

## **GENERAL STUDIES-2**

### **GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND POLICIES**

#### **REVIEWING SECTION 377**

##### **Backgrounder**

In 2013, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court upheld Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which discriminates against a section of individuals in society on the basis of their sexual orientation, and placed the onus of repealing it on the Parliament.

A review petition filed by Naz Foundation against the 2013 judgment was dismissed in 2014. But a curative petition is still pending before the top court.

##### **Court judgements**

The Delhi High Court in *Naz Foundation v. Government of NCT of Delhi* (2009) held that criminalising sexual activities with consent in private not only impairs the dignity of those persons targeted by the law, but it is also discriminatory and impacts the health of those people.

Supreme Court, in *Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation* (2013) case, set aside the Delhi High Court judgment and held that activities under Section 377 of IPC are illegal and will continue to be an offense, thus affirming that Section 377 did not suffer from any “constitutional infirmity”.

The claim made by the Supreme Court in *Koushal* case was that the LGBT community constitutes only a minuscule minority. It was unreasonable to advance the view that constitutional protection is available to a group based on its size.

##### **Recent developments**

A nine-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court accorded the status of a fundamental right to one's right to privacy. The Right to Privacy could be a small step towards decriminalizing the draconian Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, offering a ray of hope to the LGBT community.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

### **Section 377 is discriminatory**

- ✓ After the *Koushal* verdict, there have been a large number of cases where transgender men are being blackmailed by their acquaintances and the police. These cases have sharply risen in the last three years.
- ✓ People have undergone terrible humiliation and psychological stress, apart from being blackmailed.
- ✓ No human being ought to be subject to such acts on account of a natural sexual affection for another human being

#### **Section 377**

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, dating back to 1860, criminalizes sexual activities "against the order of nature", including homosexual sexual activities. Prior to that, sexual activities, including amongst homosexuals, were not penalized in India.

### **Treading the right path again**

The debate has regained fervour after the privacy judgment. Specifically referring to the rights of the LGBT community, the court said these are not "so-called" rights but are real rights founded on sound constitutional doctrine.

- It is a part of right to life
- They constitute the essence of liberty and freedom.
- Sexual orientation is an essential component of identity, and equal protection demands protection of the identity of every individual without discrimination.
- It will be extraordinarily dangerous to give an exhaustive catalogue of what will constitute privacy. Because privacy includes at its core the preservation of personal intimacies, the sanctity of family life, marriage, procreation, the home, and sexual orientation

One should be mindful of the dangerous path we may tread on if the right to privacy is not tempered with reasonable restrictions.

### **Religion and sexuality**

Many religions consider homosexuality a sin, consider it to be criminal. Another viewpoint, by the end of the 19th century, emerged that it was a pathological condition. Later, a dominant view emerged that homosexuality was inborn and therefore not immoral. Today, all these diverse opinions co-exist

We are living in a democratic society governed by our Constitution, which allows one to lead the life one wants. Nobody has the right to disturb and

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

intrude into someone's private life. However, one should be aware that such activities are private, to be conducted within their homes.

### **Should homosexuality be decriminalised?**

The Supreme Court was right in making this observation in the right to privacy judgment, and in another judgment in another case of instant triple talaq as the privacy judgment wherein personal laws have been reaffirmed as being protected under the Constitution.

The court has also observed that this right cannot be abrogated by a community in the name of majoritarian view.

- The worst aspect of Section 377 is at the individual level, which makes transgender person feel like lesser human beings because they are seen as criminals by law. That impairs not only their dignity.
- Rectifying section 377 is essential. However, the law must ensure that the rights of others must also be protected.
- The order on privacy has to be seen in the context of freedom to religion and the private lives of individual citizens.

### **Constitutional position**

The purpose of elevating certain rights to the stature of guaranteed fundamental rights is to insulate their exercise from the disdain of majorities. The right to privacy cannot be denied, even if there is a miniscule fraction of the population which is affected. One's sexual orientation is undoubtedly an attribute of privacy.

