UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS - 2018
DECEMBER 15-30 (Part – II)
HINDU & PIB IN DEPTH ANALYSIS

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GENERAL STUDIES 1

ART AND CULTURE

Tansen Samman, Tansen festival.

IN NEWS:

Noted sitar player Manju Mehta has been conferred with the **'Tansen Samman'** for 2018 by the Madhya Pradesh government for her contribution in the field of music.

IN DEPTH:

National Tansen Samman

- The prestigious **'National Tansen Samman'** is a musical award **conferred to the exponents of Hindustani music**. This award carries a cash prize of Rs. 2 Lakh along with a memento.
- **The Tansen Music Festival is organised every year by Madhya Pradesh culture department** in the memory of Tansen, one of the greatest artists in Indian history. **It is held annually in Gwalior**.

Tansen:

He was a prominent figure of Hindustani classical music.
- He began his career and spent most of his adult life in the court and patronage of the Hindu **king of Rewa, Raja Ramchandra Singh** (1555–1592), where Tansen's musical abilities and studies gained widespread fame.
- This reputation brought him to the attention of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, who sent messengers to Raja Ramchandra Singh, requesting Tansen to join the musicians at the Mughal court.
- Akbar considered him as **a Navaratnas (nine jewels), and gave him the title Mian**, an honorific, meaning learned man.
- Tansen is remembered for his epic **Dhrupad compositions**, creating several new ragas, as well as for writing two **classic books on music Sri Ganesh Stotra and Sangita Sara**.

HISTORY

Paika Rebellion

IN NEWS:

- PM Modi to issue Paika Rebellion Commemorative Stamp and Paika Rebellion Commemorative Coin

IN DEPTH:

Paika Rebellion

- The **Paika Rebellion**, also called the **Paika Bidroha**, was an **armed rebellion against the British East India Company's rule** in **Odisha in 1817**.
- The Paikas rose in rebellion under their leader **Bakshi Jagabandhu** and, projecting Jagannath as the symbol of Odia unity, the rebellion quickly spread across most of Odisha before being ruthlessly put down by the company's forces.
- The Paikas were the traditional militia of Odisha. They served as warriors and were charged with policing functions during peacetime. The Paikas were organised into three ranks distinguished by their occupation and the weapons they wielded. These were the Paharis, the bearers of shields and the khanda sword, the Banuas who led distant expeditions and used matchlocks and the Dhenkiyas – archers who also performed different duties in Odisha armies.
- With the conquest of Odisha by the East India Company in 1803 and the dethronement of the Raja of Khurda began the fall of the power and prestige of the Paikas.

Causes of Rebellion:

- The Paika rebellion had several social, economic and political reasons.
- The Paiks were alienated by the British regime, who took over the hereditary rent-free lands granted to them after the conquest of Khurda.
- They were also subjected to extortion and oppression at the hands of the company government and its servants.
- Had conciliatory measures been adopted towards the Paiks from the beginning, it is possible that they would have become a source of strength to the company rule in Odisha.
- The extortionist land revenue policy of the company affected the peasants and the zamindars alike.
- A source of much consternation for the common people was the rise in prices of salt due to taxes imposed on it by the new government.
- The company also abolished the system of cowrie currency that had existed in Odisha prior to its conquest and required that taxes be paid in silver. This caused much popular hardship and discontent.
- In 1804 the Raja of Khurda planned a rebellion against the British in alliance with the Paiks, but the plot was soon discovered and the Raja's territory was confiscated.

GEOGRAPHY

Tsunami kills 200+ people in Indonesia

IN NEWS:
- Tsunami struck the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra following a underwater landslide, believed to have been caused by the erupting Anak Krakatoa volcano.
- Anak Krakatoa, an active volcano roughly halfway between Java and Sumatra, has been spewing ash and lava for months.

IN DEPTH:
Tsunami is harbor wave which consists of a series of seismic waves which rise as high as 10m or more. They move inland, several hundred miles causing untold disaster.

Factors that lead to tsunami-genesis:
- Earthquakes: Earthquake occurring beneath the sea-when thrust faults associated with convergent or destructive plate boundaries move abruptly, resulting in vertical water displacement.
- Volcanic eruptions-80% happen within Pacific ocean's "Ring of fire" where earthquakes and volcanoes are common. Volcanic eruptions can cause discharge of large amounts not energy in a small amount of time, this energy is in turn imparted to the water which causes tsunami.
- Landslides: under ocean landslides can cause disequilibrium in the ocean water, which will move towards the shore as tsunami to regain isostasy.
- Meteorites and nuclear explosions: both of them can use release of huge amounts of energy in a few seconds, which will cause the displacement of water.

GENERAL STUDIES 2

POLITY

President's Rule in J&K

IN NEWS:
- We know that J&K has separate Constitution.
- According to its Constitution, Governor's rule is imposed under Section 92 for six months after an approval by the President.
- Under the Governor's rule, the State Assembly is either kept in suspended animation or dissolved. If it is not possible to restore the state machinery before the expiry of the six-month period, the provision is extended.
- In current case since the Assembly was not dissolved within six months, President's rule under Article 356 is extended to the State.
- In all states of India, the state government's failure results in President's rule. Only in J&K Governor's rule is imposed for six months, but only after the consent of the President of India.
- Matters related to defence, foreign relations, communication and finance of Jammu and Kashmir are under jurisdiction of the Constitution of India.

High court and its location

IN NEWS:

In pursuance of **article 214 of the Constitution and the Order issued by the Supreme Court of India and in exercise of powers conferred under clause (a) of sub-section (1) of section 30, sub-section (1) of section 31 and sub-section (2) of section 31 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014**, the President has constituted a separate High Court for the State of Andhra Pradesh, namely, the High Court of Andhra Pradesh, from the 1st day of January, 2019 with the principal seat of such High Court at Amaravati in the State of Andhra Pradesh and the High Court of Judicature at Hyderabad shall become the High Court for the State of Telangana.

The new High Court for Andhra Pradesh will be the 25th High Court in the country. The new Andhra HC is expected **to function from a temporary structure in Amaravati** till a permanent building is set up at the 'Justice City' being planned in Amaravati.

IN DEPTH:
Constitutional provisions related to High Court 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**. This means that, unless Parliament by law establishes a Common High Court for two or more States, every State has to have a High Court, i.e., upon formation of a new State a new High Court is also formed.
- **Article 216** provides that every High Court shall consist of a Chief Justice and such other number of judges as the President may from time to time deem necessary to appoint.
- **Article 217** relates to appointment of HC judges.

GOVERNANCE

Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)

IN NEWS:
- Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY) – is a direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme for nutritional support to Tuberculosis (TB) patients.
- It was rolled out from April this year and has made very slow progress.
- Of the 18 lakh registered TB patients across the country, barely 26% of the beneficiary pool, have received cash transfer so far.
- This is because many of the rural poor either do not have a bank account or are migrant patients, whose bank accounts are difficult to be captured. However, the incentives can be distributed in Cash (but implementation is poor)

IN DEPTH:
Nikshay Poshan Yojana
- All notified TB patients are beneficiaries of the scheme.
- Financial incentive of Rs.500/- per month for each notified TB patient for duration for which the patient is on anti-TB treatment.
- The scheme is registered under Direct Benefit Transfer. The incentives can be distributed in Cash (only via DBT preferably through Aadhaar enabled bank accounts) or in-kind.
- The scheme is a centrally sponsored scheme under National Health Mission (NHM). Financial norms of NHM in terms of cost sharing, are applicable to the scheme.

Ujjwala Yojana expansion: LPG scheme to cover poor people

IN NEWS:
- Union Cabinet approved the expansion of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which aims to provide deposit-free LPG connections to all poor households.
- So far, the scheme targeted the poor and underprivileged so listed in the Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011.
- The mandate of the scheme was to provide LPG connections to eight crore households.

  - Providing LPG connections to BPL households will ensure universal coverage of cooking gas in the country. This measure will empower women and protect their health. It will reduce drudgery and the time spent on cooking. It will also provide employment for rural youth in the supply chain of cooking gas.

  - Target beneficiaries Under the scheme, five crore LPG connections are to be provided to BPL households. The identification of eligible BPL families will be made in consultation with the State Governments and the Union Territories.

Child protection policy

IN NEWS:
- Ministry of Women and Child Development has drafted child protection policy
- Move comes in the wake of Muzaffarpur home case
- The Supreme Court had directed the CBI to **investigate allegations involving 17 shelter homes for children, destitute women, beggars and senior citizens** in Bihar following the case of sexual abuse of more than 30 girls in a shelter home in Muzaffarpur in the State.
- The Supreme Court had also asked the Centre to consider **framing a national policy on protection of children.**

IN DEPTH:

Draft Child protection policy -- important provisions
1. It recommends that all organisations must have **a code of conduct based on "zero tolerance of child abuse and exploitation".**
2. It requires organisations to lay down that **employees don't use language or behaviour that is "inappropriate**, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate".

