost trade and economic ties with Africa.

African Continental Free Trade Area agreement (AfCFTA)

- The CFTA aims to expand intra-African trade through better harmonisation and coordination of trade liberalisation and facilitation regimes and instruments across sub-regions (RECs) and at the continental level.
- As part of the agreement, "countries have committed to remove tariffs on 90 percent of goods with the remaining 10 percent of items to be phased in at a later stage.
- Surge in Investment:** There has been a surge in Indian investment in Africa. India is the **fifth largest investor** in Africa with cumulative investments of USD 54 billion.
- Areas for further investment:** Major areas identified for investments are minerals and mining, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, high-technology manufacturing and information and communication technology.

POLICY FOR DOMESTIC AIRCRAFT MANUFACTURING

Government is working on a policy for domestic aircraft manufacturing.

About:

- The government is working on a policy framework for the domestic manufacturing of aircraft.
- It is also looking at aircraft financing and maintenance work within the country.
- Civil Aviation Ministry has already announced the National Civil Aviation Policy and started the process of registration for drone operations in the country through 'Digital Sky' portal.

Digital Sky Platform

It is a software-based self-enforcement system to minimize deviations from the Civil Aviation Regulations.

Reasons behind the Move:

- Huge demand:** The country needs 2,300 new aircraft to meet the future air travel demand.
- Losing resources:** The government wants aircraft financing to be done by domestic players as India is losing out lot of resources to outsiders.
- Job opportunities:** Government wants aircraft Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) to happen in the country which could provide a large number of job opportunities in India.
- Growing domestic passenger traffic:** The domestic passenger traffic has been growing at 17-18 per cent creating huge opportunities.

Challenges:

- Rise of fuel prices in recent time.
- Safety violations.

Way Forward:

- Consultations with the stakeholders with respect to fuel prices.
- Zero tolerance for any safety violation.
- Need for more study on logistics.

INDIA LIKELY TO BECOME 5TH LARGEST ECONOMY

India is likely to surpass UK economy according to a Global Economy Watch Report published by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

About:

- India is likely to surpass the United Kingdom (UK) in the World's Largest Economy rankings in 2019, a report published by global consultancy firm PwC stated.

Details on Indian Economy:

- India is expected to grow at 7.6 percent in 2019 according to the report.

- India is the fastest growing large economy in the world with an enormous population, favourable demographics and high catch-up potential due to low initial GDP per head.
- The growth will be supported through further realisation of efficiency gains from the newly adopted Goods and Services Tax (GST) and policy impetus expected in the first year of a new government.
- However, the report held that headwinds in the global economy such as enhanced trade tensions or supply side shocks in oil may also impact India's growth potential.

India is currently World's Sixth Largest Economy

- As per the World Bank data, in 2017, India became the sixth largest economy with a GDP of USD 2.59 trillion, relegating France to the seventh position. The GDP of France stood at USD 2.58 trillion. The UK, which is facing Brexit blues, had a GDP of USD 2.62 trillion, which is about USD 25 billion more than that of India, the data showed.
- The US was the world's largest economy with a size of USD 19.39 trillion, followed by China (USD 12.23 trillion) at the second place in 2017. Japan (USD 4.87 trillion) and Germany (USD 3.67 trillion) were at the third and fourth places, respectively.

RIGHT TO DISCONNECT BILL, 2018

A private member bill proposes employees' right to disconnect work calls or emails after office hours.

About:

- Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Supriya Sule recently presented a private member bill named 'The Right to Disconnect Bill' 2018.
- The bill seeks to allow employees to refuse work-related calls and emails beyond office hours and on holidays.

Provisions of the Right to Disconnect Bill:

- It mandates companies to detail out-of-work demands as a way to reduce stress and ease tension between an employee's personal and professional life.
- It proposes to set up an Employee Welfare Authority. The Authority proposed is expected to consist of Minister of State, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as its Chairperson ex-officio and the Minister of State, Ministry of Communication and Ministry of Labour and Employment as the Vice-Chairmen ex-officio.
- It proposes constitution of Employees' Welfare Committees at every company to assist the employees in such negotiations.

- The Bill also seeks to impose sanctions at the rate of one per cent of its total employees' remuneration, on entities (companies or societies) for any non-compliance with the provisions of the Bill.
- It further provides for counselling services to increase awareness among employees and citizens, on reasonable use of digital and communication tools, for professional and personal use.

Arguments in Favour of the Bill:

- Counters stress:** Round the clock work availability leads to stress, sleep deprivation, and emotional exhaustion.
- Provides work-life balance:** The persistent urge to respond to calls and e-mails (termed as 'tele-pressure') is destroying work-life balance of the employees.
- Enhancement of productivity:** Long working hours reduces productivity of employees.
- Improvement of social life:** The proposed digital detox centres would free employees from digital distractions and enable them to truly connect with the people around them.
- Progressive work culture:** Similar provisions have been implemented via the French Supreme Court, introduced in New York, and discussed in Germany.

Arguments Against the Bill:

- Implementation challenge:** Various Human Resource Experts have argued that even if the law is introduced, it will be a huge challenge to implement it.
- Difficulty in handling emergency:** If this is made a law, any mishaps at any industrial site cannot be addressed immediately since the concerned person can say that this is beyond their work hours.
- Huge Work Backlog:** There is a backlog of work in most companies, due to which disconnecting is unviable.
- Not practical:** As a lot of Indian Information Technology (IT) firms work with global companies where there is a time difference, completely switching off is not practical.
- Changing Work Dynamics:** World of work is changing and there is no concept of fixed work hours.
- Unviable in certain sectors:** Areas like public transport, medical industry, law enforcement as well as media need to work beyond fixed hours.

Way Forward:

- Social media can be used to expose companies blatantly violating human rights by making them work through digital means beyond work hours.
- Improvement of work culture through better awareness of rights and prevention of exploitative practices.
- Companies should themselves promote work-life balance of their employees for enhanced productivity.
- Proper consultation with all stakeholders must be held to understand their grievances.

AMRIT STORES

Government has decided to throw open AMRIT stores to private players in a bid to increase access to affordable drugs.

About:

- The **Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT) pharmacies**, which sell expensive drugs at cheaper prices, are set to be open for private players.
- This move is inspired from the success of the Jan Aushadhi Stores.

Suicide Count	
AMRIT Stores	Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra
Owned and run by PSU HLL Lifecare.	They are opened under Pradhanmantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojna (PMBJP) and run by Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and fertilisers.
All AMRIT stores are currently on premises of government hospitals.	Along with public stores, Jan aushadhi also have had with private franchise.
They sell expensive drugs such as those used for treating cancer and cardiovascular diseases 30-40% cheaper price. Do not sell generic version.	Sell generic drugs.

Call for Private Players:

- Private players can open AMRIT stores all over the country.
- Any person who has an existing store or plans on opening one can apply and will be given a franchise provided she meets other conditions.
- Restriction that will be imposed is that the store can only sell AMRIT medicines.

Benefits of Move:

- The cost of medicines is estimated to comprise as much as 70 per cent of the total out-of-pocket expenditure that families have to make on healthcare. Present move will ensure affordability and availability of branded medicines.
- This will increase access of expensive branded without putting in government funds for the establishment expenditure.
- Expert committee reports have repeatedly highlighted the need for public expenditure to be increased towards ensuring affordability and accessibility of drugs.

TRADE UNIONS ACT, 1926

Union Cabinet approves proposed amendment to the Trade Unions Act.

About:

- The Union Cabinet has approved Amendment to the Trade Unions Act, 1926.
- Aim:** To give statutory backing to central and state-level trade unions.

Provisions of Proposed Amendment:

- Proposed amendment will insert a new Section 28A in the Trade Unions Act, 1926.
- This Section 28A empowers the Central and State Government to recognize the Central and State Trade Unions respectively.

Need of the Amendments:

- Currently, Unions are not recognised under the Trade Unions Act, 1926.
- The office of the Chief Central Labour Commissioner conducts a verification drive of the membership, based on which the Labour And Employment Ministry gives them the status of central trade unions.
- However, there was no statutory provision for either the recognition of a trade union in industry, or the establishment or recognition of a union at the central and state level.

Benefits:

- The approval will facilitate:**
 - Recognition of Trade Unions at Central and State level;
 - Ensure true representation of workers in the tripartite bodies;
 - Check on the arbitrary nomination of workers' representatives by the Government; and
 - Reduce litigations and industrial unrest.
- Transparent nomination:** The nomination of workers' representatives in tripartite bodies by the government will become more transparent.
- Industrial harmony:** Trade Unions so recognized would be accountable in maintaining industrial harmony.
- Reduce duplicacy:** Recognition of Trade Unions at Central/ State level would reduce duplicacy of such exercise by different departments.
- Recognized Trade Unions **may be assigned specific roles** at Central or State level.

Criticism of the Proposed Amendments:

- Some Trade unions alleges that proposed amendments would give State and Central Government to interfere into the independent functioning of Trade Unions.
- Critics also alleges that it would promote tout unions and stifle the collective bargaining.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR INDIAN SYSTEM OF MEDICINE (NCIM) BILL

The Union Cabinet has approved the draft National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2018.

About:

- The bill seeks to replace the existing regulator Central Council for Indian Medicine (CCIM) with a new body to ensure transparency.

Salient Features:

- Constitution of a National Commission:** The draft bill provides for the constitution of a National Commission with **four autonomous boards** entrusted with conducting overall education of:
 - Ayurveda, under **Board of Ayurveda** and
 - Unani, Siddha & Sowa-rigpa under **Board of Unani, Siddha and Sowa-rigpa**.
- There are **two common Boards** namely,
 - Board of assessment and rating** to assess and grant permission to educational institutions of Indian systems of Medicine.
 - Board of ethics and registration** of practitioners of Indian systems of medicine to maintain National Register and ethical issues relating to practice under the National Commission for Indian Medicine.
- It also proposes a common entrance exam and an exit exam**, which all graduates will have to clear to get practicing licenses.
- Further, a **teacher's eligibility test** has been proposed in the Bill to assess the standard of teachers before appointment and promotions.
- Allopathy system of medicine:** The draft bill is aimed at bringing reforms in the medical education of Indian medicine sector in lines with the **National Medical Commission** proposed for setting up for Allopathy system of medicine.
- Transparency and Accountability:** The proposed regulatory structure will enable transparency and accountability for protecting the interest of the general public.
- Availability:** The NCIM will promote availability of affordable healthcare services in all parts of the country.

PANEL ON RBI'S ECONOMIC CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in consultation with the government, has set up a six-member committee to review the economic capital framework of the central bank.

About:

- An expert committee, headed by its former governor Bimal Jalan has been setup to suggest how the central bank should handle its reserves and whether it can transfer its surplus to the government.
- The panel will submit its report within 90 days of its first meeting.

Terms of Reference/Functions of the Committee:

- Review status, need and justification of various provisions, reserves and buffers presently provided for by the RBI.
- Review best practices followed by the central banks globally in making assessment and provisions for risks.
- Suggest an adequate level of risk provisioning that the RBI needs to maintain.
- Determine whether RBI is holding provisions, reserves and buffers in surplus or deficit of the required level.
- Propose a suitable profit distribution policy.

Need for Review:

- The government has been insisting that the central bank hand over its surplus reserves.
- It is argued that access to this funds will allow finance ministry to meet deficit targets, infuse capital into weak banks to boost lending and fund welfare programmes.
- RBI argues that most of its surplus are in revaluation reserves, which fluctuate with corresponding changes in currency and gold valuations, making it national and difficult to distribute it to the government.

Other Contentious Issues between Government and RBI

- Relaxation of prompt corrective action norms on weak banks.
- Special liquidity window for non-banking financial companies.
- the transfer of surplus reserves to the government.
- Easing the Policy Rates (Repo rate).
- Easing of Bank credit to MSMEs.
- Capital Adequacy Ratios Norms for Banks.

Why RBI Requires Surplus Reserves:

- To carry out market intervention operations like Open Market Operations involving buying and selling of government securities.
- To carry out the functioning of the lender of last resort by lending to banks via Repo rate and Marginal Standing Facility route.
- To de-risk the financial system during times of financial stress like maintain Rupee stability during times of high volatility.

- To ensure RBI's Financial Autonomy; if the central bank suffer losses and do not have adequate buffers they would have to depend on the Sovereign for recapitalization. The dependence on the Sovereign had implications on the autonomy of the Central Bank. Government might not have the fiscal space in a crisis situation where the fiscal situation would in itself be under stress.

Way Ahead:

- As of June 30, 2018, the RBI had ₹10.46 lakh crore in reserves, bulk of it under two heads:
 - Currency and gold revaluation reserve (₹ 6.91 lakh crore) and
 - Contingency reserve (₹ 3.55 lakh crore).
- While the RBI is opposed to the transfer of its reserves as surplus, it may end up paying an interim dividend to help the Centre meet its fiscal deficit target for 2018-19 (Apr-Mar), again as done in last year.
- For example, in March, the central bank paid 100 bn rupees to the government as interim dividend for 2017-18 (Jul-Jun), as part of the 500-bn-ruppee surplus transfer for the year.

GAS-BASED POWER PROJECTS ENCOURAGED BY ENERGY COMMITTEE

The 42nd Parliamentary Standing Committee on Energy in its report has pulled up the government for diverting coal cess and recommended financial support to the stressed gas-based power projects in the country.

About:

- 42nd Parliamentary Standing Committee observed that the coal cess collected from 2010-11 to 2017-18 amounts to ₹66,440.21 crore, out of which only ₹ 29,645.29 crore have actually been transferred to the National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF).
- The committee pulled up the government for diverting coal cess to compensate states for revenue loss post-Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Coal Energy Cess Abolished

- The Union Government has abolished 13 cesses along with the GST rollout in 2017.
- Prior to GST, a clean energy cess was levied on coal, lignite and peat production at the rate of ₹ 400 per tonne, which has been repealed under GST regime since 2017.
- This was replaced by a new levy viz. GST Compensation Cess at the rate of ₹ 400 per tonne of coal which is to be used to fund the compensation to States for revenue losses.
- This move also has been criticized by the 42nd Parliamentary Standing Committee.

Observations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee:

- Diversion of this fund to unrelated activities reflects poorly on our commitment towards cleaner environment and shows government's apathy towards clean energy projects.
- Since it is levied on coal as that is a polluting fuel, the amount collected should be used to promote cleaner fuel.
- The committee also recommends financial support to the stressed gas-based power projects in the country from National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF).

National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF)

- NCEF is based on the principle of "polluter pays" and was created in out of **cess on coal** to provide financial support to clean energy initiatives.
- The Fund is designed as a non-lapsable fund under Public Accounts.
- The fund can be used for financing research and innovation projects in clean energy technologies of public sector or private sector entities, only upto the extent of 40% of the total project cost.
- An Inter-Ministerial Group chaired by the Finance Secretary was constituted to approve the project/schemes eligible for financing under NCEF.
- The main criticism of the NCEF is regarding its underutilisation. Also the administration of the fund has been questioned for being inefficient.

Natural Gas in India

- Natural gas is either produced domestically or imported as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).
- It is produced in Assam, Bombay High, Krishna Godavari basin and the Cauvery basin.
- Also, the country has four LNG import terminals:
 - Dehej (Gujarat)
 - Hazira (Gujarat)
 - Dhabol (Maharashtra)
 - Kochi (Kerala)
- Two more LNG terminals — one in Ennore, Tamil Nadu and the other one in Dhamra in Odisha — are under construction.

Need for Gas-Based Power Projects:

- It signifies India's commitment towards cleaner environment as the gas-based fuels emit very low amount of particulate matter.
- The economic advantage of gas over other conventional fuels is that it is 40% cheaper than liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).
- India's consumption of energy from natural gas is way below the global average. Globally, natural gas constitutes 24 per cent of the primary energy consumption. While in India, it accounts for merely 6.2 per cent of its primary energy consumption.

- As demand for energy is picking up due to government's efforts in electrifying all households, revival of gas-based plants will help provide clean energy.
- Gas-based projects can be used as peak-based plants and also for ancillary services. This will help these plants to settle their outstanding debt of ₹ 50,000 crore with banks.

EXTERNAL COMMERCIAL BORROWINGS NORMS

RBI recently revised its framework on ECBs to simplify the process and make it easier for corporates to borrow from overseas.

About:

- Recently the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revised the norms governing External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs).
- The revised norms seek to **simplify the framework and make it easier for corporates to borrow** from overseas market.

Details:

- The RBI has drawn up a new external commercial borrowing (ECB) framework **allowing all eligible borrowers to raise up to \$750 million** per financial year under the **automatic route**, replacing the existing sector-wise limits.
- The central bank has also **expanded the list of eligible borrowers** and recognised lenders.
- To curb volatility in the forex market arising out of dollar demand for crude oil purchases, the framework provides a **special dispensation to public sector oil marketing companies**.
- It allows them to raise ECB, with an **overall ceiling of \$10 billion**, for working capital purposes with a minimum average maturity period of three years under the automatic route **without mandatory hedging** and individual limit requirements.

What is Hedging?

- Hedging is a standard practice followed in the stock market by investors to **safeguard themselves from the losses that might arise from market fluctuation**.
- In a way, **hedging is the insurance** that helps the investor to lessen their losses, but it does not prevent the negative things happening in the course of life or business.
- In India context Hedging for ECB is basically insuring them against currency fluctuations in the future.

External Commercial Borrowings

ECB is the financial instrument used to borrow money from the foreign sources of financing to invest in the commercial activities of the domestic country.

- The list of borrowers has been expanded to include all entities eligible to receive Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
- However, the changes in external commercial borrowings guidelines by RBI will narrow refinancing options for Indian corporations.
- This is because masala bonds or rupee-denominated debt securities sold to offshore investors can no longer be used to refinance local-currency debt, leaving some companies to revise their funding plans.

Masala Bonds

- Masala Bonds are rupee-denominated borrowings issued by Indian entities in overseas markets.
- Masala means spices and the term was used by International Finance Corporation (IFC) to popularise the culture and cuisine of India on foreign platforms.
- The objective of Masala Bonds is to fund infrastructure projects in India and fuel internal growth via borrowings and internationalise the Indian currency.
- Refinancing rupee-denominated debt through masala bonds is an attractive option as the issuer of these bonds is shielded against the risk of currency fluctuation.

Impact on Fund-Raising:

- The corporate fundraising through masala bonds has come down drastically after the RBI tightened norms for masala bonds in September 2017, including a price limit over government yields.
- However, most corporates in the country are unlikely to get affected by the regulations significantly as not many have been able to take advantage of offshore refinancing options. Only the largest and strongest like India's largest mortgage lender, HDFC, National Highways Authority of India and NTPC have been able to raise capital through masala bonds.

FUTURE OF CONSUMPTION IN FAST-GROWTH CONSUMER MARKET – INDIA

India is expected to emerge as the third largest consumer market, just behind the US and China, according to WEF.

About:

- World Economic Forum in a report titled 'Future of Consumption in Fast-Growth Consumer Market – India' held that India is set to become the third-largest consumer market in the world.
- Consumer spending in India is expected to grow from the current \$1.5 trillion to \$6 trillion by 2030.
- With this, India is expected to emerge as the third-largest consumer market, just behind the United States and China.

'FUTURE OF WORK' REPORT BY ILO

In the recently released 'Future of Work' report, ILO has called for placing people at the centre of all social and economic policies.

About:

- The International Labour Organisation (ILO) recently released a report on the 'Future of Work' in Geneva to mark its centenary.
- NOTE:** The "Future of Jobs Report 2018" was released by World Economic Forum (WEF) which says that 75 million jobs will be displaced by disruptive technology in the future.
- ILO is the United Nations agency that sets international labour standards.
- In the report, ILO has urged for the following:
 - Universal labour guarantee to ensure a living wage.
 - Universal social protection from birth to old age,
 - An international governance system for the gig economy,
 - A human-in-command approach to artificial intelligence.

Findings of the Report:

- The ILO warned that without decisive action we will be sleepwalking into a world that widens inequality, increases uncertainty and reinforces exclusion, with destructive political, social and economic repercussions.
- Around the world, 190 million people are unemployed, while 300 million workers live in extreme poverty.
- Wage gaps are growing at a time of declining wage growth.
- Two-thirds of jobs in the developing world are susceptible to automation, and only 15% of households in emerging countries have internet access.
- Implementing the Paris Climate Agenda could create 24 million new jobs, but it could still be brutal to the 6 million workers expected to lose their jobs in the transition to a greener economy.

Recommendations of the ILO:

- It has asked all countries to place people at the centre of economic and social policy, ensuring that final decisions are taken by human beings.
- It suggested that an international governance system be set up to police the gig economy, and ensure that 'digital labour platforms' such as Uber and Swiggy respect certain minimum rights and protections.

Do You Know?

Gig Economy: A Labour market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs.

- To reduce inequalities, the ILO recommends the **development of the rural economy**, where the future of many the world's workers lies, should become a priority.
- Urging a **universal labour guarantee** to ensure a **living wage**, the ILO sought limits on working hours and work safety norms.

Living Wage

- A living wage is the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs.
- Needs are defined to include food, housing, and other essential needs such as clothing.
- The goal of a living wage is to allow a worker to afford a basic but decent standard of living.
- In order to cope with changes, it suggests that countries commit to a **universal entitlement to lifelong learning**, which would help people reskill and upskill.

WESP REPORT OF UN

According to the UN's World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2019, India will continue to remain the world's fastest-growing large economy in 2019 as well as in 2020.

About:

- According to the **UN's World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2019**, India's GDP growth is expected to accelerate to 7.6 per cent in 2019-20 from an estimated 7.4 per cent in the current fiscal ending March 2019.
- As a result, India will continue to remain the world's fastest-growing large economy in 2019 as well as in 2020, much ahead of China.

Factors Driving Optimism for India:

- The report held that the growth in India continues to be underpinned by:
 - Robust private consumption.
 - A more expansionary fiscal stance.
 - Benefits from previous reforms.

PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING TRENDS

RBI data collated on credit growth and priority sector lending.

About:

- RBI data over the last five years shows that growth in credit outstanding for the priority sector has traditionally been rising at a much faster rate than the growth in gross bank credit. But the last 18 months — June 2017 to November 2018 — have been an exception.

- The priority sector lending growth has languished in single digit over this period.
- Even within the priority sector, the growth of credit to agriculture and allied activities continues to remain below the double-digit which can be attributed to its low performance.
- The manufacturing segment has seen one of the weakest growth rates among the key segments of priority sector lending and the credit outstanding to the segment has grown at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of just 2.8 per cent between November 2016 and November 2018. In comparison, the services sector has grown at a CAGR of 15.2 per cent during the same period.

Priority Sector

- Priority Sector refers to those sectors which the government and the central bank regard as important for the development of the basic needs of the economy and thus, should be given priority over other sectors.
- These sectors include categories such as agriculture and allied activities, micro and small enterprises, export Credit, education, housing, social Infrastructure, Renewable Energy and others.
- Total Priority Sector Lending target is 40% of Adjusted Net Bank Credit.
- Sub targets are:**
 - Agriculture – 18% and sub target of 8% for small and marginal farmers
 - Micro Enterprises – 7.5%
 - Weaker sections – 10%

AIR CARGO POLICY

Civil Aviation Ministry recently launched Air Cargo Policy.

About:

- Aim:** To make India among the **top five** air freight markets by **2025**, besides creating air **transport shipment hubs** at all major airports over the next six years.
- The policy covers all three categories of air cargo transport:**
 - Domestic cargo** to ensure efficient flow of goods across India,
 - International cargo** facilitating all indigenous export and import of goods,
 - Transit International cargo** by making India the transit cargo hub of choice to and from other parts of the globe.
- The policy will encourage code sharing/inter-line agreements between foreign and Indian carriers.

Need for the Policy:

- Predominance of International cargo:** As per the policy, international cargo comprises 60 per cent of the total air cargo tonnes handled in the country, logging a growth of 15.6 per cent in the previous fiscal.
- Skewed modal mix:** Domestic cargo grew by over 8 per cent, which reflects the skewed modal mix, in which roads account for over 60 per cent of cargo transportation as compared to the global average of around 30 per cent.
- Growing market:** Indian express industry is one of the fastest growing markets globally at growth rate of 17 per cent over the past five years, but with a small share of about 2 per cent of the global market.

Expected Benefits:

- It will help sustain the cargo growth enabling long-term infrastructure creation.
- The domestic express industry, a key constituent of the Indian express industry, is estimated to be worth Rs 17,000 crore, and is estimated to contribute Rs 5,000 crore to the Indian express industry.
- It will establish agreements between national carriers and integrators to improve domestic connectivity.
- It will also encourage the establishment of agreements between national and international carriers and other airline operators to provide access to key global cargo hubs.
- The security strategy under the policy will address security related to the physical cargo, people handling the cargo, data and information related to shipments within and across all chains of custody transfers.
- In order to increase process transparency while decreasing shipment delays, costs and dwell time, the policy will implement a fully automated paperless trade environment with minimum face-to-face interactions.

INDIAN BRIDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Over 1.7 Lakh Bridges inventorized under IBMS.

About:

- Ministry of Road Transport & Highways** has inventorized 1,72,517 bridges / structures under Indian Bridge Management System (IBMS).
- The bridges/structure condition data will be collected twice a year during 'Pre-Monsoon' and 'Post-Monsoon' period for 3 years by using Mobile Bridge Inspection Units (MBIU).
- Earlier there was no proper data available on these structures on the National Highways network.

Indian Bridge Management System

- IBMS is the largest platform in the world owned by a single owner, with database of bridge structures.
- During inventory creation each bridge is assigned:**
 - National Identity Number based on the state, RTO zone and whether it is situated on National Highway, State Highway etc,
 - Bridge Location Number based on location in terms of latitude-longitude collected through GPS,
 - Bridge Classification Number based on engineering characteristics like the design, materials, type of bridge, loading etc,
 - Structural Rating Number based on rating of the structure on a scale of 0 to 9,
 - Socio-Economic Bridge Rating Number based on the importance of the structure in relation to its contribution to daily socio-economic activity of the area nearby.
- The data will help to inform the concerned implementation agency about which bridge needs critical attention, or which needs to be rebuilt etc.

ONLINE PORTAL FOR MSMEs

An online lending portal has been launched to relax lending norms for MSMEs.

About:

- An online lending portal www.pblloansin5minutes.com with majority ownership of 6 Public Sector Banks (PSBs)/Financial Institutions (FIs) along with their associated companies, has been launched.
- Alex To facilitate in principle approval for loans to Micro Small and Medium Enterprises [MSMEs] up to Rs. 1 crore within 59 minutes from PSBs.
- The portal is developed, operated and maintained by Online PSB Loans Limited, formerly known as Capita World Platform Private Ltd.
- The portal assesses the creditworthiness of the applicant through data analysis of GST returns, tax returns and bank account statements.

Key Features of the Portal include:

- Enabling borrowers to connect with multiple banks without visiting the branch.
- Financial technology (FinTech) based architecture with high level of information security.
- Analysis of data from various data points,
- Loan products in line with scoring models and assessment methods within approved credit policies.

- Eligibility check for credit guarantee from CGTMSE (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises), etc.