### **In conclusion**

The British, who enacted the law, got rid of it in the 1960s in England. Many countries have got rid of such laws. India now remains with countries which India would not like to be associated with otherwise.

We are a country of many religions. One cannot impose his/her views on others. That's the beauty of our Constitution. So it is the right time that Section 377 has to be read in totality to safeguard the rights and dignity of miniscule fraction of the country's population.

## **WELFARE SCHEMES AND DEVELOPMENTAL GROUPS**

### **NATIONAL NUTRITION STRATEGY**

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

**Launched by:** NITI Aayog

**The need for such a strategy**

NFHS-4 results do show some progress, with a decline in the overall levels of under nutrition in both women and children. However, the pace of decline is far below what numerous countries with similar growth trajectories to India have achieved. Also, India pays an income penalty of 9% to 10% due to a workforce that was stunted during their childhood.

**Details of the strategy**

The Strategy lays down a roadmap for effective action, among both implementers and practitioners, in achieving our nutrition objectives.

The nutrition strategy envisages a framework wherein the four closely related determinants of nutrition – uptake of health services, food, drinking water & sanitation and income & livelihoods – work together to accelerate decline of under nutrition in India.

The foremost challenge is that currently there is a lack of real time measurement of these determinants, which reduces our capacity for targeted action.

- ✓ Focus is on behavioural change as Supply side challenges have often overshadowed the need to address behavioural change efforts to generate demand for nutrition services.

The Nutrition Strategy framework envisages a Kuposhan Mukht Bharat – linked to Swachh Bharat and Swasth Bharat. The aim is to ensure that States create customized State/ District Action Plans to address local needs and challenges. This is especially relevant in view of enhanced resources available with the States

**MINIMUM WAGES NOT REVISED**

**Why in news?**

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

The labour ministry has clarified that the Centre has not fixed Rs 18,000 as national minimum monthly wage under the Code on Wages Bill. There were also reports that there would be revision of the formula for fixing wages by increasing the number of family members from three to six, as demanded by trade unions.

The clarification came as a big relief to employers who have been “apprehensive” about the move, saying it would affect their competitiveness, but deals a blow to trade unions.

### **Backgrounder**

The Code on Wages, 2017 seeks to consolidate laws relating to wages by replacing: (i) the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, (ii) the Minimum Wages Act, 1949, (iii) the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, and (iv) the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.

- The Code will also include government establishments.
- The central government will make wage-related decisions for its authorities, and establishments related to railways, mines, and oil fields, among others. State governments will make decisions for any other establishments.
- Wages include salary, allowance, or any other component expressed in monetary terms. This will not include bonus payable to employees or any travelling allowance, among others.

**National minimum wage:** The central government may notify a national minimum wage for the country. It may fix different national minimum wages for different states or geographical areas. The minimum wages decided by the central or state governments will not be lower than the national minimum wage.

**Fixing the minimum wage:** The minimum wages will be based on time, or number of pieces produced, among others. The Code specifies that the central or state governments will review or revise the minimum wage every five years.

**Working hours:** The central or state governments will fix the number of hours that will constitute a working day. Further, they will provide for a day of rest for employees every week. An employee will receive overtime for working beyond these working hours on any day. This amount will be at least twice the normal wage of the employee.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

## **TWO NEW CONTRACEPTIVES**

**Launched by:** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

**Names of the contraceptives:** MPA and Chhaya

**Objective:** To keep a check on the increasing population

### **Details**

- ✓ MPA is an injectable contraceptive under the 'Antara' programme, effective for 3 months
- ✓ Chhaya is a contraceptive pill, effective for a week, in the public health system

These will expand the basket of contraceptive choices to meet the emerging needs of couples.

- The contraceptives are being launched under the government's Mission Parivar Vikas, a central family planning initiative.

### **Mission Parivar Vikas:**

**Objective:** To bring down the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to 2.1, which is when the population starts stabilizing, by the year 2025.

- The mission is being implemented in high focus districts that house 44% of the country's population, with the highest total fertility rates of 3 and more. The districts are in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Assam.

The key strategic focus of this initiative will be on improving access to contraceptives.