3. Recommends employees of all organisations to **sign a declaration agreeing to ensure the safety of children.**
4. Institutions should also **designate a staff member to ensure that procedures are in place** to ensure the protection of children as well as to report any abuse. Any individual who suspects physical, sexual or emotional abuse must report it to the **helpline number 1098**, police or a child welfare committee.

CHANGES MADE:
- Child Protection Policy will be the first policy **dedicated to the protection of children**, an area that until now was only a part of the broader National Child Policy, 2013.
- Unlike the National Child Policy, 2013, the latest document **doesn't talk about children who may need special protection**: including those affected by migration, communal or sectarian violence, children forced into begging or in conflict with the law, and those infected with HIV/AIDS.
- It also **doesn't talk about the role of the State** for ensuring the protection of child rights or addressing local grievances.

Commercial surrogacy to be banned?

IN NEWS:
- Lok Sabha passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016, which **bans commercial surrogacy** in India.
- In 2009, **Law Commission of India in its 229th report** recommended a prohibition on commercial surrogacy.
- Commercial surrogacy is a procedure by which a woman accepts a fee to carry an embryo to term for another couple.

IN DEPTH:
Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016
- India has become a hub for commercial surrogacy and several incidents of women being exploited had come to light.
- The law seeks to end such exploitation and regulate non-commercial or "altruistic surrogacy".
- The law bans women from accepting payment to become surrogates.
- The Bill says no money can be paid except "the medical expenses incurred on surrogate mother and the insurance coverage for the surrogate mother".
- The Bill states that an Indian infertile couple, married for five years or more, can go in for 'altruistic surrogacy'.
- The Bill allows only close relatives to be surrogate mothers.
- **Bioethical problems** of allowing commercial surrogacy – woman body is treated as a commodity in the marketplace.

Limitations banning Commercial Surrogacy:
- The Bill fails to consider same- sex couples or LGBT community (who are now accepted to be a part of the mainstream after Supreme Court decriminalised Section 377).
- In a country like India, an outright prohibition of commercial surrogacy will only push the business underground, into the black market. This may lead to women being exploited even more.
- Commercial surrogacy in India was legalized in India in 2002.
- The availability of medical infrastructure and potential surrogates, combined with international demand, has fueled the growth of the industry.

Strategy for New India @75'

IN NEWS:
- NITI Aayog released a vision document – 'Strategy for New India @75'
- It contains comprehensive national strategy **to build New India by 2022** and propel India towards a **USD 5 trillion economy by 2030**.
- Niti Aayog through this vision document attempts to **bring innovation, technology, enterprise and efficient management together**, at the core of policy formulation and implementation.
- 'Strategy for New India @ 75' has identified 41 different areas that require either a sharper focus on implementing the flagship schemes already in place or a new design and initiative to achieve India's true potential.
- The forty-one chapters in the document have been disaggregated under four sections: **Drivers**, **Infrastructure**, **Inclusion** and **Governance**.

IN DEPTH:
key recommendations –
According to the vision document,

- A growth rate of 9% is essential to generate enough jobs and achieve universal prosperity.
- In order to the economy's size in real terms from $2.7 trillion in 2017-18 to nearly $4 trillion by 2022-23, India should target 8% growth over the period 2018-23.
- In order to boost economic growth, the document identified few key steps – increase the country's investment rate, increase the tax-GDP ratio, boost both private and public investment.
- Recommends to rationalise direct taxes for both corporate tax and personal income tax.
- There is a need to ease the tax compliance burden and eliminate direct interface between taxpayers and tax officials using technology.

In Agriculture sector,
- Emphasis must shift to converting farmers to 'agripreneurs' by further expanding e-National Agriculture Markets (e-NAMs) and replacing the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act with the Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (APLM) Act.
- The creation of a unified national market, a freer export regime and abolition of the Essential Commodities Act are essential for boosting agricultural growth.
- The document also called for a strong push towards 'Zero Budget Natural Farming' (ZBNF) techniques that reduce costs, improve land quality, and increase farmers' incomes.

Mission 2022-23

The government think tank NITI Aayog unveiled a strategy document on Wednesday. Excerpts from the document:

- Target is to raise the investment rate from about 29% in 2017-18 to about 36% of GDP by 2022-23
- The tax-GDP ratio to be raised from 17% to 22%
- The share of
- waterways in freight transport to be doubled
- All villages to be digitally connected
- The size of the economy to be increased to $4 trillion

NITI Aayog SDG index

IN NEWS:
According to a first-of-its-kind sustainable development index released by NITI Aayog –

- **Himachal Pradesh**, **Kerala**, and **Tamil Nadu** have been ranked highest in terms of being on track to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- The **SDG Index Score** for Sustainable Development Goals 2030 ranges between 42 and 69 for States and between 57 and 68 for UTs.
- The average Indian score was 57.
- The aim of the index is to **instill competition among States** to improve their performance across social indices as the States' progress will determine India's progress towards achieving the set goals by 2030.

IN DEPTH:
About the Index:
- The index comprises a composite score for each State and Union Territory based on their aggregate performance across 13 of the 17 SDGs.
- The score, ranging between 0 and 100, denotes the average performance of the State/UT towards achieving the 13 SDGs and their respective targets.
- The average Indian score was 57.

Quantifying **development**

Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are progressing at a faster rate towards the Sustainable Development Goals set for 2030, a NITI Aayog report said on Friday

The progress was measured using a score based on each aggregate performance across 13 SGDs

57/100
India's overall score

HIMACHAL PRADESH: 69

UTTAR PRADESH: 42

BIHAR: 48

ASSAM: 49

TAMIL NADU: 66

KERALA: 69

Average score
42.0   55.5   69.0
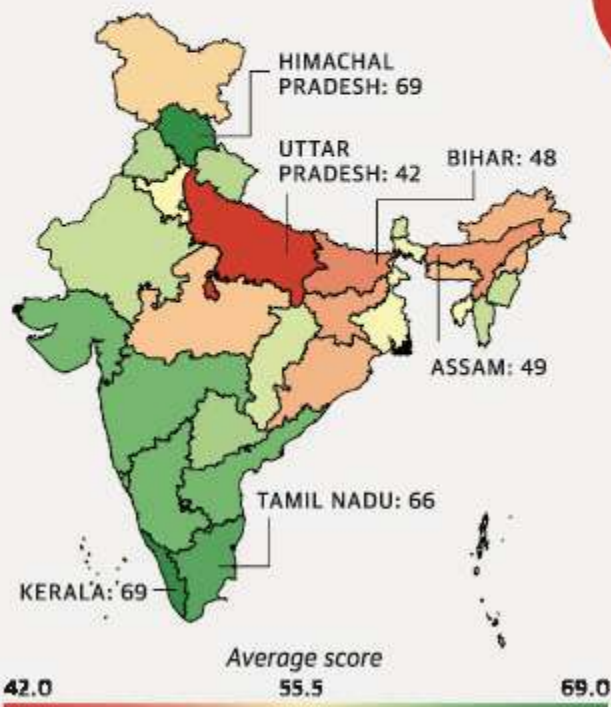
Source - SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018

WHAT THE SCORES MEAN They reflect a State's progress in goals, such as ending poverty, ensuring healthy lives, gender equality and sustainable water management, among others

- U.P., Bihar and Assam are progressing at a slower rate

- The score ranges between 0 and 100. If a State's score is 100, it means that it has achieved the national target set for 2030

- If the score is 0, it means that the State's progress is the worst among all

- Among the States, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are the front runners, with an SDG India Index score of 69. Among the UTs, Chandigarh is the front runner with a score of 68.
- Tamil Nadu has a score 66, and is the top scorer on the goals to do with eradicating poverty and also providing clean and affordable energy.
- Kerala's top rank is attributed to its superior performance in providing good health, reducing hunger, achieving gender equality and providing quality education.
- Himachal Pradesh ranks high on providing clean water and sanitation, in reducing inequalities and preserving the mountain ecosystem.

Report card

NITI Aayog has ranked every State based on its performance on 13 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The index score used for measurement ranges between 0 and 100. A score of 100 signifies that the national target set for 2030 has been achieved while 0 denotes it was the worst performer. A look at what the SDGs mean and where the States stand:

PROGRESS METER

Table shows India's progress in each goal:
Good progress (■), average progress (■), & slow progress (■)

SDG	Score
SD5	36
SD11	39
SD9	44
SD2	48
SD7	51
SD3	52
SD1	54
SD4	58
SD6	63
SD8	65
SD10	71
SD16	71
SD15	90

WHAT THE GOALS MEAN?