Steps taken by Government and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to Ensure Access of Credit to MSMEs include:

- Advice to all Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) to achieve a 20% year-on-year growth in credit to Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs).
- Allocation of 60% of the MSEs advances to the micro enterprise accounts.
- A 10% annual growth in number of micro enterprise accounts.
- Additional working capital limit** to meet the requirements arising due to unforeseen/seasonal increase in demand.
- Operationalising at least one specialised MSME Branch in every district.
- Simplified computation of working capital of MSE units to make it minimum 20% of the projected annual turnover of the unit for borrowing limits upto Rs.5 crore.
- Setting up of Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) to solve the problem of delayed payment of MSMEs, etc.
- MSMEs that were registered on the GST platform were to be given 2% interest subsidy on fresh loans.

TReDS Explained

It is an electronic platform that allows auctioning of trade receivable. The process is also commonly known as 'bills discounting'. A financier (typically a bank) buying a bill (trade receivable) from a seller of goods before it's due or before the buyer credits the value of the bill. In other words, a seller gets credit against a bill which is due to him at a later date. The discount is the interest paid to the financier.



Current Status:

- Loans to MSMEs are extended by individual banks on commercial basis as per their Board approved loan policy and extant RBI guidelines in this regard.
- Loans sanctioned:** The state-owned banks have sanctioned loans worth over Rs 14,000 crore under the 59 minutes scheme.
- The Reserve Bank of India data on deployment of gross bank credit till October-end this year shows that credit to industry has grown by 3.6 per cent year-on-year.
- Within this broad category, credit to micro and small enterprises has increased 1.6 per cent, and to medium enterprises by 10.9 per cent.
- In contrast, credit to the services sector has posted a phenomenal growth of 27.4 per cent, while overall non-food credit has grown at 13.4 per cent.

NORTH EAST INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (NEIDS)

DIC Organizes Awareness Programs on NEIDS Benefits

About:

- A mega awareness programme was organized by **Department of Industries and Commerce (DIC)**, Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) in coordination with Federation of Industries, J&K.

About NEIDS:

- North East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS), 2017** covers eligible industrial units in the **manufacturing and service sectors** in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.
- Though J&K is **not** a part of NEIDS, Government of India approved **extension** of all benefits of NEIDS to the state under J&K Industrial Development Scheme (JKIDS).
- Aim:** To promote industrialization and boost employment and income generation.
- The Scheme is valid from 01.04.2017 to 31.03.2022.
- The Scheme **does not envisage sanction of projects**, rather, eligible units are registered after following due process.
- North East Industrial Development Finance Corporation (NEDFi) will be the nodal agency for disbursal of incentives under various components of scheme.

The Scheme Provides:

- Central Capital Investment Incentive** (30% of the investment in plant & machinery with an upper limit of Rs. 5 crore).
- Central Interest Incentive** (3% interest on working capital for 5 years).
- Central Comprehensive Insurance Incentive** (Reimbursement of 100% insurance premium for 5 years).
- Income Tax Reimbursement** of center's share for 5 years.
- GST reimbursement** of Central Government share of CGST & IGST for 5 years.
- Employment Incentive** under which additional 3.67% of the employer's contribution to EPF in addition to Government Bearing 8.33% Employee Pension Scheme (EPS) contribution of the employer in Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRKY).
- Transport Incentive** on finished goods movement by Railways (20% cost of the transportation), by Inland Waterways Authority (20% of the cost of transportation) & by air (33% of cost transportation of air freight) from the station/port/airport nearest to unit to the station/port/airport nearest to the destination point.
- Also, under this scheme, a single unit can avail overall benefits up to Rs. 200 Crores.



Chapter

2 MAGAZINE EDITION INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

ASIA REASSURANCE INITIATIVE ACT

U.S. President signed into law the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA), which was passed by the U.S. Senate.

About:

- The Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) establishes a multifaceted U.S. strategy to increase U.S. security, economic interests, and values in the Indo-Pacific region.

Highlights of ARIA:

- ARIA will authorize **\$1.5 billion spending** for a range of U.S. programs in **East and Southeast Asia**.
- It focuses attention on U.S. relations with China, India, the ten member states of ASEAN, Japan and South Korea.
- The ARIA **reasserts U.S. support for Taiwan** and encourages the travel of high level US officials to Taiwan, in accordance with the Taiwan Travel Act, which was made law in 2018.
 - The Act expresses support for regular arms sales to Taiwan and to enhance the economic, political, and security relationship between Taiwan and the United States.
- Freedom of Navigation:** ARIA devotes attention to the maritime commons in the Asia and the South China Sea. It calls for working on **joint maritime training and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, including the East China Sea and the South China Sea**.
- The act represents an attempt by the U.S. Congress to exercise a degree of oversight over the White House's implementation of the Asia policy articulated in the **2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy** documents.

Significance of the Act for India:

- Forms the framework for security agreements:** The act reiterates US commitment to all bilateral and security agreements and arrangements between US and India including the **New Framework for the United States-India Defense Relationship, and the United States-India Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI)**.
- Major defence partner status:** The law elevates trade and technology cooperation with India, in Defence, to a level commensurate with the closest allies and partners of the United States.
- Role of Quad:** This Act regards the Quad, comprising of the US, India, Japan and Australia, as 'vital to address the pressing security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region'.

- Concluding Remark:** India needs to remember that under Obama Administration, the "pivot" and then the "re-balance strategy" was formulated to push similar objectives which never started. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is also yet to take an institutional shape.

BANGLADESH ELECTIONS

The poll in Bangladesh gave Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a third straight term.

About:

- The incumbent prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, and her ruling coalition won 288 out of 300 seats in Parliament.
- The victory was one of its kind - 96 percent seats – that one might expect in a place like North Korea, not a democratic nation such as Bangladesh.
- Awami League** fared even better than it did in the last national poll in 2014, when the opposition boycotted the elections and many seats were contested by a single candidate.

Allegations of Unfair Elections:

- The poll that gave Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a third straight term was undermined by **ballot stuffing, voter intimidation and occupation of polling booths** among other malpractices, according to Transparency International.
- Transparency International** found "irregularities" in 47 of 50 constituencies it surveyed during last month's general election in Bangladesh. The report was rejected by the Bangladesh government.

Importance of Sheikh Hasina's Victory for India:

- Controlling Insurgency:** Ethnic militancy has dropped in the northeast since 2009, after Sheikh Hasina came to power and ordered a tough crackdown on all north-eastern guerrillas and ISI-backed Islamist militants who were operating from Bangladesh during the BNP-Jamaat regime (2001-06).
- Curbing terrorism:** With President Donald Trump announcing a phased withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, Indian security establishment is bracing for heightened militancy in Kashmir in 2019. Hasina's zero tolerance and her determination to not allow her soil to be used by the 'enemies of India' is very crucial.
- Key to Act East:** Sheikh Hasina has addressed India's connectivity needs. Use of Bangladesh ports and land territory to access northeast will make it far easier for India to pursue its 'Act East' policy.

History of India-Bhutan Relations

- **1865:** Bhutan was a protectorate of British India and came under the British suzerainty in 1865.
- **1910:** It signed the '**Treaty of Punakha**' with the British in 1910 allowing the British to "guide" its foreign affairs and defence. The treaty set the stage for any future contact between the two countries after the British left the subcontinent.
- **1947:** Bhutan was one of the first country to recognize India's independence in 1947.
- **1949:** Though the Anglo-Bhutanese treaties continued to guide the bilateral relations, Independent India signed a fresh treaty with Thimpu in 1949 – the **Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation**.
 - One of the most important provisions of the treaty, 'Article 2' declared that Bhutan's internal affairs shall function without any interference from India while the foreign relations will continue to take place under its guidance.
- **1968:** Formal diplomatic relations were established in 1968 after a special office of India was opened in Thimpu.
- **2007:** The **1949 Treaty was renegotiated**. The new treaty replaced the provision requiring Bhutan to take India's guidance on foreign policy with broader sovereignty.
 - The treaty also allowed **Bhutan to freely import** arms, from or through India into Bhutan, required for the strength and welfare of Bhutan.
 - Treaty also **bars export** of such arm, and ammunition outside Bhutan either by the Government of Bhutan or by private individuals.

India's Commitment to Bhutan's Development:

- Bhutan remains one of the key recipients of developmental assistance from India.
- India is also Bhutan's largest trading partner.
- India provided ₹4,500 crore for the 11th five year plan that lasted between 2013-18.
- India has further committed to provide ₹4,500 crore for Bhutan's 12th five-year plan.
- To share the benefit of the South Asian Satellite, ISRO is setting up a ground station in Bhutan that will help in telemedicine, disaster relief and climate trends.

SINO-INDIAN DIGITAL COLLABORATION PLAZA (SIDCOP)

SIDCOP, an initiative to bring Indian IT companies and Chinese enterprises closer to each other on a single Artificial Intelligence enabled platform, launched.

About:

- This is a partnership by National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) with Municipal Governments of Guiyang and Dalian.
- A Joint Venture comprising of one Indian and Chinese company has been tasked with the running of the platform.

Significance:

- Indian IT enterprises are world renowned for their expertise in business transformation and operational optimization by using IT tools in complex business environments.
- SIDCOP, which is a boundary-less marketplace offers this opportunity for Chinese enterprises in order to assist them in operational optimization and adopting industry best practices in business solutions.
- This platform could be useful to connect with top providers from India and help Chinese enterprises source the right solution providers for their projects.

National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM)

- It is a trade association of Indian Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry.
- Established in 1988, NASSCOM is a non-profit organisation.

2+2: INDIA AND USA

Mini 2+2 or Inter-sessional 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue between US and India held in Delhi.

About:

- Both countries reviewed the progress on finalising two key agreements: **Industrial Security Annex (ISA)** and the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA)**.
- ISA allows sharing of classified information from the U.S. government and American companies with the Indian private sector, which is so far limited to the Indian government and the defence public sector undertakings.
 - This is particularly essential as the Indian industry looks for a greater role in defence manufacturing.

Taking Ties Forward**Industrial Security Annex (ISA)**

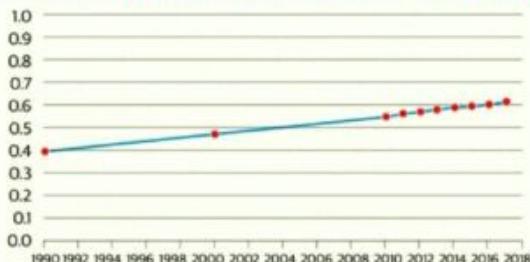
As the Indian Industry looks for greater role in defence manufacturing, the agreement allows sharing of classified information from the U.S. government and companies with the Indian private sector.

Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA)

The U.S. has already shared a draft of BECA, the last foundational agreement to be signed with India.

- India had to go for the much more expensive and not yet implemented Kaladan Multi Modal project because the Khaleda regime was not willing.
- Changing perception and friendly image:** A CSDS-Hindu survey had shown in one of its public attitude surveys that Bangladesh is now the country Indians trusts most – more than our traditional friend, Russia.
- Concluding remarks:** The big silver lining for Bangladesh, though, is that despite all the political unrest, the economy has grown at a healthy pace (GDP growth rate 7.86% in FY18, 7.28% in FY17), and its human development indicators are continuously improving.

BANGLADESH'S PROGRESS IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX



INDIA PAK NUCLEAR INSTALLATION

India and Pakistan exchanged a list of their nuclear installations under a bilateral agreement.

About:

- India and Pakistan on Tuesday exchanged for the 28th consecutive year a list of their nuclear installations under a **bilateral agreement that prohibits them from attacking each other's atomic facilities**.
- The two countries also exchanged details of civilian prisoners and fishermen lodged in each other's jails.

Non-Nuclear Aggression Agreement:

- The **Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities**, also known as **Non-nuclear aggression agreement** is a bilateral and nuclear weapons control treaty between India and Pakistan.
- The agreement bars both nations from carrying out any surprise attack (or to assist foreign power to attack) on each other's nuclear installations and facilities.
- It was signed on 31st December 1988 and entered into force on 27th January 1991.
- Both countries inform each other about their nuclear installations and facilities that need to be covered under the Agreement on 1st January every year.

PALESTINE TO CHAIR G77

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the "historic leadership" of Palestine which assumed the chairmanship of G77.

About:

- The decision to elect Palestine as the 2019 Chair of the G77 was taken in September, 2018.
- Egypt was the previous Chair of the Group of 77 (G77).
- The chairmanship is a tremendous political boost for Palestine at a time when it is being increasingly blacklisted by the Trump administration, which is kowtowing to the Israelis.

Group of 77 (G77):

- The group was founded on 15 June 1964**, by the **"Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Countries"** issued at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- Presently, the Group of 77 (G77) at the United Nations is a **coalition of 134 developing nations**, designed to promote its members' collective economic interests and create an **enhanced joint negotiating capacity in the United Nations**.
- The group comprises **over 80% of the world's population** and approximately two-thirds of UN membership.
- How to decide chairman?** Under a system of geographical rotation, it was Asia's turn to name a chairman for 2019. The Asian Group has unanimously endorsed Palestine, which will be formally elected chair at the annual G77 ministerial meeting.
- India and Pakistan are all members of G77.
- Since China participates in the G77 but does not consider itself to be a member, all official statements are issued in the name of **The Group of 77 and China**.

BHUTAN'S 12th FIVE YEAR PLAN

India's assistance to Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan was high on agenda in Prime Minister Lotay Tshering's maiden visit to India.

About:

- Bhutan's newly elected Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering made his first visit abroad, after assuming office, to India which shows the importance Bhutan attaches to relations with India.
- The state visit is taking place during the golden jubilee year of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan.

- This is also important as United States has emerged as India's second largest arms supplier, closing \$15 billion worth of deals in the past decade.
- In order to strengthen the existing defence ties, the two nations, for the first time, decided to conduct a tri-services joint exercise off the eastern coast of India in 2019.

Foundational Agreements

- They are meant to build basic ground work and promote interoperability between militaries by creating common standards and systems. They also guide sale and transfer of high-end technologies. US signs these agreements with countries with which it has close military ties.
 - India has already signed 3 of them — General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002 and Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016 and Communications, Compatibility, Security Agreement (COMCOSA) in 2+2 dialogue held in Sep. 2018.
 - BECA is the last foundational agreement to be signed.
- GSOMIA:** It allows sharing of classified information from US Government and American companies with Indian government and defence Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) **but not with Indian private companies.**
 - LEMOA:** It gives access to both countries and to designated military facilities on either side for the purpose of refuelling and replenishment.
 - COMCOSA:** It will provide a legal framework for the transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India that would facilitate "interoperability" between their forces — and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secured data links. It will further result in:
 - It will also allow the installation of high-security US communication equipment on defence platforms being sourced from the US.
 - Enhance India's defence capability and preparedness.
 - Reduce the chances of the United States imposing sanctions on India for looking to buy Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile systems as under new US defence bill, President can waive them for national security interests.
 - BECA:** It facilitates exchange of geospatial information between India and US for **both military and civilian use.**

FARM TO PORT SEZ

India will grow crops for UAE and Saudi Arabia: announced at CII summit.

About:

- India and UAE are planning to create a Farm-to-Port Special Economic Zone.

- The **farm-to-port project**, similar to a special economic zone, will be in the style of a **corporatized farm**.
- The crops there would be grown keeping a specific UAE market in mind with dedicated logistics infrastructure all the way to the port.
- It would create a whole new sector for agro-industries

Need:

- High import dependency:** UAE has arid climate and thus was forced to import 90% of its food needs in 2018.
- Increase Indian farmer's income:** Provision of export will provide earning opportunity for Indian farmers.
- Promotion of Organic Farming in India:** UAE and Saudi Arabia have high buying power and prefer high quality organic products. Thus India can export expensive organic products to them.
- Investments in agriculture and food processing:** India accepted proposal from the UAE for establishing food security parks, including through the creation of high-quality food processing infrastructure, integrated cold chains, value addition, preservation technology, packaging of food products and marketing.
- India's export policy:** For the first time, India's export policy identifies the potential of agriculture along with horticulture, dairy, plantation and fisheries.

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)

- CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization, playing a proactive role in India's development process.
- It was founded in 1895, it has around 9000 members, from the private as well as public sectors, including SMEs and MNCs, and an indirect membership of over 300,000 enterprises from around 265 national and regional sectoral industry bodies.
- It aims to create and sustain an environment conducive to the growth of industry in India, partnering industry and government alike through advisory and consultative processes.

CHAHABAR PORT

India took over operations of the Shahid Beheshti port and opened the first office of Indian Ports Global Limited.

About:

- India has helped develop the **Shahid Beheshti port** in Chabahar and has been given the contract to manage it for 18 months.

- India, Afghanistan and Iran have decided to hold an international event in February 2019 to promote Chabahar and to study ways to make the route more attractive and decrease logistic costs.
- The Chabahar port has received a waiver from the U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Importance of Chabahar Port for India:

- Boost to India-Iran relations:** The opening of Chabahar's port is a big fillip to India's bilateral ties with Iran, a major oil supplier and potential trade market for India.
- Geopolitical significance:** Operating Chabahar port will provide India with a foothold at the mouth of the strategic Straits of Hormuz, through which a third of all the world's sea-borne oil passes.
- Regional development:** Chabahar has immense potential as a game-changer for prosperity and stability in the region.
- Link to Central Asia:** Chabahar port opens up a permanent alternative route for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia, given the hurdles in the direct route through Pakistan.
 - Once Chabahar is linked to the multimodal International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), it could expand India's trade ties with the Central Asian Republics (CARs), which currently stands at a meagre \$1.5 billion.
- Eye on China:** China's presence in the region has grown rapidly in recent years, especially with Pakistan handing over Gwadar port, a gateway to CPEC, to China. Gwadar port is just 72 kms away from Chabahar.
- Afghanistan's development:** It will enable India to play a larger role in Afghan reconstruction, which has been restricted hitherto by Pakistan's refusal to allow India overland access through its territory to Afghanistan.

CPEC'S MILITARY TURN

Allegations of military dimension of CPEC, has once again agitated this issue.

About:

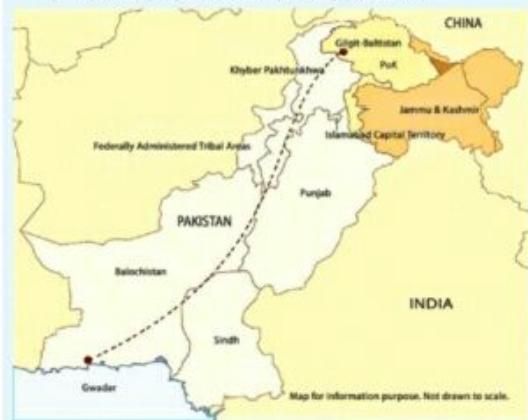
- The New York Times** has alleged that China has hatched a secret plan to build fighter jets and other military hardware in Pakistan as part of the \$60 billion CPEC project.
- Pakistan, in response to a US media report, said that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a bilateral economic project and has no military dimensions.

CPEC's Military Turn:

- Gwadar's strategic location:** The Gwadar port gives Beijing a strategic card to play against India and the United States.

CPEC

- The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a part of China's ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative to link China with Europe.
- It will connect Kashgar in Xinjiang province of China, with Gwadar port in Baluchistan through a network of roads as well as other infrastructure projects such as dams, hydropower projects, railways, and pipelines.



- The Gwadar port provides China with the shortest route to the oil-rich Middle East, Africa, and most of the Western hemisphere. At present, **China transports 80% of its oil through the Strait of Malacca**.
- It is to be noted that China and Pakistan have close military collaboration and in 2015, China agreed to sell eight submarines to Pakistan in a deal worth up to \$6 billion.
- Military manufacturing:** It is alleged that a special economic zone under CPEC is to be created in Pakistan to produce a new generation of fighter jets. For the first time, navigation systems, radar systems and onboard weapons would be built jointly by the countries at factories in Pakistan.
- The Chinese-designed jets have given Pakistan an alternative to the U.S.-built F-16 fighters.
- Substituting US' GPS:** A less scrutinized component of BRI is the role Pakistan plays in China's Beidou satellite navigation system. Pakistan is the only other country that has been granted access to the system's military service, allowing more precise guidance for missiles, ships and aircraft.
- Chinese military presence:** Thousands of Chinese security personnel are deployed in Pakistan to provide security to Chinese workers in Pakistan.

PANDA Bonds**About:**

- A **Panda bond** is a Chinese renminbi-denominated bond from a non-Chinese issuer, sold in the People's Republic of China.
- These bonds were first issued in 2005 by the **International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank**.
- Pakistan's cabinet has approved the issuance of first-ever **renminbi-denominated bonds** referred to as **PANDA Bonds** to raise loans from China's capital markets.

Implications:

- **Reduce dependence on USD:** As part of the long-term plan of the CPEC, China & Pakistan had decided to use renminbi (RMB) as the second international currency to lessen Pakistan's reliance on dollar.
- **Diversify investor base:** The bonds will help Pakistan's government to diversify the current investor base in capital market.
- **Avert BoP crisis:** Pakistan received a \$6-billion rescue package from Saudi Arabia, but it still need a bailout from the IMF to avert a balance of payments crisis.
- Pakistan has the highest trade deficit with China. The raising of capital in Chinese currency will aid Pakistan to bridge the deficit.

SAFEGUARDS FOR INDIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN KUWAIT

India recently signed an MoU with Kuwait for protection of three lakh Indian workers, including ninety thousand women.

About:

- The Union Cabinet recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Kuwait to promote cooperation on the **protection of Indian domestic workers** in the Gulf country.
- The MoU provides a **structured framework for cooperation** on domestic workers related matters and provides strengthened safeguards for Indian domestic workers including female workers deployed in Kuwait.
- The MoU is initially valid for a period of **five years** and incorporates provision for automatic renewal.
- Around **3 lakh Indian domestic workers** deployed in Kuwait. This includes around **90,000 female** domestic workers, as per a government release.

India-Kuwait Relations:

- **Energy Security:** Kuwait has been a reliable partner in India's energy security and is the ninth largest crude oil supplier, meeting 4.6 per cent of India's energy requirements.

- **Trade relations:** Indo-Kuwait relations have always had an important trade dimension. India has consistently been among the top ten trading partners of Kuwait.
- **Technical cooperation:** India and Kuwait have signed several agreements relating to scientific and technological cooperation including medical cooperation and in the areas of culture and education.
- **Indian diaspora:** As per the latest statistics, over 8 lakh Indian nationals legally reside in Kuwait. Indians have been described by the Emir's special envoy as having acquired a special space in Kuwait.

INDIA-CENTRAL ASIA DIALOGUE

First ever India-Central Asia Dialogue at the ministerial level was held recently in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

About:

- The first India-Central Asia Dialogue was recently held in Uzbekistan.
- India-Central Asia Dialogue also saw the **participation of Afghanistan** at the ministerial level in Samarkand.
- The dialogue focussed on a number of **issues** including ways to **improve connectivity and stabilize war-ravaged Afghanistan**.
- The participation of Afghanistan in the India-Central Asia Dialogue is seen as an important land link in the regional cooperation, transit of goods and energy.
- They also called for an **Inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process** and reconciliation, and assistance in economic reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- India proposed a dialogue on air corridors with the countries of landlocked Central Asia in an attempt to boost trade languishing below \$2 billion for years.
- India also called on the Central Asia Republics (CARs) to participate in the Chabahar Port project jointly undertaken by India and Iran to move Indian goods to landlocked Afghanistan.
- India has supported multiple options of connectivity in the region by joining the Ashgabat Agreement in 2018.
- The Ashgabat Agreement **aims** at establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor between Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
- India-Central Asia Dialogue is part of India's Connect Central Asia Policy.

Connect Central Asia Policy

The primary goal behind the Connect Central Asia policy was re-connecting with the region which has a long shared history with India.



Chapter

3RD EDITION

INTERNAL SECURITY

INDIA-AFRICA FIELD TRAINING EXERCISE

India will conduct an "India-Africa Field Training Exercise (IAFTX)" in Pune in March 2019.

About:

- India's army is expected to participate in military training exercises in March with a few African countries including **Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, and Tanzania**.
- Significance:** This will help India to expand its military footprint across the African continent vis-à-vis China.
- So far, India has only held military drills with only one country on the continent, South Africa.
- Aim:** The exercises are intended to boost military cooperation with African countries.
- The training is supposed to cover de-mining and peacekeeping operations, amongst other things.

IMBEX 2018-19

India-Myanmar begin Army exercise for UN peacekeeping missions.

About:

- The second India-Myanmar bilateral Army exercise 'IMBEX 2018-19' commenced at Chandimandir military station, Haryana.
- Aim:** The aim of this joint training event is to train the Myanmar delegation for participation in UN peacekeeping operations.
- Note:** Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise is known as SIMBEX.

NEW MISSILE DEFENSE PLAN OF USA

USA government announced new missile defense plan with focus on sensors in space.

About:

- It is a new and more aggressive **space-based missile defense strategy** to counter threats from North Korea and Iran and to compete with advanced weapons systems being developed by countries like China and Russia.
- This highlights the growing importance of weaponization of space.

- The new strategy is **aimed at better defending the U.S. against potential adversaries**, such as Russia and China, who have been developing and fielding a much more expansive range of advanced offensive missiles that could threaten America and its allies.
- Significance:** The developments in hypersonic propulsion will revolutionize warfare by providing the ability to strike targets more quickly, at greater distances, and with greater firepower.
- For example,** recently, Russia unveiled new strategic weapons that can't be intercepted. One is a **hypersonic glide vehicle**, which could fly 20 times faster than the speed of sound.

WOMEN IN MILITARY POLICE

As per Ministry of Defense, Indian women will get 20% jobs in Military Police in near future.

About:

- The government has decided to induct women for the first time in the role of **Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR)** Corps of Military Police.



- Women will be inducted into the military police in a **graded manner**, and will **eventually comprise 20 percent of its total strength**.
- Narrow representation:** Currently, women are allowed in some select areas such as medical, legal, educational, signals and engineering wings of the Army.

- Enhancing gender Parity in military:** The decision to induct women in the military police with an aim to enhance their representation in the armed forces.
- Role of the military police:**
 - Policing cantonments and army establishments,
 - Preventing breach of rules and regulations by soldiers,
 - Maintaining movement of soldiers as well as logistics during peace and war times,
 - Handling prisoners of war, and
 - Extending aid to civil police whenever required.

EXERCISE SEA VIGIL

Exercise Sea Vigil was recently undertaken to test India's preparedness along its coastline.

About:

- Indian Coast Defence:** India recently conducted its largest coastal defence drill, **Exercise Sea Vigil**, to test its preparedness along the entire 7,516.6 km-long-coastline and exclusive economic zone of the country.
- Aim:** The exercise Sea Vigil aims to comprehensively and holistically validate the efficacy of the measures taken since 26/11.
- It aims to **simultaneously activate the coastal security mechanism** across all 13 coastal States and Union Territories.
- This involves the **evaluation of critical areas** and processes, including inter-agency coordination, information sharing and technical surveillance.

India's Coastal Defence Preparedness:

- Changing roles:** Post 26/11, **Indian Navy** was designated as the agency responsible for overall maritime security, including offshore and coastal security, while the **Indian Coast Guard** was designated as the agency responsible for coastal security in territorial waters.
- Multi-tier mechanism:** A multi-tiered patrol and surveillance mechanism with focus on technical surveillance and augmenting Maritime Domain Awareness through the coastal radar chain was adopted.
- NC3I network:** The progress has been made in real-time information sharing through the **National Command Control Communication and Intelligence (NC3I) Network** and improving intelligence and operational coordination.

