



इशाईका
Comprehensive NEWS Analysis

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Week - 02

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Polity and Governance

1. Future is in modern cities, not Gandhi's villages

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi was right about decentralisation of power to local-level governments but wrong about villages. Perhaps, the context he lived in, made him place great faith in villages as units of India's democracy. However, if Gandhi were to live today, I am certain he'd readily acknowledge the importance of cities and change his famous utterance from 'the future of India lies in its villages' to 'the future of India lies in its vibrant cities'.

In the past, the fact that cities were at the forefront of civilizations and empires is undisputed— take the Indus Valley Civilization, where cities not only existed but thrived because of robust urban planning and governance; or the towns that predominated the era of Kushans and Satavahanas; or the Delhi Sultanate where towns were centers of trade, commerce and great prosperity.

Why do cities matter today?

According to Census 2011, 31 per cent of the population lived in cities while the rest resided in villages. Given that more than 2/3rd lives in villages, isn't it paradoxical that cities should matter more than villages? Yet cities matter today because:

- The village economy is largely driven by agriculture. Today, agriculture is facing distress and scores of people are migrating to cities. To accommodate them meaningfully, cities need to start acting as enablers through jobs, affordable housing, quality infrastructure, and so on.
- Cities have cluster effects, that is, benefits derived due to individuals or groups engaging in similar socio-cultural and/or economic activities. For example, Florence in Italy played a pivotal role during the Renaissance where luminaries like Leonardo da Vinci thrived; Birmingham in England facilitated the Industrial Revolution. In India, the automobile manufacturing plants are centered on Chennai and the software parks around Bangalore.
- Cities are home to large reservoirs of intellectual capital. There are several public-spirited citizens who are industrialists, entrepreneurs, students, etc. who is not otherwise concentrated locally. In cities, it becomes possible to leverage their strengths and talents to improve governance.
- Bereft of resources and devoid of talent due to migration to urban areas, villages are increasingly shrinking in importance. Low level of economic activity limits their resource base and they are helplessly dependent on transfers from the State and Union governments.

Therefore, villages in their present form cannot continue. In situ urbanization must be facilitated wherein a village or a bunch of villages are

able to scale-up non-farm economic activities, generate employment and arrest migration to cities. This will not only promote prosperity and economies of scale but would also decongest our heavily burdened urban centers like Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore.

Now, the next question is - if cities are here to play an important role, how do we ensure they are ready for it? To meaningfully address this question, we must understand the issues of 3F's and 1C — Functions, Functionaries, Funds and Citizen Participation of our cities' municipalities.

Functions

- 18 functions including — urban planning; public health and sanitation; solid waste management; public amenities — parks, street lighting, etc.; roads and bridges; water supply; fire services and so on, come under the jurisdiction of municipalities according to Schedule XII of the Indian Constitution. However, the reality is vastly different.
- Presence of multiple parastatals, overseen by State governments, such as Water Supply and Sewerage Boards, Roads and Bridges Department, etc. interfere with the functioning of municipalities. For example, the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWSSB) is headed by the CM of Telangana and has State government officials.
- In West Ben-gal, fire services — a Municipal-level function lies with the State government. In Kochi, the Roads and Bridges department is independent of the Kochi Municipal Corporation — all functions concerning roads are taken over by the State so much so that even bus stops cannot be sanctioned by the municipality.
- Consequently, municipalities end up exclusively dealing with only 5–6 functions out of the 18 functions. This is in stark contrast to even an auto-cratic country like China wherein a city like Shanghai controls traffic, police and even the airport among others.

Functionaries

- Mayors remain mere figureheads in municipalities while the real power lies with the Municipal Commissioner (who is appointed by the State government). For instance, in most municipalities, the budgets are decided by the Commissioner.
- Similarly, recruitment and appointment of municipal staff are done by the State government. As a result, municipalities have little control over their own personnel. On the other hand, in countries like the USA and the UK, the Mayor is highly empowered, appoints her own staff and has control over municipal personnel.

Funds

- When it comes to funds, two problems confront cities lack of adequate fund devolution and low internal revenue base.
- The dependence on external transfers combined with a low potential for resource generation results in urban local bodies being stuck in a low-level equilibrium trap (Economic Survey 2017–18). There is an

over-reliance on property tax and even here, the efficiency of tax collection is low (less than 30% in Bangalore). Other tax avenues are woefully inadequate and have failed to attune to the changing times. In Kerala, the building tax was last revised in 1992. Since the power lies with the State government, the municipalities cannot do anything about it.

- The transfer of funds from the Union and State governments is grossly in-adequate. As the 15th Finance Commission officials are presently visiting several states for consultations, the demand for greater devolution to local bodies is reverberant across states.

Citizen participation

- Citizen Participation is virtually non-existent due to non-functioning of ward committees except in states like Kerala. In Rajasthan, ward committees have been defunct for more than a decade.
- The overall effect is that participatory governance is stymied. This leads us to the next question of reviving urban centers in India.

Making cities work

It is important to either vest all 18 functions of Schedule XII of the Indian Constitution under the municipality or have a robust coordination mechanism when that's not entirely possible.

- The leadership needs to be empowered — elected Mayor, Mayor-in-Council system (as in Bhopal and Kolkata) or greater autonomy depending on the local context (For example — the Municipality in Kochi can pass a resolution to stall any autocratic appointment of its Secretary (Commissioner) by the State government).
- There is a need for greater devolution of funds in a rule-based manner through Finance Commission transfers and/or greater transfer by the States. At the same time, municipalities must be enabled to augment their own resource base - revision of tax rates and/or levying new fees like parking charge, etc.
- The vast amount of intellectual and social capital of citizens needs to be tapped into the framework of urban governance to ensure inclusive outcomes. Kerala is a noteworthy example of citizen participation at the local level.

It is estimated that more than 60 per cent of our population will live in Indian cities by 2050. Unless we fix urban governance, neither can cities function well nor can they afford livelihood opportunities to the rising urban dwellers. It's time for India to act.

2. Global Housing Technology Challenge

In News

- The Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has recently launched the Global Housing Technology Challenge to make the construction of houses cost-effective and innovative.

- The GHTC-India challenge is a well-conceptualised and designed programme to bring out the most innovative, simple, effective and appropriate solutions for making housing available and affordable to the common man.
- Under the challenge, a grand expo-cum-conference will be organised in March which will be a unique platform not only for the stakeholders but also for the States/Union Territories and technical institutions.
- Global firms will be invited to India to demonstrate construction techniques for housing that are affordable and take minimum time – as less as three months instead of the conventional three years for construction
- It will address issues related to the housing shortage in a time-bound manner and focus on the need for emerging, cost-effective & speedy construction technologies.
- The challenge will also focus on identifying and mainstreaming proven demonstrable technologies for lighthouse projects and spotting potential future technologies for incubation and acceleration support through ASHA (Affordable Sustainable Housing Accelerators) — India.
- The idea is to enable a paradigm shift in the country's construction sector and meet the target of building 1.2 crore houses by 2022 under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U).

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban

- PMAY (U), was launched by the Prime Minister in 2015 to ensure Housing for all by 2022 through financial assistance. Around 68.5 lakh houses have been approved so far for construction under the PMAY (U) and around 1.5 million houses have been handed over to beneficiaries.
- The PMAY-U mission has four verticals – In-situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR), Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP), Beneficiary-led Individual house construction or Enhancement (BLC), and Credit-Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS).
- Under the scheme, Economically Weaker Sections and Low Income Group beneficiaries can avail central assistance of up to Rs 2.67 lakh per house as provisioned under the different components of the scheme while benefits to Middle Income Group are restricted to CLSS only.

3. Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojna

In News:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the “Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN (JaivIndhan- VatavaranAnukoolfasalawasheshNivaran) Yojana”.

- The scheme provides financial support to Integrated Bioethanol Projects using lignocellulosic biomass and other renewable feedstock.

- The scheme focuses to incentivise 2G Ethanol sector and support this nascent industry by creating a suitable ecosystem for setting up commercial projects and increasing Research & Development in this area.

Apart from supplementing the targets envisaged by the Government under EBP programme, the scheme will also have the following benefits:

- Meeting Government of India vision of reducing import dependence by way of substituting fossil fuels with Biofuels.
- Achieving the GHG emissions reduction targets through progressive blending/substitution of fossil fuels.
- Addressing environment concerns caused due to burning of biomass/ crop residues & improve health of citizens.
- Improving farmer income by providing them remunerative income for their otherwise waste agriculture residues.

Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana

PM JI-VAN yojana under process for creating infrastructure of 2G Ethanol Bio-refineries in the Country.

Focus:
Providing viability gap funding for setting up Commercial Projects and promoting R&D in this field by providing grant on setting up demonstration projects.

Budget
₹5,000 crore

Benefits of the scheme:

- a) Doubling farmer income by providing remuneration on agriculture residues.
- b) Address environmental concerns caused due to burning of biomass & improve health of citizens.
- c) Create rural & urban employment opportunities.
- d) Crude import substitution by enhancing ethanol blending percentage progressively.
- e) Forex savings
- f) Contribute to Swachh Bharat Mission by supporting the aggregation of non-food biofuel feedstocks such as waste biomass and urban waste.
- g) A tool to meet the targets envisaged in Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme for achieving 10% blending of Ethanol in Petrol on Pan India basis

- Creating rural & urban employment opportunities in 2G Ethanol projects and Biomass supply chain.
- Contributing to Swachh Bharat Mission by supporting the aggregation of non-food biofuel feedstocks such as waste biomass and urban waste.
- Indigenizing of Second Generation Biomass to Ethanol technologies.
- The ethanol produced by the scheme beneficiaries will be mandatorily supplied to Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to further enhance the blending percentage under EBP Programme.
- Centre for High Technology (CHT), a technical body under the aegis of MoP&NG, will be the implementation Agency for the scheme.

Significance

Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas has targeted to achieve 10% blending percentage of Ethanol in petrol by 2022. Despite efforts of the Government such as higher ethanol prices and simplification of ethanol purchase system, the highest ever ethanol procurement stands around 150 crore litres during Ethanol supply year 2017-18 which is sufficient for around 4.22% blending on Pan India basis.

Therefore, an alternate route viz. Second Generation (2G) Ethanol from biomass and other wastes is being explored by MoP&NG to bridge the supply gap for EBP programme. In this direction, "Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana" is being launched as a tool to create 2G Ethanol capacity in the country and attract investments in this new sector.

Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme:

- Government of India launched Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme in 2003 for undertaking blending of ethanol in Petrol to address environmental concerns due to fossil fuel burning, provide remuneration to farmers, subsidize crude imports and achieve forex savings.
- Presently, EBP is being run in 21 States and 4 UTs of the country. Under EBP programme, OMCs are to blend upto 10% of ethanol in Petrol. The present policy allows procurement of ethanol produced from molasses and non-food feed stock like celluloses and lignocelluloses material including petrochemical route.

4. 10% Quota for Low Income Groups

In News

The Parliament has approved 124th Constitutional Amendment Bill (103rd Amendment Act) to give 10% reservation to the economically weaker sections (EWS) of society, over and above the 49.5% quota in place for SC, ST and OBCs. (It is a type of horizontal reservation like for PH category not like vertical reservation for SCs/STs)

Background

- **2006 Commission:** The UPA government in 2006 had formed the Commission for Economically Backward Classes under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE). Maj Gen (Retd) SR Sinho headed the Commission. It had given 14 recommendations, one of the major recommendations was to qualify upper caste members who don't pay income tax as EWS and treat them at par with other backward classes.
- **Other recommendations:** The Commission also recommended that EWS children should be eligible for soft loans for higher education, scholarships, coaching for IAS and PCS exams and subsidized health facilities. Further, they can also be helped in the housing sector with soft loans.

Provisions of the Bill

- **Aim:** The Bill aims to add **Clause 6 in Articles 15 and 16** of the Constitution to extend reservation in educational institutions and government jobs for EWS. The beneficiaries include EWS from all religions.
- **Article 15(6):** The new clause (6) to Article 15 allows the government to carve reservation for the EWS of society in higher educational

institutions, including private ones, whether they are aided or not by the State. **Minority educational institutions are exempted.**

- **Article 16(6):** Likewise, the new clause (6) to Article 16 provides for quota for economically deprived sections in the initial appointment in government services.
- **Exclusions:** The person not entitled to EWS reservation include those family having annual income **above Rs 8 Lakh**, persons whose family owns or possesses five acres of agricultural land, residential flat of 1000 square feet and above, residential plot of 10 yards and above in notified municipalities and residential plot of 200 yards and above in areas other than notified municipalities.

Arguments In Favor Of the Bill

- **50% limit does not apply:** The Amendment Act does not violate the **Indra Sawhney judgment of 50% ceiling** as it applies only in the case of socially and educationally backward classes, whereas amendment deals with quota for the EWS of society.
- **Implementation of Article 46:** The government has invoked the Directive Principles of State policy contained in Article 46 to defend its proposal for reservation for the economically weaker sections. Article 46 says that the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people.
- **De-stigmatization:** The people from the SC and ST have supported the amendment in anticipation that it is the beginning of the process of de-stigmatization of reservation.
- **Secular initiative:** The 10% quota for the EWS, (those, not SC, ST or OBC) was the first time in India's history that a government welfare programme specifically included Muslims under its umbrella of recipients.
- **Larger beneficiaries:** The EWS reservation cuts across erstwhile limitations of caste and religion, enabling a policy that serves a larger segment of beneficiaries.

Challenges

- **Overall issues:** It primarily affects the **basic structure of the Constitution**. At the same time the Constitution does not provide for economic reservation.
- **Against SC decision:** Further, the **Indira Sawhney judgment** has capped the reservation limit to 50%, but the new amendment increases reservation to 59%. Moreover, the court has said economically deprived is not a homogenous group and **economic backwardness cannot be the sole criterion** for reservation.
- **Against Article 14:** A total of **59% (49%+10%) quota** would leave other candidates with just 41% government jobs or seats. This may amount to sacrifice of merit and violate Article 14.

- **Lack of compelling necessity:** Similarly, the government has to justify compelling reasons of going beyond the 50% limit. In some states, upper castes number less than 10% and this scheme may be difficult to justify as for 52% backward classes there is just 27% OBC reservation.
- **Not an affirmative action:** Affirmative action was designed for those who have suffered social discrimination, not as poverty alleviation, employment measure. Thus, the government has overlooked the fact that upper castes neither face social injustice nor are subjected to any form of exploitation.
- **Fluctuating criteria's:** The economic criteria were too fluctuating a basis for providing quota.
- **Limit too high:** The cutoff of **Rs 8 lakh** is too high and will not benefit the truly poor families. The National Sample Survey (NSS) of 2011-12 shows that with this annual per capita income criteria, 99% of households will fall under this threshold.

5. Possible End of Oral Mentioning In SC

In News

- The Supreme Court (SC) is drafting new guidelines that would help ensure that urgent cases automatically come up before a Bench for hearing within four days of their being filed, obviating the need for lawyers to appear before the Chief Justice of India (CJI) to orally mention their cases for urgent listing.
- Further, if such cases did not come up for hearing, the lawyers concerned could make a mention before the Registrar to have their cases listed.

Benefit

- **Saving of time:** Earlier, the urgent mentioning before the SC, unnecessarily wasted the precious time of the court.
- **Impact on other cases:** When the CJI takes a call on the spot, i.e. whether the case deserves to be heard out of turn. This would mean pushing other cases off the list.
- **Not urgent:** The CJI has also often complained about how cases that were orally represented by a lawyer during mentioning, did not turn out to be urgent.
- **Level playing field:** The convention was also misused by the Senior Advocates by taking advantage of their standing in court to get early dates during oral mentioning. Thus, new rule will create a level playing field for all lawyers by allowing only advocates on record to mention cases.

International Relations

6. Organization of Islamic Cooperation

In news:

- It is for the **first time that India has been invited** to a meeting of the OIC, which is an influential grouping of 57 Islamic countries.
- The invitation has an immense significance because of the timing. At a time when India is cornering Pakistan on all international forums due to its alleged role in Pulwama terror attack, the invitation by the OIC which is the biggest supporter of the Pakistan, is a welcoming move. This invitation is seen as a signal of changing geopolitical dynamics.
- UAE government said the theme of the 46th ministerial meet was “50 years of Islamic cooperation: The road map for prosperity and development,” coinciding with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the organization.

About OIC

- Organization of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states.
- It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.
- The organization states that it is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony”.
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.