SD1: End poverty; **SD2:** End hunger; **SD3:** Ensure healthy lives & promote well-being; **SD4:** Ensure quality education; **SD5:** Achieve gender equality; **SD6:** Ensure sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; **SD7:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy; **SD8:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth; **SD9:** Build resilient infrastructure; **SD10:** Reduce inequality; **SD11:** Make cities and settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; **SD12:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; **SD13:** Combat climate change; **SD14:** Conserve marine resources; **SD15:** Protect terrestrial ecosystems; **SD16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies

TOP THREE AND BOTTOM THREE PERFORMERS

Graph shows the state of progress of all the 13 goals in the top 3 and bottom 3 States
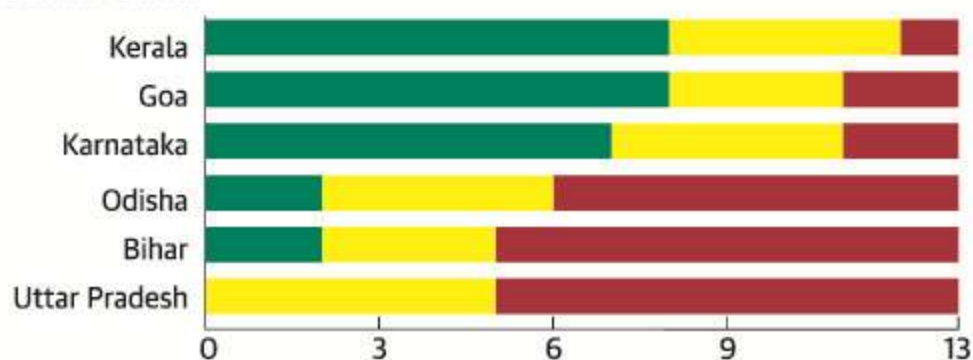
No rise in working women despite high literacy levels

IN NEWS:
- A rise in literacy levels among women has failed to translate into an increase in the number of working women due to a combination of socio-economic factors.
- There is a rise in the percentage of women out of labour force between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016 across all levels of education and age-cohorts.
- At the same time, the percentage of illiterate women out of the labour force too increased.
- Despite one's educational attainment there has been a decline in the incentive for women to participate in the labour force.

IN DEPTH:
- The gross enrolment ratio shows that there are equal numbers of boys and girls at secondary level and women remain in education longer.

Socio-economic factors that has led women out of the labour force

- role education plays in marriage markets (importance of education for improving marital prospects)
- social norms – higher prestige or social status is associated with families which keep their women out of the workforce
- poor condition for educated women
- quality of education

Government policies should focus on behavioural changes that make female employment more acceptable in the society, communication programmes on gender equality in secondary education to help students imbibe equitable gender norms as well as programmes that acknowledge child care as the responsibility of both parents.

State startup Ranking Report, 2018

IN NEWS:
According to the Central government's **State startup Ranking Report, 2018** –
- Maharashtra is placed in 25-50 percentile 'emerging' category (i.e., the State has ranked in the bottom half).
- Gujarat claimed the top spot

IN DEPTH:
Reasons for Maharashtra's poor ranking –

- Maharashtra announced its startup policy only in 2018. Andhra Pradesh was the first State in the country to announce a startup policy in 2014, following directions from the Centre to all States.
- Maharashtra's industrial growth rate is falling continuously, from 7.2% in 2015-16 to 6.5% in 2017-18.
- Maharashtra's ease-of-doing-business rank has come down from eight in 2015 to 13 in 2018.

The State-wise story

	States	Percentile
Best performer	**Gujarat**	**100**
Top performers	Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha and Rajasthan	85 to 100
Leaders	Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana	70 to 85
Aspiring leaders	Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal	50 to 70
Emerging states	Assam, Delhi, Goa, Jammu & Kashmir, **Maharashtra**, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand	25 to 50
Beginners	Chandigarh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Puducherry, Sikkim and Tripura	More or less equal to 25

SOURCE: STATE STARTUP RANKING REPORT, 2018 RELEASED BY DIPP

RTI activists living dangerously

IN NEWS:
- RTI activists living dangerously in Bihar – 2018 alone has seen the death of five Right to Information (RTI) activists

Targeting crusaders
Profiles of RTI activists killed in Bihar this year

He had recently complained against the manner of selection of Anganwadi workers

Jayant Kumar: A resident of Vaishali district, he was killed in April 2018. He was filing several RTI applications on the powerful liquor mafia

Bhola Sah: An activist from Banka district, he exposed financial irregularities in social welfare schemes

Valmiki Yadav: Hailing from Jamui district, he was known to file numerous RTIs on panchayat-level programmes

Rajendra Prasad Singh: The 63-year-old from Motihari had exposed several corruption cases in police recruitment, PDS, toilet scheme and health and education schemes through his RTI applications

Aspirational Districts Programme

IN NEWS:

Niti Aayog has released the Second Delta Ranking of the Aspirational Districts Programme. The ranking details the incremental progress achieved by the districts during June to October this year across six key development sectors.

IN DEPTH:

How are districts ranked?

The districts have been ranked in a transparent basis **on parameters across various performance indicators like Health and Nutrition, Education, Skill Development and Basic Infrastructure among others**.

The rankings are based on the data that is publicly available through the Champions of Change Dashboard, which includes data entered on a real-time basis at the district level.

Performances of various districts:

Top performers: Virudhunagar district in Tamil Nadu has shown the most improvement overall, followed by Nuapada district in Odisha, Siddarthnagar in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar's Aurangabad and Koraput in Odisha. These districts have championed the development narrative in fundamental parameters of social progress.

Least performers: Meanwhile, Nagaland's Kiphire district, Jharkhand's Giridih, Chatra in Jharkhand, Hailakandi in Assam, and Pakur in Jharkhand have shown least improvement.

About Aspirational Districts Programme:

- Launched in January this year, the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
- The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan.
- With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.

Focus of the programme:

To enable optimum utilization of their potential, this program focuses closely on improving people's ability to participate fully in the burgeoning economy. Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure are this programme's core areas of focus.

Significance of the scheme:

If these districts are transformed, there would be tremendous improvement in the internal security environment of the country. If Prabhari officers can bring convergence in the development efforts of different Ministries and state Governments and the schemes specially launched by Home Ministry in these districts, it would serve as a great opportunity to ensure rapid development in the country.

Swachch Bharat Grand Challenge

IN NEWS:

As part of the **Swachhta Pakhwada** held from 1st to 15th November, 2018, **Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) organized a Swachch Bharat Grand Challenge.**

Four Areas selected for the grand challenge:

- Sanitation
- Waste Management
- Water and Wastewater management
- Air Management

Objective of the award:

- This was organized to **reward innovative solutions by DIPP recognized Start-ups** in the country.

Unique solutions were received from start-ups who had also filed for intellectual property rights.

IN DEPTH:

About Swachhata Pakhwada –

It was **started in April 2016** with the objective of **bringing a fortnight of intense focus on the issues and practices of Swachhata by engaging GOI Ministries/Departments in their jurisdictions.**

An annual calendar is pre-circulated among the Ministries to help them plan for the Pakhwada activities. They are monitored closely using online monitoring system of Swachhata Samiksha where action plans, images, videos related to Swachhata activities are uploaded and shared.

After the observation, Ministries/Departments announce their achievements through a press conference and other communication tools.

Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2018,

IN NEWS:
The Lok Sabha has passed **the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2018**, also known as, Triple Talaq Bill.
The Bill makes instant triple talaq void and illegal. It seeks to make the practice of instant triple talaq a punishable offence with imprisonment of up to three years.

IN DEPTH:
 A brief history:

The case dates back to 2016 when the Supreme Court had sought assistance from the then Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi on pleas challenging the **constitutional validity of "triple talaq", "nikah halala" and "polygamy"**, **to assess whether Muslim women face gender discrimination in cases of divorce**.

Opposing the practice of triple talaq, **the Centre told the top court that there is a need to re-look at these practices on grounds of gender equality and secularism**.

A Bill in this regard:
In September, the government had proposed **the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill** in the Parliament and sought to make triple talaq a punishable offence under the law.
At first, the Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha but it failed to secure a majority in the Rajya Sabha. The Bill was postponed till the winter session of Parliament. Following this, **an ordinance was issued by the government** after the bill failed to get cleared in Rajya Sabha amid protests by the Opposition.

Key provisions of the Bill:
The Bill makes all declaration of talaq, including in written or electronic form, to be void (i.e. not enforceable in law) and illegal.
Definition: It defines talaq as talaq-e-biddat or any other similar form of talaq pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.
Offence and penalty: The Bill makes declaration of talaq a cognizable offence, attracting up to three years' imprisonment with a fine. (A cognizable offence is one for which a police officer may arrest an accused person without warrant.) The offence will be cognizable only if information relating to the offence is given by: (i) the married woman (against whom talaq has been declared), or (ii) any person related to her by blood or marriage.
The Bill provides that the Magistrate may grant bail to the accused. The bail may be granted only after hearing the woman (against whom talaq has been pronounced), and if the Magistrate is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for granting bail.
The offence may be compounded by the Magistrate upon the request of the woman (against whom talaq has been declared). Compounding refers to the procedure where the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings, and settle the dispute. The terms and conditions of the compounding of the offence will be determined by the Magistrate.

Allowance: A Muslim woman against whom talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek subsistence allowance from her husband for herself and for her dependent children. The amount of the allowance will be determined by the Magistrate.

Custody: A Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek custody of her minor children. The manner of custody will be determined by the Magistrate.