Measures taken after 26/11 to Enhance Coastal Security

- Setting up of **Joint Operation Centres (JOCs)** at Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, Kochi and Port Blair.
- Formation of the **Sagar Prahari Bal** of the Navy comprising 80 Fast Interceptor Craft and 1000 personnel.
- Regular conduct of Coastal Security exercises** in all coastal states in conjunction with the Coast Guard, State and Central Government agencies.
- Registering of all vessels** and issue of **identity cards** to all fishermen/coastal population.

Setting up of **Coastal Radar Chain and Coastal AIS** (automatic identification system) **chain** in a time bound manner.

DRONE OLYMPICS

Ministry of Defence recently launched a web page on 'Drone Olympics'.

About:

- A web page on 'Drone Olympics' event at Aero India – 2019 was recently launched in Bengaluru.
- It will not only encourage the UAV manufacturing in the country but also provide an opportunity to the Armed Forces to assess the capabilities that exist in the world.
- The UAV market is one of the fastest growing fields in the world.
- Role of UAVs in defence sector is ever-increasing as they are fit for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, electronic warfare and strike missions.
- 'Drone Olympics' is open to both Indian and international players.



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Chapter

4 AGZTER EDITION

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

NEW HIGH COURT FOR ANDHRA PRADESH

Andhra Pradesh, Telangana to have separate high courts from January 1.

About:

- The President constitutes a separate High Court for the State of Andhra Pradesh, namely, the High Court of Andhra Pradesh, with the **principal seat at Amravati** and the existing High Court at Hyderabad shall become the High Court for the State of Telangana.
- It will be the **25th high court** in the country and will initially function from a temporary structure till the permanent building comes up in the ambitious Justice City complex in the State's capital Amravati.

Background:

- With the enactment of the **Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014**, Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated into two States, viz., State of Andhra Pradesh and State of Telangana.
- The Act, which came into effect from June 2, 2014 had also a provision for **separate high courts for State of Telangana and State of Andhra Pradesh**.
- The **existing High Court is located at Hyderabad** and it would be housing the High Court of State of Telangana.

Constitutional Provisions Related to High Courts in India

- Article 214** provides that **every State shall have** a High Court, however, **Article 231** states that **Article 214** shall not be a bar for constituting a common high court for two or more States.
- Only **Parliament may by law** establish a Common High Court for two or more States.

Significance of the Move:

- Establishment of High Court in Amravati is a sign of **delivering justice to the doorsteps** of people from Rayalaseema, north coastal and south coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh.

VOTE ON ACCOUNT

The government is to present its interim Budget, ahead of the 2019 general elections to elect the 17th Lok Sabha, on February 1.

About:

- In an election year, the incumbent government seeks a vote on account from the Parliament for proposed expenditure to be incurred in the next few months till the new government takes over.

Do You Know?

Vote on Account is a grant in advance to enable the government to carry on until the voting of demands for grants and the passing of the Appropriation Bill and Finance Bill.

- Though vote-on-account is a temporary measure, it needs the approval of Parliament.
- As a convention, it is treated as a formal matter and passed by Lok Sabha without much discussion.
- It is usually valid for two months, until the new government presents a full Budget.
- The vote on account typically does not seek funds for major projects or new initiatives. It usually does not contain any direct tax proposals, as that requires amendments to the Finance Bill.

Interim Budget:

- As customary, an interim budget is passed in two conditions:
 - If the government of the day does not have time to present a full budget.
 - If general elections are nearby.
- An outgoing government presents only an interim Budget or seeks a vote on account. It leaves it to the next government to present the full Budget.
- In an interim Budget, the vote-on-account seeks parliament's nod for incurring expenditure for part of a fiscal year. However, the estimates are presented for the entire year, as is the case with the regular Budget.
- The incoming government has full freedom to change the estimates completely when the final Budget is presented.

Constitutional Provisions:

- Article 114(3)** of the Constitution stipulates that no money can be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund of India without the enactment of a law i.e., an appropriation bill.
- Article 266** of the Constitution mandates that Parliamentary approval is required to draw money from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- The term budget has nowhere been used in the constitution, instead the term "annual financial statement" has been used in Article 112 of the constitution.

Do You Know?**Are a vote-on-account and an interim Budget the same?**

- No. While a vote-on-account deals only with the expenditure side of the government's budget, an interim Budget is a complete set of accounts, including both expenditure and receipts.

Can the finance minister make policy statements while presenting the vote-on-account?

- Barring any announcement on taxation, the finance minister's speech before seeking Parliament's approval of the vote-on-account can contain his intentions on economic policy.

For how long can a vote-on-account be in force?

- Normally, the vote-on-account is taken for two months only. But during election year or when it is anticipated that the main Demands and Appropriation Bill will take longer time than two months, the vote-on-account may be for a period extending two months.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2018

India moves up a rank to 41 on The Economist's Democracy Index 2018.

About:

- Democracy Index for 2018** was recently published by the London-based newspaper The Economist – Intelligence Unit.
- The Economist's Democracy Index ranks nations on **five parameters** – electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties.
- Positive outlook about global democracy:** It gave a positive outlook on global democracy, with significant improvement in women's participation, people willing to engage in lawful demonstrations and voters getting more proactive than ever despite being disillusioned with democracy.
- Observations on Indian democracy:** It has noted that not much has changed in India. India is ranked at 41 – a notch above last year.
- India as Flawed Democracy:** India is still classified as a 'flawed democracy' according to the index. India achieved a score of 7.23 on the index to maintain its position – the same it did last year.
- India ranks below the United States (ranked 25th in the index) and other so called 'flawed democracies' like Italy, France, Botswana and South Africa.
- India fared the worst when it came to political culture.

- Flawed Democracy:** The report defines a flawed democracy as nations that have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected.

- However, in a flawed democracy there are significant weaknesses in other aspects, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.

- The report explaining the index titled 'Democracy 2018: Me too? Political Participation, Protest & Democracy' was particularly damning of the present central ruling party of India.

VOTER AWARENESS FORUM

Voter Awareness Forum (VAF) to generate awareness on electoral process was recently launched by the Election Commission of India.

About:

- Purpose:** The major purpose of the forum is to generate awareness on electoral process through activities like discussions, quizzes, competitions and other engaging activities.
- VAFs are informal forums and all employees of the organisation are expected to become members of the VAF.
- VAF seeks to facilitate members to check their names and details on Electoral Roll through online National Voter Service Portal (NVSP) of ECI and the Voter Helpline No 1950.
- VAF is part of the Electoral Literacy Club programme of the poll body.

Electoral Literacy Club (ELC) Programme:

- The ELC programme envisages setting up of Electoral Literacy Club in every educational institution and Chunav Pathshala at every booth to cover those outside the formal education system.

NVSP Portal

- National Voter Service Portal has been created by the Election Commission of India to provide all possible support services to electors with the help of IT tools.
- It seeks to provide single window services to the electors.
- It provides services such as searching name on the Electoral List, correction of entries and so on.
- Around 2.11 Lakh ELCs have been established across the country in the first year of the launch of the programme.



Chapter

5

SOCIAL ISSUES

PLAIN TOBACCO PACKAGING

Thailand and Saudi Arabia will join a growing club of nations introducing plain packaging of tobacco products.

About:

- They are the **first in the Asian and Arab regions**, respectively, to adopt the tough measure in order to curb tobacco consumption from September in Thailand, and May 1, 2019 in Saudi Arabia's case.

Background:

- In December 2012, **Australia became the first country** to introduce plain packaging following the **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) guidelines**.
- It has **also been implemented** in countries like France, United Kingdom, Norway, New Zealand and Hungary in recent years.
- It will be implemented in Uruguay, Slovenia and 14 more countries.

Plain Packaging System:

- Plain packaging standardises the appearance of tobacco products:** Other than brand and product names displayed in a standard colour and font style, it prohibits the use of logos, colours, brand images or promotional information.
- Reduce the attractiveness of tobacco products:** Besides increasing the effectiveness of health warnings, the idea is to reduce the attractiveness of tobacco products, with no scope for using packaging to advertise and promote consumption.

**Opposition to Plain Packaging Initiative:**

- The tobacco industry was opposed to Australia's plain packaging initiative. But the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruling in June 2018, favoured plain packaging.

- The WTO panel, while rejecting the notion that Australia had infringed tobacco trademarks and violated intellectual property rights, said the plain packaging law led to "improving public health by reducing use of and exposure to tobacco products".

India's Case:

- One million deaths:** In India, tobacco is the cause of about one million deaths annually.
- Pictorial warnings:** In April 2016, India increased the size of graphic pictorial warnings, to 85%, on the packaging of tobacco products (both front and back).
- Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2016-2017:** According to the survey percentage of users in India who thought of quitting tobacco use because of such warning labels increased sharply to 62% (cigarette), 54% (bidi) and 46% (smokeless tobacco users), when compared with the survey results of 2009-2010.
- Positive effects:** Likewise, tobacco use among those aged 15-24 years showed 6% reduction (18.4% in 2009-10 to 12.4% in 2016-17). The number of tobacco users dropped by 8 million.

Way Forward:

- Plain packaging along with other measures led to **0.55 percentage point reduction** in smoking prevalence in Australia, translating into at least 1,18,000 fewer smokers.
- Introduce a law:** With the legal hurdle to tobacco control being cleared, countries including India, can introduce similar legislation.
- The higher taxes and large pictorial warnings,** plain packaging can deter new users and prompt existing users to quit.

LANCET STUDY ON DIET PLAN

Lancet diet plan for the world recommends cutting red meat and sugar by half.

About:

- As per the EAT-Lancet Commission report, there is a need to transform the eating habits, improving food production, and reducing food waste.
- This is necessary for feeding an estimated world population of 10 billion people by 2050 in a healthy and sustainable manner.
- The Commission recommended to cut consumption of sugar and red meat by 50 percent, and to increase the intake of fruits, vegetables, and nuts.

- Such a diet would not only be healthier but also more environment-friendly, said the commission.

The EAT-Lancet Commission

- The EAT-Lancet Commission is an independent non-profit consisting of 19 scientists and 18 co-authors from 16 countries.
- It is a 3-year project that brings together 37 experts from 16 countries with expertise in health, nutrition, environmental sustainability, food systems, economics and political governance.
- It was tasked with developing global scientific targets for a healthy diet and sustainable food production.
- The experts on this panel from India included Srinath Reddy of the Public Health Foundation of India and Sunita Narain of the Centre for Science and Environment.

Recommendations:

- The Commission recommended that the average adult, whose daily requirement is about 2,500 calories, must strive to source around 800 calories from whole grain (rice, wheat or corn), 204 calories from fruits and vegetables, and not more than 30 calories from red meat (beef, lamb or pork).
- It also suggested that the ideal diet should have no "added sugar" or "added fat".
- It emphasises that "global targets" ought to be applied "locally" and must keep in mind "cultural sensitivities". That means the protein requirement from meat can be substituted, with, say, legumes or equivalent substitutes.

Benefits:

- Following this healthy diet could avoid approximately 11 million premature deaths a year as a result of consumption of an unhealthy diet.
 - People in North American countries eat almost 6.5 times the recommended amount of red meat.
- It will help ensure that the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are met, specially Goal no. 2 i.e. Zero Hunger.
 - More than 800 million people have insufficient food. Consumption of meat is resource intensive and lot of plant products go into feeding the animals meant for slaughter.
 - A global diet based on vegetables and grains is the only way to ensure food sufficiency to the poor.
- It will also be good for environment, as it will help ensure that targets under Paris Agreement are achieved.

Way Forward:

- The report shared a road map to help global populations move towards such a diet by 2050.
- These include re-orienting the focus of agriculture from large-scale production of a few crops to "a diverse range of nutritious foods from biodiversity-enhancing food production systems".

- For India, the task is to orient its food system from a calorie-rich carbohydrate diet to a nutrition rich protein diet.

LESSONS FROM PRIMARY HEALTHCARE IN KERALA

The experience of Kerala in transforming primary health care has lessons for the country in achieving the Astana Declaration goals.

About:

- Aardram mission:** The 'Aardram mission' in Kerala aims at creating "People Friendly" Health Delivery System in the state. In 2016, as part of the Aardram mission, Kerala attempted to re-design its primary care.
- In the revamped primary care, Kerala tried to provide the services enlisted in the Astana declaration and more, with mixed results.

Lessons Learnt from Kerala's Experience:

- Need of adequate human resource:** Providing comprehensive primary care would require at least one team for 5,000 populations. This would mean a six-fold increase in the cost of manpower alone. Currently India has one team per 30,000 populations. Kerala tried to reduce the target population to 10,000 per team but it was ineffective.
- Funding:** Supply of more human resources would generate demand for services, there would be a corresponding increase in the cost of drugs, consumables, equipment etc. So comprehensive primary care would require substantial increase in fund allocation.
- Specialised training:** Providing the entire set of services require specialized training, as given to postgraduates, to medical and nursing graduates. For example, the Post Graduate Course in Family Medicine. Kerala has addressed this challenge through short courses in specific areas such as management of diabetes mellitus, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and depression.
- Access to data:** Access to longitudinal data on individuals through dynamic electronic health records and decision support through analysis of data will help in better service delivery.
- Role of private sector:** In India, more than 60% of primary care is provided by the private sector. It can provide good quality primary care if there are systems to finance care and if it is prepared to invest in developing the needed capacities. Devising and operating such a system (more fund management than insurance though it can be linked to insurance) is needed.

Astana Declaration

- Astana Declaration was made at "Global Conference on Primary Health Care: From Alma-Ata towards universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals" meeting in Astana in October 2018.
- The conference marked 40 years of the historic Alma Ata Declaration.
- The conference was co-organized by collective initiative of Government of Kazakhstan, WHO and UNICEF.
- **Aim:** The declaration aims to refocus efforts on primary health care to ensure that everyone everywhere is able to enjoy the highest possible attainable standard of health.
- This would be through comprehensive preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative services and palliative care.
- The **success** of primary health care will be driven by:
 - Knowledge and capacity building.
 - Human resources for health.
 - Empower individuals and communities.
 - Technology.
 - Financing.
 - Aligning stakeholder support to national policies, strategies and plans.

Alma-Ata Declaration

- It was adopted at the International Conference on Primary Health Care (PHC), Almaty (formerly Alma-Ata), Kazakhstan.
- It was the first international declaration underlining the importance of primary health care.
- It reaffirmed that health is a fundamental human right.
- It identified primary health care as the key to the attainment of the goal of Health for All.

SELECTION OF SPORTSPERSONS

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has issued guidelines to ensure transparency in Selection of Sportspersons.

About:

- The development and promotion of various disciplines of sports including selection of players for various national and international sports competitions is the responsibility of the concerned National Sports Federations (NSFs).
- The NSFs work in an autonomous environment and the Government is not directly involved in their functioning, including selection of sports persons.
- However, to ensure transparency in selection process Government has issued guidelines according to which selection of sportspersons for major international events is to be done by a Selection Committee.

Promotional Schemes to tap Sports Talents

- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) through Sports Authority of India (SAI) has been implementing various sports promotional schemes to tap sports talents throughout the country irrespective of their financial status.
- **SAI Training Centres (STC), Special Area Games (SAG):** Under the Schemes sports talents belonging to rural, tribal, coastal, hilly and backward areas of the country are selected.
- The selected trainees are provided financial support in the form of expert coaches, sports equipment, boarding and lodging, sports kit, competition exposure, educational expenses, medical/ insurance and stipend.
- **Scheme of Assistance to National Sports Federations:** The Government supports the identified sportspersons, including those from weaker sections of society/teams for intensive coaching through national coaching camps, foreign exposures/competitions etc.
- **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS): Customized training** is being provided to identify sportspersons at the state-of-the-art sports institutes/academies within the country and abroad.

Sports Authority of India (SAI)

- It is the apex national sports body of India.
- It is established in 1984 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for the development of sports in India.

National Sports Federations

National Sports Federations (NSFs) are autonomous bodies registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860.

CENTRE PROPOSES TO HIKE MONTHLY PENSIONS

Union Government plans to increase the monthly pensions for the elderly poor, disabled and widows.

About:

- The Rural Development Ministry has proposed to increase the monthly pensions of the elderly poor, disabled and widows from the current ₹200 to ₹800. For those above the age of 80, the proposal is to increase the pension from ₹500 to ₹1,200 a month.
- Currently, those who are older than 80 years are paid ₹500 per month, while the rest are given ₹200 per month under the National Social Assistance Program.

National Social Assistance Program (NSAP):

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with an annual budget of ₹9975 crores.
- It currently covers more than three crore people who are below the poverty line (BPL), including about 80 lakh widows, 10 lakh disabled and 2.2 crore elderly.

Need for the Changes in the NSAP:

- To Account for Inflation:** The last revision was done in the year 2007 and there had been significant increase in the costs of living since then.
- Uniformity:** State Governments are giving different amounts ranging from ₹500 to ₹2000 as per State of Pension in India report 2018.
- Increasing burden of Non-Communicable Diseases:** For meeting their medical expenses, the increase in pension was desired for long time.
- Enhance Coverage:** Government still uses the BPL criteria for Pensions rather than the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC). Moving over to SECC can lead to 3 Crore additional beneficiaries.
- Convergence:** For bringing more coordination and coherence between the efforts of Central and State Governments.

WHO'S TEN THREATS TO GLOBAL HEALTH IN 2019

WHO released a list of "Ten threats to Global Health in 2019" which need attention from public and governments.

About:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has released a list of "Ten threats to global health in 2019", which would "demand attention from WHO and health partners".
- The following table shows what these threats are, and what they mean for India:

Ten Threats to Global Health in 2019		
S. No	Threat	Importance for India
1.	Air Pollution	India, with 18% of the world's population, sees a disproportionately high 26% of the global premature deaths and disease burden due to air pollution.
2.	Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs)	61% of deaths in India in 2016 were due to NCDs.
3.	Global Influenza Pandemic	In 2018, 14,992 cases and 1,103 deaths were reported countrywide due to influenza.

4.	Fragile Vulnerable Settings	Massive distress in India's farm sector and natural calamities like floods, cyclones and droughts along with weak health service lead to protracted crises. For example, Kerala floods last year were followed by a leptospirosis outbreak.
5.	Weak Primary Healthcare	High Out of Pocket Expenditure, Doctor shortages and Absenteeism.
6.	Antimicrobial Resistance	Wide presence of Multi-drug Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR TB, XDR TB) in India.
7.	Vaccine Hesitancy	The reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines threatens to reverse progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases. India plans to achieve full immunization only by 2020 end.
8.	Dengue	The disease is spreading to less tropical and more temperate countries such as Nepal. WHO estimates 40% of the world is at risk of dengue. Dengue is endemic to India and India recorded nearly 89,974 dengue cases and 144 deaths in 2018 (Until 25th November).
9.	HIV	Nearly 21 Lakh Indians are living with HIV/AIDS in India. Indian adopted test and treat policy to address this health epidemic.
10.	Ebola and Other Pathogens	India has spared Ebola so far. WHO prioritizes research & development for several haemorrhagic fevers, Zika, Nipah, and SARS. Several Indian states battled Zika in October-November 2018.

GLOBAL HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGE-INDIA

Government recently launched Global Housing Tech Challenge for innovation and construction of cost-effective houses.

About:

- The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** recently launched the Global Housing Technology Challenge (GHTC).
- The initiative was launched under the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban (PMAY-U)**.
- The purpose of GHTC is to make the construction of houses cost-effective and innovative. This will help in meeting the target of constructing 1.2 crore houses by 2022.
- For this, it seeks to **source technologies from all over the world** and to identify such technologies which would be suitable for adoption in India.

Details of the GHT Challenge:

- Under the challenge, a grand expo-cum-conference on GHTC will be organised in March.
- It will be a unique platform not only for the stakeholders but also for the States/Union Territories and technical institutions.
- The challenge will also focus on identifying and mainstreaming proven demonstrable technologies.
- These technologies will be used for lighthouse projects and spotting potential future technologies for incubation and **acceleration support through ASHA (Affordable Sustainable Housing Accelerators)** — India.

Do You Know?

Affordable Sustainable Housing Accelerators (ASHA):

- It refers to programs by a group of local non-profits, government agencies or private companies to accelerate initiatives in the housing sector in an affordable and sustainable manner.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) Gramin:

- It seeks to provide pucca house to all who are houseless and living in dilapidated houses in rural areas by 2022.
- Under the scheme, financial assistance is provided for construction of pucca house.
- The scheme would be implemented in rural areas **throughout India except Delhi and Chandigarh**.
- The cost of houses would be shared between Centre and States.
- Beneficiaries of the rural houses would be chosen according to data taken from the **Socio-Economic Caste Census of 2011**.

(PMAY) – Housing for All (Urban) Mission:

- The purpose of the mission is to facilitate housing for all in urban areas by 2022.
- It envisages government interventions for different segments of urban poor in the following ways:
 - Slum rehabilitation of slum dwellers.
 - Promotion of affordable housing for weaker section through credit linked subsidy.
 - Affordable Housing in partnership with public & private sectors.
 - Subsidy for beneficiary-led individual house construction/enhancement.

Affordable Sustainable Housing Accelerators (ASHA):

- It refers to programs by a group of local non-profits, government agencies or private companies to accelerate initiatives in the housing sector in an affordable and sustainable manner.

Way Forward:

- A concerted effort is required to create mass awareness to accept a technology transition from conventional to new technologies that will mainstream its use.
- This transition will contribute towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), **particularly Goal Number 11**, which seeks to ensure access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services.
- Moreover, the transition will also facilitate the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Climate Accord to which India is a signatory and other such international commitments.
- Such a technology transition aligns well with the vision of New India 2022.
- This will bring the country at par with the advanced economies of the world and their rigorous standards in the construction sector.

NATIONAL POLICY ON DOMESTIC WORKERS

New National Policy for Domestic Workers have been drafted to benefit 40 lakh domestic workers in India.

About:

- The Ministry of Labour & Employment is drafting a national policy on domestic workers which will benefit nearly 40 lakh domestic workers.
- As per the National Sample Survey, there are an estimated 39 lakh people employed as domestic workers by private households, of which 26 lakhs are female domestic workers.

- The purpose behind the proposed policy is to give recognition to domestic workers besides making them eligible for minimum wages, social security and safe working conditions.

Salient Features of the Policy:

- Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations.
- Domestic workers will have the right to register as unorganized workers. Such registration will facilitate their access to rights and benefits.
- Right to form their own associations/unions.
- Right to minimum wages, access to social security.
- Right to enhance their skills.
- Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation.
- Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals for grievance redressal.
- Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of private placement agencies.
- Establishment of a grievance redressal system for domestic workers.

Key Concerns with the Policy:

- The provision of minimum wage for domestic help may make them unaffordable to many middle-class families, leading to job losses.
- The grassroots level implementation is likely to be challenging.

Way Forward:

- The draft policy is rightly going through various rounds of stakeholder consultation before it is finalised.
- The Ministry is trying to push the policy forward because it is drafting a universal social security code that would cover even domestic workers, who are otherwise deprived of social security benefits.

'OUTBREAK READINESS AND BUSINESS IMPACT' REPORT

A WEF report released recently says pandemics could cause \$570 billion annual loss to global economy.

About:

- In the report on 'Outbreak Readiness and Business Impact', Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF) held that the number and kind of infectious disease outbreaks have increased significantly over the past 30 years.
- This new era of **epidemics and pandemics** poses huge risks to global businesses that may cause an average annual economic loss of \$570 billion to the global GDP, posing a threat similar to that from climate change, according to the report.

Details of the Report:

- The report was released by the WEF in collaboration with the Harvard Global Health Institute.
- WEF's Global Risks Report 2019**, released earlier, had also flagged concerns over naturally emerging infectious disease threats and risks posed by revolutionary new biotechnologies.
- Weak global health defence mechanisms:** The world remains ill-prepared to detect and respond to outbreaks and is also not prepared to respond to a significant pandemic threat.
- Growing enormity of Local outbreaks:** While potentially catastrophic outbreaks may occur only every few decades, highly disruptive regional and local outbreaks are becoming more common and pose a major threat to lives and livelihoods.
- Threat of misinformation is looming large:** The WEF said one threat is disease and its uncertainty while another is the fear of disease itself or uninformed panic.
- As seen in past epidemics, health-related misinformation can spread as fast as viruses to undermine or disrupt the overall medical response efforts, it added.

Way Forward:

- Need for Leaders Initiative:** Political and Business leaders need to better understand expected costs of epidemics, mitigate these costs and strengthen health security more broadly.
- Enhance Public Private Partnership:** It is a time to strengthen public-private cooperation for global health security in areas of vaccines, data science, travel, communications, and supply chain and logistics.

RTE AMENDMENT BILL (DETENTION vs NO-DETENTION DEBATE)

The policy of detention for children in class V and VIII remains a debatable issue among policymakers for long time now.

About:

- The Rajya Sabha passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill, 2019, that does away with the no-detention policy of the law. The Lok Sabha had already passed the same in July during the Budget Session.

What has Changed in the RTE?

- The Right to Education Act, 2009** prohibits detention of children till they complete elementary education i.e., class 8.
- The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill, 2019** amends this provision to provide for a **regular examination in class 5 and class 8** at the end of every academic year.

- If a child fails the exam,** he will be given additional instruction, and take a re-examination.
- If he fails in the re-examination,** the relevant central or state government may decide to allow schools to detain the child.
- Effectively,** the amendment allows states to decide whether to withdraw automatic promotion at the end of 5th and 8th grades.

NOTE TO READERS

The topic of **No detention policy** was dealt in Sept. 2018 edition of our magazine. Kindly refer that edition for comprehensive **ANALYSIS** on the same.

- Main concerns in granting Scheduled Tribe status to Bodos (Hills):** Most Bodos are migrants in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts, and granting ST status to them will take away much of the 7.5% quota for the hill tribes, according to the Autonomous State Demand Committee.

TINY TARGETS

Tobacco companies targeting children, a study recently revealed.

About:

- A report released recently finds that tobacco companies in India are systematically targeting children as young as eight by selling tobacco products and placing tobacco advertisements near schools.
- The study was titled 'Tiny Targets' and was conducted by two groups working in the area of tobacco control – Consumer Voice and Voluntary Health Association of India.
- The purpose of the study was to determine the extent of tobacco products being marketed and sold around schools in India.

Findings of the Study:

- Increasing advertisement near school:** Despite the prohibition on sales of tobacco products near educational institutions, numerous shops/vendors/and points of sale sell and advertise tobacco products around schools.
- These tactics, happening all over the country, is a clear violation of **Section 5 and 6 of Cigarettes & Other Tobacco Products Act.**
- Wrong means for Advertisement:** Vendors display tobacco products in ways that are appealing to children and youth.
- In most of the points of sale of tobacco, it is observed that most of the displays were at child's eye level, had no visible health warning, and were placed near items marketed to children.

Cigarettes & Other Tobacco Products Act

- The purpose of the Act is to prohibit advertisement of, and to provide for the regulation of trade and commerce in, and production, supply and distribution of cigarettes and other tobacco products in India.
- Section 5 of the Act:** It prohibits advertisement of tobacco products including cigarettes.
- Section 6 of the Act:** Tobacco products cannot be sold to person below the age of 18 years, and in places within a radius of 100 yards from the outer boundary of an institution of education, which includes school and colleges.

SCHEDULED TRIBE (ST) STATUS FOR 6 GROUPS TRIGGERS PROTEST IN ASSAM

Forum of tribal organisations called for a shutdown in Assam against the Centre's proposal to grant ST status for 6 groups.