Membership

- Its members are reserved only muslim majority countries.
- But there are few non-muslim majority countries like Russia who hold a observer status.

India and OIC

- It was Qatar that first proposed ‘Observer’ status for India at the OIC Foreign Ministers’ meet in 2002 in recognition of India’s significant Muslim population, but Pakistan had consistently blocked the move.
- The 45th session was held in Bangladesh and therefore Bangladesh had suggested that India where more than 10% of worlds Muslims live should be given observer status .
- Pakistan has to threatened to leave OIC if India is given membership

Highlights of Sushma Swaraj’s Speech

- In her speech, Swaraj highlighted New Delhi’s robust economic and security cooperation with numerous members of the 56-member

grouping, and the role of the country's 185 million Muslims, a "microcosm of the diversity of India".

- Swaraj then turned to "senseless terrorist violence" that has wreaked havoc across the world, including in Afghanistan and Bangladesh, and, without naming Pakistan.
- Swaraj also noted that the Gulf Region, besides being a supplier of energy and source of remittances, is home to more than 8 million Indians.

Way Forward:

- India has been consistently criticised by the OIC for its alleged human rights violations in Kashmir, often seen at the behest of Pakistan.
- Pakistan on its part had objected stating that any country wishing to get observer status should not be involved in any dispute with an OIC member state the reference being to the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir.
- With India moving to recraft and consolidate its ties with major Muslim countries in recent years, countries such as the UAE and Turkey besides Saudi Arabia have responded to New Delhi's overtures.
- Swaraj's participation in the Abu Dhabi ministerial, therefore, must be viewed as a diplomatic opening for a sustained and long-term political engagement of the Islamic world as a collective.
- India's observer status at the OIC does not appear to be around the corner.

7. Jobless Basic Income in Finland

Context:

Finland's basic income trial boosts happiness, but not jobs.

Universal Basic Income

- Universal basic income (UBI) is a model for providing all citizens of a country geographic area with a given sum of money, regardless of their income, resources or employment status.
- The purpose of the UBI is to prevent or reduce poverty and increase equality among citizens.

Finland Model

- Finland started a two-year trial for 2,000 Finns, chosen randomly from among the unemployed, become the first Europeans to be paid a regular monthly income.
- The basic income was also not stopped even if they got a job.
- The trial period ended in January, after which report was prepared to weight the working of the program.
- The report suggested that the test group was happier and healthier than the other people.

- But this did not increase the jobs, as the basic income was seen as a way of encouraging the unemployed to take up low-paid or temporary work without fear of losing their benefits.
- The major problem is that this basic income in Finland is not taxed even after the beneficiary gets a job and attains a certain income criteria.

8. India-China-Arunachal Ties

In News:

India replies to China on Modi's visit to Arunachal.

About

- The Arunachal Pradesh border that China claims to be its own territory is the largest disputed area, covering around 90000 sq. km.
- During the 1962 war, the People's Liberation Army occupied it but they announced a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew respecting the international boundary called Mac Mohan Line.
- However, it has continued to assert its claim over the territory and from then almost the whole of Arunachal is claimed by China.
- China lays its claim on Arunachal Pradesh (AP) on the basis of its cultural similarity with Tibet.
- PM visit Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the Sela Tunnel Project in Arunachal Pradesh.
- China had objected to Prime Minister Modi's visit to the state.
- China has also said that India should respect Chinese interest and concerns and should not intensify disputes and complicate the border issue.
- The Indian government replied that the State of Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India.

9. Macedonia Renamed as the Republic of North Macedonia

In News

- The parliamentarians of the Republic of Macedonia voted to change their country's name to the "Republic of North Macedonia".
- This is very significant move given the longstanding dispute between FYR Macedonia and Greece.
- The change of name, if cleared by Greece, would pave the way for the small republic to enter NATO and the European Union.

Dispute between Macedonia and Greece

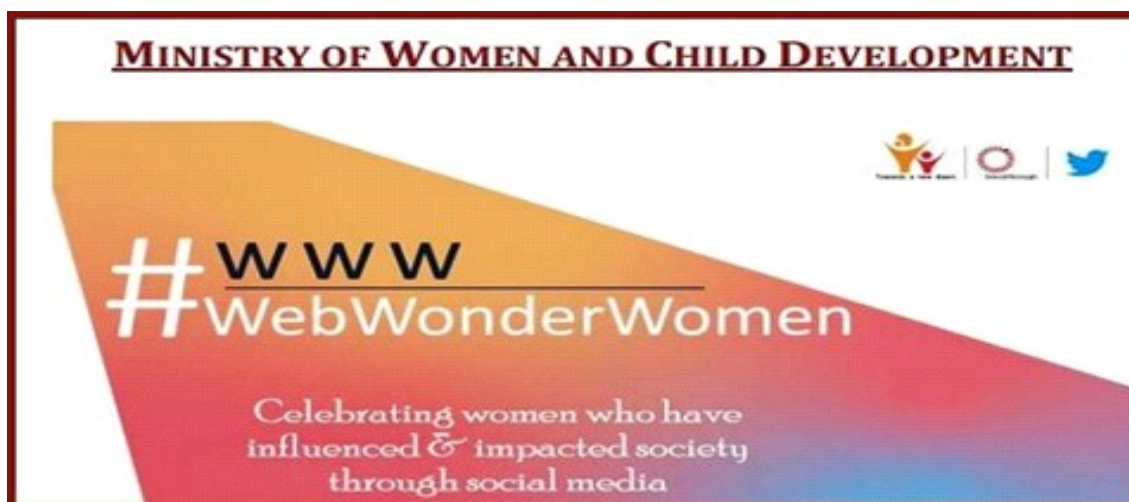
- Macedonia broke away from the former Yugoslavia in 1991 and declared independence.

- It measures a little over 25,000 sq km, and has a population just over 2 million.
- Neighbouring Greece has objected to its name all through, suggesting it implied the Macedonian republic's territorial aspirations over the northern region of Greece.
- For the Greeks, Macedonia is significant as the cradle of Alexander the Great's empire.
- Insisting that the name apply only to the Greek region, the Greeks have been blocking the Macedonian republic's entry to NATO and EU membership.

10. Web- Wonder Women Campaign

Context:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development hosted a felicitation event for Web Wonder Women.



About the Campaign:

- The Campaign has been launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India in association with the NGO Breakthrough and Twitter India.
- Through the campaign, the Ministry aims 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 is aimed at encouraging, recognizing and acknowledging the efforts of these meritorious Women.

11. UNODC

Context:

The latest report released by United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) says that India is one of the major hubs of illicit drug trade ranging from age-old cannabis to newer prescription drugs like tramadol, and designer drugs like methamphetamine.

Key findings:

- While the global trend of purchasing drugs over the internet, particularly on darknet trading platforms using cryptocurrencies has already spread across South Asia, it is particularly rampant in India.
- India is also a transit country for illicitly produced opiates, in particular heroin. The route used by traffickers to smuggle opiates through South Asia is an alternative part of the so-called "southern route", which runs through Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran, via the Gulf countries, continues to East Africa and on to destination countries.
- Also, India, Australia, France and Turkey accounted for 83% of global production of morphine-rich opiate raw materials in 2017. The stocks were considered sufficient to cover 19 months of expected global demand by manufacturers at the 2018 level of demand.

About UNODC:

- Established in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention, UNODC is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime.
- UNODC relies on voluntary contributions, mainly from Governments, for 90% of its budget.
- UNODC is mandated to assist Member States in their struggle against illicit drugs, crime and terrorism.

The three pillars of the UNODC work programme are:

1. Field-based technical cooperation projects to enhance the capacity of Member States to counteract illicit drugs, crime and terrorism.
2. Research and analytical work to increase knowledge and understanding of drugs and crime issues and expand the evidence base for policy and operational decisions.
3. Normative work to assist States in the ratification and implementation of the relevant international treaties, the development of domestic legislation on drugs, crime and terrorism, and the provision of secretariat and substantive services to the treaty-based and governing bodies.

12. International Criminal Court (ICC)**Context:**

Malaysia has ratified the Rome Statute making it the 124th State party to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

About ICC:

- The International Criminal Court (ICC), located in The Hague, is the court of last resort for prosecution of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

- It is the first permanent, treaty based, international criminal court established to help end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community.
- Its founding treaty, the Rome Statute, entered into force on July 1, 2002.
- Funding: Although the Court's expenses are funded primarily by States Parties, it also receives voluntary contributions from governments, international organisations, individuals, corporations and other entities.