Significance:

Time has come to put an end to the suffering of Muslim women who have been at the receiving end of instant talaq for several years. More than 20 Islamic countries have already banned the practice.

National Register of Citizens (NRC)

IN NEWS:

The Centre has given an extension of six months to complete the ongoing exercise for updating the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** in Assam by June 30.

▪ The decision was taken as the exercise to enumerate citizens in the NRC, a list of Assam's residents, could not be completed within the specified date of December 31, 2018.

IN DEPTH:

Background:

On December 6, 2013, the government issued the first notification setting a deadline of three years for completion of the entire NRC process. Since then, five extensions have been given by the government. The draft NRC was published on July 30 and included the names of 2.9 crore people of the total 3.29 crore applicants.

Why is NRC being updated in Assam?

Officially, the NRC process will address the issue of illegal migrants, specifically from Bangladesh. The National Register of Citizens was first published in 1951 to record citizens, their houses and holdings. Updating the NRC to root out foreigners was a demand during the Assam Agitation (1979-1985).

Why is March 24, 1971 the cut-off date?

There have been several waves of migration to Assam from Bangladesh, but the biggest was in March 1971 when the Pakistan army crackdown forced many to flee to India. The Assam Accord of 1985 that ended the six-year anti-foreigners' agitation decided upon the midnight of March 24, 1971 as the cut-off date.

Who is a citizen in Assam?

The Citizenship Act of 1955 was amended after the Assam Accord for all Indian-origin people who came from Bangladesh before January 1, 1966 to be deemed as citizens. Those who came between January 1, 1966 and March 25, 1971 were eligible for citizenship after registering and living in the State for 10 years while those entering after March 25, 1971, were to be deported.
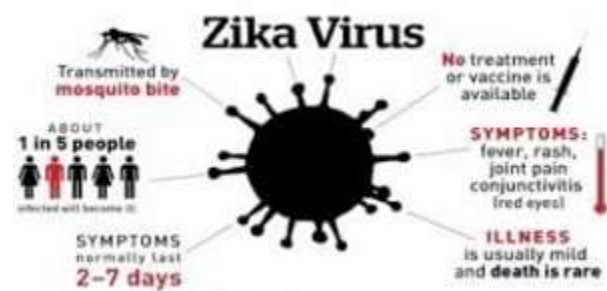
Zika virus

IN NEWS:

Context: India has asked the United States' public health agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to "withdraw or modify" an advisory it issued on December 13 warning people against travelling to Rajasthan due to an outbreak of the Zika virus.

- The government took exception to the use of "endemic" in the advisory as Zika outbreaks in India have been contained within small areas.

IN DEPTH:

Background:

The CDC had said the virus was endemic to India and pointed out "there is an unusual increase in the number of Zika cases in Rajasthan and surrounding states". It cautioned pregnant women against travelling to such areas. This is because Zika infection during pregnancy can cause serious birth defects. The health agency classified its alert under Level 2, which requires "enhanced protection". **Level 1 advises "usual precautions" and Level 3 advises against "non-essential travel"**.

What is Zika Virus?

Zika virus is similar to dengue fever, yellow fever and West Nile virus. Carried by infected Aedes aegypti mosquitos, Zika is largely transmitted through bites, but can also occur through intrauterine infection.

- It was first identified in 1947 in Zika Forest, Uganda from where it derives its name.
- If a woman is bitten by an infected mosquito and becomes infected, Zika can cross into the placenta and affect the fetus. While anyone can contract Zika, pregnant women are the most at risk due to the potential for fetal microcephaly and other neurologic abnormalities.
- **Symptoms include** fever, headache, red eyes, skin rash, fatigue, muscle pain etc.
- **Treatment and Prevention:** There is no specific treatment or vaccine currently available to treat Zika. The best form of prevention is protection against mosquito bites and clearing stagnant water where mosquitoes breed.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India-Maldives: $1.4 bn aid package to Maldives
IN NEWS:
- India offers $1.4 bn aid package to Maldives to tackle financial crisis.
- Maldives is facing a debt of $3.2 billion with China. It is expected to boost Male's global financial standing.
- Financial assistance will be in the form of budgetary support, currency swap and concessional lines of credit for development programmes.
- Both sides agree to coordinate maritime policing activities in the Indian Ocean region.
- Cooperation between both countries is necessary for maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean region.
- India to support the Maldives in its human-centric development plans.

India and Pakistan: Row over ownership of the Jinnah House
IN NEWS:
- India rejected Pakistan's claim of ownership of the Jinnah House in Mumbai. The Jinnah House on Malabar Hill in Mumbai was designed by architect Claude Batley in European style and Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah lived there in the late 1930s.
- Pakistan has been demanding that the property be handed over to it for housing its Mumbai consulate.
- India's MEA decides to use it for official events.

Pakistan and China ties draws more irk
- A Chinese-built seaport and special economic zone in the Pakistani town of Gwadar, gives Beijing a strategic card to play against India and the U.S. if tensions worsen to the point of naval blockades as the two powers increasingly confront each other at sea.
- Pakistan is the only other country that has been granted access to the China's Beidou satellite navigation system. It allows more precise guidance for missiles, ships and aircraft.
- China had agreed in 2015 to sell eight submarines to Pakistan in a deal worth up to $6 billion.
- An SEZ under the CPEC would 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 JF-17 fighter jets have given Pakistan an alternative to the U.S.-built F-16 fighters.

India-Bhutan: golden jubilee of the diplomatic relations
IN NEWS:
- India to host newly elected Bhutan PM (Dr. Lotay Tshering)
- His visit will take place to mark the golden jubilee of the diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan
India-Bhutan ties
- likely to witness sealing of important power projects to be implemented by both sides.
- Bhutan assured that it will continue to have special ties with India and avoid establishing diplomatic ties with any of the permanent members of the UN Security Council.
- Bhutan hopes to finalise India's assistance for the 12th Five-Year Plan.

Bangladesh-India relationship

IN NEWS:

Positive areas:

- Bangladesh-India relationship has taken a giant leap forward.
- In the last decade, the relationship has reached new heights — almost all outstanding issues have been amicably settled, including the **demarcation of boundaries**, **resolution of adverse territorial possessions** and **cross-border purchase of electricity**.
- Bus, railway and waterways connectivity
- Connectivity is fostering sub-regional cooperation and bringing benefits to India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

Concern areas:

- It is often argued in Bangladesh that India has not done enough.
- Unresolved issues – Teesta water agreement
- India is concerned about unchecked foreign donations received by the Bangladesh. (Funding of about 550 mosques and madrasas by Saudi Arabia)
- China factor – Bangladesh has ensured that it will not allow its territory to be used by any foreign power against any other country.
- On the Rohingya issue, since the signing of the initial agreement, not one refugee has gone back to Myanmar. India is committed not to repatriate the Rohingya unless Myanmar is safe for the return of the refugees.

GENERAL STUDIES 3

ECONOMY

Simplification of the Goods and Services Tax

IN NEWS:

- PM Modi has hinted at further simplification of the Goods and Services Tax.
- The current government wants to ensure that 99% items attract sub-18% GST slab.
- According to the PM, GST implementation has removed contradictions in the trade market and efficiency of system is improving. The economy is also getting transparent.

Centre seeks 41,000 crore more to recapitalise banks

IN NEWS:

- The government moved a proposal in Parliament for an additional ⬜41,000 crore to **recapitalise public sector banks**, over and above the already budgeted ⬜65,000 crore.
- If approved by the House, this would take the **total recapitalisation package** for the current financial year to **1,06,000 crore**, of which the government plans to utilise ⬜83,000 crore over the remaining portion of the year.

IN DEPTH:

According to the government,

- recognition of loans that are non-performing assets (NPAs) was nearly complete

- recovery process is progressing strongly
- ☐60,726 crore recovered in the first half of this financial year

The government fund infusion will have four express objectives:

- To **help banks meet regulatory capital norms**
- Enable better performing PCA (prompt corrective action) **banks to get capital**
- Infuse funds into non-PCA banks that are closer to the red line and
- **Give regulatory and growth capital** to banks that are being amalgamated

Funding the banks

Govt. has sought approval to give ₹41,000 cr. more to PSU banks

- Demand will take the recap amount to ₹1,06,000 cr. this year
- Of this, govt. plans to spend ₹83,000 cr. over next few months
- Funds will be used to help banks meet capital requirements, come out of PCA* framework and merged banks to grow

- They will also be used to prevent borderline banks from slipping into PCA framework
- Non-performing assets are declining and recoveries in the first half of this year were at ₹60,726 cr.
- Most PSU banks will get funds, except stronger ones such as SBI
- Govt. had announced ₹2.11 lakh cr. capitalisation plan in October 2017, of which ₹1.35 lakh crore was to be raised through recapitalisation bonds
- The rest was to be raised by banks from the market or via sale of non-core assets

*Prompt corrective action

Foreign fund outflows highest since 2008

IN NEWS:

- For the Indian equity markets, year 2018 will end as the worst in terms of foreign money outflows since 2008 when markets across the globe were reeling under the sub-prime crisis and Lehman Brothers filed for the largest bankruptcy in history.
- Reasons – weakness in the rupee, trade war between U.S. and China and the volatility of the stock markets
- The biggest factor that spooked everyone, especially foreign investors, was the fall in the rupee that moved from around 64 level to 74 against the dollar during the year.