## **INDIA AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

### **CHINA'S RESERVATIONS ON ASIA-AFRICA CORRIDOR**

#### **Why in news?**

China has initiated a move to persuade India to go slow on the Asia Africa Growth Corridor, which New Delhi has formulated along with Japan.

Chinese idea envisages to merge the project with the BRICS platform and keep its rival, Japan, out of it.

#### **China's worry and design**

#### **Asia- Africa Corridor**

The Asia Africa Growth Corridor project was planned by India and Japan with the active support of the African Development Bank and several African countries including South Africa, who wish to reduce their dependence on Beijing.

The idea is to "create a 'free and open Indo-Pacific region' by rediscovering ancient sea-routes and creating new sea corridors" by integrating the economies of South, Southeast, and East Asia with Oceania and Africa. It

primarily focuses on Development Cooperation Projects, Quality Infrastructure and Institutional Connectivity, Enhancing Skills, and People-to-People Partnership.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

The Asia-Africa corridor is seen by many as an alternative Silk Road to tap the African market. China sees the move as a source of major competition that will reduce its economic and political influence over the African continent.

Apart from persuading both India and Africa, China is also pushing the New Development Bank, the Shanghai based financial institution, which has been created by BRICS countries, to expand its lending to different African countries even though they are not be members of the organization.

### **9<sup>TH</sup> BRICS SUMMIT: XIAMEN DECLARATION**

**Venue:** Xiamen, China.

#### **Xiamen declaration:**

- BRICS countries will strive towards broad partnerships will pursue initiatives for dialogue and cooperation with non-BRICS countries, of equal standing, including through BRICS Plus cooperation.
- To promote the development of BRICS local currency bond markets and to jointly establish a BRICS local currency bond fund and also to facilitate financial market integration.
- They will also encourage explorations toward the establishment of the BRICS Institute of Future Networks.
- Besides, partner countries will enhance joint BRICS research, development and innovation in information and communications technology, including the internet of things, cloud computing, big data, data analytics, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, 5G and their innovative applications.
- They have also committed to strengthen BRICS cooperation on energy and work to foster open, flexible and transparent markets for energy commodities and technologies.
- BRICS Agriculture Research Platform is proposed to be established in India.
- They also called upon the international community to establish a genuinely broad counterterrorism coalition and

#### **About BRICS**

The acronym "BRICS" was initially formulated in 2001 by economist Jim O'Neill, of Goldman Sachs, in a report on growth prospects for the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China.



September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

support the UN's central coordinating role in this regard.

- Importance of people-to-people exchanges in promoting development and enhancing mutual understanding, friendship and cooperation among BRICS peoples was also emphasized.
- Countries also resolved to work together to promote most effective use of fossil fuels and wider use low emission technologies, foster better energy access and sustainable development.

### **INDIA- MYANMAR RELATIONS**

#### **Why in news?**

PM's visit to Myanmar alongside a visit to China



#### **Significance**

Earlier, despite India's push to Look East policy with an Act East policy, PM did not visit Myanmar due to elections in Myanmar in November 2015, the finalisation of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its assertiveness in the South China Sea, the India-China border stand-off; and Myanmar's efforts over the peace process, the Rohingya issue and the economy.

#### **The Rohingya crisis**



September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

This is a conflict involving Buddhists and Muslims in the Rakhine province which has been simmering for years now. In August 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA, now designated as 'terrorists') launched a major attack on police posts, in Rakhine state, resulting in significant casualties.

The attacks and clearance operations against it have resulted in some 400 deaths, mostly Rohingya and displacement of thousands within Rakhine state and across the Naf river to Bangladesh; and severe disruption in food and humanitarian supplies

The international community is worried about the reports of harsh response of the Myanmar security forces resulting in civilian casualties and forced migration.

### **India's muted stance is understandable**

Finding the balance between India's democratic ideals and security interests has always proven to be unusually hard when it comes to Myanmar. This was more than evident during Prime Minister's state visit to Myanmar. New Delhi skirted the issue of horrific treatment of its Rohingya Muslim minority but was able to persuade Naypyidaw to allow India to launch a large-scale aid programme in Rakhine province, the home of the Rohingya and the epicentre of the present violence.