Composition and voting power:

- The Court's management oversight and legislative body, the Assembly of States Parties, consists of one representative from each state party.
- Each state party has one vote and "every effort" has to be made to reach decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions are made by vote. The Assembly is presided over by a president and two vice-presidents, who are elected by the members to three-year terms.

Jurisdiction:

- The ICC has the jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.
- The ICC is intended to complement existing national judicial systems and it may therefore only exercise its jurisdiction when certain conditions are met, such as when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute criminals or when the United Nations Security Councilor individual states refer situations to the Court.

Criticism:

- It does not have the capacity to arrest suspects and depends on member states for their cooperation.
- Critics of the Court argue that there are insufficient checks and balances on the authority of the ICC prosecutor and judges and insufficient protection against politicized prosecutions or other abuses.
- The ICC has been accused of bias and as being a tool of Western imperialism, only punishing leaders from small, weak states while ignoring crimes committed by richer and more powerful states.
- ICC cannot mount successful cases without state cooperation is problematic for several reasons. It means that the ICC acts inconsistently in its selection of cases, is prevented from taking on hard cases and loses legitimacy. It also gives the ICC less deterrent value, as potential perpetrators of war crimes know that they can avoid ICC judgment by taking over government and refusing to cooperate.

13. Asia Reassurance Initiative Act

In News

- U.S. President Donald Trump has signed into law the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA).
- This act was passed by the U.S. Senate earlier in December 2018.

Key Highlights

- This act tries to establish a multifaceted U.S. strategy in order to increase U.S. security, economic interests, and values in the Indo-Pacific region.
- It will authorize \$1.5 billion in spending every year for the next five years for a range of U.S. programs in East and Southeast Asia.
- ARIA draws attention to U.S. relations with *China, India, the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Northeast Asian allies Japan and South Korea.*
- The act also addresses U.S. policy toward North Korea. It authorizes the U.S. Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Secretary of the Treasury, to terminate U.S. support for any United Nations Security Council resolutions sanctioning North Korea or to lift any unilateral U.S. sanctions on North Korea.
- The act reasserts U.S. support for Taiwan and calls on the president of the United States to “encourage the travel of high level United States officials to Taiwan, in accordance with the Taiwan Travel Act,” which was made law in 2018.
- The act also devotes attention to the maritime commons in the Asia and the South China Sea.
- In this regard, it calls on the United States to support the ASEAN nations as they adopt a code of conduct in the South China Sea with China.
- The act urges U.S. President to develop a Diplomatic Strategy. This strategy should include joint maritime training and freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific region, including the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

Analysis

- ARIA is very broad, covering relations with countries and regions from India to ASEAN, to the
- Korean peninsula and Japan, and support for issues from democracy to cyber security to maritime security.
- Through this act, USA has sent a clear signal to Asia that the United States will remain an effective, respectful ally and partner in Indo-Pacific region.
- It has shown its commitment to a “free and open Indo-Pacific region and the rules-based international order.

- Five-year funding programme would help U.S' regional diplomacy at a time when many South East Asian countries have urged for greater engagement.
- Mentioning of Taiwan, South China Sea can be viewed in the context of the US' mounting strategic competition with China.

Significance for India

- India has been accorded special importance under the Act, which reiterates India's significance in the U.S. strategy in the region.
- The Act notes India as a Major Defense Partner, a "unique" status for India, which would ease defense trade and sharing of technology, including "license-free access to a wide range of dual-use technologies".
- It will also promote greater coordination on security policies and strategies and increased military to-military engagements.
- Although, ARIA welcomes a continued close relationship with India, but it is mostly symbolic in nature.
- It does not initiate notable new projects with the United States' largest democratic partner.
- The Act also talks about countering China's coercive economic policies, but India would be interested in seeing whether this will provide any help to India's neighbors in escaping China's debt grasp.

Economy

14. General System of Preferences

Why in news?

- US President Donald Trump has said that he intends to end India's preferential trade treatment under generalized system of preferences (GSP)
- Trump, who has vowed to reduce US trade deficits, has repeatedly called out India for its high tariffs. US claiming that New Delhi has failed to assure the US of "equitable and reasonable" access to its markets, a move India will not have a "significant impact" on its exports to America.
- This move can be a big blow for India's competitiveness in items groups such as garments, engineering and intermediary goods in the American market.

What is Generalized System of Preferences?

- The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a U.S. trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world by providing preferential duty-free entry for up to 4,800 products from 129 designated beneficiary countries and territories. GSP was instituted on January 1, 1976, by the Trade Act of 1974.
- The GSP, instituted in 1971 under the aegis of UNCTAD, has contributed over the years to creating an enabling trading environment for developing countries.
- It involves reduced/zero tariffs of eligible products exported by beneficiary countries to the markets of GSP providing countries.

Beneficiaries of GSP:

- The following 13 countries grant GSP preferences: Australia, Belarus, Canada, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Norway, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States of America.
- The beneficiaries of GSP are around 120 developing countries. As on December 2018, India and Brazil were the major beneficiaries in terms of export volume realised under GSP.
- Imports from China and some developing countries are ineligible for GSP benefits. The beneficiaries and products covered under the scheme are revised annually.

Objective of GSP:

- The main objective is to give development support to poor countries by promoting exports from them into the developed countries.

- According to the US Trade Representative Office (USTR), GSP promotes sustainable development in beneficiary countries by helping these countries increase and diversify their trade with the United States. "GSP provide opportunities for many of the world's poorest countries to use trade to grow their economies and climb out of poverty," it reads.
- According to the USTR, "GSP also boosts American competitiveness by reducing costs of imported inputs used by US companies to manufacture goods in the United States."



How has GPS benefitted India?

- The benefits amount to a saving of around \$200 million for India, according to the latest commerce ministry data.
- India was getting a tariff preference on 5,111 products, or what are called tariff lines, out of 18,770 tariff lines in the US.
- However, the tariff advantage was 4 per cent and above on only 2,165 tariff lines.

GSP and usual trade agreements under WTO:

- Under the normal trade laws, the WTO members must give equal preferences to trade partners. There should not be any discrimination between countries. This trade rule under the WTO is called the Most Favored Nation (MFN) clause.
- The MFN instructs non-discrimination that any favorable treatment to a particular country. At the same time, the WTO allows members to give special and differential treatment to from developing countries (like zero tariff imports). This is an exemption for MFN. The MSP given by developed countries including the US is an exception to MFN.

Advantages of GSP:

- Generally, developing countries export agricultural products, manufactured and semi-manufactured products which have a declining trend in the world market.
- Particularly agricultural products have to be marketed in competition with the products of industrially advanced countries.
- As advanced countries make use of sophisticated technology, their cost of production is comparatively cheap. So, developing countries do not get remunerative prices for their export commodities.

- In view of these, developing countries are allowed to compete on preferential basis. While imports of products from developed countries are subject to normal rates of duties, exports of developing countries would be more competitive.
- Challenges arise for beneficiaries in fully exploiting the market access opportunities available under these schemes, including in effectively meeting the rules of origin requirements.

Disadvantages or limitations of GSP

In spite of the above advantages, GSP suffers from certain limitations:

- The scope of GSP scheme is limited. Only dutiable products are covered under this scheme. So, the developing countries cannot take advantage of the GSP in respect of duty free products. Export of duty free products by developing countries suffers.
- GSP gives only marginal relief to the export of agricultural products. In many countries, agricultural products are outside the purview of GSP.
- Even manufactured products like textiles, leather products and petroleum products are not covered under the scheme.
- Some of the GSP schemes limit the volume of exports. Ceilings that limit the quantity of imports adversely affect the export prospects of less developed countries

How will the suspension impacts India?

- GSP is meant largely for those export-oriented sectors that are labor-intensive. So, if it is withdrawn, it will impact jobs. With the leaked NSSO data showing unemployment at a 45-year high, this is an important factor.
- As the Federation of Indian Export Organisations points it, India is predominantly exporting intermediate and semi-manufactured goods to the US under the GSP. This has helped in cost-effectiveness and price competitiveness of the US downstream industry — that is, the manufacturing industry that uses inputs covered under GSP.
- Therefore, withdrawal of GSP will also impact the competitiveness of many manufacturing sectors and will hit the consumers at the same time.
- The US import price of most chemicals products that constituted a large chunk of India's exports is expected to increase by about 5 per cent.
- The withdrawal of the GSP benefit will also hit the import diversification strategy of US, which is keen to replace China as the main supplier to other developing countries of merchandise goods.
- India could lose US market share to rivals like Vietnam and Bangladesh, which will continue have duty-free access.