Ebb and flow

Significant outflows are primarily on account of weakness in the rupee and volatility in stock markets

(₹ Crore)

3,630

FPIs were net sellers at almost $4.8 billion till date

Global markets were reeling under sub-prime crisis — -52,987

-2,714

-33,344

2002   2008   2011   2018

Source: NSDL
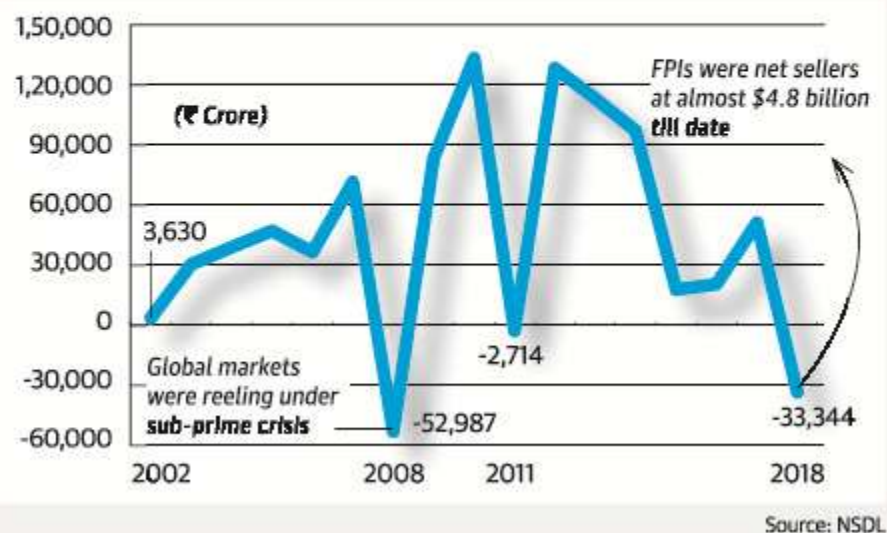
Economic Capital Framework

IN NEWS:
RBI has constituted **a panel on economic capital framework**. It will be **headed by Ex-RBI governor Bimal Jalan**.
The expert panel on RBI's economic capital framework has been **formed to address the issue of RBI reserves**—one of the sticking points between the central bank and the government.

IN DEPTH:
What's the isssue?
The government has been insisting that the central bank hand over its surplus reserves amid a shortfall in revenue collections. Access to the funds will allow the government to meet deficit targets, infuse capital into weak banks to boost lending and fund welfare programmes.

Terms of reference:
- The panel will decide **whether RBI is holding provisions**, reserves and buffers in surplus of the required levels.
- It would propose **a suitable profits distribution policy** taking into account all the likely situations of the RBI, including the situations of holding more provisions than required and the RBI holding less provisions than required.
- The ECF committee will **also suggest an adequate level of risk provisioning** that the RBI needs to maintain. That apart, any other related matter, including treatment of surplus reserves created out of realized gains, will also come within the ambit of this committee.

What is economic capital framework?

Economic capital framework refers to the risk capital required by the central bank while taking into account different risks. The economic capital framework reflects the capital that an institution requires or needs to hold as a counter against unforeseen risks or events or losses in the future.

Why it needs a fix?

- Existing economic capital framework which governs the RBI's capital requirements and terms for the transfer of its surplus to the government **is based on a conservative assessment of risk by the central bank and that a review of the framework would result in excess capital being freed, which the RBI can then share with the government**.
- The government believes that RBI is sitting on much higher reserves than it actually needs to tide over financial emergencies that India may face. Some central banks around the world (like US and UK) keep 13% to 14% of their assets as a reserve compared to RBI's 27% and some (like Russia) more than that.
- Economists in the past have argued for RBI releasing 'extra' capital that can be put to productive use by the government. **The Malegam Committee** estimated the excess (in 2013) at Rs 1.49 lakh crore.

National Investment & Manufacturing Zones

IN NEWS:
National Investment & Manufacturing Zones (NIMZs) are one of the important instruments of National Manufacturing Policy, 2011.
NIMZs are envisaged as large areas of developed land with the requisite eco-system for promoting world class manufacturing activity.

IN DEPTH:
Objective of Special Economic Zones –
To promote exports, while NIMZs are based on the principle of industrial growth in partnership with States and focuses on manufacturing growth and employment generation.
NIMZs are different from SEZs in terms of size, level of infrastructure planning, governance structures related to regulatory procedures, and exit policies.

For the Financial Year 2016 – 2017, Rs. 3.35 crores has been earmarked under the **'Scheme for Implementation of National Manufacturing Policy'** for **'Master Planning of NIMZs'** and **Technology Acquisition and Development Fund (TADF)**.

FDI policy on e- commerce.

IN NEWS:
The Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion recently issued a clarification to the existing rules pertaining to Foreign Direct Investment in e-commerce companies.

IN DEPTH:
The main features of the clarification include:
- Vendors that have any stake owned by an e-commerce company **cannot sell their products on that e-commerce company's portal**.
- **Any vendor who purchases 25% or more of its inventory from an e-commerce group company**will be considered to be controlled by that e-commerce company, and thereby barred from selling on its portal. This provision aims to ensure that vendors in which marketplaces, such as Amazon, have a stake do not sell the bulk of their items to a third-party vendor who then goes on to sell those items on the e-commerce marketplace.
- In other words, **the provision seeks to deny control by the marketplace entity over vendors**.
- **E-commerce firm will not be allowed to influence the price of a product sold on its portal by giving incentives to particular vendors**.

Background:
E-commerce companies can operate under **two different models in India**.
- The first is the **marketplace model** where the e-commerce firm simply acts as a platform that connects buyers and sellers. **FDI is allowed in e-commerce companies in this model**.
- The second model is **inventory-based** where the inventory of goods sold on the portal is owned or controlled by the e-commerce company. **FDI is not allowed under this model**.

What is the context for these changes?
- What has been happening is that large e-commerce companies such as Amazon and Flipkart, while not owning inventory themselves, have been providing a platform for their group companies such as CloudTail and WS Retail respectively.
- Some see this as skewing the playing field, especially if these vendors enjoyed special incentives from the e-commerce firm, over others. These controlled or owned vendors may then be able to offer discounts to customers that competitors may not be able to match.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Norway witness a boom in electric cars
IN NEWS:
- In Norway approximately 30% of all new cars are electric cars, compared with 2% across Europe overall and 1-2% in the U.S.
- Norway's success has one key driver — the government.
- The government offered big subsidies and perks that it is now due to phase out, but only so long as electric cars remain attractive to buy compared with traditional ones.
- The move is towards the commitment to have **only sell zero-emissions cars sold** in Norway by 2025.
- The plan supports Norway's CO_2 reduction targets under the 2015 Paris climate accord, which nations agreed to ensure emissions goals are met.
- To help sales, the Norwegian government waived hefty vehicle import duties and registration and sales taxes for buyers of electric cars. Owners don't have to pay road tolls, and get free use of ferries and bus lanes in congested city centres.

SPACE

ISRO's GSAT-7A to add muscle to Air Force

IN NEWS:
- **Military communication satellite GSAT-7A** to be launched on Dec. 19 from Sriharikota
- It is expected to add a new space-based dimension to the way Indian Air Force interlinks, operates and communicates with its aircraft.
- Although all Indian communication satellites offer capacity to the armed forces, GSAT-7A will be the **first one built primarily for the IAF** to qualitatively unify its assets and improve combined, common intelligence during operations.

Eye in the sky

GSAT-7A - a communication satellite designed specifically for military operations - will be launched from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota on December 19. Some facts about the launch:

- This is the 13th flight of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV)
- The satellite GSAT-7A is the 35th Indian communication satellite. It weighs 2,250 kg.
- The satellite is built to provide communication capability to users in the Ku-band over the Indian region
- Ku-band will enable superior real time aircraft-to-aircraft communication

- Since August 2013, the Navy has a satellite largely for its use, the GSAT-7, for similarly linking its ships to command on land.

Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (or SSLV)

IN NEWS:
- ISRO's **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), Kerala** has completed the design for the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).
- SSLV is a '**baby rocket**' designed **to launch small satellites** (payload capacity of 500 kg to Low Earth orbit or 300 kg to Sun synchronous orbit) in quickest way to the space.
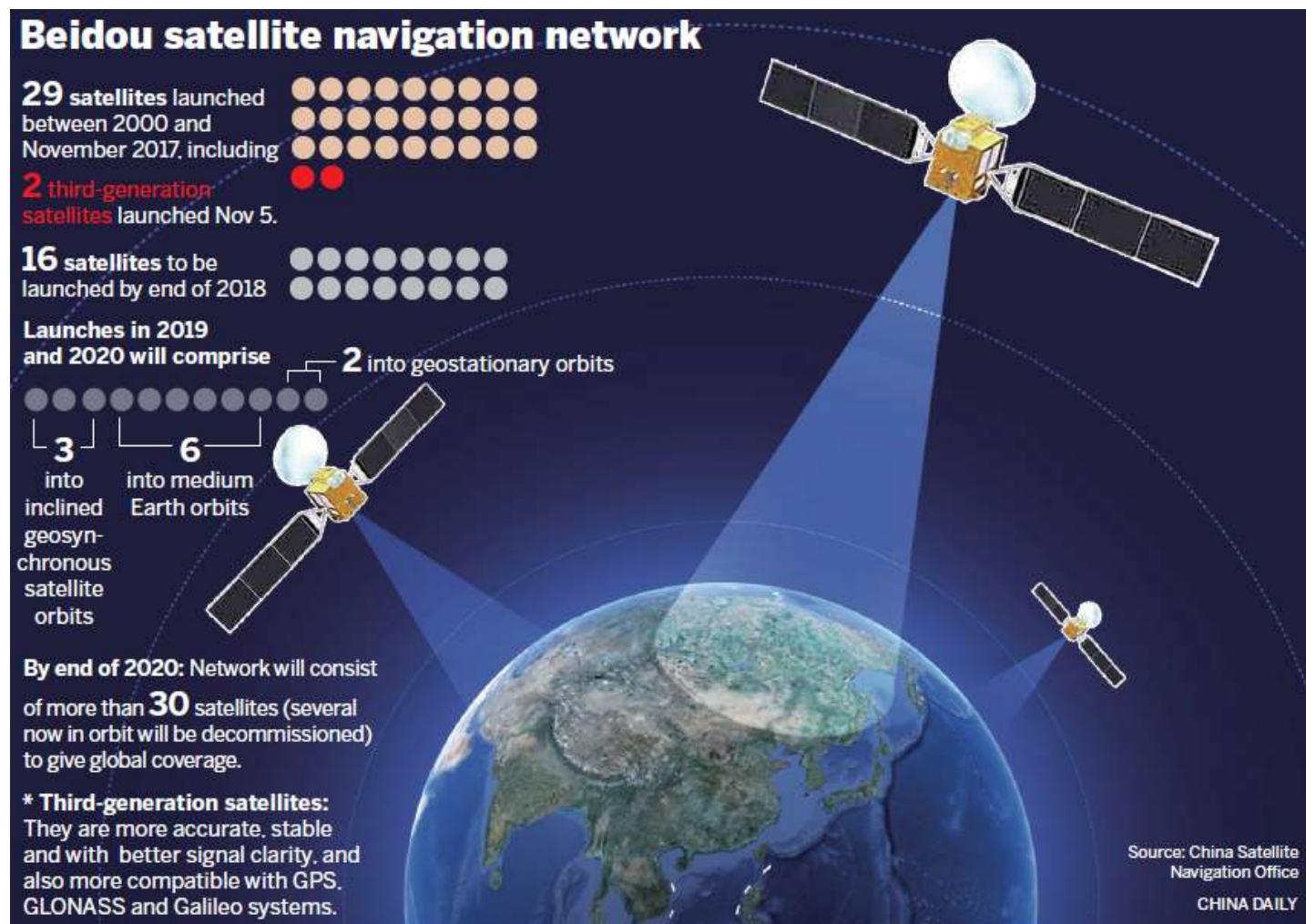
IN DEPTH:

- SSLV was developed with the aim of launching small satellites commercially at drastically reduced price and higher launch rate as compared to PSLV. The manufacturing cost of SSLV is expected to be 10% of that of PSLV.
- **It takes a mere 15 days** and minimum personnel to design the SSLV.
- The SSLV has three solid motor stages and like the PSLV and GSLV, can accommodate multiple satellites.
- Unlike the PSLV and GSLV, the SSLV **can be assembled both vertically and horizontally**.

Navigation satellite systems.

IN NEWS:

China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), touted as a rival to the widely-used American GPS, has started providing global services.

- The positioning accuracy of the system has reached 10 metres globally and five metres in the Asia-Pacific region. Its velocity accuracy is 0.2 metres per second, while its timing accuracy stands at 20 nanoseconds.
- **Pakistan has become the first country to use the BeiDou system** ending its reliance on the Global Positioning System (GPS).

Beidou satellite navigation network

29 satellites launched between 2000 and November 2017, including

2 third-generation satellites launched Nov 5.

16 satellites to be launched by end of 2018

Launches in 2019 and 2020 will comprise

2 into geostationary orbits

3 into inclined geosynchronous satellite orbits

6 into medium Earth orbits

By end of 2020: Network will consist of more than **30** satellites (several now in orbit will be decommissioned) to give global coverage.

* Third-generation satellites: They are more accurate, stable and with better signal clarity, and also more compatible with GPS, GLONASS and Galileo systems.

Source: China Satellite Navigation Office

CHINA DAILY

IN DEPTH:
Significance:
It will be **the fourth global satellite navigation system** after the US GPS, Russia's GLONASS and the European Union's Galileo.

About BeiDou Satellite System:
Named after the Chinese term for Big Dipper, the BeiDou system started providing independent services over China in 2000. It is being projected by Beijing as a rival to the American Global Positioning System (GPS).
- The full constellation is scheduled to **comprise 35 satellites**.
- **BeiDou has two separate constellations**, BeiDou-1 and BeiDou-2. BeiDou-1 also known as first generation was a constellation of three satellites.
- **BeiDou-2, also known as COMPASS**, is the second generation of the system. It became operational in the year 2011.

What are the various GNSS systems?
The four global GNSS systems are – GPS (US), GLONASS (Russia), Galileo (EU), BeiDou (China). Additionally, there are two regional systems – QZSS (Japan) and IRNSS or NavIC (India).

ENVIRONMENT

Animal in news: Pangolin

IN NEWS:
- The pangolin, which can be found all over India, seems doomed because of its scales, which are said to have medicinal value and are more expensive than gold, are sheared ruthlessly.
- Its meat too is in demand in China. Illegal trade continues not just in parts where there are tigers but also in parts where there are musk deer, otter, mongoose and other animals.
- It is an insectivore, feeding on ants and termites, digging them out of mounds and logs using its long claws, which are as long as its fore limbs. It is nocturnal and rests in deep burrows during the day.
- Pangolins are the most trafficked mammals in the world, despite an international ban on their trade.They are trafficked both for their meat, and the unfounded belief that their keratinous scales have medical properties used in traditional medicine.
- IUCN Conservation status: Endangered

Animal in news: Great Indian Bustard
IN NEWS:
- One of the rarest species and undoubtedly one of the most endangered is the Great Indian Bustard, which is the State bird of Rajasthan.
- Endemic to Jaisalmer and Pokhran, its habitat was severely damaged by the nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998. Once widely spotted across 11 Indian states, but their numbers now stand at 60 in Rajasthan and the world population of the bird may be just 80. In Gujarat, not a single adult male has been sited. Power lines are pushing out the birds.

- Apart from power lines (high voltage ones, running above the ground), loss of grassland are the reasons behind the decline.
- IUCN Conservation status: Critically Endangered
- The GIB is a heavy bird, weighing 15-16 kg.
- The GIB is a flagship species of the grassland; it determines the health of the grasslands, on which many other species of birds and animals, and even the dairy industry is dependent on.
- There is unhindered grazing and installing of windmills and power stations on grasslands, thereby encroaching upon the breeding and wintering ground of the GIB.
- Large parcels of grassland are converted to agricultural land.
- The changing agricultural pattern that is moving away from traditional crops is another reason. With the disappearance of the traditional Bajra and Jowar crops, whose by-products served as fodder, their food has been on the decline.
- An increase in the use of pesticides has further depleted the population of insects like the beetle, which the GIB and other birds feed on.

Tiger Conservation
IN NEWS:
- India recorded 95 tiger deaths in 2018, 41 outside reserves
- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) chief says many animals venture into habitations, which increases the possibility of human-animal conflicts and results in deaths
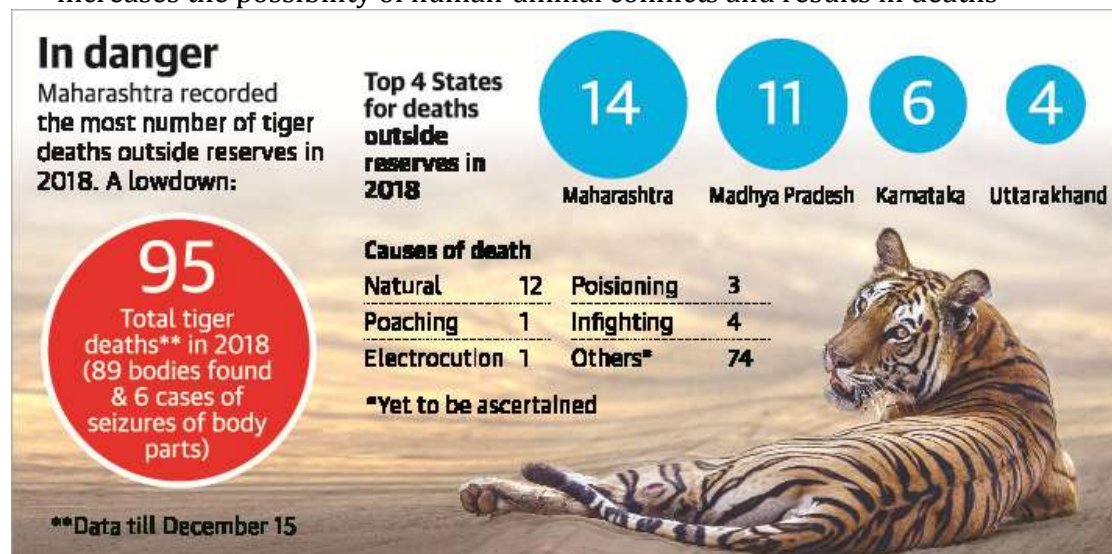
- The NTCA maintains the official database of tiger mortality in the country, and compiles figures from reports sent by different States on the basis of recovery of bodies or seizure of body parts.