About:

- A forum of tribal organisations recently announced a 24-hour Assam bandh against the Centre's move to grant Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six "advanced" communities.
- These communities are:**
 - Chutia
 - Motok
 - Moran
 - Koch-Rajbongshi
 - Tai-Ahom
 - Tea Tribes/Adivasis
- These groups are currently categorised as Other Backward Classes.
- Main Concerns:** If these communities are granted ST status, it will impact the rights and privileges of the existing ST communities.
- Assam has 38 lakh tribal people while these six groups account for more than 1.5 crore of Assam's 3.12 crore people.

Other Similar Issues:

- Bodos Issue:** Centre recently decided to grant ST status to the Bodos living in the hill districts of Assam.
- This has infuriated the hill tribes, who have called for a shutdown in two hill districts to protest this move.
- The tribes of Assam are divided into hill and plains dwellers.
- The **Bodos** are treated as ST in the plains but are not considered tribal in the hills. Communities such as **Karbi and Dimasa** are treated as ST in the hills but do not enjoy tribal status in the plains.

Way Forward:

- This is not the first time the tobacco industry has been found targeting children, nor is it unique to India.
- However, the data is alarming because it documents a very systematic and widespread pattern of activity by tobacco companies to get young people addicted to tobacco.
- Prevent Tobacco Industry from adopting wrongful means of advertisement:** The tobacco industry must be held accountable for their aggressive advertising efforts around schools.
- Enforce Law in letter and spirit:** There is an urgent need for strict implementation of the provision of The Cigarettes & Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003.

WEB-WONDER WOMEN CAMPAIGN

Women and Child Development Ministry recently launched "Web-Wonder Women" campaign to celebrate women who have influenced society positively via social media.

About:

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, has launched an online campaign, '#www: Web-WonderWomen'.
- Aim:** The campaign aims to discover and celebrate the exceptional achievements of women, who have been driving positive agenda of social change via social media.
- Through the campaign, the Ministry and the campaign's partners- Breakthrough and Twitter India- aim to recognize the fortitude of Indian women stalwarts from across the globe who have used the power of social media to run positive & niche campaigns to steer a change in society.
- The campaign invites entries from across the world till 31st January. Indian-origin women, working or settled anywhere in the world, are eligible for nomination.
- The shortlisted entries will be open for public voting on Twitter and the finalists will be selected by a specialized panel of judges.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

To address the need of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls residing primarily in rural areas, Government of India is supporting the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme.

About:

- Under the **Menstrual Hygiene Scheme**, funds are provided to States/Union Territories (UTs) through **National Health Mission** for decentralized procurement of sanitary napkins packs for provision primarily to **rural adolescent girls at subsidized rates** as per proposals received from the States and UTs in their Programme Implementation Plans.
- This scheme encompasses the following:**
 - Increasing awareness** among adolescent girls on Menstrual Hygiene.
 - Improving access** to and use of high quality sanitary napkins by adolescent girls in rural areas.
 - Ensuring safe disposal** of Sanitary Napkins in an environmentally friendly manner.
 - Provision of funds** to Accredited Social Health Activist(ASHAs) to hold monthly meeting with adolescents to discuss issues related to menstrual hygiene.
 - ASHAs across the country are trained and play a significant role in promotion of use and distribution of the sanitary napkins.

'Ujjwala Sanitary Napkins' Initiative

- It has been launched in Odisha by Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) – Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited(BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL)
- It forms part of the **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** initiative of OMCs in Odisha.
- It aims to educate women on female hygiene and health, improve accessibility to low cost eco-friendly sanitary pads and boost rural employment and economy.
- Under this initiative, OMCs will set up 100 manufacturing units at the Common Service Centers covering 93 blocks in 30 districts of Odisha.

Khushi Scheme

- It is launched by **Odisha Government**.
- It will promote health and hygiene among school going girls and higher retention of girls in school.
- It aims to provide free sanitary pads to girl students from grade 6th to 12th in government and government-aided schools.

THE CONSTITUTION (SCHEDULED TRIBES) ORDER (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018

Cabinet approves 'The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018' for revision in list of Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

About:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the introduction of a bill namely The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018 in the Parliament for certain amendments in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 so as to modify the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) of Arunachal Pradesh.

Changes Made and the Rationale for the Changes	
Changes	Rationale
Deletion of 'Abor'	Removal of duplication as 'Abor' is same as 'Adi' in the list
Replace Tai Khamti' instead of 'Khampti'	There is no tribe called 'Khampti'
Inclusion of 'Mishmi-Kaman' (Miju Mishmi), Idu (Mishmi) and Taraon (Digaru Mishmi)	Existing entry is only of 'Mishmi'. There is reportedly no such community.
Inclusion of Monpa, Memba, Sartang, Sajolong (Miji)	Replaced in lieu of 'Momba'.
Inclusion of 'Nocte', 'Tangsa', Tutsa', 'Wancho'	Existing entry is of 'Any Naga Tribes'. These are reportedly the only Naga tribes in the State.

- Benefits:** After the Bill becomes an Act, members of the newly listed communities will also be able to derive **benefits meant for STs under the existing schemes of the Government.**
- Major schemes:** Some of the major schemes of this kind include Post Matric Scholarship, National Overseas Scholarship, National Fellowship, Top Class Education, Concessional Loans from National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation, Hostels for ST boys & girls etc.
- Reservation:** They will also be entitled to reservation in services and educational institutions as per Government policy.

Procedure to Amend the ST List

- Article 366 (25)** defined scheduled tribes as 'such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities **as are deemed under Article 342** to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution.'
- According to article 342, President**, with respect to any State or Union territory, after consultation with the Governor concerned, can specify Scheduled Tribes in relation to a particular State/Union Territory by a notified order.
- Subsequently **Parliament** may by law include in or exclude any tribe from the list of Scheduled tribes specified by Presidential order.
- These orders can be modified **subsequently only** through an Act of Parliament.

- The President, after consultation with the State Governments concerned have promulgated so far 9 orders specifying the Scheduled Tribes in relation to the state and union territories.
- In pursuance of these provisions, the list of Scheduled Tribes is notified **for each State or Union Territory and are valid only within the jurisdiction of that State or Union Territory and not outside.**
- The **criterion** followed for specification of a community, as scheduled tribes are indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. This **criterion is not spelt out** in the Constitution but has become well established through the definitions contained in 1931 Census, first Backward Classes Commission 1955 and reports of different committees.
- No community** has been specified as Scheduled Tribe in relation to the State of **Haryana and Punjab and Union Territories of Chandigarh, Delhi and Puducherry.**
- Under **article 341**, procedure to amend Scheduled Castes list has been given which is **same** as that of STs.

FIRST HUMAN RIGHTS CHANNEL

World's first television channel dedicated to human rights was launched recently.

About:

- The world's first television channel dedicated to human rights **was launched in London** with a promise to deliver hidden stories ignored by mainstream media into people's living rooms.
- The International Observatory of Human Rights (IOHR)** said its web-based channel would bring human rights issues to audiences in over 20 countries across Europe, Latin America and the Middle East.
- Topics** will include refugees, press freedom and the incarceration of journalists, extremism, women's rights, LGBT+ issues and the plight of the world's stateless people.
- Programmes in the pipeline will look at China 30 years after the crackdown on the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests, the positive and negative impacts of technology on women, and the human rights implications of Brexit, Britain's departure from the European Union in March.
- Broadcasts can be viewed via the netgem.tv interactive platform and will shortly be available via a mobile app.
- Programming is in English, but IOHR eventually hopes to broadcast in other languages including Farsi, Turkish, Arabic and Russian.



Chapter

6 ENVIRONMENT, DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND GEOGRAPHY

SIX NEW LIZARDS

Northeast is home to six new species of lizards.

About:

- Researchers have discovered six new species of bent-toed geckos, a type of small lizard, from northeast India.
- The discoveries by an international team from institutes including Bengaluru's National Centre for Biological Sciences and London's The Natural History Museum – have been published in taxonomic mega-journal, Zootaxa, published from New Zealand.

Details:

- Researchers found the Guwahati bent-toed gecko (*Cyrtodactylus guwahiensis*, named after the city) near a small hillock in the urban sprawl of Guwahati city. Thus it the fifth lizard to be described from a major Indian city, the others being Bengaluru, Delhi, and Mumbai.
- The Kaziranga bent-toed gecko, the Jaintia bent-toed gecko and the Nagaland bent-toed gecko have been discovered from Assam's Kaziranga National Park, the Jaintia hills of Meghalaya and Konomo village in Nagaland, respectively.
- The Abhayapuri bent-toed gecko is currently found only in the vicinity of Abhayapuri town in Assam's Bongaigaon district, and the Jampui bent-toed gecko, only in Tripura's Jampui Hills.
- All the new lizards belong to the genus *Cyrtodactylus*, the most species-rich genus of geckos globally with over 250 species and are called bent-toed or bow-fingered geckos, named after their bent toes.
- They are nocturnal and live on rocks, and are likely to be narrowly distributed endemic species.
- The discovery increases the number of bent-toed geckos described from the Himalaya and north-eastern India to 15.

RENUKAJI DAM MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT

Centre and six states sign agreement for Renukaji Dam Multipurpose Project.

About:

- Union Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR, RD & GR) inked an agreement with Chief Ministers of six states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

- Under the agreement, **three storage projects** are proposed to be constructed on the river Yamuna and two of its tributaries – Tons and Giri in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.
- These include **Lakhwar project** on river Yamuna in Uttarakhand, **Kishau** on river **Tons** in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and **Renukaji** on river **Giri** in Himachal Pradesh. These three projects were identified as National Projects in 2008.

Features:

- It is a storage project on the **Giri river** which is **tributary of the Yamuna** at Sirmour district of Himachal.
- A **148 m-high rock-crammed dam** would be built throughout the river Giri.
- The project will **generate 40 MW of power** during peak flow. It is proposed to be executed by **Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd (HPPCL)**.
- After construction of the project, the flow of the Giri will increase which will meet the **drinking water needs of Delhi and the other Yamuna basin states** up to some extent in the lean period.
- Water sharing after completion of project:** Haryana-47.8%, Uttar Pradesh / Uttarakhand-33.65%, Himachal-3.15% Rajasthan-9.3% and NCT of Delhi: 6.04%.
- The project cost:** It includes irrigation/drinking water component and the power component. The Centre will bear 90 per cent of cost of irrigation/drinking water component of the dam, and the balance cost will be borne by the states.

National Projects

- Government of India had launched a scheme of **National Projects during XI Five Year Plan** with a view to expedite completion of identified National Projects.
- Such projects will be provided **Central grant** which will be **90% of the estimated cost**.
- The progress of work of National Project is **monitored by Central Water Commission (CWC)**. A High Powered Steering Committee headed by Secretary, MoWR, RD & GR also reviews the implementation of National Projects.
- Sixteen projects in the country** have been declared as National Project till August 2018.
- The State Governments send requests for inclusion of the projects in the scheme of National Projects. Inclusion depends upon appraisal/approval by Advisory Committee of Ministry of WR, RD & GR.
- Polaravaram is the last national project.** The government has decided **not to announce any other projects further** as a national project.

INDIA'S SECOND BIENNIAL UPDATE REPORT TO UNFCCC

The Union Cabinet has approved submission of India's Second Biennial Update Report (BUR) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

About:

- India is a Party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Convention, in accordance with its Article 4.1 and 12.1, enjoins upon all Parties, both developed country Parties and developing country Parties to furnish information, in the form of a National Communication regarding implementation of the Convention.
- The BUR fulfills the reporting obligation under the Convention.

Salient Features:

- Components:** The BUR contains five major components i.e.
 - National Circumstances.
 - National Greenhouse Gas Inventory.
 - Mitigation Actions.
 - Finance, Technology and Capacity Building Needs and Support Received and Domestic Monitoring.
 - Reporting and Verification (MRV) arrangements.
- BUR has been prepared based on a range of studies conducted at the national level.
- The BUR has undergone **multitier review process**, through peer review, review by Technical Advisory Committee of Experts chaired by Additional Secretary (Climate Change) and by National Steering Committee chaired by Secretary (EF&CC). The National Steering Committee is an inter-ministerial body comprising NITI Aayog and some other ministries.
- Out of the total emissions:**
 - Energy sector accounted for 73%.
 - Industrial Process and Product Use 8%,
 - Agriculture 16% and
 - Waste sector 3%.
- About 12% of emissions were offset by the carbon sink action of forestland, cropland and settlements.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

- The UNFCCC was adopted in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit.
- Secretariat:** Bonn, Germany.
- Objective:** To stabilize greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.
- The treaty itself sets no binding limits on GHG emissions for individual countries and contains no enforcement mechanisms.

- It provides a framework for negotiating specific international treaties (called 'protocols') that may set binding limits on GHG.
- Kyoto Protocol (1997) and Paris agreement (2015) were concluded under UNFCCC.

MUGGER CROCODILE

Mugger Crocodile is being removed from the Narmada.

About:

- Mugger Crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*) has come to the centre of attention when the Forest Department in **Gujrat** has started evacuating muggers from two ponds on the Sardar Sarovar Dam premises on the Narmada, to facilitate a seaplane service at the Statue of Unity.
- It is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. So its relocation or capture is illegal without permission. However, according to experts, state governments have the authority to give permissions in some situations where they become a danger for the human population.

Mugger Crocodile

- The mugger has been listed as **vulnerable** on the IUCN Red List.
- It is also called as marsh crocodile or broad-snouted crocodile, is a native species to freshwater habitats from **southern Iran and Pakistan to the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka**.
- It is protected under **Schedule I** of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- It is one of three crocodilians in India, apart from saltwater crocodile (*C. porosus*) and gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*).

Some facts regarding Mugger:

- Vadodara**, is the only city in the country **where crocodiles live in their natural habitat** amidst human population.
- Crocodiles from the Vishwamitri river** often enter people's homes, giving rise to conflict and capture.

OLIVE RIDLEY NESTING SITE

The Odisha forest department is developing one more olive ridley mass nesting site – at Bahuda rookery.

About:

- Around 3 km stretch of the beach from Sunapur to Anantpur at Bahuda rookery is being developed as a possible olive ridley mass nesting site.

- The Bahuda rookery is located around 20 km to the south of **Rushikulya rookery coast**, a major mass nesting site of olive ridleys on the Indian coastline.

Olive Ridley Sea Turtle

- The olive ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), also known as the Pacific ridley sea turtle, are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- This species of sea turtle is found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- They can also be found in the warm waters of the Atlantic Ocean.
- These turtles, along with the related Kemps ridley turtle, are best known for their unique mass nesting called **arribada**, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
- It is included in **Vulnerable** category by the IUCN Red list.
- The breeding season normally commences in January and the conservation authorities prepare the ground for the season until mid-summer.

Death of Turtles

- Many of the first batch of olive ridley turtles that chose the Andhra Pradesh coast for the annual breeding season have died before they reached the destination, after being trapped in fishing nets.
- The prime reason for the rise in the deaths is the absence of the 'Turtle Excluder Device' in fishing operations.

Turtle Excluder Device (TED):

- A TED is a grid of bars with an opening either at the top or the bottom of the trawl net.
- The grid is fitted into the neck of a trawl.
- Small animals such as shrimp pass through the bars and are caught in the bag end of the trawl.
- When larger animals, such as sea turtles and sharks, are captured in the trawl, they strike the grid bars and are ejected through the opening.

Recent Steps Taken:

- Setting up of rookeries:** The Wildlife authorities have identified 12 locations to set up rookeries between the Krishna and the Korlinga wildlife sanctuaries, which witness a huge turnout of turtles.
- Official teams at the rookeries are sent to save turtles from stray dogs and conserve the eggs.
- The hatchlings will be released into the sea in a phased manner.
- The Orissa government has made it mandatory for trawls to use TEDs.

RIVER DOLPHINS GO MISSING IN SUNDERBANS

National aquatic animal no longer sighted in the central and eastern parts of the archipelago, according to a recent study.

About:

- Rise in salinity in the Sunderbans water system has resulted in a decrease in population of the Ganges River Dolphins (GRDs) in the region.

Highlights of the Study:

- GRD is no longer sighted in the central and eastern parts of Sunderbans region. Only in the western part of Sunderbans, where the salinity is lower, could researchers find some evidence of the species.
- Though there is some fresh water connectivity and flow in the eastern part, salinity levels were still high and thus there was no evidence of the GRDs.
- There is a higher rate of encounter with the species in rivers and stretches that had limited use of motorised boats, less river traffic and more country boats.
- Because of its unique body shape, it becomes difficult for the dolphin to remain submerged in waters with high salinity. Hence freshwater flow to the Sunderbans is crucial for the subsistence of these species.

Reasons for Increase in Salinity:

- The rise in sea level**, triggered by climate change, is one of the reasons for the increase in salinity of waters of rivers and channels.
- Hydrological modifications** like water diversion and commission of large barrages upstream have had a great impact on the salinity profile of the rivers downstream in the Sunderbans.
- Lost connectivity:** The hyper-saline zone in the central part of the Sunderbans, which includes areas such as Raidighi and Patharpratima has lost connectivity with the upstream freshwater flow.



COUNTRY'S PRIDE

Dolphin Facts

- Bengal is home to both Irrawaddy dolphins and Ganges river dolphins.
- Irrigation projects and river pollution are the main threats to the species

- Habitat of Irrawaddy dolphins is more protected as it falls in Sunderbans.
- Conservation of Ganges river dolphins will also ensure protection of river's ecology.

Proposals to be discussed

- Declaration of stretch of river Hooghly between Murda and Sagar Islands as dolphin community reserve.
- Declaration of six conservation reserves Establishment of Faft Kolkata Wetland Species Community Reserve.
- Expansion of Teesta Wildlife Sanctuary in Dooars.
- Formation of standing committee for state board for wildlife.

Ganges River Dolphin

- Ganges river dolphins fall under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act.
- It is India's National Aquatic Animal.
- It has been declared an '**endangered**' species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- **Habitat:** Prefers deep waters, in and around the confluence of two or more rivers. It Shares habitat with crocodiles, freshwater turtles and wetland birds.
- It is found in India, Bangladesh and Nepal is almost completely blind.
- It is one of the four freshwater dolphin species in the world. The other three are found in the Yangtze river, the Indus river in Pakistan and the Amazon river.
- Further, the Irrawaddy river dolphins can survive in both fresh and marine waters.

HIMALAYAN STATE REGIONAL COUNCIL**NITI Aayog sets up Himalayan State Regional Council****About:**

- **Aim:** To ensure sustainable development of the Himalayan Region.
- **Membership:**
 - **Chairman:** V K Saraswat, Member, NITI Aayog.
 - **Members:** Chief Secretaries of the 12 Himalayan States, Secretaries of key Central Ministries and special invitees.
- **Function:**
 - To review and implement identified action points based on the reports of five Working Groups.
 - To act as the **nodal agency** for sustainable development in the Himalayan region which has **12 states:** Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, two districts of Assam namely Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong , Darjeeling and Kalimpong in West Bengal.



- **Five Working Groups:** They prepared a roadmap for action across five thematic areas:

- **Inventory and Revival of Springs** in Himalayas for Water Security,
- **Sustainable Tourism** in Indian Himalayan Region,
- **Shifting Cultivation:** Towards Transformation Approach,
- **Strengthening Skill & Entrepreneurship (E&S)** Landscape in Himalayas, and
- **Data/Information** for Informed Decision Making.

Dhara Vikas Scheme

- It is a **spring rejuvenation** scheme launched in **Sikkim**.
- **Aim:** To help villages tide over summer water shortage.
- **Working:**
 - It involves villagers in reviving springs and streams that provide drinking water to over 80% of the state's rural household.
 - The state is using central funds provided under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** to pay daily wages to the villagers it has involved in the scheme.

SURVEY ON SANITATION ACROSS THE BANK OF RIVER GANGA

Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) conducted the third party assessment of towns along Ganga river.

About:

- Four-and-a-half years after the Centre launched its flagship Namami Gange programme to clean up the Ganga, Quality Council of India (QCI) commissioned assessment.
- Study covered 92 of the 97 towns along the river, located in **five States:** Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Findings:

- Of the 205 **nullahs** allowing solid waste to flow freely into the river without any screens, 100 are in the towns of West Bengal.
- Bihar also fared very poorly, with none of the 30 nullahs in the State having any screens.
- Most of the **12 towns** that achieved an '**A**' grade had populations of less than 1 lakh people. Most were located in the upstream States of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. A notable exception was the West Bengal town of Maheshtala, with a population of **4.5 lakh**.



Quality Council of India (QCI)

The QCI assessment graded the towns on **four parameters**:

- Overall cleanliness, which involved the dump sites and garbage vulnerable points present near the ghats, as well as the presence of solid waste floating on the river's surface.
- The availability of a municipal solid waste plant.
- The installation and maintenance of screens placed over nullahs.
- Solid waste management services such as sweeping and cleaning arrangements, litter bins and anti-littering signs and a trash cleaner to trap solid waste floating on the river.

Different Grades for Towns:

- **Grade A:** Good cleanliness and waste management services.
- **Grade B:** Managed only a partial cleanliness around the ghats.
- **Grade C:** Need a lot to do to achieve over improvement in cleanliness, solid waste management and in setting up infrastructure.
- It was set up in 1997 as an autonomous body jointly by the Government of India and the Indian Industry.
- It aims to establish and operate national accreditation structure and promote quality through National Quality Campaign.
- **The Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion**, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, is the nodal ministry for QCI.
- The Council has an equal representation of Government, Industry and other Stakeholders.
- Chairman of QCI is nominated by the Prime Minister on recommendation of the industry to the government.
- It publishes a magazine named Quality India.

CLIMATE TIME BOMB FOR WORLD'S GROUNDWATER

World's groundwater systems take decades to respond to the present day impact of climate change.

About:

- In a study published in Nature Climate Change, scientists warned that future generations face an environmental **"time bomb"** as the world's groundwater systems replenishing capacity has drastically reduced due to climate change.
- Also, they found that Climate Change induced extreme weather events such as **Droughts and Cloudbursts** could have long-lasting impact on how quickly the groundwater reserves replenish.
- Using computer modelling of groundwater datasets scientists found that **only half of all groundwater supplies are likely to be fully replenished** or re-balanced within the next 100 years.

Groundwater in India: Important Facts

- India is the largest user of groundwater in the world.
- It uses an estimated 230 cubic kilometers of groundwater per year which is over a quarter of the global total.
- More than 60% of irrigated agriculture and 85% of drinking water supplies are dependent on groundwater.

FLAMINGO FESTIVAL

Annual Flamingo Festival was held at Pulicat lake and Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary.

About:

- The Flamingo Festival was organized from 8th January, 2019 for a period of 3 days by the Andhra Pradesh Government.
- The festival is being organized for the past 12 years.
- This year, over 90000 migratory birds have visited the Pulicat Lake.
- Often spotted birds in the festival include Flamingoes, Grey Pelican, White Ibis, Grey Heron, Painted Storks, etc.

Do You Know?

Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary:

- It is one of the biggest habitats for Pelicans and other birds.
- It is located about 20 km north of the Pulicat Lake near the Andhra Pradesh Tamilnadu Border.
- It is also an important winter home for Migratory Birds.

Pulicat Lake:

- It is a Ramsar Site and the second largest brackish water lake or lagoon in India after Chilika Lake.
- Around 96% of it is in Andhra Pradesh and remaining is in Tamilnadu.
- Arani and Kalangi are two rivers which feed the lagoon.
- The barrier island of Sriharikota separates it from Bay of Bengal.

IUCN Conservation Status of Flamingoes:

- While the Greater Flamingo is given a Least Concern Status, the Lesser Flamingo is under the Near Threatened Category.

IRRAWADDY DOLPHIN CENSUS CONCLUDES

The Dolphin Census carried out in Gahirmatha and Bhitarkanika Sanctuaries was recently completed.

About:

- The annual headcount exercise has come to an end and the data will be released shortly.
- In the Census last year 250 dolphins were sighted in the sea and deltaic zones.
- The enumerators covered the Gahirmatha marine sanctuary, Dhamara coast, estuaries in Bhitarkanika, Hukitola, Paradip and Kujang coast.

Irrawaddy Dolphins

- Irrawaddy dolphin is an **oceanic dolphin** that lives in brackish water near the coasts or mouths of the rivers and even in the estuaries in South and Southeast Asia.
- Features:** They are characterized by slate blue to slate gray colour while the underparts are relatively pale. It has a typical bulging forehead and short beak.
- IUCN Status:** Endangered.
- It has been placed in **Appendix I** of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).
- Distribution:** It is found in discontinuous subpopulations near sea coasts and in estuaries and rivers in parts of the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia.

**PLASTIC WASTE IMPORTS INTO INDIA MAY GO UP**

The imports of PET Bottle Scrap had quadrupled from 2017 to 2018, and are projected to be higher in 2018-2019.

About:

- A Delhi-based environmentalist organisation, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Smriti Manch in its report showed that the imports of Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) bottle scrap & flakes have increased.
- Indian firms are mainly importing plastic scraps from **China, Italy, Japan and Malawi** for recycling.
- Despite a 2015 government ban on such imports, the increase is mainly attributed to the 2016 amendment which allowed such imports as long as they were carried out by agencies situated in Special Economic Zones.
- The imports are especially problematic when India consumes annually about 13 million tonnes of plastic but recycles only about 4 million tonnes. The imports in such a situation can cripple the domestic recycling.

Expanding Threat

Import of PET bottle scrap & flakes have increased from 12,000 MT in FY 16-17 to 48,000 MT in FY 17-18, growing at 250%.

India has already imported 25,000 MT in the first 3 months of FY 18-19.

About 9 MT of plastic waste is generated in Indian annually

Discarded PET bottles in India are typically collected by scrap dealers for ₹14-15/kg. 90% of all PET bottles are recycled in India.

The production of plastic materials is done in more than 30,000 units that are estimated to employ 4 million people in India.

The Indian packaging industry, the largest consumer of plastic, is valued at over \$32 billion and offers employment to more than 10 lakh people

**Polyethylene Terephthalate**

- PET is one of the most common consumer plastics used.
- It is used as a raw material for making packaging materials such as bottles and containers.
- It can also be used as the main material in making water-resistant paper.

NITROGEN POLLUTION IN SOUTH ASIA

18 Indian institutions to study nitrogen pollution.

About:

- 18 research institutions in India are among a group of 50 institutions — called the **South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH)**

— in the United Kingdom (U.K.) and South Asia to assess and study the quantum and impact of "nitrogen pollution" in South Asia.

- The five-year programme is being established with funds from the **UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)**.
- The Indian partner institutions are the Aligarh Muslim University, Centre for Marine Living Resources & Ecology, Council of Scientific & Industrial Research, National Institute of Oceanography, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and others.
- The SANH will study the impacts of the different forms of pollution to form a "coherent picture" of the nitrogen cycle.
- In particular, it will look at **nitrogen in agriculture** in eight countries — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.

Nitrogen Pollution:

- Nitrogen is the dominant gas in the atmosphere (78%), it is **considered as inert**, though it is **not 'truly inert'** like noble gases.
- But, when it is released as part of compounds from agriculture, sewage and biological waste, it is **considered reactive**, and it may be polluting and even exert a potent greenhouse gas.
- Nitrous oxide (N_2O) is 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide but isn't as prevalent in the atmosphere.
- Gases such as ammonia (NH_3) and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) contribute to poor air quality and can aggravate respiratory and heart conditions, leading to millions of premature deaths across the world.
- Nitrate from chemical fertilisers, manure and industry pollutes the rivers and seas, posing a health risk for humans, fish, coral and plant life.
- Agriculture** remained the **largest** contributor to nitrogen emissions, non-agricultural emissions of nitrogen oxides and nitrous oxide were growing rapidly, with sewage and fossil-fuel burning for power, transport and industry.