This is probably the best that can be expected given the overriding security and geopolitical interests India has with Myanmar.

### **India's primary interests in Myanmar**

1. To build an economic and security relationship that prevent Myanmar from inexorably slipping into the orbit of China by building road, port and other transport links between the two countries.
2. Ensure the Myanmar military's continuing cooperation in preventing various Northeastern militants, most notably Naga insurgents, from using Myanmar as a safe haven.
3. Preserve and support the country's stuttering transition into a full-fledged federal democracy.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

4. Seek to ameliorate the plight of the Rohingyas as well as ensure the already tense relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar do not spiral out of control.

### **Myanmar's dependence on China**

The Myanmar government today is more dependent on Chinese support than it was two or three years ago. Its dependence on China characterised by

- a largely extractive relationship focused on natural resources and access to the Bay of Bengal where it already has an oil and gas terminal,
- concession to build a Special Economic Zone
- Seeks a possibly controlling stake in a natural deep sea harbour at Kyaukpyu that could form part of its ambitious BRI.
- China has been a major player in the peace negotiations between the armed ethnic groups and the Myanmar government.
- Further, because of the on-going conflict in the Rakhine state, the Myanmar government will be dependent on the support from China on various human right platforms including the Security Council.

### **Bilateral relationship**

#### **Agreements signed during the recent visit to Nyapidaw**

India and Myanmar signed 11 agreements in a range of sectors, important ones include

1. maritime security cooperation, to further strengthen their multifaceted partnership,
2. sharing white shipping information to improve data sharing on non-classified merchant navy ships or cargo ships.
3. An MoU was also signed to organise cultural exchange programme for the period 2017-2020
4. Extension of agreement on the establishment of India-Myanmar Centre for Enhancement of IT skill.

### **Economic**

The bilateral trade between the two countries is around \$ 2.2 billion, and there is scope for significant improvement. These cover large directly funded and executed connectivity infrastructure projects like

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

- Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport project
- The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway
- High value capacity and human development projects
- Small border area development projects in Chin and Naga areas of Myanmar
- Soft lines of credit for other infrastructure projects

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of commercial trade and investments. Both stand on narrow bases.

### **Regional frameworks**

India and Myanmar have been promoting regional frameworks such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

- The Goa BIMSTEC summit, in October last year, stressed the importance of strengthening transit agreements and early conclusion of Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

### **Political**

India has scaled up its engagement with all the important power centres in Myanmar.

- In the recent past, President, State Counsellor (Aung San Suu Kyi) and Myanmar military Chief have visited India.

### **Trade**

It has been the keystone of our post-Independence relationship.

- Indian imports of beans and pulses that play a vital part in our food security and Myanmar's economy.
- Unfortunately, the recent decision to impose quantitative restrictions on the trade in pulses does exactly the opposite.

### **In Conclusion**

We often say that Myanmar is our "gateway" to the East but the existing connectivity between the two neighbours leaves much to be desired. The two sides are yet to take full advantage of long land and maritime borders.

Historically, India has been a major player in Myanmar's socio-economic landscape till the 1960s. The advent of military dictatorship and its economic policies reduced India's interactions with Myanmar. As the political transition in Myanmar picks up momentum, it provides an excellent opportunity for India to explore new avenues of cooperation.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

## **INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

### **TRADE-DISTORTING AGRI SUBSIDIES**

#### **Why in news?**

India and China have jointly proposed to the WTO for the elimination of trade-distorting agricultural subsidies given by developed countries.

#### **Importance**

The proposal counters the efforts of some developed WTO member countries that are targeting the subsidies given by the developing economies to their poor farmers while letting the developed rich nations like the US, EU and Canada retain their huge farm subsidies.

It is an important proposal by India and China in view of the ongoing negotiations for the ministerial conference of the WTO to be held in Buenos Aires in December.