COP24 Katowice climate summit
IN NEWS:
- Nations struck a deal to breathe life into the landmark **2015 Paris climate treaty** after marathon UN talks that failed to match the ambition the most vulnerable countries need to avert dangerous global warming.
- Delegates from nearly 200 states **finalised a common rule book** designed to deliver on the Paris goals of limiting global temperature rises to well below 2°Celsius.

- Rule book will help to track how countries are doing, whether they are actually doing what they say they are doing.

Bt cotton seed probe

IN NEWS:

- In India, Bt cotton seeds of Bollgard-I (since 2002) with **Cry1Ac gene** and Bollgard-II (since 2006) with **Cry2Ab gene** are approved for sale on a commercial scale.
- A company needs the approval of the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) to commercially produce genetically modified seeds.
- Bt cotton seeds with **HTTG** are not approved by the GEAC.
- However, as per the report from the Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR), Nagpur, five branded Bt cotton seeds namely Jadu, ATM, Balbhadra, Arjun and Krishna-gold were found with HTTG. (The Maharashtra State government has requested a CBI probe.)

Role of NGT over illegal extraction of groundwater

IN NEWS:

- NGT had rapped the Central Ground Water Authority for failing to curb illegal extraction of groundwater and directed the Ministry to notify a policy by December 18.
- Following which, the Union Water Resources Ministry issued a notification pertaining to groundwater extraction.
- However, NGT said the notification was against "national interest".

IN DEPTH:

- We already read that – Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) has notified a water conservation fee (WCF).
- Industries will need to pay on groundwater extraction starting from June 2019.
- Industries extracting groundwater, including mining-dewatering units and those that use groundwater for packaged drinking water, will need to apply for a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the government.
- Individual households that draw groundwater using a delivery pipe of a greater than 1" diameter, too, will need to pay a WCF.
- However, the agriculture sector — the largest consumer of groundwater in the country — will be exempt from the fees.

Hefty fines if States fail to give plans to clean up rivers: NGT

IN NEWS:

NGT noted that –

- 16 States have submitted "incomplete action plans" pertaining to the cleaning of 351 polluted river stretches in the country.
- It has extended the deadline for submitting the action plans to January 31.
- In case of non-compliance, hefty compensation will be levied on the States and the Union Territories.

Concern:
- States and UTs have not even taken the first requisite step of preparing an action plan, showing total insensitivity to such a serious matter and public issue.
- NGT said – for every delay, compensation for damage to the environment will be payable by each State or UT at the rate of □1 crore per month for each of the Priority-I and Priority II stretches, □50 lakh per month for stretches in Priority III and □25 lakh per month each for Priority IV and Priority V stretches.

Animal in news: 260 leopards poached since 2015

IN NEWS:

According to Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) –

- At least 260 leopards were poached in the country between 2015 and 2018.
- Uttarakhand accounted for 60 cases and Himachal Pradesh reported another 49.
- Central Indian States like Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh also recorded a high number of cases of leopard poaching in the past four years.
- There are also several incidents of leopard deaths on account of road kills, particularly in States such as Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Hunted down

64 cases of leopard poaching were recorded in 2015, 83 deaths in 2016, 47 cases in 2017 and 66 till October 2018

● 2015 ● 2016 ● 2017 ● 2018
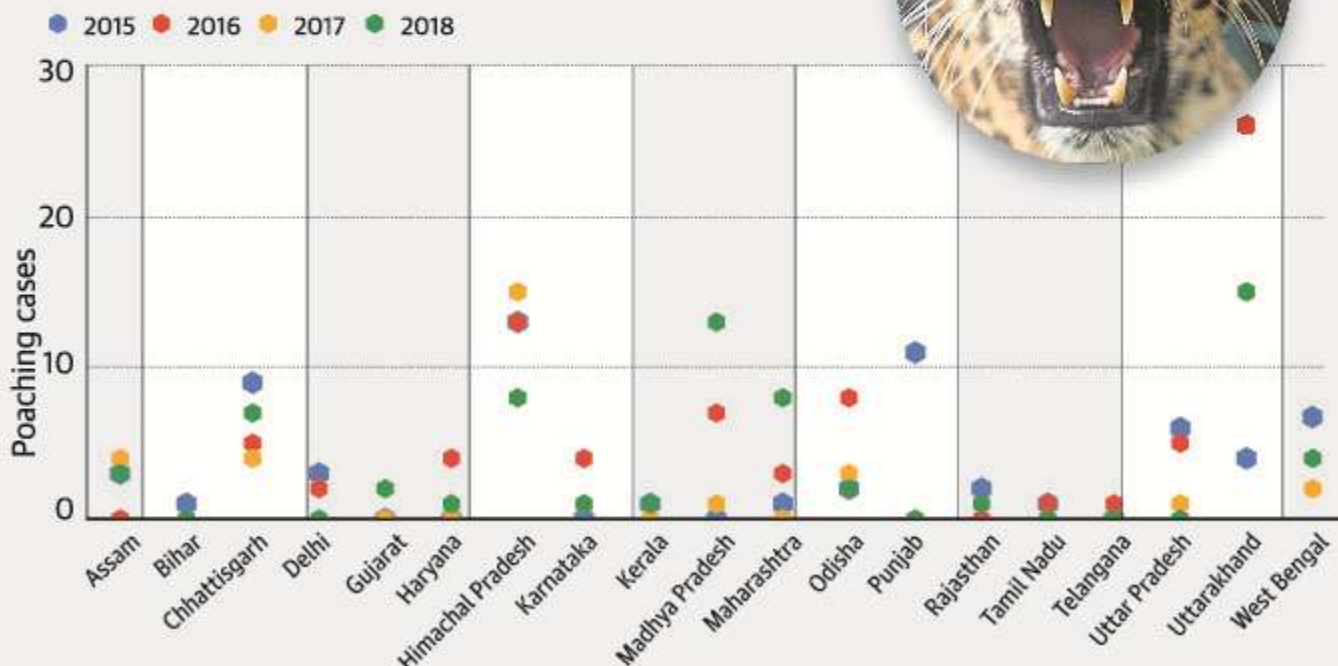
Source: Lok Sabha unstarred question no. 844

IN DEPTH:

- 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 habitations and are found all across the country, the cases of poaching too are spread countrywide.
- IUCN status: Vulnerable

Bahuda rookery

IN NEWS:
        The Odisha forest department is all set to add another olive ridley mass nesting site to its wildlife map- at **Bahuda rookery**. 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.
Location: 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.

IN DEPTH:
Key facts:
- Also known as **the Pacific ridley sea turtle**, Olive turtles are a medium-sized species of sea turtle found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- They are best known for their behavior of synchronized nesting in **mass numbers**.
- The **Convention on Migratory Species and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles** have also provided olive ridleys with protection, leading to increased conservation and management for this marine turtle.
- It is included **in Vulnerable category by the IUCN Red list**.

UNFCCC

IN NEWS:
 The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved Submission of India's second Biennial Update Report (BUR) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) towards the fulfilment of the reporting obligation under the Convention.

IN DEPTH:
Background:
The submission of India's second BUR would fulfil the obligation of India to furnish information regarding implementation of the convention, being a party. The scope of the BUR is to provide an update to India's first BUR to the UNFCCC.
The second biennial update report aims to provide an update to India's first biennial report to the United Nation's body on climate change. The report contains five major components including national circumstances, national greenhouse gas inventory, mitigation actions, finance, technology and capacity building needs and support received and domestic monitoring, reporting and verification arrangements.

Key findings:
- Out of the total emissions, energy sector accounted for 73%, IPPU 8%, agriculture 16% and waste sector 3%. About 12% of the emissions were offset by the carbon sink action of forestland, cropland and settlements.