Scare in the air

Nitrogen, when released as part of compounds from agriculture, sewage and biological waste, is considered 'reactive' and may be polluting and causing greenhouse gas (heat trapping) effect



Some cause of nitrogen pollution

- Emission from chemical fertilisers
- Burning of fossil fuels
- Emission from livestock manure

Key threats due to nitrogen pollution

- Biodiversity loss
- Pollution of rivers and seas
- Ozone depletion
- Health, economy and livelihoods

India's nitrogen emissions grew at 52% from 1991 to 2001 and 69% from 2001 to 2011

UK Research and Innovation

- It is a new body which works in partnership with universities, research organizations, businesses, government etc. to create the best possible environment for research and innovation to flourish.
- It is one of the delivery partner of The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) announced by the UK Government in 2015 to support cutting-edge research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries.

Do You Know?

India is the only country in South Asia that has completed its nitrogen assessment over a year ago and is already co-leading the South Asian nitrogen assessment for the UN Environment.

INVASIVE MUSSEL

Invasive mussel posing threat to native species found in Kochi backwaters.

About:



- Scientists have confirmed the presence of the invasive black-striped mussel *Mytilopsis sallei* in Kochi's backwaters.
- Extracted DNA from these mussels matched to the DNA of mussels observed from the Lam Tsuen River in Hong Kong (China), confirming that it is the same species that is now found in Kochi's backwaters.
- The estimated population density in Ezhupunna region of Vembanad lake was 748 per sq m.

Why it is Harmful?

- Biofoulers:** Though tiny, these invasive mussels are 'biofoulers': organisms that accumulate on wet surfaces, causing huge ecological and economic losses.
- Deterioration of infrastructure:** They can cause the deterioration of coastal infrastructure.
- Reduction in native biodiversity:** The mussels can displace native species of clams from their coastal habitats and cause a reduction in native biodiversity.

Black-striped Mussel

- It is only around a centimeter or two long.
- The mussel is native to the western Atlantic which extends from Colombia to the Gulf of Mexico. However, it reached West Africa, Japan and Indian subcontinent by getting attached to the hull of ships and ballast water.

- It is an invasive species in most parts of the world.
- In India, it has been recorded from the ports of Mumbai and Visakhapatnam.
- It spreads primarily through the **discharge of ballast waters of ships**.
- It has ability to rapidly establish huge populations.
- The fast-growing species – which dwells in shallow water – can tolerate a wide variety of environmental conditions (salinity, water temperatures and oxygen levels), which helps them thrive in the new areas they colonise.
- It can survive and reproduce in a wide temperature range of 10 to 35 degree Celsius.
- It is **not edible**.

CINEREOUS VULTURE

Cinereous vulture sighted in Jharkhand for the first time.

About:

- While earlier records of this migratory bird have revealed that it comes to northern parts of India up to Rajasthan, bird watchers found it in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.
- Usually during winters Cinereous vultures migrates from the mountainous regions of Europe and Asia to warmer places, including India.

Cinereous Vulture

- Cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) draws its name from "monachus", which means hooded (like a monk) in Latin.
- It has a blacked-tipped pink beak.
- **IUCN status:** Near threatened
- The Cinereous vulture is the **largest bird of prey** of the Old World.
- **Breeding:** The cinereous vulture breeds mostly in high mountains and large forests, in loose colonies or solitarily. Usually it builds a huge nest in a tree, where it lays one egg.
- **Feeding:** Cinereous vultures feed on medium to large carcasses, only rarely taking live prey, but also insects, tortoises and lizards appear in the diet.

Do You Know?

- India is home to nine species of vultures.
- India has launched a species-recovery plan for vultures through **conservation breeding centres** in different parts of the country.

NATIONAL CLEAN AIR PROGRAMME (NCAP)

The government launched National Clean Air Programme, a time-bound national level strategy to tackle increasing air pollution.

About:

- The NCAP will be a mid-term, **five-year action plan with 2019 as the first year**.
- The programme has been launched with an initial budget of ₹300 crores for the first two years.

Goal:

- To meet the prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in the country in a stipulated timeframe.
- **20-30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by 2024 with 2017 as the base year** for the comparison.

Features:

- 102 cities from 23 States and Union Territories (UTs) have been chosen as **non-attainment cities**. With the exception of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru, most of those chosen are tier two cities.
- **Maharashtra tops the list** with 17 cities in the list, including Pune and Nagpur, while **Uttar Pradesh is second** with 15 cities chosen, including Lucknow and Varanasi.
- No cities from Manipur, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura, Kerala, Goa and Haryana figure in the list.
- Apart from experts from the industry and academia, the programme is expected to be a collaboration between the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Heavy Industry, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, NITI Aayog, and Central Pollution Control Board.
- **An Apex Committee** at the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) at the national level, and at the Chief Secretary level in the States will be constituted to oversee implementation.
- It facilitates partnerships with multi and bilateral international organizations, philanthropic foundations, and leading technical institutions etc.
- It provides for **Sectoral specific interventions** for mitigation actions for key sectors that are known to contribute to air pollution in many cities.
- A separate component on '**Technology Assessment Cell**' has been envisaged to evaluate the technologies for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.

Non-Attainment Cities

Cities are declared non-attainment if over a 5-year period they consistently do not meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for **PM 10 or NO₂**.

REDD+***REDD+ has failed to achieve its objectives: CSE report*****About:**

- A new study by Delhi-based non-profit Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has revealed that Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) has largely failed to achieve its objectives.

About the Report:

- The report, titled '**Rethinking REDD+**'.
- The report is an assessment of the REDD+ implementation experiences in India, Kenya and Tanzania.
- It reveals that the performance of REDD+ in halting or reversing deforestation remains questionable.
- It highlights the need to rethink the REDD+ mechanism based on these experiences and the findings emerging from new research on the potential of forests to mitigate climate change.

Reasons why REDD+ is not Yet Successful:

- Large-scale finance for REDD+ has been a major issue as carbon markets have not materialised and international funding commitments for REDD+ have been much lower than expected.
- High cost low benefits:** REDD+ implementation costs have been high and benefits for local communities from REDD+ projects have been minimal.

About REDD+:

- REDD+ is the programme initiated by the **United Nations** in 2005 to mitigate climate change through conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.
- It creates a **financial value** for the carbon stored in forests by offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development.
- Developing countries would **receive results-based payments** for results-based actions.
- Paris agreement calls upon country Parties to take action to implement and support REDD+.

Why it is Important?

- Deforestation and forest degradation are the second leading cause of global warming, responsible for about 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions, which makes the loss and depletion of forests a major issue for climate change.
- 80% of the Earth's above-ground terrestrial carbon and 40% of below-ground terrestrial carbon is in forests.

India and REDD+:

- NDCs:** India has communicated in its Nationally Determined Contribution under Paris Agreement, that it will capture 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of Carbon dioxide through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.
- India's first biennial update report to UNFCCC has revealed that forests in India capture about 12% of India's total GHG emissions.
- National REDD+ Strategy:** Complying with the UNFCCC decisions on REDD+, India has prepared its National REDD+ Strategy.
- The strategy seeks to address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and also developing a roadmap for enhancement of forest carbon stocks and achieving sustainable management of forests through REDD+ actions.

RED, REDD and REDD+

- Deforestation was first introduced as a new and separate agenda item of the UNFCCC negotiations at COP-11 in 2005.
- Since then, the scope has expanded from reducing emissions from deforestation (RED) to include forest degradation (REDD), and three additional 'plus' elements: conservation of forest carbon stocks, the sustainable management of forests, and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks—together known as "REDD+".

FAQ: What's the difference between REDD+ and the UN-REDD Programme?

REDD+ is a climate change mitigation solution being developed by Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). REDD+ incentivizes developing countries to keep their forests standing by offering results-based payments for actions to reduce or remove forest carbon emissions.

The UN-REDD Programme assists countries to develop the capacities needed to meet the UNFCCC's REDD+ requirements, so that they can qualify to receive results-based payments under the Convention. The UN-REDD Programme supports nationally-led REDD+ processes and promotes the informed and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities.

GANGA SAGAR MELA AND SAGAR ISLAND

Millions flock West Bengal's Sagar Island for holy dip on Makar Sankranti.

About:

- The Ganga Sagar Mela is a religious festival and **second biggest fair of India** after Kumbha Mela celebrated on **Sagardwip (Sagar Island)** in West Bengal.
- It is a six-day fair held in the month of January and on the **day of Makar Sankranti**, a ritual of pilgrims taking bath in holy water and visiting nearby famous **Kapil Muni Temple** is performed.

Sagar Island:

- Sagar Island is the southernmost part of West Bengal, an island in the Ganges delta.
- It is the biggest island of the Sunderbans archipelago.
- It is home to the Endangered Royal Bengal Tiger.

Recent Findings on Island:

- A paper titled '**Pollution and its consequences at Ganga Sagar mass bathing in India**', was published recently in the journal Environment, Development and Sustainability.
- The research paper **highlighted** the worsening water quality of Ganga river after the Ganga Sagar Mela celebrated on Sagar Islands.
- A sharp **deterioration in water quality parameters** between the pre-mela and post-mela period at Sagar Islands was noted.
- Moreover, outbreak of **diseases like cholera, dysentery, and skin disease** was predominant in the post-Ganga Sagar Mela period.

**TRACKER TO HELP FIGHT RHINO POACHING**

French tech company Sigfox has developed a tracker to help conservationists monitor and protect the endangered species.

About:

- Sigfox** has developed sensors that can be inserted into the horns of rhinos.
- Sensors are able to give the exact location of rhinos using the firm's network over a longer period of time.

- It helps rangers and conservation experts to observe from a distance, anticipate potential dangers that the animal could face and rescue animals.
- The Sigfox network uses a **specific radio signal** which offers more security. The sensor only wakes up when it has to transmit data, which makes it **immune to interception by poachers**.
- The trackers to have autonomous battery-life of around three years.

Sigfox Foundation

- Sigfox Foundation is an Impact Fund that acts on three priorities: **health, living, and the protection of the planet**.
- They use Sigfox technology.
- Supported by donors, they design, develop and test low-cost solutions, which demonstrate impact results, with the goal that this impact solution is industrialized by other actors.

Sigfox Technology

- Sigfox is the largest network dedicated to the Internet of Things.
- Sigfox, a French startup created in 2010, is rolling out a low cost, low-power and long range global network.
- The vision of Sigfox** is to connect billions of objects, and make things come alive around the globe, giving companies, institutions, governments a new space of information coming from the physical world.

Rhinoceros

- There are **five** species of rhino.
- African species and the Sumatran rhinoceros have two horns, while the Indian and Javan rhinoceros have a single horn.

White Rhino:

- Africa's largest** species of rhino, also known as the 'square lipped rhino'.
- IUCN status:** Near Threatened.

Black Rhino:

- Africa's smallest** species of rhino, also known as the 'hook lipped rhino'.
- IUCN Status:** Critically endangered.

Sumatran rhino:

- Only species of **rhino** to still be covered in hair.
- IUCN Status:** Critically endangered.

Javan rhino:

- All Javan rhinos in the world survive in Ujung Kulon National Park, in Java, Indonesia.
- IUCN Status:** Critically endangered.

The Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*):

- It is also called as greater one-horned rhinoceros.
- **It is Asia's largest** species of rhino.
- It is a native to the Indian subcontinent.
- IUCN status: **Vulnerable**
- CITES listing: **Appendix I**
- Distribution: Bhutan, India, Nepal
- Kaziranga National Park hosts two-thirds of the world's Great One-horned rhinoceros.

HARMFUL IMPACT OF DESALINATION PLANT

Water desalination plants harm environment: United Nations (U.N.)

About:

- Almost 16,000 desalination plants worldwide produce bigger-than-expected flows of highly salty waste water and toxic chemicals that are damaging the environment, according to the study by the U.N. University's Canadian-based Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH) said.
- About 55% of the brine is produced in desalination plants processing seawater in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.
- **Brine, water comprising about 5% salt**, often includes toxins such as chlorine and copper used in desalination. By contrast, global sea water is about 3.5% salt.

U.N. University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH)

- UNU-INWEH acts as the "UN Think Tank on Water" and contributes to the resolution of the global water challenge through a unique programme of applied **research and education**.
- It conceives, develops, and manages water initiatives that help **developing countries** build their capacity for lasting improvements in **human and ecosystem health, and overall reduction in poverty**.
- It is **governed by the UNU Council**. The UNU Council serves as the governing board of the United Nations University. The UNU Council reports annually to the UN General Assembly, the UN Economic and Social Council and the Executive Board of UNESCO.

Impact:

- Waste chemicals can have toxic effects on fish.
- Brine can cut levels of oxygen in seawater near desalination plants with which impacts shellfish, crabs and other creatures on the seabed, leading to harmful effect on entire food chain.

INDIA'S 6TH NATIONAL REPORT TO CBD

India submits Sixth National Report (6NR) to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD).

About:

- The report was submitted online to the CBD Secretariat during the inaugural session of the 13th National Meeting of the State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) organized by the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA).
- Also the document '**Progress on India's National Biodiversity Targets: A Preview**' was released on the occasion.

Significance:

- **India is among the first five countries in the world**, the first in Asia and the first among the mega diverse countries to have submitted 6NR to the CBD Secretariat.
- Submission of national reports is a mandatory obligation on Parties to international treaties, including CBD.
- The 6NR provides an update of progress in achievement of 12 National Biodiversity Targets (NBT) developed under the Convention process in line with the 20 global Aichi biodiversity targets.
- **India's progress:** The report highlights that while India has exceeded/overachieved two NBTs (6 and 9), it is on track to achieve eight NBTs and in respect of the remaining two NBTs also, India is striving to meet the targets by the stipulated time of 2020.
- **IRCC:** India has published the first internationally recognized certificate of compliance (IRCC) under the Protocol in 2015. India has since published nearly 75% of the IRCCs published so far on ABS Clearing House.

About IRCC

- Under the Nagoya Protocol parties are to issue a permit or its equivalent at the time of access as evidence that access to genetic resources was based on prior informed consent and that mutually agreed terms were established.
- Parties are required by the Nagoya Protocol to make information on the permit or its equivalent, available to the ABS Clearing-House for the constitution of the internationally recognized certificate of compliance.

Current Status:

- With well over 20 percent of its total geographical area under biodiversity conservation, India has exceeded the terrestrial component of 17 percent of Aichi target 11, and 20 percent of corresponding NBT relating to areas under biodiversity management.
- As a megadiverse country, India is harbouring nearly 7-8% of globally recorded species while supporting 18% of the global human population on a mere 2.4% of the world's land area.
- Tigers:** India has nearly two third of the population of wild tigers in the world.
- Lion and elephants:** The population of lion has risen from 177 in 1968 to over 520 in 2015, and elephants from 12,000 in 1970s to 30,000 in 2015.
- One-horned Indian Rhino** which was on the brink of extinction during the early 20th century, now there are about 2400 Rhinos in India.
- Further, while globally over 0.3 % of total recorded species are critically endangered, in India only 0.08% of the species recorded are in this category.

Biological Diversity

About:

Biological diversity, or biodiversity, encompasses the variety of all life on earth. Biodiversity manifests itself at three levels:

- Species diversity which refers to the numbers and kinds of living organisms;
- Genetic diversity which refers to the genetic variation within a population of species;
- Ecosystem diversity which is the variety of habitats, biological communities and ecological processes that occur in the biosphere.

Convention of Biological Diversity:

- It was adopted during the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.
- Goals:** The conservation of biodiversity; the sustainable use of its components; and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.
- India is a Party to the CBD.
- CBD has two supplementary agreements – Cartagena Protocol and Nagoya Protocol.

Cartagena Protocol:

- It aims to ensure the safe handling, transport and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health.

A Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit sharing (ABS)

- The objective of this Protocol is the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources.
- Aichi Targets:** Officially known as "Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020", provide a set of 20 ambitious yet achievable targets (divided into 5 sections: A to E), collectively known as the Aichi Targets for biodiversity.

12 National Biodiversity Targets

- By 2020, a significant proportion of the country's population, especially the youth, is aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably.
- By 2020, values of biodiversity are integrated in National and State planning processes and programmes.
- Strategies for reducing rate of degradation, fragmentation and loss of all natural habitats are finalized and actions put in place by 2020.
- By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and strategies to manage them developed.
- By 2020, measures are adopted for sustainable management of agriculture, forestry and fisheries.
- Ecologically representative areas on land and in inland waters, as well as coastal and marine zones, are conserved effectively and other area-based conservation measures are integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes, covering over 20% of the geographic area of the country, by 2020.
- By 2020, **genetic diversity** of cultivated plants, farm livestock and their wild relatives is maintained.
- By 2020, **ecosystem services**, especially those relating to water, human health, livelihoods and wellbeing, are enumerated and measures to safeguard them are identified, taking into account the needs of women, local communities, and vulnerable sections.
- By 2015, Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization as per the Nagoya Protocol are operational, consistent with national legislation.
- By 2020, an effective, participatory and updated national biodiversity action plan is made operational.
- By 2020, national initiatives using communities' traditional knowledge relating to biodiversity are strengthened in order to protect this knowledge as per national legislations and international obligations.
- By 2020, opportunities to increase the availability of financial, human and technical resources to facilitate effective implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the national targets are identified and the Strategy for Resource Mobilization is adopted.

Aichi Biodiversity Targets	
CBD Strategic Goal	Aichi Target
A. Address underlying causes	1 Improving awareness of biodiversity 2 Mainstream biodiversity 3 Reform incentives 4 Implement plans for sustainability
B. Reduce pressures and promote sustainable use	5 Reduce habitat loss and degradation 6 Fish sustainably 7 Make farming and forestry sustainable 8 Reduce pollution 9 Tackle invasive species 10 Minimise climate change impacts
C. Safeguard ecosystems, species and genes	11 Protect and manage critical sites 12 Prevent extinctions 13 Maintain genetic diversity
D. Enhance benefits from biodiversity and ecosystems	14 Safeguard ecosystem services 15 Restore degraded forest 16 Implement access and benefits sharing
E. Enhance implementation through planning, knowledge management and capacity building	17 Implement NBSAPs 18 Protect traditional knowledge 19 Share biodiversity knowledge 20 Increase conservation finance

LEOPARD POACHING

260 leopards poached since 2015, according to information given to Parliament by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

About:

- Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh accounted for the largest number of cases, with 60 and 49 cases respectively.
- Central Indian States like Chhattisgarh (25 cases) and Madhya Pradesh (21 cases) also recorded a high number of cases.
- Poaching of leopards was reported by 19 States.

Basis of the given Numbers:

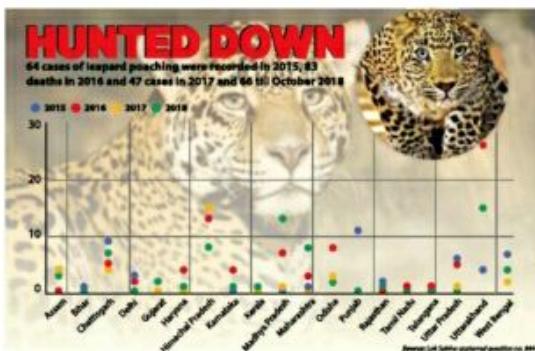
- Data from state enforcement agencies:** The figures had been compiled from data furnished by State enforcement agencies as

the management and protection of wildlife, including leopards, is primarily the responsibility of States and Union Territories.

- Information on the killing of leopards by villagers was not collated by the ministry.

Reasons why the Numbers can be Higher than Estimated:

- According to the Delhi based Wildlife Protection Society of India, 163 cases of poaching and seizures of body parts were recorded in 2018, an increase from 159 in 2017.
- Since leopards live in close proximity to human habitation and are found all across the country, the cases of leopard poaching too are spread countrywide with a significant number of such incidents not showing up in government records.
- There are also several incidents of leopard deaths on account of road kills, particularly in States such as Maharashtra and Karnataka.



Status of Leopard

- Leopards are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- IUCN status:** Vulnerable.
- CITES listing:** Appendix I

Reasons for Leopard Killings:

- Man-animal conflict:** A lot of this poaching is related to man-animal conflict.
- To save livestock:** People are attacking, poisoning or killing leopards due to loss of livestock.
- For adventure and sports:** In Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, people are going inside the forests to shoot animals for sport.
- Electrocution and poisoning are quiet killers.
- Hides, body parts and habitat loss:** Leopards have been targeted by poachers for their hides and other body parts. However, habitat loss, especially due to farming, also poses a threat to them.

Way Forward:

- The need to evolve proactive policy measures for ensuring the protection of wild animals like leopards that live outside protected areas.
- More intelligence-led enforcement is needed to proactively stop poachers from carrying out these activities.
- More awareness is needed within reserved forest areas, wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and their peripheral areas. India has reduced the number of tiger poaching cases significantly through the use of technology by developing mobile applications. A similar focus needs to be shifted to leopards now.
- We need more veterinarians who are trained in wildlife cases.

SHOLA GRASSLANDS AND INVASIVE TREES***Exotic trees eating up Western Ghats's grasslands*****About:**

- A study published in the **International Journal Biological Conservation** confirms that though grassland afforestation using pine, acacia and eucalyptus ceased in 1996, the exotics still invade these ecosystems.
- As per scientists, over four decades, **the country lost almost one-fourth of Western Ghats's grasslands**.
- Reason:** exotic invasive trees.

About the Study:

- Purpose:** To study how shola-grasslands (characterized by patches of stunted evergreen shola trees in the valleys and grasslands on hill slopes) across the Ghats – from the Baba Budan Hills in Karnataka to Tamil Nadu's Ashambu Hills – changed in extent between 1972 and 2017.
- Findings:** The satellite images reveal that 60% of the shola-grassland landscape has changed; almost 40% (516 km²) of native high-elevation grasslands have disappeared.
- Most affected areas:** Most of this loss occurred on the mountain tops of the Nilgiri, Palani and Anamalai hill ranges, which comprise more than half of the Ghats's shola-grassland ecosystems, primarily due to the expansion of exotic trees.
- Even though **no plantations** were established between **2003 and 2017**, invasion by existing trees increased areas under exotic plantations by 27% in the Palanis and 17% in the Nilgiris.
- Invasive trees can rapidly invade grassland and compete with native plants, affect fire and hydrological regimes.

How these Exotic (Non-Native) Trees Came?

- Over 50 years ago the Tamil Nadu Forest Department began planting exotic trees in the natural grasslands. By 1988, over 11,000 hectares of grasslands had been converted to plantations.
- Purpose:** To satisfy the growing demand for tanning bark by the leather tanning industry, and a demand for wood pulp by the paper industry (India's trade sanctions on South Africa after independence stopped the supply of tanning bark from South Africa, which was the major reason for the increased demand for the tanning bark).
- Plantation stopped:** In the mid-1990s, the Forest Department stopped this activity thanks to growing awareness that converting natural ecosystems to non-native monoculture plantations was not a good idea.
- Though the plantation harvesting stopped, the non-native trees **had an unfair advantage over grasses for resources** (soil nutrients and water) and continued to spread and invade the grasslands.

Exotic Invasive Species

- Wattle (Acacia Mearnsii):**
 - It is a leguminous tree native to Australia.
 - It is considered to be one of the most invasive tree species in the world.
 - Wattle trees are best killed by cutting their stem below the ground where the stem has less wood density.
 - Wattle bark, rich in tannins, was used to tan leather.
- Eucalyptus (Eucalyptus globulus):**
 - It is also called as Tasmanian blue gum or blue gum.
 - It is native to Australia.
 - They typically grow from 30–55 m.
 - Eucalyptus trees absorb large quantities of water to support their fast growth rate, which is detrimental to water tables.
 - It was introduced mainly to satisfy the demand for wood pulp.
 - They are difficult to remove as they can regenerate from cut stumps and their roots are usually very extensive.
- Pine (Pinus patula):**
 - It is native to the highlands of Mexico.
 - They can rapidly invade grassland and compete with native plants, affect fire and hydrological regimes.
 - It was introduced to satisfy the demand for wood pulp and timber.
 - They are the easiest to kill.



Chapter

7 MAGZTER EDITION

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TRANS-FAT

FSSAI launches heart attack rewind campaign for eliminating industrially produced trans-fat.

About:

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) launched its media campaign called "Heart Attack Rewind" calling for elimination of industrially produced trans-fat in the food supply.
- This move is in line with FSSAI's global target of eliminating Trans-fat by 2022. This is one year earlier than what the WHO's campaign aims at.
 - The WHO has launched the 'Replace' campaign to eliminate the industrially produced trans-fat from global food supply chain by 2023.
- WHO recommends that trans-fat intake be limited to less than 1% of total energy intake and has called for the total elimination of TFAs in global food supply by 2023. FSSAI has proposed to limit TFA limit in foods to 2% and eliminate trans fats from foods by 2022.

AN ACTION PACKAGE TO
ELIMINATE INDUSTRIALLY-PRODUCED
TRANS-FATTY ACIDS

REVIEW	PROMOTE	LEGISLATE	ASSESS	CREATE	ENFORCE
dietary sources of industrially-produced trans fats and the landscape for required policy change	the replacement of industrially-produced trans fats with healthier fats and oils	or enact regulatory actions to eliminate industrially-produced trans fats	and monitor trans fat content in the food supply and changes in trans fat consumption in the population	awareness of the negative health impact of TFA among policy-makers, producers, suppliers, and the public	compliance with policies and regulations

International Examples:

- The WHO estimates that every year, trans fat intake leads to over 5,00,000 deaths worldwide from cardiovascular diseases.
- In 2003, Denmark imposed a trans-fat ban and in just three years, their Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) mortality rates plummeted. From an annual mean death of 441.5 per one lakh it dropped by 14.2 deaths per one lakh per year (ie 750 fewer deaths every year).
- New York city also eliminated industrially-produced trans-fat a decade ago

What is Trans-fat?

- Trans fat, also called unsaturated fatty acids or trans fatty acids, are a type of unsaturated fat that occur in small amounts in nature but can also be produced industrially from vegetable fats.
- Trans fat produced by partial hydrogenation of unsaturated natural fats. This essentially means to add hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils to make increase their shelf life and melting point.

Trans Fat Facts



ALTERNATIVES
Interestereification is an alternative to hydrogenation; interesterified oils/fats have no trans fats and can be used by bakers and food industry

Re-use of cooking oil (heating above 180 degree) can also produce TFA

Partial hydrogenation produces TFAs which is proven to elevate "bad" cholesterol (LDL) and reduce "good" cholesterol (HDL)

Typical foods containing high levels of TFA include fried foods like chips, cakes, biscuits, cookies, frozen pizza etc.

Using fractionated oil

Using oil blends

Fat replacers are an option

LIMITS
FSSAI has set the limit of trans fat in food at 5% and has proposed limiting it to 2%

WHO has proposed elimination of trans fat from global food supply by 2023

What is the Harmful Effect of Trans-Fat?

- Trans-fat increases the level of Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and lowers the value of High -Density Lipoprotein (HDL).
- LDL is also known as Bad-Cholesterol which deposits in blood vessels leading to clogging of blood circulation and even heart attacks.