What next for India?

- India has made a final plea for continuation of the generalized system of preferences (GSP) benefits currently under review before the US Trade Representative (USTR), arguing that the cheaper imports of intermediary products from India enable availability of cost-effective and price-competitive inputs to the US downstream industries and helps the US firms remain domestically and internationally competitive.
- India had threatened to drag the US to the dispute settlement mechanism of the WTO, claiming withdrawal of the GSP benefits would be “discriminatory, arbitrary and detrimental” to its developmental needs.
- However, India on Saturday deferred till 18 September tit-for-tat retaliatory tariffs against the 29 US products worth \$235 million intended to counter a US move to unilaterally raise import duties on Indian steel and aluminium products. India’s move is seen as a conciliatory measure pending the GSP review and the upcoming “2+2” dialogue among their foreign and defence ministers on 6 September of the two countries.

Way forward:

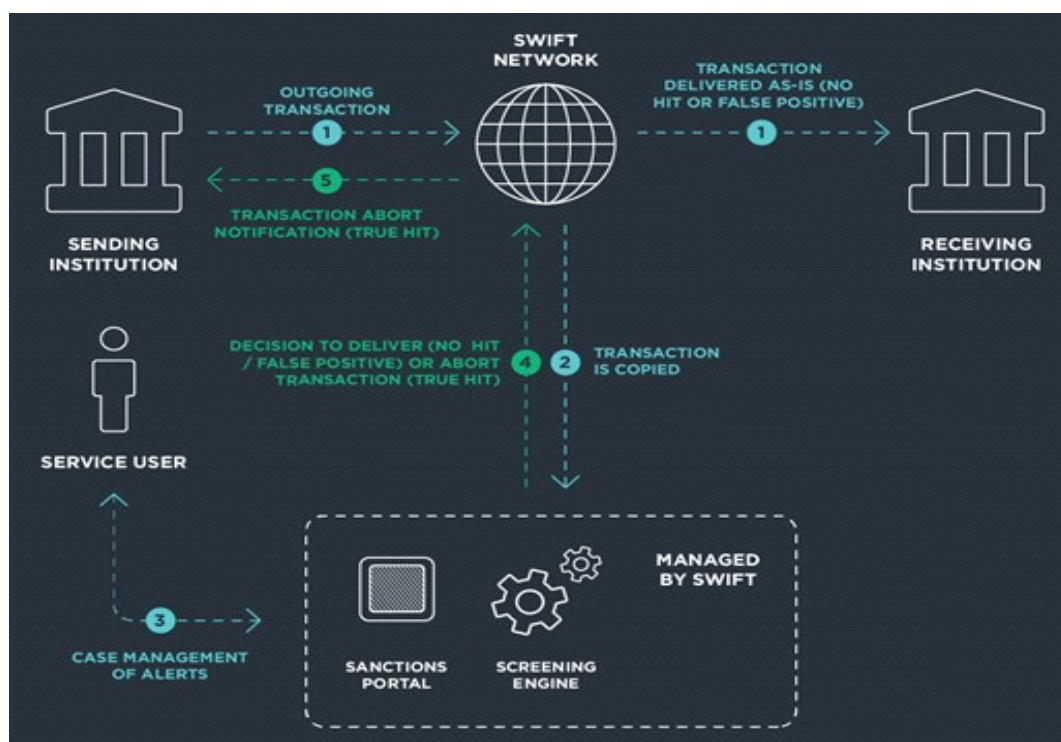
- The GSP remains a central aspect of the overall trade engagement and must remain for Indian exporters keen to address the U.S. markets.
- The U.S. should have considered continuing India’s GSP eligibility as a gesture of goodwill that reaffirms its commitment to the mutually beneficial relationship between our two countries. The India-U.S. relationship has continued to grow stronger as India liberalizes along a positive and steady trajectory.
- Today, both the US and India engage in countless areas of mutual cooperation and have a convergence of views in a large number of global issues. The relationship must not be seen through transactional prism only. By doing this the broader strategic dimensions of the partnership could get impacted.

15. Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT)

Context: Half a dozen public and private sector banks have been slapped with monetary penalties by the Reserve Bank of India for non-compliance of directions in the Swift (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) messaging system used by banks worldwide for foreign currency transfers.

What is SWIFT?

It is a **messaging network that financial institutions use to securely transmit information and instructions through a standardized system of codes**. Under SWIFT, each financial organization has a unique code which is used to send and receive payments.



- **SWIFT does not facilitate funds transfer:** rather, it sends payment orders, which must be settled by correspondent accounts that the institutions have with each other.
- **The SWIFT is a secure financial message carrier** — in other words, it transports messages from one bank to its intended bank recipient.
- **Its core role is to provide a secure transmission channel** so that Bank A knows that its message to Bank B goes to Bank B and no one else. Bank B, in turn, knows that Bank A, and no one other than Bank A, sent, read or altered the message en route. Banks, of course, need to have checks in place before actually sending messages.

SWIFT India is a joint venture of top Indian public and private sector banks and SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication). The company was created to deliver high quality domestic financial messaging services to the Indian financial community. It has a huge potential to contribute significantly to the financial community in many domains.

Significance of SWIFT:

- Messages sent by SWIFT's customers are authenticated using its specialised security and identification technology.
- Encryption is added as the messages leave the customer environment and enter the SWIFT Environment.
- Messages remain in the protected SWIFT environment, subject to all its confidentiality and integrity commitments, throughout the transmission process while they are transmitted to the operating centres (OPCs) where they are processed — until they are safely delivered to the receiver.

Geography and Environment

16. India Submits Sixth National Report to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD)

In News

- India has submitted the sixth national report (NR6) to Convention on Biodiversity.
- The report 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

Key Highlights of the Report

- India is among the first five countries in the world, the first in Asia and the first among the biodiversity rich mega diverse countries to have submitted such report.
- According to the report, India has exceeded/overachieved two NBTs, and it is on track to achieve eight NBTs.
- In respect of the remaining two NBTs, India is striving to meet the targets by the stipulated time of 2020.
- 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.
- Similarly, India has also made noteworthy achievement towards NBT relating to access and benefit sharing (ABS) by operationalising the Nagoya Protocol on ABS.
- India has done well on raising awareness about biodiversity, which is an important thrust area in several programmes of the Government.
- India is a megadiverse country 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.
- In this context, India's quest for inclusive economic development while maintaining integrity of its natural capital is being pursued through various programmes and strategies.
- Measures have been adopted for sustainable management of agriculture, fisheries and forests, with a view to provide food and nutritional security to all without destroying the natural resource base while ensuring intergenerational environmental equity.
- Programmes are in place to maintain genetic diversity of cultivated plants, farms livestock and their wild relatives, towards minimising genetic erosion and safeguarding their genetic diversity.

- Mechanisms and enabling environment are being created for recognising and protecting the vast heritage of coded and oral traditional knowledge relating to biodiversity for larger human welfare while safeguarding the interests and rights of the local communities as creators and holders of this knowledge.

About CBD

- CBD, known informally as the Biodiversity Convention, is a multilateral treaty.
- The Convention has three main goals including: the conservation of biological diversity (or biodiversity); the sustainable use of its components; and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

National Biodiversity Targets of India

1. **Biodiversity awareness** - 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
2. **Biodiversity Valuation and Poverty Alleviation** - By 2020, values of biodiversity are integrated in national and state planning processes, development programmes and poverty alleviation strategies.
3. **Safeguarding Natural Habitats** - Strategies for reducing rate of degradation, fragmentation and loss of all natural habitats are finalized and actions put in place by 2020 for environmental amelioration and human well-being
4. **Managing Invasive Species** - By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and strategies to manage them developed so that populations of prioritized invasive alien species are managed.
5. **Sustainable Landscape** - By 2020, measures are adopted for sustainable management of agriculture, forestry and fisheries
6. **Protected Areas** - Ecologically representative areas are conserved effectively and equitably, based on protected area designation and management and other area-based conservation measures and are integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes, covering over 20% of the geographic area of the country, by 2020
7. **Maintaining Genetic Diversity** - By 2020, genetic diversity of cultivated plants, farm livestock, and their wild relatives, including other socio-economically as well as culturally valuable species, is maintained, and strategies have been developed and implemented for minimizing genetic erosion and safeguarding their genetic diversity.
8. **Ecosystem Services** - By 2020, ecosystem services, especially those relating to water, human health, livelihoods and well-being, are enumerated and measures to safeguard them are identified, taking

into account the needs of women and local communities, particularly the poor and vulnerable sections.