INDC- India's proposed targets:
- **Reduce emissions intensity** of its GDP by 33 to 35% by 2030 from 2005 level.
- **Achieve about 40% electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel based energy resources** by 2030 with help of transfer of technology and low cost international finance.
- **Create an additional carbon sink** of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO_2 equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

About UNFCCC:
The UNFCCC was adopted in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit, which marked the beginning of the international community's first concerted effort to confront the problem of climate change.
- **Known also as the Rio Convention**, the UNFCCC established a framework for action to stabilise concentrations of **greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere**.
- The UNFCCC entered into force in 1994, and nearly all of the world's nations—a total of 195—have now signed on.

DEFENCE

Information Fusion Centre (IFC)

IN NEWS:
- Navy to formally inaugurate the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Through this Centre, information on "white shipping", or commercial shipping, will be exchanged with countries in the region to improve maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.
- IFC-IOR is established with the vision of strengthening maritime security in the region and beyond and and act as a maritime information hub.
- IFC has been established at the Navy's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in Gurugram.
- Navy's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) is the single point centre linking all the coastal radar chains to generate a seamless real-time picture of the nearly 7,500-km coastline.
- Around 21 countries that have already signed white shipping information exchange agreements are IFC partners.

IN DEPTH:
Trans Regional Maritime Network (T-RMN)
- In a related development, India has signed the ascension agreement to the Trans Regional Maritime Network (T-RMN) which facilitates information exchange on the movement of commercial traffic on the high seas.
- The multilateral construct comprises of 30 countries and is steered by Italy.

Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS)

IN NEWS:
* User-assisted trials of the Advanced Towed Artillery Gun are likely to start soon.

IN DEPTH:
About ATAGS –
* indigenously-designed **heavy artillery gun**
* **developed by** the Defence Research and Development Organisation **(DRDO)**
* The gun has several significant features including an all-electric drive, high mobility, quick deployability, auxiliary power mode, advanced communications system, automated command and control system.
* It also sports a six-round magazine instead of the standard three-round magazine.
* The Army, which has been seeking to modernise its weaponry, recently inducted its first modern pieces of artillery in 30 years: the **M777 Ultra-Light Howitzer from the U.S.** and the **K9 Vajra-T self-propelled artillery gun** from **South Korea**.

Firing on all cylinders

* Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) is a 155mm, 52 calibre gun, developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in a consortium model

* One prototype has been built in partnership with Tata Power (Strategic Engineering Division) and another with Bharat Forge

* Two guns from each company are undergoing trials; two more guns to join trials later

* There is a sanction for production of 10 guns as part of the development process

* The gun currently weighs about 18 tonnes while the ideal weight is 14-15 tonnes

* The defence Ministry has approved purchase of 150 guns at an approximate cost of ₹3,365 crore

* The Army is in the process of finalising the Preliminary Specifications Qualitative Requirements (PSQR) which details the essential parameters, which should be ready by July 2019

* The gun is presently undergoing development trials. User assisted trials will begin from May-June 2019

■ KEY FEATURES
Electric drive
High mobility
Quick deployability
Auxiliary power mode
Advanced communication system
Automated command and control system
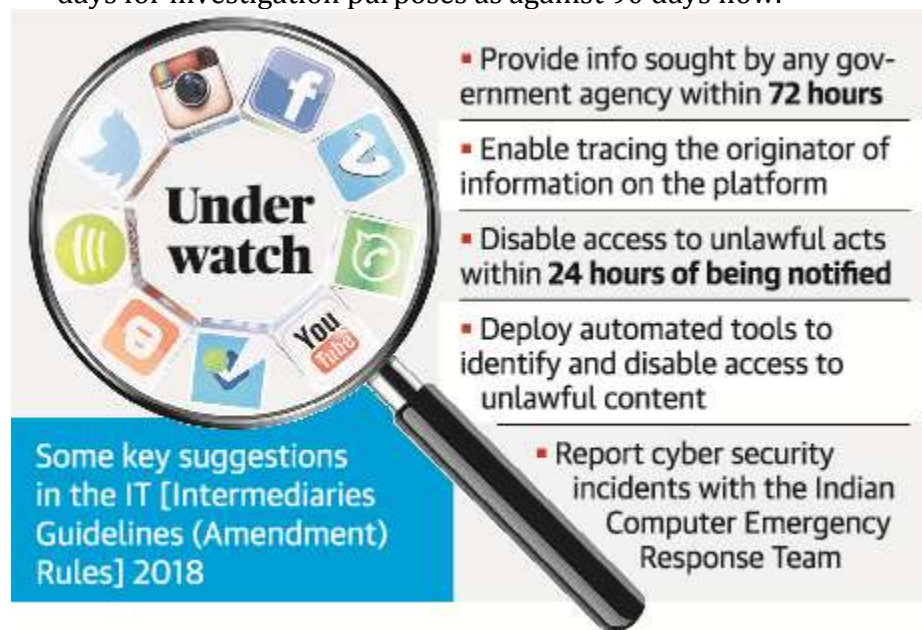Six round magazine instead of a standard three round magazine

INTERNAL SECURITY

Bid to prevent fake news

IN NEWS:
- The government has proposed amendments to the Information Technology (IT) Act.
- The amendment seeks to make it mandatory for platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter to **trace "originator" of "unlawful" information**, while also **removing such content within 24 hours** after being notified.

IN DEPTH:
- As per the draft 'The Information Technology [Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules] 2018', the intermediary after being notified by the appropriate authority should remove or disable access to unlawful content within 24 hours in the "interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence, on its computer resource without vitiating the evidence in any manner…"
- The intermediary is also expected to preserve such information and associated records for at least 180 days for investigation purposes as against 90 days now.

Under watch

- Provide info sought by any government agency within **72 hours**
- Enable tracing the originator of information on the platform
- Disable access to unlawful acts within **24 hours of being notified**
- Deploy automated tools to identify and disable access to unlawful content
- Report cyber security incidents with the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team

Some key suggestions in the IT [Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules] 2018

Development – 'bone of contention' between govt and Maoists

IN NEWS:
- Development has been the 'bone of contention' between the government agencies, including the security forces, and the banned CPI (Maoists).
- While security agencies and the authorities claim that development would ease the hardship of the tribal people in the under-developed region, the Maoists feel that it would bring in multi-national companies into the forest to exploit the resources that belong to the tribal population under the Schedule 5 of the Constitution.

- Government's strategy to contain Maoists is through building cell towers and better road connectivity. As towers would enable the tribal people to access information on climate, agriculture, health and education.
- Central government has sanctioned huge funds under the Road Connectivity Project in Left Wing Extremist Area project.
- However, the Maoists have strongly opposed against it.

CYBERSECURITY

All computers now under govt. watch
IN NEWS:
- Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order authorising 10 Central agencies to intercept, monitor, and decrypt "any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer."
- According to the order, the subscriber or service provider or any person in charge of the computer resource will be bound to extend all facilities and technical assistance to the agencies and failing to do will invite seven-year imprisonment and fine.

The MHA gave the authorisation under **69 (1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000** which says that the Central government can direct any agency after it is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient to do so in the "interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above or for investigation of any offence."

Allowing 10 different Central agencies to snoop challenges SC verdict on privacy
IN NEWS:
- Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order authorising 10 Central agencies to intercept, monitor, and decrypt "any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer."
- However, experts said that the MHA order challenges the SC verdict on privacy.
- The government order is based on **Section 69(1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000**, and **Rule 4 of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules, 2009**.
- Nine-judge Constitution Bench judgment of the Supreme Court had directed the government to **protect informational privacy of every individual**.
- In its 2017 judgment, the court had asked the government always to balance individual privacy and the legitimate concerns of the state carefully and sensitively, **even if national security was at stake**.

IN DEPTH:

New list, old rules

A look at what the fuss over the Home Ministry's order authorising 10 agencies to intercept computer-based information is all about

- Provision for interception of information from computer resources exists since 2000. Sec.69(1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000 allowed this in the interest of the country's sovereignty and integrity, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order or incitement to offence

- Section 69 was amended in 2008 to enable the Centre and the State governments to "intercept, monitor or decrypt" any information transmitted through, received or stored in a computer

RULES
- Rules were framed in 2009 setting out the procedure and safeguards. Rule 3 says 'the competent authority' (the Home Secretary in the Centre and the States) alone can issue an order for interceptionring

- Rule 4 says the competent authority may authorise a government agency to carry out the task

- The present order naming 10 agencies has been issued under Rule 4. It does not introduce any new surveillance norm or rule

PROCEDURE
- The agencies also must go only by procedure laid down in the same 2009 Rules for carrying out these tasks.

- Any direction for interception shall contain reasons ,and a copy should be to a 'Review Committee' within seven days. The authority, before issuing the order, should also consider getting the required information by other means

- An interception order will be in force only for a maximum of 60 days. Rules have also been framed outlining the intermediary's responsibilities

- The Review Committee should meet once in two months. It has the power to set aside interception orders and direct the destruction of records if procedure is not followed

Concerns:
Experts have argued that –

- It is a serious invasion of individual privacy recognised in the **S. Puttuswamy (privacy) judgment**
- Balance tilts heavily in favour of the government
- A wide range of government bodies have been given blanket powers. There is no common thread among these agencies. For example, why should the Central Board of Direct Taxes get access to the encrypted material of its citizens?