Kerala's Initiative

- Kerala's Health Department and the Food Safety wing launched an initiative to enforce dietary guidelines, involving the reduction of **Trans Fatty Acids (TFAs)**, salt and sugar in commercially available foods in the State.
- The initiative has the **technical support from the World Bank, World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**.
- The **high content of industrial TFAs and salt** in baked goods, fried chicken, or banana chips joints in the State is contributing to an epidemic of **Metabolic Syndrome (MS)** in Kerala.
- Metabolic syndrome (MS)** is a cluster of metabolic abnormalities — high blood pressure, high blood sugar, abdominal obesity, abnormal cholesterol or triglyceride levels — that occur together, raising risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

CHANG'E 4

The Chinese lunar probe named Chang'e-4 made the first-ever landing on the far side of the moon.

About:

- The landing of Chinese lunar probe Chang'e 4 "lifted the mysterious veil" from the far side of the moon, and "opened a new chapter in human lunar exploration". Previous spacecraft have seen the far side of the moon, but none has landed on it.
- Chang'e 4 carries a rover, which includes the carrying out low-frequency radio astronomical observations and probing of structure and mineral composition of the terrain.

What is the Far Side of the Moon?

- The moon is tidally locked with Earth. It rotates exactly once every time it circles Earth, thus keeping the same hemisphere pointing toward Earth at all times.
- Astronomers refer to the side we always see from Earth as the "near side" and the side we can never see as the "far side."
- The far side of the moon faces away from Earth** and is relatively unexplored. It is also known as the dark side of the moon.
- No space probe has ever reached that part of the moon's surface because of communication difficulties. To solve this problem, China launched a satellite called **Queqiao**. The satellite will relay signals from the Chang'e-4 space probe on the far side of the moon back to scientists on Earth.

India's Lunar Probe

- Chandrayaan-1** was India's first mission to the moon. It operated for almost a year (between October 2008 and August 2009). The lunar orbiter is best known for discovering evidence of water molecules on the moon.
 - Also, NASA's Moon Mineralogy Mapper detected evidence of a hydrogen-oxygen chemical bond (hinting at water or hydroxyl) when looking at the top area of the moon's regolith (soil).
- Chandrayaan-2** is India's planned second mission to the moon, which is expected to launch in 2019. It will launch aboard a GSLV rocket.
 - The mission will consist of an orbiter, a lander and a rover. The orbiter will perform mapping from an altitude of 100 kilometers, while the lander will make a soft landing on the surface and send out the rover.

Geomorphology of the Far Side of the Moon:

- The crust is much thicker on the far side, relative to the near side.

- The far side's surface generally looks rougher. The nearside is dominated topographically by the presence of large basins that have been filled to the brim with basaltic lava flows, making it relatively flat and smooth.
- The lunar far side also contains less potassium and phosphorus than the near side does, which puzzles scientists.
- The far side is home to igneous rock that may reveal clues about the moon's internal structure.

ISARC SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL CENTRE

The Prime Minister dedicated the International Rice Research Institute's (ISARC) campus to the nation in Varanasi.

About:

- The International Rice Research Institute's (IRRI) South Asia Regional Centre will serve as a hub for rice research and training in South Asia.
- The India Prime Minister visited the IRRI headquarters in Manila in November 2017, during which he discussed agricultural innovations and research advances in the rice sector.

International Rice Research Institute

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is the world's premier research organization dedicated to:

- Reducing poverty and hunger through rice science;
 - Improving the health and welfare of rice farmers and consumers;
 - Protecting the rice-growing environment for future generations.
- IRRI is an independent, non-profit, research and educational institute, founded in 1960 by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations with support from the Philippine government. Its headquarter is in Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines.
- Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) is IRRI's nodal agency in India.

Significance for India:

- India has the world's largest area under rice cultivation and is one of the largest producers of white rice, accounting for 20% of global rice production.
- Rice production in India, in 2011-12, reached a record high of 104.3 million tons.
- The institute will help farmers of the region to develop higher yielding varieties of paddy which grow in minimum water and have low sugar content and high nutritional value.

OSIRIS REX

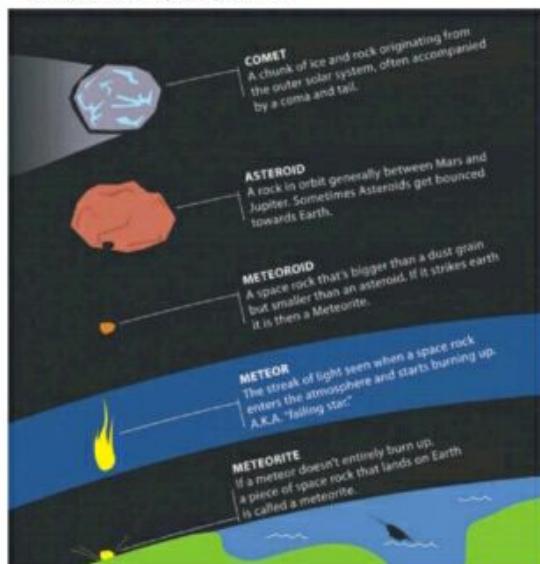
A NASA spacecraft OSIRIS-Rex has entered orbit around an asteroid named Bennu.

About:

- The spacecraft OSIRIS-Rex (Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer) is the **first-ever US mission** designed to visit an asteroid **named Bennu** and return a sample of its dust back to Earth.
- The asteroid Bennu measures about 500 metres in diameter.

Significance:

- The mission is a leap for humankind because no spacecraft has ever "circled so close to such a small space object – one with barely enough gravity to keep a vehicle in a stable orbit."
- It will help scientists better understand the formation of the early solar system, including carbon-rich asteroids that may have brought water and organic molecules to the Earth's surface and helped spark life.



ULTIMA THULE

NASA through its New Horizon Mission shared details of a distant celestial body called Ultima Thule.

About:

- The celestial body Ultima Thule is being studied using the NASA's New Horizons Mission.

- New Horizon Mission was launched in 2006. Its primary aim was to perform a flyby study of Pluto and to fly by and study Kuiper belt objects.

Kuiper Belt

The Kuiper Belt (also known as the Edgeworth-Kuiper belt) is a region of the Solar System that exists beyond the eight major planets, extending from the orbit of Neptune (at a distance of 30 Astronomical Unit) to approximately 50 Astronomical Units from the Sun.

- It is the fifth space probe to achieve the escape velocity needed to leave the solar system.
- It completed its main mission of flying by Pluto in 2015, returning the most detailed images ever taken of the dwarf planet.

Scanning Distant Worlds

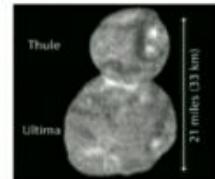
New Horizons is equipped with seven scientific instruments to gather data on its extended journey



1 REX	Radio measurements of atmospheric composition and temperature
2 PEPSSI	Composition and density of escaping plasma ions
3 SWAP	Solar wind and plasma spectrometer
4 LORRI	Long-range telescopic camera
5 SDC	Analysis of space dust hitting craft
6 RALPH	Color images and thermal maps
7 ALICE	Ultraviolet imaging spectrometer

What is Ultima Thule?

- "Ultima Thule" means "beyond Thule" – beyond the borders of the known world - symbolizing the exploration of the distant Kuiper Belt and Kuiper Belt objects.
- Ultima Thule is the farthest, some four billion miles (6.4 billion kilometers) away, and quite possibly the oldest, cosmic body ever photographed by humankind.
- It was discovered in 2014 with the help of the Hubble Space Telescope following which New Horizons started its journey towards it.
- It is an icy celestial body, shaped like a giant snowman and is believed to be 12-20 miles (20-30 kilometers) in size.
- Scientists at NASA have determined that the body was formed when two spheres, or "lobes," slowly gravitated towards each other until they stuck together.



INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS (ISC)

The Prime Minister inaugurated the 106th Indian Science Congress in Jalandhar, Punjab.

About:

- The 106th edition of the Indian Science Congress was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India at Jalandhar.
- The theme of the 106th science congress is 'Future India: Science and Technology'.**
- New Slogan:** It was announced that the famous slogan of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shahstrti - 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' and Atal Bihar Vajpayee - 'Jai Vigyan', is now upgraded. The new slogan will be **'Jai, Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan, Jai Anusandhan'**.
- Indian Science Congress is the world's largest science meet attended by many Nobel Laureates, Union Cabinet Ministers of India, science policymakers, administrators, eminent scientists, young men-women researchers & school children from across India & abroad.

Indian Science Congress

- Indian Science Congress is organised by the **Indian Science Congress Association** every year in the first week of January.
- The Indian Science Congress Association **was started in the year 1914 in Kolkata** on the lines of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Significance:

- The meet would help showcase what is being done, what can be done and what would define the future of Science and Technology in India.
- The event will play a pivotal role in stimulating scientific research effort and raising the scientific temperament in the country and the world.

AVANGARD SYSTEM OF RUSSIA

Avangard – The hypersonic missile system of Russia launched successfully.

About:

- Russia's new hypersonic missile system Avangard was recently tested successfully.
- The hypersonic missile could fly as fast as **Mach 20**.
- It can breach even the world's most advanced missile defence systems.

Working of Avangard:

- The Avangard utilizes an **intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)** and a **hypersonic glide vehicle**.

- Hypersonic cruise missiles (ICBM) are powered all the way to their targets using an advanced propulsion system called a SCRAMJET.
- Hypersonic cruise missiles can fly at altitudes up to 100,000 feet whereas hypersonic glide vehicles can fly above 100,000 feet.
- Hypersonic glide vehicles are placed on top of rockets, launched, and then glide on top of the atmosphere.
- These kind of weapons are manoeuvrable and therefore, unpredictable, they are difficult to defend against.

Significance:

- The test comes after U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans to pull out of a key Cold War-era nuclear weapons pact, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF).
- Thus it can increase tension between U.S. and Russia.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF)

- The treaty, signed in 1987 by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev, prohibited the development and deployment of midrange nuclear-tipped missiles.
- The agreement forced each country to dismantle more than 2,500 missiles with ranges of 310 to 3,420 miles from their arsenals.

BEIDOU NAVIGATION SATELLITE

China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) has started providing global services.

About:

- China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), touted as a rival to the widely-used American Global Positioning System (GPS), has started providing global services.
- Pakistan has become the first country to use the system.

Details:

- Named after the Chinese term for the 'Big Dipper' (an asterism in the constellation Ursa Major which is used as a navigation tool), the system started serving China in 2000 and the Asia-Pacific region in 2012.
- The positioning accuracy of the system has reached 10 metres globally and five metres in the Asia-Pacific region.
- It will be the **fourth** global satellite navigation system after the **US GPS, Russia's GLONASS and the European Union's Galileo system**.
- India is building its navigational system called the **Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS)** with an operational name of **NAVIC**.

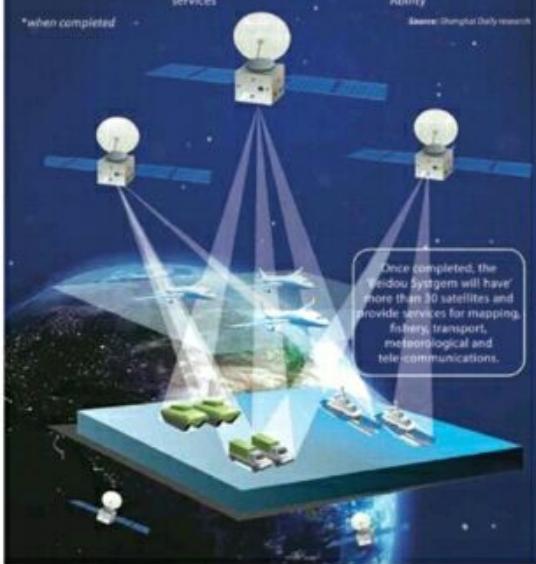
TRIALS START FOR BEIDOU NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE WORLD'S FOUR MAJOR GLOBAL SATELLITE NAVIGATION SYSTEMS

	BEIDOU (CHINA)*	GPS (UNITED STATES)	GLONASS (RUSSIA)	GALILEO (EUROPE)
NUMBER OF SATELLITE	30-Plus	21	27	30
POSITION ACCURACY	10 meter	6-10 meter	10 meter 4 meters (when used in conjunction with GPS)	
TIME OF COMPLETION	2020	1994	2009	2014
ADVANTAGES	Compatibility, telecommunication services	Mature System	Interference Resisting Ability	High Accuracy

*when completed

Source: Shanghai Daily research



INDIA TO SEE TWO ECLIPSES IN 2019

Two out of Five eclipses in 2019 will be visible in India.

About:

- According to an officer of Jiwaji Observatory, Astronomy enthusiasts will be able to watch five eclipses in 2019, two of which will be visible in India.

Jiwaji Observatory of Ujjain

The observatory was constructed by **Maharaja Sawai Raja Jaisingh of Jaipur** in 1719 when he was in Ujjain as the Governor of Malwa under the reign of King Muhammad Shah of Delhi.

- A **partial lunar eclipse** on July 16-17 and an **annular solar eclipse** on December 26 will be visible in India.

Do You Know?

Partial Lunar Eclipse:

- It happens when the Earth moves between the Sun and the Full Moon, but they are not precisely aligned.
- Only part of the Moon's visible surface moves into the dark part of the Earth's shadow.
- When that happens, a small part of the Moon's surface is covered by the darkest, central part of the Earth's shadow, called the umbra.
- The rest of the Moon is covered by the outer part of the Earth's shadow called the penumbra.

A Penumbral Lunar Eclipse:

- It occurs when the Sun, Earth, and the Moon are imperfectly aligned.
- When this happens, the Earth blocks some of the Sun's light from directly reaching the Moon's surface and covers all or part of the Moon with the outer part of its shadow, also known as the **penumbra**.
- Since the penumbra is much fainter than the dark core of the Earth's shadow, the umbra, a penumbral eclipse of the Moon is often difficult to tell apart from a normal Full Moon.

Total Lunar Eclipse:

- A total lunar eclipse takes place when the Earth comes between the Sun and the Moon and covers the Moon with its shadow. When this happens, the Moon can turn red, earning it the nickname of **Blood Moon**.

Annular Solar Eclipse:

- An annular solar eclipse happens when the Moon covers the Sun's centre, leaving the Sun's visible outer edges to form a "ring of fire" or annulus around the Moon.
- This area changes during the eclipse because the Moon and Earth are in constant motion: Earth continuously rotates around its axis while it orbits the Sun, and the Moon orbits Earth.

Partial Solar Eclipse:

- Partial solar eclipses happen when the Moon comes between the Sun and Earth, but the Moon only partially covers the Sun's disk.

Total Solar Eclipse:

- Total solar eclipses occur when the New Moon comes between the Sun and Earth and casts the darkest part of its shadow, the umbra, on Earth. A full solar eclipse, known as totality, is almost as dark as night.

ATAL TINKERING LAB HANDBOOK

Atal Tinkering Lab Handbook was released recently by the NITI Aayog.

About:

- NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) released the 'Atal Tinkering Lab Handbook – Nayee Dishayen, Naye Nirman, Naya Bharat on the eve of the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, also celebrated as the National Youth Day.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) of NITI Aayog

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is the government of India's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.
- It is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country and revolutionizing the innovation eco-system - touching upon the entire innovation life cycle through various programs.
- The purpose of the release is to take forward the spirit of tinkering and innovation across the country.
- The Handbook captures the experiences of the young innovators of the country with the Atal Tinkering Lab.
- A ten-month Student Entrepreneurship Programme was also announced.
- The programme is a fully-funded initiative to help the top six innovations of the Atal Tinkering Marathon 2017 to transform their innovative prototypes into functioning, scaled and go-to-market products.
- These innovations include prototypes across six crucial themes having a broader social impact, namely, clean energy, waste management, agri-tech, healthcare, smart mobility and water resources.

MICROSAT-R

PSLV C-44 lifted off Microsat-R with just 2 strap-on motors.

About:

- ISRO's PSLV C-44 successfully placed the 740 kg military satellite Microsat-R in orbit.
- The mission, with a modified PSLV with just dual strap-on motors (PSLV-DL), marked another first for ISRO as it provided an alternative to its normal six strap-on motors.
- This will enable the rocket to carry slightly higher payloads than its Core-Alone version.
- With Microsat-R, it is the first time an Indian satellite was being placed by ISRO in a low orbit at an altitude of 274 km.

- ISRO also demonstrated the usability of the fourth stage of the rocket after the satellites are ejected into orbit.
- However, ISRO has found a way to make use of this stage with student satellite **Kalamsat**, made by Space Kidz India, weighing just 1.26kg, attached to it.

SATURN'S RINGS

Saturn's rings are younger than thought according to recent findings from Cassini spacecraft.

About:

- Saturn's rings are younger than scientists thought and appeared within the last 10 to 100 million years, according to a research published recently based on findings from National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Cassini spacecraft.

Cassini Spacecraft

- It is an unmanned US-European probe that was launched in 1997 and ended in 2017 with a planned death plunge into Saturn's surface.
- Understanding Saturn's rings' age and mass is a fundamental goal of its mission.
- The sixth planet from the Sun formed about 4.5 billion years ago, along with the rest of the planets in our solar system, and spent the bulk of its existence without the characteristic rings it is known for today.
- Astronomers have long believed the rings could be young, and perhaps formed by collisions between the moons of Saturn or by a comet that shattered in close proximity to the planet.
- Some of these answers have come because of Cassini.
- By studying how the flight path of Cassini was deflected by the gravity of the rings, scientists were able to deduce the rings' mass and approximate age.
- The rings are made up of 99 percent ice.
- The study did not delve into the question of where the rings came from, but supported theories such as a comet or moon collision.

UNNATI—UNISPACE NANOSATELLITE ASSEMBLY

UNNATI program to build capacity development on nanosatellites was recently organized by ISRO.

About:

- UNNATI (Unispace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training) programme was recently organized by ISRO in Bengaluru.
- UNNATI is a capacity building programme on Nanosatellite development.
- It seeks to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations conference on the exploration and peaceful uses of outer space (UNISPACE-50).
- The programme provides opportunities to the participating developing countries to strengthen in assembling, integrating and testing of Nanosatellite.

NATIONAL SCIENCE CONGRESS FOR CHILDREN

The 26th edition of the National Children's Science Congress was recently held in Odisha.

About:

- National Children's Science Congress (NCSC) is a nationwide science communication programme started in the year 1993.
- It is a programme of National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science and Technology, New Delhi.
- It is a forum for children of the age-group of 10-17 years, both from formal school system as well as from out of school.
- Provides platform to children to exhibit their creativity and innovativeness and more particularly their ability to solve a societal problem experienced locally by using method of science.

The 26th National Children's Science Congress 2018:

- **Theme:** "Science Technology and Innovation for a Clean, Green and Healthy Nation".
- Children from across the country, 10 ASEAN and five Gulf countries along with several scientists attended it.

National Council for Science and Technology Communication

It is mandated to communicate Science and Technology to masses, stimulate scientific and technological temper and coordinate and orchestrate such efforts throughout the country.

Initiatives by NCSTC: Initiatives include Initiative for Research and Innovation in Science (IRIS), India Innovation Initiative-i3, Regional Innovation Science Hubs for Innovators (RISHI), Health and Nutrition through Community Radio.

Also include campaigns over the Year of Scientific Awareness, Year of Physics, Year of Astronomy, Year of Mathematics, observation of the National Science Day and National Mathematics Day, etc.

Other initiatives of NCSTC include:

- **Mission Enlighten:** It seeks to provide precise and effective messages in S&T responding to current and future challenges.
- **Mission eco NEXT:** It aims to provide S&T Communication skills centered upon eco-media, eco-design, eco-innovation & eco-cultures.
- **Science Express:** It is a unique mobile science exhibition mounted on a 16-coach, AC train, travelling across India since 2007.
- **National Science Day:** Every year on February 28, is celebrated as the National Science.
- **National Teachers' Science Congress (NTSC):** It provides a forum to teachers of the country to enhance their level of scientific awareness.
- **Mathematics Awareness Resources & Initiatives (MARI):** Under this, various initiatives are encouraged to enthuse, motivate and inculcate a positive attitude to learn mathematics in the younger generation.
- **Explaining Science behind Miracles:** It aims at providing basic skills in performing & investigating miracles and based on science behind it.
- **S&T Awareness for conservation of Resources & Sustainable development (STARS):** Nationwide training cum awareness programmes on understanding weather, climate change and disaster preparedness for sustainable development.

YOUNG SCIENTIST PROGRAM

Young Scientist Program was recently launched by ISRO for school students.

About:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently announced the Young Scientist programme for the young minds who want to explore themselves in space research.
- Under the programme, 3 students from each of the 29 States and 7 Union Territories will be selected for the Young Scientist program.
- They will be given lectures and they will be given access to R&D labs and practical experience of building a small satellite.
- Mostly 8th standard passed out students will be selected for the one-month programme.



8 LARGER EDITION

ETHICS, VALUES & INTEGRITY

ETHICAL ISSUES RELATED TO BUREAUCRACY

Shah Faesal's resignation opens up a debate on concepts of Civil Servant Neutrality and Activism.

About:

- 2010 Civil Service Examination topper (J&K Cadre) Shah Faesal quit from the IAS citing several reasons. He decided to contest elections in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).
- The reasons he mentioned varied from unabated killings in Kashmir, the lack of sincere outreach by the Union government, the threat to the special status of J&K to the subversion of autonomous institutions such as the RBI, CBI and NIA.
- This action by a bureaucrat generates some ethical dimension mainly due to two factors:
 - Whether a serving Civil Servant, before resignation, can (or should) criticise the government of the day or any of the prevailing conditions in the society?
 - Whether Civil Servants, who earn wide fame and recognition through government service should join Politics/a Political Party immediately after resignation?
- The above factors can be better understood if we first revisit the concept of Civil Servant Neutrality.

Concept of Civil Servant Neutrality:

- **Neutrality means** the Civil Servants should execute duties in accordance to laws and regulations without prejudice against or preferential treatment towards any groups or individuals.
- Further, the role of Civil Servants is to **render free and frank advice** which should not be coloured by any political considerations. Once a policy or programme has been approved by the elected government, it is the duty of the civil servant to faithfully and enthusiastically see to its implementation.
- **Kenneth Kernaghan (1976)** outlined a model of **political neutrality of the Civil Servants in a parliamentary system** of government in the following way:
 - **Politics and policy are separated** from administration. Politicians make policy decisions; public servants execute them. Public servants **do not publicly express their personal views on government policies** or administration.
 - Public servants provide objective advice to their political masters. In return, political executives protect the **anonymity of public servants** by publicly accepting responsibility for departmental decisions.
 - Public servants execute policy decisions loyally irrespective of the philosophy and programs of the party in power and regardless of their personal opinions.

Civil Servants and Post Retirement Jobs/Politics:

- **Politics:** Currently there is **no legal or constitutional bar** on the Civil Servants joining Politics after their retirement. There is also **no cooling off period** when they are disallowed from contesting polls.
- **Private Jobs:** However, such a **Cooling Period exists** for Civil Servants (1 year) taking up **private jobs**.
- **Government Jobs:** For few Civil Servants like the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), no other appointment under the government is allowed after their retirement.

Way Forward:

- Civil Servant Neutrality is an essential feature of Indian Administration. At the same time, there is need to allow civil servants to express their opinions freely. Thus Government must come out with a "Code of Ethics" for Civil Servants which can guide them and also complement the existing Code of Conduct.
- Further, as suggested by the **Election Commission of India** in 2013, a **Cooling off period** must be there between a Civil Servants retirement and entry into politics.

Case Study

- Do the actions of a bureaucrat involving criticism of the government and joining a political party immediately after retirement violate Civil Servant Neutrality?

Yes, it violates Civil Service Neutrality:

- The criticism of Government Policy by a serving bureaucrat violates the principle which requires them not to publicly express their personal views on government policies or administration.
- Also, such public criticism may **undermine the trust of people** on the government since the bureaucrat him(her)self is a part of that government.
- Also the decision to join a political party creates doubts regarding whether the Civil Servant had in letter and spirit followed the Civil Servant Neutrality where he is supposed to work free of any political ideology or philosophy.

No, it does not violate Civil Service Neutrality:

- **Liberal view:** While a Civil Servant is bound by Civil Servant Neutrality, as a **Citizen** he enjoys the Constitutional rights to express his opinion freely.
- Criticism of the prevailing conditions should not be taken as criticism of the government.
- It is the **fundamental duty** of every citizen of India to ensure that the **nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement**. Thus, highlighting gaps in the prevailing conditions and working to improve the same via political party route is part of the fundamental duty of the citizen.



KALA UTSAV

Ministry of Human Resource and Development has launched national level Kala Utsav to promote arts in schools.

About:

- Recently, national level Kala Utsav 2018 was organized in Delhi from 12th – 5th December, 2018, in which students participated from 34 States/UTs, Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas.

More about Kala Utsav:

- The Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), launched the national level Kala Utsav in the year 2015.
- Aim:** To promote arts in education, by nurturing and showcasing the artistic talent of school students, in the country.
- During Kala Utsav 2015 to 2017, group competitions were held** in four art forms: Dance, Music, Theatre, Visual Arts (Drawing, Painting, Sculpture, Crafts) where each State/UT sent one team for each form of art.
- However, **during 2018, solo competitions were held** in four art forms: Vocal Music, Instrumental Music, Dance, Painting, where each State/UT had to send two entries i.e. one male and one female student in each art form, in order to identify and showcase individual talent.

Importance:

- Kala Utsav helps to encourage creativity and improve skills of students. It gives students the opportunity to understand and celebrate cultural diversity, creates awareness about India's cultural heritage, prepares students as ambassadors of our culture.
- It is also an effort to mainstream students with special needs (differently-abled and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds) and celebrating their abilities.

DWIJING FESTIVAL

3rd edition of 'Dwijing Festival' celebrated to promote river tourism in Assam.

About:

- Dwijing Festival held on the bank of River Aie in Chirang District, Assam.

- It is an annual river festival.
- Dwijing' means river bank.
- Adventure sports, food mart, cultural events, traditional games were organized in the 12 day-long event.

About Dwijing Festival:

- Dwijing Festival is celebrated in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) region of Assam.
- The festival provides a platform** of earning for the people in the region by putting in to focus the business activities for the better economy generation through rural tourism.
- The festival also aims to provide **help to the flood victim families** through charity generation and distribution.
- The association of the **Hagrama Bridge**, the **longest rural river bridge of Assam**, with the festival further resulted in the increase of visitors to the festival.
- Organised by:** The festival is being organised jointly by Assam's tourism department, Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) and Bodoland Tourism.

About River Aie:

- River Aie originates from the Himalayan Mountains of Bhutan and flows through the Chirang and Bongaigaon districts of Assam before joining the river Brahmaputra.

SARANGKHEDA CHETAK FESTIVAL

The third edition of Sarangkheda Chetak Festival 2018-19 held in Maharashtra.

About:

- Location:** The third edition of Sarangkheda Chetak Festival 2018-19 held in Nandurbar district of Maharashtra.
- It is one of the oldest horse fairs in the country.
- Organised by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) in association with the Sarangkheda Committee.

About the Festival:

- The Chetak Festival is a 300-year-old horse fair held on the banks of the Tapi river.
- The festival hosts more than 2,500 horses and people from all over the State come in large numbers to witness world-class equestrian spectacle.
- Events like water sports, food festivals and horse races are being organised.

PRAYAGRAJ KUMBH

Prayagraj Ardh Kumbh Mela, 2019 is being held at Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj, from 15 January to 4 March 2019.