- 9. Access and Benefit Sharing** - 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 legislations.
- 10. Inclusive Governance** - By 2020, an effective, participatory and updated national biodiversity action plan is made operational at different levels of governance
- 11. Protecting Traditional Knowledge** - By 2020, national initiatives using communities' traditional knowledge relating to biodiversity are strengthened, with the view to protecting this knowledge in accordance with national legislations and international obligations.
- 12. Resource Mobilization** - 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

17. Climate Change Performance Index 2019

In News

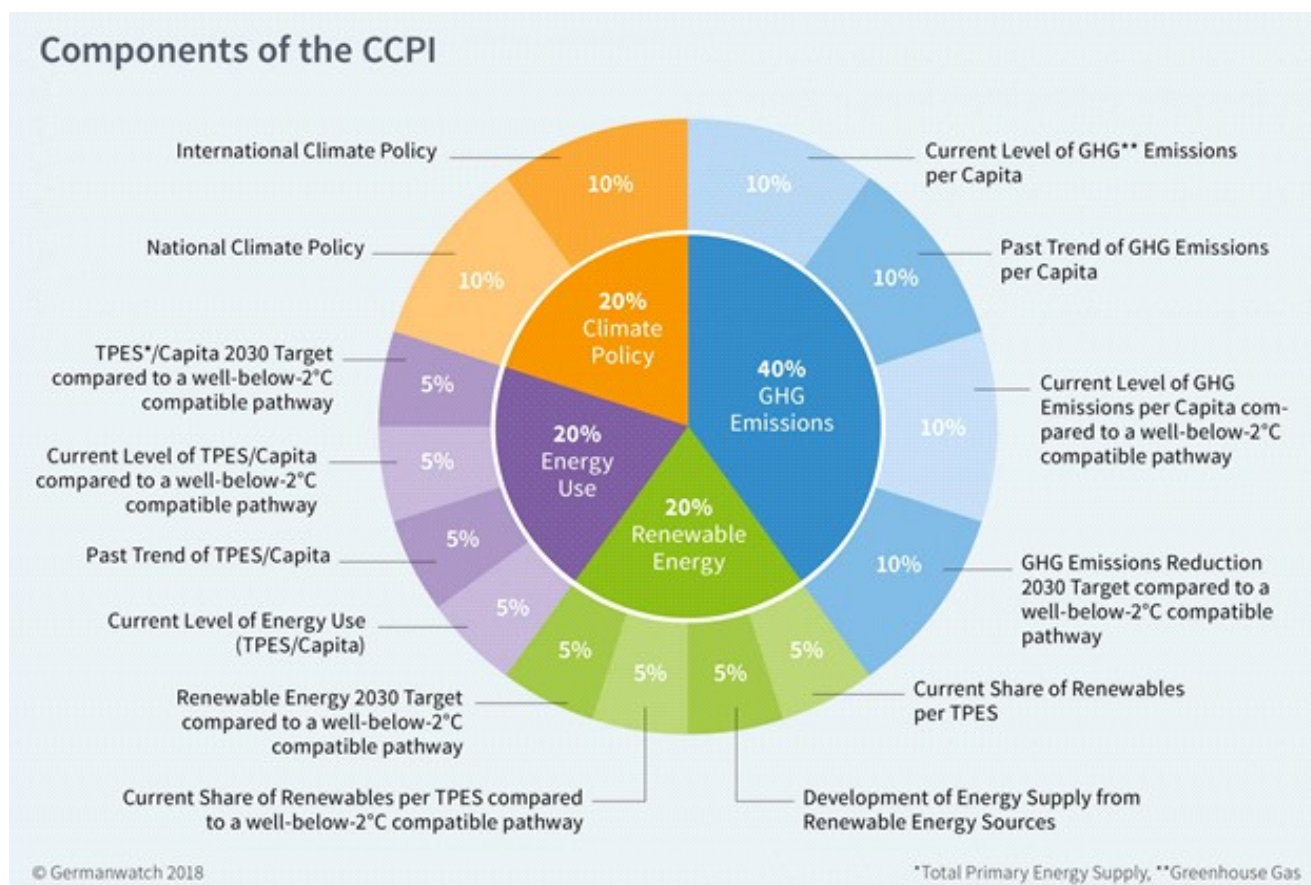
- Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2019 has been released.
- CCPI is an annual publication by Germanwatch, NewClimate Institute and Climate Action

Key Highlights

- Morocco has been named the second best performing country after Sweden in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).
- The North African country significantly increased the share of renewables over the past five years and increased new renewable energy capacity.
- Sweden is in top position, followed by Morocco and Lithuania in the CCPI 2019.
- The bottoms five in the list are Saudi Arabia, U.S., Iran, South Korea and Taiwan.
- With the connection of the world's largest solar plant to the grid, Morocco is on track for achieving its target of 42% installed renewable energy capacities by 2020.

India Specific Observation

- India ranks 11th in this year's CCPI, improving its standing by three places compared to the previous edition.



- Most notably India improved its performance in the Renewable Energy category, joining the group of medium performers.
- Comparatively low levels of per capita GHG emissions and a relatively ambitious mitigation target for 2030 give India an overall high rating in the emissions category.

18. Agricultural Project with FAO

In News

The government has launched a Global Environment Facility (GEF) assisted project namely, “Green – Ag: Transforming Indian Agriculture for global environment benefits and the conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes” in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Key Highlights

- The project has been launched in high-conservation-value landscapes of five States namely (i) Madhya Pradesh: Chambal Landscape, (ii) Mizoram: Dampa Landscape, (iii) Odisha: Similipal Landscape, (iv) Rajasthan: Desert National Park Landscape and v) Uttarakhand: Corbett-Rajaji Landscape.
- The project seeks to mainstream biodiversity, climate change and sustainable land management objectives and practices into Indian agriculture.
- The overall objective of the project is to catalyze transformative change of India’s agricultural sector to support achievement of national and

global environmental benefits and conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes.

- The project will support harmonization between India's agricultural and environmental sector priorities and investments.

About GEF

- The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle most pressing environmental problems.
- Since then, the GEF has provided over \$17.9 billion in grants and mobilized an additional \$93.2 billion in co-financing for more than 4500 projects in 170 countries.
- GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.
- GEF support is provided to government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector companies, research institutions, among the broad diversity of potential partners, to implement projects and programs in recipient countries.

About FAO:

- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.
- It is headquartered at Rome, Italy.

19. India Demands Removal of Rosewood from CITES

In News

India has proposed to remove rosewood (*Dalbergiasissoo*) from Appendix II of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Key Highlights

- The species is currently part of Appendix II of CITES that has species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival.
- However, India does not want that for rosewood. The species grows at a very fast rate and has the capacity to become naturalised outside its native range, even it is invasive in some parts of world.
- India sent the proposal ahead of the 18 th Conference of Parties (COP) of CITES, which will be held in Colombo from May 23 to June 3.
- Apart from *Dalbergiasissoo*, India has also proposed to transfer small clawed otters (*Aonyxcinereus*), smooth coated otters (*Lutrogaleperspicillata*), Indian Star Tortoise (*Geocheloneelegans*) from Appendix II to Appendix I, thereby giving more protection to the species.

- The proposal also includes inclusion of Gekko gecko and Wedgefish (Rhinidae) in Appendix II of CITES. It says that Gekko gecko is traded highly for Chinese traditional medicine.
- Regulation of trade in the species is required to ensure that the harvest of specimens from the wild is not reducing the wild population to a level at which its survival might be threatened by continued harvesting or other influences.

CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls. All import, export, re-exports and introduction from the sea of species covered by the convention has to be authorized through a licensing system. CITES is legally binding on the Parties, however, it does not take the place of national laws.

It has three appendices. Appendix I have species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances. Appendix III contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other, CITES parties for assistance in controlling trade.