#### **The issue**

The developed nations have been consistently providing trade-distorting subsidies to their farmers at levels much higher than the ceiling applicable to developing countries. Such subsidies are referred to as Aggregate Measurement of Support (AMS) or Amber Box support, by the WTO.

Most of the developing countries, including India and China, do not have AMS entitlements.

- Besides, developed members of the WTO have access to huge amount of AMS beyond their de minimus — the minimal amount of domestic support that are allowed even though they distort trade, up to 5% of the value of production for developed countries and 10% for developing.
- In contrast, most developing members have access only to de minimus

#### **Different types of subsidies**

1. Amber box are trade-distorting subsidies
2. Blue box are subsidies with restrictions designed to reduce distortion
3. Green box subsidies are non-trade distorting subsidies.

Direct cash transfers, coupons and subsidies that do not impact production are not considered trade-distorting subsidies and categorised as green box.

resulting in a major

#### **Amber box: De Minimus limits**

- Under WTO's agreement on agriculture (AoA), domestic-subsidies are classified into three groups: Green, Blue and Amber.
- Amber box subsidies create trade distortion because they encourage excessive production e.g. fertilizers, seeds, electricity and irrigation subsidies.
- Therefore, WTO wants to limit the amber box subsidies.
- De Minimus is the Minimal amounts of Amber box subsidies permitted by WTO, even though they distort trade.
- De minimus limits are calculated on the agriculture production of the given member state in 1986-88.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

asymmetry in the rules on agricultural trade.

### **PACE OF SERVICES TALKS AT RCEP WORRYING**

India has decided to flag concerns over the 'slow' pace of negotiations on services trade liberalization, at the ministerial-level meeting on the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) involving 16 Asia-Pacific nations.

#### **India's concerns:**

Presumably, 'higher priority' is being accorded to commitments to open up goods trade in the region. The RCEP nations seem to be focused more on "extracting as much (binding commitments) as possible on eliminating tariffs to open up goods trade", instead of sticking to the RCEP 'Guiding Principles and Objectives' which state that the "negotiations on trade in goods, trade in services, investment and other areas will be conducted in parallel to ensure a comprehensive and balanced outcome."

#### **RCEP**

RCEP is a proposed FTA amongst the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).

#### **In conclusion**

India has decided to talk tough and state that any more discussions on opening up goods trade will be only after ensuring that negotiations on services trade liberalisation "catch up" with talks on goods trade. It would augur well for India if liberalization in services is realised including easing norms on movement of professionals and skilled workers across borders for short-term work.

### **INDIA-IRAN GAS PIPELINE**

A 1,300-km undersea pipeline from Iran has been proposed to port cheap gas. The idea aims to avoid Pakistan. It is said that this pipeline can bring

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

natural gas from the Persian Gulf to India at rates less than the price of LNG available in the spot market.



### **Details of the proposal**

As per the proposal, the pipeline can first travel to Oman, and then to Porbandar in the state of Gujarat.

- The subsea pipeline is being seen as an alternative to the on-land, Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline.
- New Delhi has not been participating in talks on Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline since 2007 citing security and commercial concerns. But, it has never officially pulled out of the project.

### **Potential benefits of the new proposal**

LNG, imported through ships costs higher than natural gas imported through the proposed line. The cost of landed gas through an undersea pipeline will be at least \$2 cheaper than importing LNG, saving about \$1 billion annually.

### **Iran- Pakistan- India (IPI) gas pipeline**

IPI pipeline was envisaged to transport natural gas from a gas field in Iran to Pakistan and India, to be equally split between India and Pakistan. The pipeline would enter Indian border near Barmer



**Natural gas:**

Natural gas is an odourless, colourless gas, largely formed over millions of years underground. It's made of a variety of compounds, but methane is by far the most significant. Natural gas is a fossil fuel, releasing greenhouse gases when burnt – but is less climate-polluting than coal, releasing about half of its carbon emissions.