About:

- The Kumbh Mela (the festival of the sacred pitcher) is anchored in Hindu mythology. It is the largest public gathering and collective act of faith, anywhere in the world.

Kumbh Mela – Some Facts:

- Kumbh Mela is a religious pilgrimage that is celebrated **four times over a course of 12 years**. The geographical location of Kumbh Mela spans over four locations in India and the Mela site keeps rotating between one of the four pilgrimage places on four sacred rivers as listed below:
 - Haridwar** on the Ganges in Uttarakhand.
 - Ujjain- Simhastha** on the Shipra River in Madhya Pradesh.
 - Nashik - Trimbakeshwar Simhastha**, on the Godavari in Maharashtra.
 - Prayagraj** at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Uttar Pradesh.
- Types of Kumbh Melas:**
 - The **Maha Kumbh** occurs after 12 Purna Kumbh Melas i.e. every 144 years
 - The **Kumbh Mela** occurs every 12 years **at any of the four sites for Kumbh**.
 - Ardh Kumbh** ("Half Kumbh") Mela occurs every 6 years between the two Purna Kumbha Melas **at Allahabad and Haridwar only**.
 - The **Magh Mela** (annual Mini Kumbh) is celebrated in the month of Magh in the National calendar) every year at Prayagraj, except the years of 'Purna Kumbh Mela' and 'Ardh Kumbh Mela'.
- It is inscribed on the **UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**
- The origin of Kumbh Mela was transcribed by the **8th-century philosopher Shankara**.
- Historical mention:** First mention of was made some 2,000 years ago by the **Chinese traveler Hsuan Tsang** who visited India during the reign on King Harshvardhana.
- Determination of date:** The exact date of the Mela is determined, following the **Vikram Samvat calendar**.

Significance of the Kumbh Mela:

- Mythological significance:**
 - The founding myth of the Kumbh Mela points out to the **Puranas** (compilation of ancient legends).
 - It recounts how gods and demons fought over the **sacred pitcher** (Kumbh) of Amrit (nectar of immortality) called the **Ratna of Samudra Manthan**.

Social significance:

- Primarily, this is the congregation includes Ascetics, Saints, Sadhus, Sadhvis, Kalpvasis, and Pilgrims from all walks of life.
- Thus, Kumbh involves various Yajnas, the chanting of Vedic Mantras, holy elucidations combined with donations, made to the poor and needy.
- Religious assemblies are held where doctrines are debated**, standardized and conducted by renowned saints and sages.

Economic Significance:

- The Ardh Kumbh 2019 is expected to generate 1.2 lakh crore as per the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
- Hospitality sector, airlines and airports, tour operators are expected to gain significantly from this Ardh Kumbh.

Religious tourism Eco-tourism and medical tourism

- The Kumbh, not only generates revenue for the State in which it is being held but also for other neighbouring states as tourist also explore other destinations as well.

Employment Generation:

- Kumbh leads to the creation of new jobs, over 6 lakh in 2019, in the unorganized sector comprising of tour guides, taxi drivers, interpreters, volunteers.
- It involves setting up of new city in the huge Mela area involves 250 km roads and 22 pontoon bridges, which will make it the largest temporary city in the world.

COMMEMORATIVE COIN ON SIKH GURU GOBIND SINGH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will release a commemorative coin on Guru Gobind Singh to mark the birth anniversary of the 10th Sikh Guru.

About:

- He had also released a commemorative postage stamp to mark the occasion.
- Earlier, Prime Minister had attended 350th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh in Patna on January 5, 2017.



Guru Gobind Singh:

- Guru Gobind Singh, born as Gobind Rai, was the tenth Sikh Guru, a spiritual master, warrior, poet and philosopher.
- Before his death, **Guru Gobind Singh** decreed that the **Guru Granth Sahib** would be the final and perpetual guru of the Sikhs.
- Composition:** The text of Guru Granth Sahib comprises 6,000 sabads (line compositions), which are poetically rendered and set to rhythmic ancient north Indian classical form of music. The bulk of the scripture is classified into thirty one ragas,

- Language:** The main language used in the scripture is known as **Sant Bhasa**, a language related to both Punjabi and Hindi and used extensively across medieval northern India.
- Script:** The text is printed in Gurumukhi script, believed to have been developed by Guru Angad, but it shares the Indo-European roots found in numerous regional languages of India.

GANDHI PEACE PRIZE

Recently, Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 has been announced by Government of India.

About:

- The awardees were selected by the jury under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Awardees:

- Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari (2015):** For contribution in the field of rural development.
- For the year 2016, it is jointly awarded to **Akshaya Patra Foundation** (for mid-day meal program) and **Sulabh International** (for improving the condition of sanitation in India).
- Ekal Abhiyan Trust (2017):** For providing Education for Rural and Tribal Children in remote areas of the country.
- Shri Yohei Sasakawa (2018):** For his contribution in Leprosy Eradication in India and across the world.

Gandhi Peace Prize:

- The Gandhi Peace Prize was instituted in the year **1995** on the occasion of the 125th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- This **annual award** is given to individuals and institutions for their contributions towards social, economic and political transformation through non-violence and other Gandhian methods.
- The award carries a cash prize of Rs 1 crore, a citation and a Plaque as well as an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item.

HUNAR HAAT

Union Finance Minister and Union Minority Affairs Minister inaugurated "HunarHaat" on 12th Jan. 2019 in New Delhi.

About:

- Hunar Haats are organised by Ministry of Minority Affairs under **USTTAD** (Upgrading the Skills & Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development) scheme.

- The USTTAD scheme aims at preserving and promoting the rich heritage of the traditional arts and crafts of the Minority communities. This is one of the flagship programmes of the Ministry.

Significance:

- Supports Local Talent:** "HunarHaat" has proved to be a "credible brand" of "Indigenous Talent" of Indian artisans and craftsmen.
- "HunarHaat" has ensured **"Development with Dignity"** of artisans and craftsmen of the country.
- Provides a platform to fulfil the commitments under **"Make in India"**, **"Stand up India"** and **"Startup India"**.
- Hunar Haats have become a successful mission to provide **employment and income generation opportunities** with platforms for marketing the products of master artisans, craftsmen and culinary experts belonging to the minority communities.

KANI TRIBE

They are angry over Kerala High Court order allowing women to go up to Agasthyakoodam peak.

About:

- The major concern of Kani tribe is that, for centuries, their women have not gone to Agasthyakoodam, a pilgrimage for them, and now it is getting transformed into a trekking site insulting their faith.
- The Kanis, a tribal community numbering around 20,000 members, had opposed the Forest Department's guidelines, framed over a decade ago, on women going up the peak.

Kani Tribe:

- Kani is a tribe living in the **Western Ghats area of Kerala**.
- The Kanis worship an idol of Agastya Muni on the hill. According to them, permitting women beyond Athiramala, a base station of Agasthyakoodam, would interfere with their traditional rights of worship.
- Kanis are now settled on forest land in the southern districts of Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam.
- Their use of the forest plant **arogyapacha** (*trichopus zeylanicus*) as a key ingredient in a herbal remedy called **Jeevani** was noted by visiting scientists in the 1980s.
- Arogyapacha** is a small medicinal plant with slender stems and thick leaves. In India, it is seen in the forests of the south Western Ghats at an altitude of 1,000 metres. In ayurveda, arogyappacha is described as one of the 18 divine herbs.
- The forests of **Agasthya Hills** are a treasure trove of medicinal plants and the Kanis have a rich traditional knowledge of these resources.

MAKARAVILAKKU FESTIVAL SEASON

The sacred grove (poonkavanom) of Ayyappa at Sabarimala is all set to celebrate the annual Makaravilakku festival.

About:

- Makaravilakku is an **annual festival held on Makar Sankranti** in Kerala, India at the shrine of Sabarimala.
- The festival includes the **Thiruvabharanam** (sacred ornaments of Ayyappan) procession and a congregation at the hill shrine of Sabarimala.
- An estimated half a million devotees flow to Sabarimala every year to have a darshan (vision) of this ritual.
- The hill shrine of Lord Ayyappa in Kerala has been opened for the 21 day-long Makaravilakku festival season, marking the concluding phase of the annual pilgrimage season.
- Makaravilakku**, is a part of a religious ritual that is practiced in the past by the tribes in the forest of Ponnambalamedu (the place where Makaravilakku appears) and then later secretly continued by The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB).

History of Sabarimala:

- The history of Sabarimala and the Ayyappa deity is shrouded in mystery.
- As per M N Srinivas**, Ayyappa worship is not known further north than mid-Karnataka, where it was probably introduced from Kerala.
 - Due to the significant non-presence of god Ayyappa in the conventional *Ithihasa-Purana* texts, it becomes difficult to categorise the cult.
- Buddhist Influence:** According to historian A. Sreedhara Menon, Sabarimala history has more to do with Buddhism than with Brahmanism. "Ayyappa devotees strictly follow non-violence, vegetarianism and abstention from sex during the two months before the pilgrimage. It resembles the Ahimsa principles practiced by Buddhists.
- For some scholars, Ayyappa is **Nilakantha Avalokiteswara** depicted in the Buddhist Puranas.
- Another uniqueness of the temple is the presence of **Vavar (a Muslim deity)** in its premises.
- Some Christian influences could also be identified. Sabarimala pilgrims visit **Arthunkal church**, where thousands of them return their malas (string of beads).
- Therefore, Sabarimala becomes significant example for the **mixed religious culture**.
- From this **heterogeneous identity**, the Sabarimala space witnessed a transformation into the Brahmanic fold of Hinduism, especially in the twentieth century.

PETROGLYPH SITE

Andhra Pradesh's second largest petroglyph site, containing about 80 petroglyphs, has been discovered at Mekala Benchi in Kurnool district.

About:

- Mekala Benchi** has petroglyphs dating back from the **Neolithic to the Megalithic period**. **Kandanathl carvings** range from the prehistoric to the historic period. Kandanathl, with 200 petroglyphs, is also in Kurnool district.
- These petroglyphs, or rock carvings, become a major site of **Neolithic** settlements in south India.
- Two boulders**, one known locally as '**Boodida Konda**' (ash-coloured hill) and the other an unnamed granite hillock, mostly have images of **bulls or bull-riding**, in addition to **human figures, an elephant, tiger-like animals and cupules**.
- The current archeological site, at the granite foothills of Boodida Konda, could possibly a Neolithic settlement.
- Proof of Being a Neolithic Settlement:** Settled village life and the finished stone axe are salient features of the Neolithic age. Neolithic communities settled on top of granitoid hills or levelled terraces on hillsides or on valley floors.
- Hence, the current archaeological site, at the granite foothills of Boodida Konda, fits the description of a Neolithic settlement.
- The present day **Gollas and Kurubas (grazing communities)**, who are predominant in this region, are the living examples of the first pastoralists who resembles Neolithic people.

What are Petroglyphs?

- Petroglyphs are rock carvings made by pecking directly on the rock surface using a stone chisel and a hammer stone. When the desert varnish (or patina) on the surface of the rock was chipped off, the lighter rock underneath was exposed, creating the petroglyph.
- Petroglyphs are powerful cultural symbols that reflect the complex societies and religions of the surrounding tribes.

75th ANNIVERSARY OF HOISTING OF TRICOLOUR

PM Modi renames three popular islands in Andaman and Nicobar.

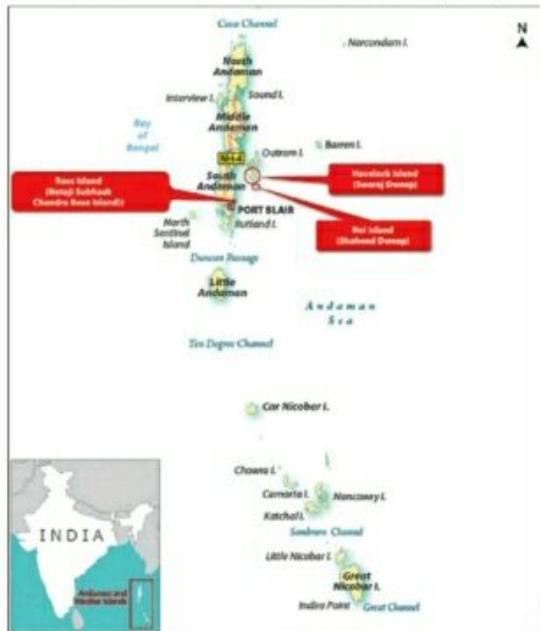
About:

- Central government renamed three islands in Andaman and Nicobar – **Ross Island, Neil Island and Havelock Island** as **Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island, Shaheed Dweep and Swaraj Dweep**, respectively.

- Occasion:** The renaming of the islands took place to mark the 75th year of freedom fighter Subhash Chandra Bose hoisting the national flag at Port Blair.
- Government also released a commemorative postal stamp, coin, and First Day Cover** to mark the hoisting of Tricolour on Indian soil by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

Background:

- Bose had hoisted the flag at Port Blair on **December 30, 1943**, as he believed that Port Blair was the first territory to be freed from British rule.
- This was done after the Japanese captured that area during the time of the Second World War.
- Bose had reportedly suggested** back then that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands be renamed as Shaheed and Swaraj Dweep.



About the Islands:

- NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE DWEEP (Ross Island)** was once a settlement where the British established a penal colony and later buildings including troop barracks. It was gradually abandoned following a massive earthquake and World War II.
- SWARAJ DWEEP (Havelock Island)**, 39 km northeast of Port Blair, is one of the bigger islands in the Andaman group with an area of 113 sq km. It has several white sand beaches, rich coral reefs and lush green rainforest.
- SHAHEED DWEEP (Neil Island)** is a miniature version of Havelock Island, just south of it. Its beaches are named

after characters from the Ramayana (Laxmanpur, Sitapur, Ramnagar, etc.) The island is 5 km across at its widest point.

Places which have seen Name Change Recently

- Rajahmundry as Rajamahendravaram in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh;
- Outer Wheeler as APJ Abdul Kalam Island, situated in Bhadrak district of Odisha;
- Arikkod as Areekode in Malappura district of Kerala;
- Pindari as Pandu-Pindara in Jind district of Haryana;
- Samphur as Sanphure in Kiphire district of Nagaland;
- Allahabad as Prayagraj;
- Faizabad as Ayodhya.
- Mughalsarai Junction as Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction.

What is the Procedure to Change the Name of a Place?

State:

- The Constitution of India provides for the renaming of a state under Article 3 and Article 4.
- The procedure of renaming of the state can be initiated by either the Parliament or the State Legislator and the procedure is as follows:
 - A bill for renaming a state may be introduced in the Parliament on the recommendation of the President.
 - Before the introduction of the bill, the President shall send the bill to the respective state assembly for expressing their views within a stipulated time.
 - The views of the state assembly are non binding.
 - On the expiry of the period, the bill will be sent to the Parliament for deliberation.
 - The bill in order to take the force of a law must be passed by a simple majority.
 - The bill is sent for approval to the President.
 - After the approval of the said bill, the bill becomes a law and the name of the state stands modified.

City:

- Renaming of cities is the prerogative of the state government. Several states in India have legislations to that effect.
- For instance, states of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh incorporate the provision in their Revenue Code, whereas others have it in their respective Reorganization Acts.
- The above legislations require a mere notification in the Gazette for changing the name, which means a Cabinet decision to that effect is required.
- However, the Central Government through the Ministry of Home Affairs added the additional requirement of obtaining a No-Objection Certificate from the Centre as well, which has been accorded judicial validity in Sharan Desai v. State of Karnataka.

ADOPT A HERITAGE PROJECT

Ministry of Tourism is supporting the development of mobile audio guide app for five iconic sites under Adopt a Heritage Project.

About:

- The five iconic sites for which the mobile Audio Guide App is to be developed are:
 - Amer Fort (Rajasthan),
 - Kaziranga (Assam),
 - Colva Beach (Goa),
 - Kumarakom (Kerala), and
 - Mahabodhi Temple (Bihar).
- The agencies involved such as Dalmia Bharat Pvt. Ltd. would become '**Monument Mitras**' through the innovative concept of '**Vision Bidding**', which does not involve financial bidding.

Vision Bidding

- Vision Bidding is a form of bidding where the agency with best vision for the heritage site will be given an opportunity to associate their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) activities with a heritage site.
- They would also get a chance of limited visibility in the premises and the Incredible India website.
- The aim is an enhancement of tourist experience and promotion of the incredible heritage sites to bring them on tourism map.

Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan:

- Aim:** It aims to involve public sector companies, private sector companies and corporate citizens/individuals to take up the responsibility for making our heritage and tourism more sustainable.
- Strategy adopted:** This is to be done through development, operation and maintenance of world-class tourist infrastructure and amenities at ASI/State heritage sites and other important tourist sites in India.
- Joint collaboration:** This project is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and State/UTs Governments.
- It also aims to develop synergy among all partners to effectively promote "**responsible tourism**".

ASURGARH FORT

Recently, 2,300 years-old artefacts found in Asurgarh Fort in Odisha.

About:

- Archaeologists have unearthed artefacts believed to be 2,300 year-old while carrying out excavation at the **Asurgarh Fort** in Odisha's Kalahandi district.
- The items excavated were found to be dating from **Mauryan period** (322 BCE 185 BCE) to **Kushan period** (during the first three centuries of the Common Era). The present archaeological work revealed a number of **brick structures**.
- Asurgarh people:** These findings reveal that these people probably used stone rubbles and tile fragments for flooring their houses and the streets.
- Other artefacts found:** Besides, silver punch marked coins, silver and copper toe ring and ear rings, beads of coral, carnelian, jasper, beryl, garnet and agate have been found.
- The findings of coral beads and imperial variety of silver punch mark coins strongly indicates about **long distant trade** and association of hinterland people with seafaring people.

INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE DURING HARAPPA TIMES

The well preserved skeletal remains of a couple of Harappa times were discovered recently at Rakhigarhi.

About:

- Origin of Institution of Marriage:** The near-complete skeletal remains of a young male and female, believed to be a couple, have been discovered at a recently excavated archaeological.
- According to the scientists, this suggests that an institution of marriage could have originated in India as the gender of the skeletal remains are clearly established as male and female.

Practice of Burials during Harappa Times:

- Rarity of Joint burials:** Most archaeological recoveries show individuals were **buried separately** in Harappan times. Joint graves have been very rare, and almost none have been found containing a couple.
- The only joint burial of a couple** discovered earlier has been from **Lothal in Gujarat**.
- But there, the skeletal remains of the male and female were found placed over one other, indicating that they **may have been buried** at the same place, **but at different times**.

Present Findings:

- In the present case, the skeletal remains were found in a supine position with arms and legs extended along with the remains of pots and stone-bead jewellery found close to the burial site. It points to the possibility of a **ceremonial burial with rituals**.
- The researchers believed that the **institution of marriage** could have been originated in the Harappan civilisation.



10 MISTER EDITION MISCELLANEOUS

AN OPEN AIR LAB IN SENO BALLENA FJORD

Scientists analysing marine species of Chile's Seno Ballena.

About:

- Four researchers from the Austral University of Chile embarked from Punta Arenas for the remote Seno Ballena fjord.
- In the southernmost part of Chile's Patagonia region, scientists are studying whales, dolphins and algae.
- Aim:** To help predict how climate change will affect the world's oceans.
- The expedition members are measuring the effects of the melting glacier on Santa Ines.

Significance:

- The researchers are analyzing the chemical, physical and biological variables of the waters, which show lower levels of pH, salinity and calcium, especially in the shallowest areas, as a consequence of climate change.
- Climate change poses a threat to its ecosystem as the melting of a glacier on Santa Ines Island and increased rainfall have led to rising levels of freshwater.
- If that continues, it would have dire consequences for whales as the plankton they feed on could disappear.
- Under normal circumstances, when there is an abundance of microalgae, these provide food for the zooplankton that subsequently nourishes the food chain all the way up to whales.

Findings Till Now:

- For now, researchers have noted a slight drop in the number of humpback whales but an increase in other species such as sea lions, which previously were not present in that region, and dolphins.
- They also found a lower concentration of calcium carbonate, something which can affect the shells of marine organisms such as mollusks or krill, a staple of a whale's diet.
- The crab, a species vital to the economy of the region around the strait, could be affected as it needs calcium to harden its shell.

Why this Place?

- The fjord produces the kind of conditions that should be seen in other marine systems in the next few decades, when

dramatic changes are expected in the environment due to increased carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere and the melting of glaciers.

- This place is like an actual experiment in nature because it allows knowing what will happen without imagining it.
- The chilly fjord waters provide one of the most productive marine habitats in the world, where sardines and krill can be found in huge numbers.

DIRECT-TO-HOME (DTH) NEW REGULATIONS

The new regulatory framework by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), will be effective from February 1.

About:

- The new regulatory framework by the TRAI will apply to all DTH and local cable operators.
- Consumer choice Increases:** Under these rules, customers can choose which channels they wish to watch rather than pick from pre-decided packs offered by service providers.

New Rules and their Benefits:

- Every channel on a la carte basis:** The new framework makes it mandatory for the service provider to offer every channel on a la carte basis.
- Maximum Retail Price (MRP) to be displayed on screen:** The MRP of the channels needs to be displayed on the TV screen through the Electronic Program Guide. Hence, the distributor will not be able to charge more than what has been declared by a broadcaster.
- Can offer bouquets of channels:** Broadcasters and distributors can also offer bouquets of channels. However, the price of the bouquet is also to be published transparently.
- Less monthly charges:** This is likely to bring down the monthly cable/DTH bill.

How much will Consumers Need to Pay?

- The framework puts in place a network capacity fee with an upper ceiling of ₹130 for 100 channels.
- Any subscriber who opts for more than 100 channels can choose additional channels in each slab of 25 channels with a maximum price of ₹20 per slab.
- A high definition channel** will be treated as two standard definition (SD) channels for the purpose of determining the network capacity fee.

About Direct-To-Home

- DTH is defined as the reception of satellite programmes with a personal dish in an individual home.
- Geostationary satellites are used for this purpose.
- Signals are transmitted through Ku-Band (12 to 18 GHz).
- DTH puts the broadcaster directly in touch with the consumer.

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

- It is a statutory body set up under Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act, 1997.
- **Objective:** To provide a fair and transparent environment that promotes a level playing field and facilitates fair competition in the market.
- It regularly issues orders and directions on subjects such as tariffs, quality of service, interconnections, DTH services and mobile number portability.

Telecommunications Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT)

- The TRAI Act was amended to establish TDSAT.
- It was set up to adjudicate any dispute between a licensor and a licensee, between two or more service providers, between a service provider and a group of consumers, and to hear and dispose of appeals against any direction, decision or order of TRAI.

WOMEN OF INDIA ORGANIC FESTIVAL

Sixth 'Women of India Organic Festival' was organized by WCD Ministry in Chandigarh.

About:

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) organized the 6th 'Women of India Organic Festival' in Chandigarh.
- **Objective:**
 - To celebrate and promote women farmers and entrepreneurs in the organic sector from the remotest parts of India.
 - To encourage Indian women entrepreneurs and farmers to connect with more buyers and thus, empower them through financial inclusion, while promoting organic culture in India.
 - To educate people about the ministries various initiatives and schemes relating to women and children.
 - To provide a platform to showcase the varied products of women farmers and entrepreneurs.

- The Festival showcased over 1,000 varied organic products, including fabric, wellness, grains, seeds, jewellery, bakery items and a lot more.
- The festival has been held annually in New Delhi since 2015, and makes its debut in Chandigarh this year.
- Union Minister for WCD also inaugurated National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) Mohali Regional Centre.

National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development

- It is a premier organisation devoted to promotion of voluntary action research, training and documentation in the overall domain of women and child development.
- It is an autonomous organisation under the aegis of **Ministry of WCD**.
- It is established in New Delhi in the year 1966 under Societies Registration Act of 1860.
- It has established four Regional Centres at Guwahati, Bangalore, Lucknow and Indore.
- It functions as an apex institution for **training functionaries** of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme.
- It has also been designated, by the Ministry of WCD, the nodal institution for imparting training on **Child Rights and Prevention of trafficking of women children for SAARC countries**.
- Institute's expertise and performance was recognized by UNICEF in 1985 when it awarded the **Maurice Pate Award** for its outstanding contribution in the field of Child Development.

Maurice Pate Award:

- The award, named in honour of the first UNICEF Executive Director Maurice Pate, is given to an individual or organization displaying extraordinary example and exemplary innovation and inspirational leadership in contributing to the advancement of the UNICEF mandate for children on a national, regional and global scale.

GAU KALYAN CESS

Uttar Pradesh (UP) government has decided to levy cess to pay for cowsheds in UP to tackle the menace of stray cattle.

About:

- The State government decided to introduce an additional levy of up to 0.5% as '**Gau Kalyan Cess**' on more than half-a-dozen public sector infrastructure departments, including excise, to fund and maintain the project.

- The levy imposed on mandi parishads will now be doubled from 1% to 2%, while a cess of 0.5% will be levied on the toll tax collected by the government agencies for travel on State-built roads and highways.
- It has decided to set up 'asthayi govansh ashray sthal' or temporary cow shelters in both rural and urban areas with a capacity to house a minimum of 1,000 cows and cow progeny.
- These shelters would be made financially 'self-sustainable' through sale of milk, dung and compost.
- If cattle-rearers and farmers leave their animals in public places, on roads or on the private land of other people, a fine will be imposed on them.

NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE (NCI)

India's largest cancer institute in Haryana's Jhajjar to open in January.

About:

- It will operate under the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi.
- Different facilities such as surgical oncology, radiation oncology, medical oncology, anaesthesia and palliative care and nuclear medicine will be available at the institute.
- It will also have the **first-of-its-kind tissue repository** in India.
- It will operate on the lines of National Cancer Institute in the US and German Cancer Research Centre (DKFZ) as a nodal centre for indigenous research, promotive, preventive and curative aspects of care and human resource development.
- The institute is aimed to plan, conduct and coordinate research on cancers which are **more specific to India** — like tobacco-related cancers, cancer of the uterine cervix, gall bladder cancer and liver cancers.
- Some beds will be dedicated for **translational research** on India-specific cancers.
- The NCI will be the **nodal institution** for all activities related to cancer in the country.
- It will act as an **apex body** for the network of the State Cancer Institutes and Tertiary Care Cancer Centres.

Do You Know?

There are more than 80 lakh cancer patients in the world. Nearly 29 lakhs of them are in India. About 11 lakh cancer cases are detected every year.

PAINT YOUR TOILET

Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched a month-long campaign, "Swachh Sundar Shauchalaya" that commenced on 1st January.

About:

- Swachh Sundar Shauchalaya has been organised to **promote ownership and sustained usage** of toilets and also provide a **facelift** to toilets built under the Swachh Bharat Mission.

The Campaign:

- The campaign comprises a unique Contest, under which, households are being mobilised to **paint and decorate** their toilets creatively, including Swachh Bharat logos and safe sanitation messaging.
- The campaign has been rolled out across rural India and will involve rural communities in the 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats across the country.
- The ministry is monitoring the progress through a specially designed portal.
- Individual households, Gram Panchayats and Districts will be awarded on the basis of number of toilets painted and the quality and creativity of their work.
- It will be spearheaded by Gram Panchayats and coordinated by district administrations.
- This campaign is one more innovative step by the Government to reinforce Swachh Bharat as a Jan Andolan as envisaged by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

Do You Know?

The sanitation coverage in rural India has already crossed 98%, with over 9 crore toilets built under Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) since its launch.