20. Nitrogen Pollution – The Biggest Environmental Threat

Introduction:

The UN Environment in its Frontiers report mentioned that Nitrogen Pollution is one of the biggest environmental threats faced by humans today and needs urgent measures from countries around the world.

Nitrogen is essential for life; however, the excess nitrogen pollution has huge consequences on humans and the environment. It is 300 times more potent than CO₂ as a greenhouse gas besides its negatives effects on air quality and the ozone layer. Altogether, humans are emitting a huge amount of reactive nitrogen that threatens health, climate, and ecosystems, making nitrogen one of the most important pollution issues facing humanity.

However, pollution caused by Nitrogen is being overlooked by governments and they focus only on carbon emissions, thus ignoring the growing risks to health and the environment.

What is Nitrogen?

Nitrogen is the 5 most abundant elements in the Universe. It accounts for 78% of Earth's air. In the form of gas – it is colourless, odourless and mostly considered as an inert gas (not readily react chemically). In the form of liquid – it is also colourless, odourless and looks like water.

How does Nitrogen work as an essential Nutrient?

- Nitrogen is essential to life on Earth because the compounds of Nitrogen are present in foods, fertilizers, organic materials, explosives, poisons etc. However, atmospheric nitrogen, or dinitrogen, is unreactive and cannot be utilized by plants directly.

- Until the early 20 century, farmers depended on a natural process known as nitrogen fixation – The assimilation of atmospheric nitrogen by soil bacteria and its release for plant use on the death of the bacteria in the form of reactive compounds such as ammonia and nitrate.
- However, the natural nitrogen cycle was insufficient to feed the growing population. Scientists Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch addressed this issue by producing ammonia by combining atmospheric nitrogen with hydrogen gas at high temperature and pressure.
- This process is called the Haber-Bosch Process. Green revolution, which was instrumental in creating food security in the developing nations in the 1960s, was driven by artificial nitrogen-fixation. Today, about 50% of the world's population depends on this process for its nutrition.

How did Nitrogen turn into pollutant from nutrient?

- Nitrogen is an inert gas that is important for life. However, we are changing it into forms that are harmful + overloading it in the environment = causing an imbalance to the natural nitrogen cycle.
- Nitrogen becomes a pollutant when it escapes into the environment and reacts with other organic compounds

What are the negative impacts of nitrogen pollution?

Water Pollution:

- Nitrogen compounds running o agricultural lands and dissolves in rivers, lakes or groundwater = water pollution.
- It creates harmful algal blooms and creates dead zones in our waterways and oceans as the algae produce toxins which are harmful to human and aquatic organisms.
- It indirectly affects fisheries and biodiversity in coastal areas as well. Drinking water is being contaminated by excessive nitrate concentrations = adverse impact on human health such as reduces blood flow, cancer, and endemic goiters.

Soil Pollution:

- As the world needs to feed an ever-growing population, loss of arable land is a major global problem. Excessive use of nitrogen fertilizer causes soil acidification& soil nutrient depletion.
- The lowering pH as a result of the acidification = nutrient disorders + increased toxicity in plants. It may also affect natural soil decomposition.

Air Pollution:

- Nitrogen emissions from industry, agriculture and vehicles = air pollution.
- The release of nitrous oxide is essentially a greenhouse gas which is harmful to the environment

What are the challenges ahead?

- Nitrogen is crucial to food production in India; however, its excessive usage in agriculture has put us under serious risk.
- We cannot produce sufficient food to feed the entire nation without nitrogen, but at the same time, we cannot keep releasing a higher amount of nitrogen due to its polluting effects.
- Thus the challenge is to optimally utilize the nitrogen while reducing its negative impacts

What is the way forward?

- Since the issue of nitrogen pollution starts to gain global attention, there have been innovations seeks to improve its efficiency by optimizing usage.
- A simpler method of minimizing nitrogen application in soil is Precision farming where small quantities of nitrogen are administered routinely rather than applying large doses uniformly across the field.
- Zero Budget Natural Farming which involves usage of locally available materials such as cow dung and cow urine to increase soil productivity and plant growth.
- Also, tablets and coated forms of nitrogen, when applies at the root level = release nutrients slowly to the crops.
- Notably, Bangladesh has managed to improve the efficiency of nutrient uptake by plants by applying fertilizers through tablets.
- A similar initiative has been taken in India with neem-coated urea. These methods combined with the organic fertilizers and optimal timing of application, sowing, and watering, have shown marked improvement over traditional efficiencies of nitrogen

Developed regions such as the US and Europe have published detailed reports regarding nitrogen usage and pollution. However, India is nowhere near aggregating something similar to its own. Thus the Nitrogen pollution is the problem of improper management rather than inability. The costs of abating nitrogen pollution would be much lesser than the benefits to health and the environment.

Science and Technology

21. Exclusive Satellite to Help in Securing Pakistan, Bangladesh Borders

In News

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch a satellite exclusively for the home ministry
- It is aimed to help it further strengthen its frontiers with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Key Highlights

- The move is part of recommendations made by a task force on the use of space technology in improving border management.
- Report has identified island development, border security, communication and navigation, Geographic Information System (GIS) and operations planning system, and border infrastructure development as the areas for use of space technology.
- To execute the project in a time bound manner, a short, medium and long-term plan has been proposed for implementation in five years.
- In short term, immediate needs of border guarding forces will be met by procurement of high resolution imagery and hiring of bandwidth for communications.
- In mid-term, one satellite is being launched by the ISRO for exclusive use of the MHA.
- Over the long term, the MHA will develop ground segment and network infrastructure to share satellite resources by user agencies, develop a central archival facility for storing various imagery resources and dissemination of the same to user agencies.
- The Border Security Force (BSF) has been designated as lead agency for implementation of ground segment and network infrastructure, including establishment of archival facility.

22. Women into Military Police in Non-Combat Roles

In News

- The Centre has decided to induct women into the personnel below officer rank role in the military police.
- This is the first time women will be inducted into a non-combat role in the military police.
- Currently, women are allowed in select areas such as medical, legal, educational, signals and engineering wings of the Army.

Key Highlights

The women will be inducted in graded manner to eventually comprise 20 per cent of total Corps of Military Police.

Role:

- Investigate offences like rape, molestation and thefts.
- Conduct military operations in cases where the Army needs help from the police.
- Help in controlling refugee influx, especially crowds of women and children.
- Assist the civilian police and the administration during evacuation operations in villages near the border
- Frisk female suspects during cordon and search operations, and will oversee ceremonies, police discipline and prisoner of war camps

About Military Police

The role of the military police includes policing cantonments and army establishments, preventing a breach of rules and regulations by soldiers, maintaining movement of soldiers as well as logistics during peace and war, handling prisoners of war and extending aid to civil police whenever required.

Status in India

- The Indian Air Force, last year, had inducted three women as fighter pilots.
- A decision on having women as fighter pilots will be taken after evaluating performance of the three women — AvaniChaturvedi, BhawanaKanth and Mohana Singh who are now part of IAF's fighter squadron.
- The Indian Navy is currently deliberating on a policy on having women onboard the ships.
- The Navy allows women in various other segments including in legal, logistics, naval architecture and engineering departments.
- In Indian Army, women got the nod for induction into a non-combat role in the military police.

Women in Combat Role:

A Debate Arguments opposing the combat role

- **Physical Ability** - The standards of physical fitness have been set to suit men, and women attempting to reach them will over-stretch themselves and will suffer high injury rates.
- **Additional Burden** - integration of women through regulatory and disciplinary costs associated may not make it a worthwhile move.

- **Military readiness** - Pregnancy can affect the deployability of a unit when the unit has a disproportionate number of women or is understaffed.
- **Abuse by Enemy** - Both male and female prisoners are at risk of torture and rape, but misogynistic societies may be more willing to abuse woman prisoners.
- **Possible insubordination** – In India, most of the jawans are from rural origin, may not be ready to accept a woman as their officer.

Arguments in Support:

- Ability vs Gender - As long as an applicant is qualified for a position, one's gender is arbitrary.
- Military Readiness - Women, who choose to become active combat soldiers, are unlikely to shirk their duty by becoming pregnant after a call-up.
- Changing Traditions - Cultures change over time and the masculine subculture can evolve too. Many previously masculine professions have been successfully opened to women over the past century.
- Wider base - Having a wider personnel base allows militaries to have the best and most diplomatic soldiers working to end conflict quickly.