Typical Composition of Natural Gas

Methane	CH <sub>4</sub>	70-90%
Ethane	C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>6</sub>	
Propane	C <sub>3</sub> H <sub>8</sub>	0-20%
Butane	C <sub>4</sub> H <sub>10</sub>	
Carbon Dioxide	CO <sub>2</sub>	0-8%
Oxygen	O <sub>2</sub>	0-0.2%
Nitrogen	N <sub>2</sub>	0-5%
Hydrogen sulphide	H <sub>2</sub> S	0-5%
Rare gases	A, He, Ne, Xe	trace

**Unconventional gas:**

Unconventional natural gas is trapped in deep underground rocks that are hard to reach, such as shale rock or coal beds. Recent technological advances have made it possible to get these new sources of energy out of the ground.

**Shale gas:** Shale gas is extracted from shale rock using fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, of the rock. Shale rock is very common. It makes up 35 per cent of the world's surface rocks.

**Methane:** When it's released directly in the atmosphere – rather than being burnt – methane is a powerful greenhouse gas. It is approximately 25 times more climate-polluting than carbon dioxide over a 100-year timescale. Some academics are worried that methane leaks during the fracking process – so called fugitive emissions – will significantly increase the impact of fracking on the climate.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

**Liquefied Natural gas (LNG):** In order to feed the world's demand for natural gas, the gas needs to be transported from where it's produced to where it's going to be consumed. But transporting gas is not that easy. LNG is created by cooling natural gas to -160 C, creating a clear, colourless and non-toxic liquid, 600 times smaller than natural gas. The biggest exporter of LNG around the world is Qatar, which sends it around the world in enormous tankers.

**Shale oil:** Fracking can be used to get not just gas out of the rock, but oil. Shale oil represents 10 per cent of the world's crude oil resources.

**Coal bed methane (CBM):** Methane occurs naturally underground within coal reserves. It can be extracted using a variety of techniques. In comparison to shale gas, the amount of gas we might get from CBM seems to be fairly small.

**Underground coal gasification (UCG):** UCG is an industrial process where coal is converted into gas while it's still underground. It involves drilling boreholes into the coal seam, injecting water and oxygen, and partially burning the coal underground. UCG has the potential to open up large new areas of coal to exploitation – a prospect that has alarmed environmental campaigners.

## **ROHINGYA EXODUS**

### **Why in news?**

International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s report points out that about 18,000 Rohingya Muslims are estimated to have crossed into Bangladesh in a week's time seeking to escape the worst violence in Myanmar's northwest in at least five years.

### **How it all started?**

A series of coordinated attacks were made by Rohingya insurgents on security forces in Myanmar's Rakhine state and clashes ensued triggering the exodus of Rohingya. Meanwhile, the government evacuated thousands of Rakhine Buddhists.

The United Nations, while condemning the attacks, pressured Myanmar to protect civilian lives without discrimination and appealed to Bangladesh to let those fleeing the military counteroffensive through.

### **Who are rohingyas?**

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

The Rohingya are denied citizenship in Myanmar and regarded as illegal immigrants, despite claiming roots there that go back centuries.

**International Organization for Migration**

Established: 1951

Members: 166 member states and 8 states holding observer status

IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.

IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.

IOM works in the four broad areas of migration management:

- Migration and development.
- Facilitating migration.
- Regulating migration.
- Forced migration.

**UJALA IN MALAYSIA**

India's zero-subsidy UJALA (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All) Scheme has been successful in India and has now travelled to Malaysia.

**Implemented by:** Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), under Ministry of Power

**Where in Malaysia:** In the State of Melaka, Malaysia.

**UJALA scheme:**

**Objective:** To promote efficient lighting, enhance awareness on using efficient equipment which reduce electricity bills and help preserve environment.

The scheme will not only help reduce consumers their electricity bills but also contribute to the energy security of India.