POSTAGE STAMP FOR BENGAL'S ROSOGOLLA

A postage stamp and special cover were released to mark 150 years of the invention of 'Bengal's Rosogolla' by Nabin Chandra Das.

About:

- The stamp was launched at the inaugural function of 'Baghbazar-O-Rasogolla Utsab', a three-day Rosogolla Utsav held as a tribute to Nabin Chandra Das.
- West Bengal had won the **Geographical Indication (GI)** in 2017 for 'Banglar Rasogolla' after tussle with Odisha.
- Earlier, the State government observed **November 14** as Rosogolla Day to mark one year of obtaining the GI tag.

SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE AAPDA PRABANDHAN PURASKAR

Government of India announced winner of Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar.

About:

- The award is to be announced every year on 23rd January, on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.
- Eligibility:** Only Indian nationals and Indian institutions, who have excelled in areas of **Disaster Management**; like Prevention, Mitigation, Preparedness, Rescue, Response, Relief, Rehabilitation, Research/Innovations or Early Warning are eligible for the award.
- For institutional awards, voluntary organizations, corporate entities, academic/research institutions, response/uniformed forces or any other institution may apply for the award.
- If the awardee is an institution, it shall receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 51 lakhs. For individual awardee, winner shall receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 5.00 lakhs.
- For the year 2019, **8th Battalion of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)** located at Ghaziabad has been selected for the award for its commendable work in Disaster Management.

INSECT ALLIES

Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which is responsible for developing military technologies in the U.S. has launched a new program called 'Insect Allies'.

About:

- In this program, researchers have been asked to develop insects that introduce **genetically modified viruses into crops**.
- According to DARPA, it is being done to address infections.
- Main Concerns:** This development is seen as a new form of agricultural warfare.
- As per journal "Science", the programme appears as an effort to develop biological agents for hostile purposes".

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIAN CINEMA

National Museum of Indian cinema recently launched.

About:

- National Museum of Indian Cinema was recently launched in Mumbai.

- The museum has a 30-hour-long digitised footage of World War II.
- With this, the valour of 1.5 lakh Indian soldiers who died in that war will be known to the world.
- Films have played a huge role in India's soft power as Indian films are immensely popular outside the country also.

SWACHH BHARAT GRAND CHALLENGE

DIPP Swachh Bharat Grand Challenge Awards presented

About:

- As part of the Swachhata Pakhwada held from 1st to 15th November, 2018, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) organized a Swachh Bharat Grand Challenge.

Swachh Bharat Grand Challenge:

- It was organized to reward innovative solutions by **DIPP recognized Start-ups** in the country.
- Four areas of sanitation, waste management, water and wastewater management and air management were selected for the grand challenge.

Swachhata Pakhwada

- It was started in April 2016.
- Objective:** Bringing a fortnight of intense focus on the issues and practices of cleanliness by engaging Government of India Ministries/Departments in their jurisdictions.
- The Ministries observing Swachhata Pakhwada are monitored closely using online monitoring system of Swachhata Samiksha.
- For the Pakhwada fortnight, observing ministries are considered as Swachhata Ministries and are expected to bring qualitative Swachhata improvements in their jurisdictions.

KAVERI CRATER

A research on Kaveri Crater won the Radhakrishna Prize 2018.

About:

- A recent research by two Indian scientists hints at asteroid strike 800 million to 550 million years ago, creating a crater in peninsular India.
- According to the scientists, the **land between present day Nilgiris and Kodaikanal** is located on a crater formed by the impact.
- They have named the area 'Kaveri Crater'.

- Kaveri Crater is between Nilgiris and Kodaikanal. Both the Palghat Gap (a mountain pass) and Dhimbam Ghats are a part of the Kaveri Crater, with the geological evidence stretching up to Belakavadi and Shivanasamudra in Karnataka.
- The study, which was funded by the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences, suggests that the crater has a diameter of 120 km.
- Unlike the impact event that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs about 65 million years ago, this one took place when there were very primitive life forms.
- Based on crater size and impact angle, the geologists concluded that the extra-terrestrial object was at least five km in diameter.
- Unlike smaller craters, Kaveri Crater can be visualised only through satellite images.
- Their findings were published in the Journal of the Geological Society of India and the study won the Radhakrishna Prize 2018 for best paper.

ONE FAMILY ONE JOB SCHEME

Sikkim recently launched the 'One Family One Job' Scheme.

About:

- Sikkim government recently launched the 'One Family One Job' scheme which entitles **one government job for every family in the state**.
- Over 12,000 unemployed youths were handed out appointment letters.
- However, the letters were awarded **only to members of those families which do not have a government job** at present.
- Over 25,000 already employed but unregularised government employees would also be subsequently regularised within 2019 according to their seniority.

OXFAM REPORT

Nine Indians own as much as half the country, according to the recent Oxfam report.

About:

- India's top 9 billionaires own as much as the country's poorest half, according to an **annual report by anti-poverty campaigner Oxfam**, which looked at inequalities in 2018.
- The world's richest 26 billionaires own as much wealth as the 3.8 billion people in the bottom half of humanity.
- In India, the wealth of billionaires rose by over one-third from \$325 billion to \$440 billion, which translates to Rs 2,200 crore a day.

- While billionaires' wealth grew by 12%, the wealth of the 3.8 billion in the poorest half of the world population dropped by 11%.
- In India, the richest 1% added 39% to their wealth, while the poorest half added just 3%.
- The world's richest man Jeff Bezos, owner of Amazon, saw his fortune increase to \$112 bn.

PHILIP KOTLER AWARD

PM Modi received the Philip Kotler Award

About:

- Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the first-ever Philip Kotler Presidential award in New Delhi.
- The award focuses on the **triple-bottom-line of 'people, profit and planet'**. It will be offered annually to the leader of a nation.
- According to the award citation, PM Modi was selected for his **outstanding leadership for the nation**.
- Philip Kotler is a professor of marketing at Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management.

RailTel

Public WiFi provider RailTel is turning railway stations into digital hubs.

About:

- RailWire WiFi at 746 railway stations across the country has emerged as **one of the world's largest public WiFi networks**.
- The network is provided by **RailTel** which is a '**Mini Ratna central PSU** (Public Sector Undertaking) under the Ministry of Railways.
- RailTel is not only one of the largest but also **one of the fastest** public WiFi networks.
- Free WiFi services to commuters are being provided under 'RailWire', RailTel's retail broadband initiative.
- WiFi at rural railway stations:** RailTel has also started providing WiFi at rural railway stations, which are small stations catering to rural populations that do not have access to state-of-the-art telecom infrastructure.

SAKSHAM VANS

SAKSHAM vans to promote energy conservation flagged off recently.

About:

- Recently SAKSHAM (Sanrakshan Kshmata Mahotsav) vans were flagged off to promote and **create awareness among people on the need of oil and gas conservation for the future and the methods to do it.**
- The van will travel to 30 districts to create awareness on conservation of energy for a better future.
- The Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) in association with Oil and Gas Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) has been organising **SAKSHAM as a month-long campaign** to sensitise citizens about the acute need for petroleum conservation.
- PCRA will run people-centric drives throughout the country to **encourage a behavioural change.**
- Even a small deed like turning off the car engine at traffic signal stoppages and conservatively using heater and AC can not only add up household savings but also lead to reduced pollution levels and a stronger Indian rupee.

LAUNCH OF SCIENCE CHANNELS

Recently two science channels were launched.

About:

- The Department of Science and Technology and public broadcaster Doordarshan recently launched two science channels – **DD Science and India Science.**
- DD Science is a one-hour slot on Doordarshan national channel, India Science is an Internet-based channel.
- National level initiatives:** The two science communication platforms are national-level initiatives to elevate science into a celebration and bring it close to everyday life.
- These channels will have science-based documentaries, studio-based discussions, virtual walkthroughs of scientific institutions, interviews and short films and will be completely free to access.
- These channels have been supported by the Department of Science and Technology and are being implemented and managed by Vigyan Prasar.
- The two science channels which are milestones in the history of science communication in India are the **first step in creating a national science channel for the country.**
- While India Science (www.indiascience.in) is already a 24x7 presence, DD Science may also be scaled up to a full-fledged channel in the future.

UDAAN SCHEME DISCONTINUED

Udaan Scheme – for skilling youth in J&K discontinued.

About:

- The Centre has decided to withdraw UDAAN, a Special Industry Initiative (SII) scheme in Jammu and Kashmir after it was launched five years ago in 2013.
- The scheme meant to give skill training to the local youth in partnership with corporate entities and make them employable.
- Udaan was meant to train graduates, postgraduates, and three-year diploma holders in engineering from J&K for a period of five years.
- The National Skill Development Corporation ran the scheme, which was funded by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)
- Under the Narendra Modi government, Udaan was being implemented by the Skill Development Ministry, set up in 2014 by carving it out from the Labour Ministry.

Reasons for the Discontinuation:

- Not many youths showed interest in taking up employment outside the Valley, and MNCs were unable to provide all opportunities in Kashmir.
- Two other such employment schemes – Skill Development and Employment Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana – are being run in J&K to train and provide employment to the youths.

UK SINHA COMMITTEE

IBBI recently set up a committee under UK Sinha to facilitate insolvency.

About:

- The insolvency regulator Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has set up a working group under former Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Chairman UK Sinha to recommend a complete regulatory framework.
- The committee is expected to facilitate insolvency resolution and liquidation of debtors in a corporate group within the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).
- At present, the IBC provides for the resolution or liquidation of only individual stressed companies.
- So a framework within the IBC is sought to be created for the resolution/liquidation of an entire stressed corporate group having several entities in multiple National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) jurisdictions. The two-year-old **IBC has been the most successful mechanism to recover debt.**
- A recent RBI report suggested that the average recovery by banks, based on the amount filed through the IBC, was as much as 41.3 per cent in FY18, against just 12.4 per cent through other mechanisms such as the SARFAESI Act, Debt Recovery Tribunals and Lok Adalats.



Chapter

11 MAGZTER EDITION CURRENT AFFAIRS QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice Questions

- Q.36** With reference to System of Rice Intensification (SRI), consider the following statements:
- It is an indigenous rice production practice developed in Andhra Pradesh.
 - It helps in reducing methane emission.
 - SRI crops do not require continuous soil submergence.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 3 only
- Q.37** In Indian Bridge Management System (IBMS) during inventory creation each bridge is assigned with which of the following numbers?
- Unique identification number or National Identity Number
 - Bridge Location Number
 - Bridge Classification Number
 - Structural Rating Number
 - Socio-Economic Bridge Rating Number
- Select the correct answer from codes given below:
- 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
 - 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
 - 1, 3, 4 and 5 only
 - 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- Q.38** With reference to North East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS), consider the following statements:
- This scheme covers all North-Eastern states except Sikkim.
 - It is valid for 5 years only.
 - It provides central capital investment incentive, central interest incentive and transport incentive.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.39** With reference to Dwijing festival, consider the following statements:
- It is an annual river festival.
 - It is celebrated in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) region of Assam.
 - It is held on the banks of river Barak.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.40** With reference to Sarangkheda Chetak Festival, consider the following statements:
- It is a 300 year old horse fair.
 - It is organized by Ministry of Culture.
 - It is held on the banks of river Tapi.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.41** Which of the following is under Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)?
- Cartagena Protocol
 - Nagoya Protocol
 - Aichi Targets
- Select the correct answer from codes given below:
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.42** Which of the following is an invasive tree with reference to Shola grasslands in Western Ghats?
- Wattle trees
 - Eucalyptus trees
 - Pine trees
- Select the correct answer from codes given below:
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.43** With reference to black-striped mussel *Mytilopsis sallei*, consider the following statements:
- It is an invasive species found in Kochi, Mumbai and Vishakapatnam in India.
 - It is native to the South China Sea.
 - It is a biofouler.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 3 only
- Q.44** Rethinking REDD+ report, recently seen in news, is published by which of the following?
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
 - United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
 - Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)
 - United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
- Q.45** With reference to Cinereous vulture, consider the following statements:
- It is a migratory bird.
 - It has a blacked-lipped pink beak.
 - It is classified as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.46** With reference to Bank Amalgamation in India, consider the following statements:
- Amalgamation of Bank of Baroda, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank has been approved.
 - Amalgamation of banks is done through an executive order by the cabinet.
 - Bank of Baroda is the transferee bank; Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank are the transferor banks.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3

1. Vote-on-account deals only with the expenditure side of the government's budget.
2. An Interim Budget is a complete set of accounts, including both expenditure and receipts.
3. The term 'budget' is mentioned only once in the constitution.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q.58 Outbreak Readiness and Business Impact report is released by which of the following?

- (a) World Bank
- (b) International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- (c) Oxfam
- (d) World Economic Forum (WEF)

Q.59 Gau kalyan Cess is recently levied by which one of the following State government?

- (a) Uttar Pradesh
- (b) Bihar
- (c) Madhya Pradesh
- (d) Rajasthan

Q.60 Consider the following statements regarding National Cancer Institute(NCI):

1. The NCI will be the nodal institution for all activities related to cancer in the country.
2. It will also have the first-of-its-kind tissue repository in India.
3. It will operate under the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q.61 Consider the following statements regarding Bengal's Rosogolla:

1. The Geographical Identification tag for Bengal Rosogolla was given to West Bengal and Odisha.
2. Nabin Chandra Das has invented Bengal Rosogolla.
3. The West Bengal State government observed November 14 as Rosogolla Day.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q.62 Consider the following statements regarding Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar:

1. 8th Battalion of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has been selected for 2019 award
2. Only Indian nationals and Indian institutions are eligible for the award.

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

Q.63 Consider the following statements regarding Kala Utsav:

1. Ministry of Culture, Government of India launched the national level Kala Utsav in the year 2015.
2. The main aim of the event is to promote arts in education.

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

Q.64 Consider the following statements regarding Khushi Scheme:

1. It is a female health and hygiene program to provide free sanitary pads to girl students.
2. It is launched by Maharashtra government.
3. It aims to promote higher retention of girls in school.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q.65 Consider the following statements regarding plain packaging:

1. In December 2012, Australia became the first country to introduce plain packaging.
2. Plain packaging standardizes the appearance of tobacco products.
3. It prohibits display of brand name on the packaging.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

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

Q.66 Consider the following statements regarding Aardram mission:

1. It is launched by Tamil Nadu government.
2. It aims at creating people friendly health delivery system in the state.

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

Q.67 Consider the following statements regarding Global Conference on Primary Health Care :

1. The conference marked 40 years of the historic Alma Ata Declaration.
2. The conference was co-organized by collective initiative of Government of Uzbekistan and World Health Organization.

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

- Q.68** Consider the following statements regarding Sports Authority of India:
- It is the apex national sports body of India.
 - It is established in 1984 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
 - It is registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.69** Consider the following statements regarding Swachh Bharat Grand Challenge:
- Waste management, wastewater management and air management were selected for the grand challenge.
 - It was organized to reward innovative solutions by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion recognized Start-ups in the country.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.70** IMBEX 2018-19 is the military exercise between:
- India – Bangladesh
 - India – Myanmar
 - India – Bangladesh – Myanmar
 - India – Myanmar – Brazil
- Q.71** Consider the following statements regarding project 'Insect Allies' recently seen in news:
- Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has launched this project.
 - In this programme, researchers have been asked to develop insects that introduce genetically modified viruses into crops.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.72** Consider the following statements :
- The government has decided to induct women for the first time in Personnel Below Officer Rank.
 - The aim is to enhance women representation in the armed forces.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.73** The Global Risk report is Published by:
- World Bank
 - IMF
 - World Economic Forum
 - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- Q.74** Who among the following is known as the Solar man of India:
- Kunwer Sachdev
 - Pranav R Mehta
 - R V Reddy
 - Hansal Ahluwalia
- Q.75** Consider the following statements regarding G77:
- The Group of 77 (G77) at the United Nations is a coalition of all developed nations.
 - The group comprises over 80% of the world's population.
 - India is the member of G77.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.76** Consider the following statements regarding e-commerce guidelines which are recently in news:
- 100% FDI under automatic route is permitted in marketplace model and in inventory based model of e-commerce.
 - E-commerce entity providing a marketplace will not exercise ownership or control over the inventory.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.77** Public Enterprises Survey 2017-18 is published by:
- Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
 - Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.
 - Ministry of Statistics and programme implementation.
 - Ministry of Corporate Affairs
- Q.78** Consider the following statements regarding Mugger crocodile:
- The mugger has been listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List.
 - It is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
 - It is a native species to freshwater habitats from southern Iran and Pakistan to the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.79** Consider the following statements regarding Olive Ridley Nesting Site:
- These are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
 - This species of sea turtle is primarily found in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
 - It is included in Vulnerable category in the IUCN Red list.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3

- Q.80** Consider the following statements regarding Gangetic River Dolphin:
- Gangetic River Dolphin falls under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act.
 - The Gangetic river dolphin is one of the four freshwater dolphin species in the world.
 - It has been declared an 'Critically endangered' species by the IUCN.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.81** Consider the following statements The Indian rhinoceros:
- It is listed as Endangered in the IUCN Red List.
 - Half of the world population of Indian rhinoceros is found in Orissa state.
 - Excessive hunting and agricultural development are the main reason behind their reducing population.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 3 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.82** With reference to South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH), consider the following statements:
- It is established under Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
 - It is funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB).
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.83** With reference to United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), consider the following statements:
- It acts as a think tank for water.
 - It is governed by UN General Assembly.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.84** With reference to Leopards, consider the following statements:
- Leopards are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
 - They are listed as near threatened in IUCN red list.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.85** With reference to Chang'e 4, recently seen in news, consider the following statements:
- It is a Chinese lunar probe which has made the first ever landing on the far side of the moon.
 - A special satellite called Queqiao was launched to relay signals from Chang'e 4 to Earth.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.86** With reference to International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), consider the following statements:
- International Rice Research Institute's South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC) has been set up in Varanasi.
 - Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) is IRRI's nodal agency in India.
 - IRRI works under Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 and 2 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Q.87** With reference to OSIRIS-Rex (Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security-Regolith Explorer), consider the following statements:
- It is NASA's aircraft.
 - It is an explorer to look out for new exoplanets.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Q.88** With reference to Ultima Thule, often seen in news consider the following statements:
- It is an icy celestial body, shaped like a giant snowman.
 - It was discovered in 2014 with the help of the Hubble Space Telescope.
 - It is being studied using NASA's Voyager mission.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- 1 only
 - 1 and 2 only
 - 2 and 3 only
 - 3 only
- Q.89** China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), touted as a rival to the widely-used American Global Positioning System (GPS), has started providing global services. Which of the following country has become the first country to use the system?
- North Korea
 - Iran
 - Pakistan
 - Afghanistan

Q.90 Which of the following best describes a Penumbral Lunar Eclipse?

- It happens when the Earth moves between the Sun and the Full Moon, but they are not precisely aligned.
- It occurs when the Sun, Earth, and the Moon are imperfectly aligned.
- It happens when the Earth comes between the Sun and the Moon and covers the Moon with its shadow completely.
- It happens when the Moon covers the Sun's centre, leaving the Sun's visible outer edges to form a "ring of fire" around the Moon.

Q.91 e-Samvad, often seen in news, refers to which of the following?

- It is an online portal which provides women citizens with easy access to information on government schemes and initiatives for women.
- It is an online portal to provide a platform for NGOs and Civil Societies to interact with the Ministry of Women and Child development.
- It is an online portal for citizens to interact with their Member of Parliament (MP) and raise their grievances directly.
- It is an online portal started by Maharashtra for citizens to interact with their District Collector.

Q.92 Which of the following tribes belong to Arunachal Pradesh?

- Abor
- Tai Khamti
- Monpa

Select the correct option from the codes given below:

- 1 and 2 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Q.93 With reference to Scheduled Tribes in India, consider the following statements:

- Constitution of India doesn't define Scheduled Tribe.
- The list of Scheduled Tribes is notified for each State or Union Territory and is valid only within the jurisdiction of that State or Union Territory and not outside.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.94 With reference to world's first television channel dedicated to human rights launched recently, consider the following statements:

- It has been launched recently in Norway.

- It aims to deliver hidden stories ignored by mainstream media into people's living rooms.

- It is a web-based channel.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only

Q.95 With reference to NSSO's latest data on unemployment in India, consider the following statements:

- Unemployment was higher in urban areas (7.8%) as compared to 5.3% in rural areas of the country.
- The labour force participating rate (LFPR) declined from 36.9 per cent in 2017-18 as against 39.5 per cent in 2011-12.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.96 With reference to National Statistical Commission (NSC), consider the following statements:

- It was constituted in 2006 on recommendation of the Planning Commission.
- The NSC has four Members besides a Chairperson.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q.97 Consider the following pairs:

Muslim Sects	—	Country
1. Rohingya	—	Myanmar
2. Ahmadiya	—	Syria
3. Uighur	—	China

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

- 1 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1 and 2 only

Q.98 With reference to the Assam Accord (1985), consider the following statements:

1. All those foreigners who had entered Assam before 1947 were to be given full citizenship including the right to vote.
2. Migrants those who had done so after 1971 were to be deported.
3. Those that entered between 1966 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Q.99 With reference to India-Africa Field Training Exercise (IAFTX), consider the following statements:

1. It will be the first time that India will be conducting military drills with any of the African Nation.

2. This exercise will be conducted in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

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

Q.100 Recently, a new and more aggressive space-based missile defense strategy has been announced. It focuses on sensors in space. Which of the following country has announced this new missile defense strategy?

- (a) Russia (b) China
 (c) Israel (d) United States



ANSWERS

1. (b)	2. (a)	3. (b)	4. (c)	5. (c)	6. (d)	7. (b)	8. (a)	9. (c)
10. (c)	11. (b)	12. (c)	13. (c)	14. (c)	15. (d)	16. (d)	17. (a)	18. (a)
19. (b)	20. (d)	21. (c)	22. (a)	23. (d)	24. (a)	25. (c)	26. (b)	27. (d)
28. (a)	29. (d)	30. (c)	31. (b)	32. (d)	33. (a)	34. (a)	35. (d)	36. (b)
37. (d)	38. (b)	39. (a)	40. (c)	41. (d)	42. (d)	43. (b)	44. (c)	45. (a)
46. (c)	47. (a)	48. (a)	49. (b)	50. (b)	51. (d)	52. (a)	53. (d)	54. (b)
55. (a)	56. (a)	57. (a)	58. (d)	59. (a)	60. (d)	61. (c)	62. (c)	63. (b)
64. (c)	65. (c)	66. (b)	67. (c)	68. (a)	69. (c)	70. (b)	71. (c)	72. (c)
73. (c)	74. (b)	75. (c)	76. (c)	77. (b)	78. (c)	79. (d)	80. (a)	81. (b)
82. (d)	83. (a)	84. (a)	85. (c)	86. (a)	87. (a)	88. (b)	89. (c)	90. (b)
91. (b)	92. (d)	93. (b)	94. (c)	95. (c)	96. (b)	97. (c)	98. (b)	99. (d)
100. (d)								

Subjective Questions

GS Paper 1

- Q.1** Given the deep inequalities prevalent in access to education and jobs based on caste and socio-economic status, affirmative action (or positive discrimination) makes a lot of sense. Critically analyse. (15)

GS Paper 2

- Q.2** Relation of India and South Africa is not merely limited to bilateral cooperation, but has global significance. Discuss. (10)

- Q.3** Discuss recent developments in India which have contributed to the rise of number of death penalty awarded in 2018. Shall India abolish death penalty? Justify your stand. (10)

- Q.4** Election is a process of legitimization of political power. However, the election process in our country has become the progenitor of political corruption. Discuss. (15)

- Q.5** Recently, Thailand and Saudi Arabia introduced plain packaging of tobacco products. In your opinion should India also introduce plain packing? Also discuss the implications of plain packaging in India. (10)

- Q.6** A glut of engineering colleges and resultant over-supply of graduates has led to poor quality of engineers. Discuss. Also suggest ways to overcome the problem of substandard engineering education in India. (10)

- Q.7** Recently Right to Disconnect Bill, 2018 has been introduced in the Lok Sabha to help employees strike a better work-life balance and reduce stress. Discuss the need of the bill and its implications if it becomes a law. (10)

- Q.8** Recently Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019 was passed in Lok Sabha. Critically analyze the provisions made in the bill. (10)

- Q.9** India and China have enjoyed significant economic and cultural ties since time immemorial. Discuss the opportunities and challenges in India China bilateral relations in recent times. (15)

- Q.10** The Government of India has initiated the Capacity Building Programme for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Discuss the significance of capacity building of EWRs and challenges associated with it. (15)

GS Paper 3

- Q.11** Though Civil Aviation sector in India has a tremendous scope for growth, there are major constraints which are limiting its true potential. Discuss. (15)

- Q.12** The idea of a universal basic income to replace subsidies appears appealing but may be hobbled by implementation hurdles. Discuss. (10)

- Q.13** Worries over trade war, weak global growth and financial stress in the developing economies are likely to put pressure on Indian growth outlook. Examine. (15)

- Q.14** Why is there a demand for a more robust data on employment? Discuss the challenges which India faces in generating quality jobs. How can these challenges be addressed? (15)

- Q.15** Climate change is a complex and long-term problem faced by the developing nations. Discuss the challenges faced by India in addressing the issue of climate change. Give measures that India has adopted to address the issue of climate change. (15)

- Q.16** The Union Cabinet has approved merger of Bank of Baroda, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank. Discuss the need, benefit and challenges of bank amalgamation in India. (15)

GS Paper 4

- Q.17** "Value is the protocol of behaviour that enhances the trust, confidence and commitment among the members of a community." In the light of above statement discuss the importance of values in personal and professional life of an individual. (10)

- Q.18** "Civil servant neutrality is an essential feature of Indian administration. At the same time, there is need to allow civil servants to express their opinions freely." Discuss. (10)

- Q.19** Torture of human beings consists of curtailment of individual autonomy. Given the moral importance of autonomy, torture is also unjustifiable. Do you agree? Justify your standpoint. (10)

- Q.20** Torture is unjustified from many ethical perspectives, but there may be situations when law enforcement officer or a person with noble intentions might feel compelled to resort to torture. Discuss. (10)



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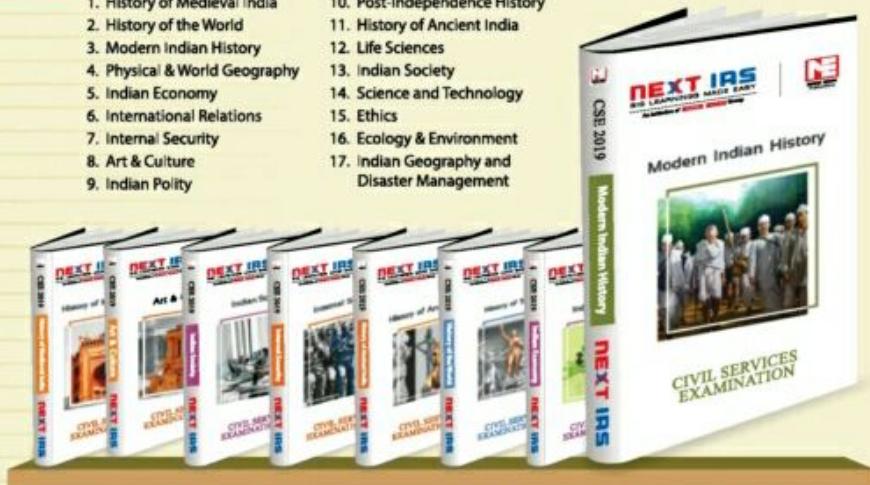
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