Conclusion:

- Many countries including Germany, Australia, Canada, the US, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, Sweden and Israel have allowed women in combat roles.
- India can certainly gain from their experience although there is a variance in the cultural milieu.
- There are a plethora of challenges that need to be tackled through a trial-and-error method to evolve a planned induction.

23. Solar Rooftop Programme

In News:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved phase 2 of the grid-connected rooftop solar programme, with a focus on the residential sector. India has set an ambitious target of achieving 40 GW of rooftop solar capacity by 2022.

Current Scenario:

- There has been progress on rooftop solar installations among industries and commercial consumers, the uptake among residential consumers has been slow.
- The Phase II programme provides for central financial assistance (for residential rooftop solar installations) up to 40% for rooftop systems up to 3kW and 20% for those with a capacity of 3-10kW.

ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY

Solar system is a photovoltaic system in which electricity generating panels are installed on the roof of any residential, commercial, institutional or industrial building

HOW MUCH AREA IS REQUIRED?

A rooftop solar plant generally requires around 100 square feet shadow free area per kilowatt

IS THERE ANY GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY?

Subsidy of 30% is being given by the central government. Those interested to install solar plants can avail the subsidy from the ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) through CREST. The subsidy is released to the applicant after commissioning of the project and receipt from the MNRE based on the rates of different categories

THE COST OF INSTALLATION

Chandigarh Renewable Energy, Science and Technology Promotion Society (CREST) has fixed rates at which residents can get solar plants from empanelled agencies

Category (in kWp)	Rate per kWp
1-5	₹60,000
5-10	₹59,000
10-20	₹58,000
20-50	₹55,000
50-100	₹52,000

IS FINANCE OPTION AVAILABLE?


Banks do provide loan for solar plant installations. The loan will cover up to 80% of the project cost at a fixed rate of interest for a 5-year tenure

HOW MUCH ENERGY IS GENERATED?

1 kW system can generate upto 4.5 kWh per day depending upon the location and maintenance of the plant

WHAT IS THE LIFE OF THE SYSTEM?

The life span of a solar panel is around 40 years but the manufacturers give a warranty for a period of 25 years



- The second phase will also focus on increasing the involvement of the distribution companies (DISCOM).
- Raising awareness and building consumer capacity to engage with the sector are crucial for ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all and for India to achieve its rooftop solar targets.

Rooftop Solar Capacity:

- Rooftop solar installations as opposed to large-scale solar power generation plants can be installed on the roofs of buildings.
- As such, they fall under two brackets: commercial and residential. This simply has to do with whether the solar panels are being installed on top of commercial buildings or residential complexes.
- Since the market for residential rooftop solar power is nascent, there are opportunities to learn from more mature consumer durable markets.
- For example, RWAs can tie up with vendors to organize demonstration programmes, so that consumers can observe, operate and understand how the system works.

Potential of Rooftop Solar Capacity:

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has pegged the market potential for rooftop solar at 124 GW. However, only 1,247 MW of capacity had been installed as of December 31, 2016. That is a little more than 3% of the target for 2022, and 1% of the potential.

- Imports of cheap solar panels are continuously placing a downward pressure on prices and so this scenario could change in the future. Commercial applications of rooftop solar are already viable in most states.
- The Programmes will have substantial environmental impact in terms of savings of CO₂ emission.
- Considering average energy generation of 5 million units per MW, it is expected that addition of 38 GW solar rooftop plants under Phase-II by year 2022 will result in CO₂ emission reduction of about 45.6 tonnes per year.
- The programme has directed employment potential.
- Besides increasing self-employment, the approval is likely to generate employment opportunity equivalent to 9.39 lakh job years for skilled and unskilled workers for addition of 38GW capacity under Phase-II of the scheme by the year 2022.

Issues that are underlying in Installation of Rooftop Solar:

- One of the major problems with rooftop solar and what affects solar energy generation in general is the variability in supply.
- Not only can the efficiency of the solar panels vary on any given day depending on how bright the sunlight is, but the solar panels also produce no electricity during the night.
- Many states have adopted a net metering policy, which allows disaggregated power producers to sell excess electricity to the grid.
- However, the subsidised tariffs charged to residential customers undermine the economic viability of installing rooftop solar panels. The potential profit simply does not outweigh the costs.
- Urban residential electricity consumers are still hesitant to consider rooftop solar power for their homes.
- This is because they don't have enough information about it, according to a 2018 study by the World Resources Institute in five cities of Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Jaipur and Nagpur.
- For residential urban consumers, one of the key barriers to installing rooftop solar systems is that they do not know who to contact to understand the processes to be followed and permissions required.
- There is no single source to access information, evaluate benefits and disadvantages, and examine if any government support (such as a financial subsidy) is available.
- Most of the technical information provided by various sources, including the government, tends to be Internet-based.
- The study shows that less than 20% of respondents rely on the Internet to make a decision concerning rooftop solar systems.

- A significant majority of consumers seek face-to-face discussions and recommendations from friends and family.

Way Forward

- Objective information must be put out through various avenues, so that it is accessible to all segments of the population and in local languages.
- Information kiosks can be set up in public institutions like banks to offer information on the technology, as well as on practical issues such as guidance on selecting vendors.
- A robust feedback mechanism can be put in place for consumers to share their experiences with others.

Miscellaneous

24. MGNREGS has raised welfare, brought down inequality, says study

Why in news?

A research paper by Klaus Deininger of the World Bank and Yanyan Liu of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) published in the World Development journal shows that this scheme seems to have improved the well-being of beneficiaries significantly in Andhra Pradesh.

About MGNREGS

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was launched in 2006 to provide 100 days of employment to villagers in the lean season. It has worked as a conditional cash transfer programme.

Findings of the study:

- The MGNREGS participants had improved energy and protein intake within a year of participation in the scheme.
- Beneficiaries with a two-year exposure to the scheme were also able to accumulate more household assets and livestock.
- The benefits were most pronounced for disadvantaged groups such as scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and poor households.
- Families which had differently abled members and women as head of the household were also significantly benefitted.

25. Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival

In news:

Arunachal Pradesh has declared the **Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival (PPHF)**—the states only conservation festival as a “state festival”.

- The first ever PPHF was held in 2015, it was started with a number of objectives in mind—to recognise the role played by the resident Nyishi tribe in conserving hornbills in the Pakke Tiger
- Reserve (PTR), to devise alternative sources of income for a region that relies on hunting and logging, and to tell the rest of the country about the wonders of the PTR and its surrounding areas.
- As part of the festival, visitors are treated to cultural programmes, food stalls, plays, sightseeing, river and village walks, bird-watching, screenings of short films as well as local tribal sports and dances. It has also helped in creating awareness on nature conservation.

26. World Hindi Day

In News

- World Hindi Day was recently celebrated on 10th January, marking the anniversary of first World Hindi Conference which was held in 1975 by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- World Hindi Day was first observed on January 10, 2006. Since then, it is celebrated on January 10 every year.

World Hindi Day vis a vis National Hindi Diwas

- National Hindi Diwas is celebrated every year on September 14. On that day in 1949, the constituent assembly adopted Hindi, written in Devanagari script, as the official language of the Union, while the focus of the World Hindi Day is to promote the language at the global stage.
- The first World Hindi Conference was held in Nagpur with Mauritius prime minister Seewoosagur Ramgoolam as the chief guest. Also, persons of Indian origin and non-residential Indians in many countries organise events to commemorate the day to spread the greatness of the language.

Lesser Known Facts about the Hindi Language

- The word Hindi originated from the Persian word Hind, which means the land of the Indus River.
- Hindi is the first language of around 430 million people around the world.
- Apart from India, the language is also spoken in Nepal, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Fiji and Mauritius. Hindi and Nepalese share the same script - Devanagari.
- In linguistic terms, Hindi belongs to the Indo-Iranian sub-family of the Indo-European family of language.
- Hindi has been influenced and enriched by Turkish, Arabic, Persian, English and Dravidian (ancient South India) languages.
- The earliest form of Hindi was called 'Apabhramsa', which was an offspring of Sanskrit. In 400 AD, poet Kalidas wrote Vikramorvashiyam in Apabhramsa.
- Hindi is one of the seven Indian languages that can be used to make web URLs.

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