**Other details**

- ✓ The scheme has seen successful implementation in the UK as well.
- ✓ Under the scheme, each household in Melaka will get 10 high quality 9-watt LED bulbs at a cost of only RM 10 (10 Malaysian Ringgit), which is a special price and is almost half of what is being offered in the market.
- ✓ The initiative will have the logistical assistance and facilitation support from Green Growth Asia, a non-profit organisation in Malaysia

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

## **GENERAL STUDIES-3**

### **INDIAN ECONOMY**

#### **THE SLOWING DOWN**

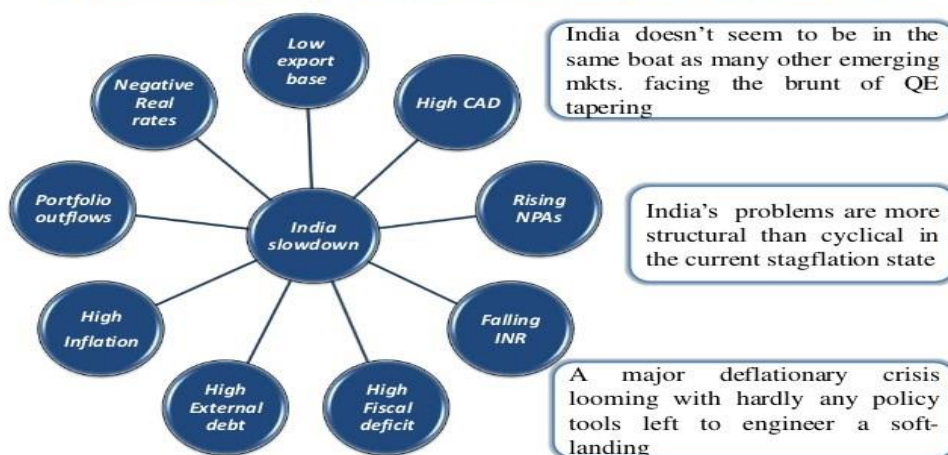
##### **Why in news?**

The Indian economy slowed down to a 13 quarter low of 5.7% in the April-June quarter of 2017-18

Reasons posited include companies stalling production in June to prepare for the switch-over to the Goods & Services Tax regime. Also, the prolonged effects of demonetisation also contributed to the slowdown.

The slowing down of GDP growth rate in first quarter of this fiscal is a matter of concern and it throws up challenges to the economy.

#### *India heading towards a major slowdown*



##### **Some of the favourable factors of current economy**

- Inflation has been moderate, and touched a low of 1.5% recently.
- Both trade and fiscal deficits are moderate and manageable. So they don't eat up investible resources or precious foreign exchange.
- The interest rate has been cut repeatedly over the past year and a half.
- The inward rush of dollars is at a peak, both in financial markets (stocks and bonds) and as direct investment.
- The stock market index is at an all-time high.
- Oil prices have been stable and comfortably low.
- Finally, the monsoon has been normal.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

Despite these favourable macro factors, our economy has not managed to convert them into a higher growth rate.

Loss of 1% growth rate means a lot. In nominal terms, one percentage less of growth translates into a loss of ₹ 1.5 lakh crore of national income. It also signifies millions of jobs not created.

### **Performance of Sectors**

Services sector posted higher growth especially in trade, hotels, transport and communication, among others, mostly due to discount sales ahead of GST implementation. Growth in government spending held up close to double digits at 9.5%, continued to support overall economic growth.

Slowdown was steepest in manufacturing, mining. Uncertainty related to the GST rollout on 1 July, which came about eight months after demonetisation, saw manufacturers cutting production and dealers offering discounts on items such as cars. As a result, manufacturing growth slowed down and mining activity contracted.

The agricultural sector grew 2.3 percent

### **Several reasons**

- **Declining Private Investment:**

Investment, which is between 30 and 35% of the total pie, needs to grow at least in double digits. Investment in future capacity creates GDP growth of the future. It needs to be led by the private sector. Currently, that component is barely growing at 1.5%. As a result, capital formation is steadily declining for several years. Private sector investment has practically come to a standstill. Despite the push for 'Make in India', reforms for improving 'Ease of Doing Business', increased access to electricity, improvement in infrastructure and private investment are not picking up.

Initiatives such as Housing For All, Smart Cities and Digital India give room for huge opportunities for private entrepreneurs.

- **Twin Balance sheet problem:**

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

The corporate sector and banks have been affected by the twin balance sheet squeeze wherein corporates are over-leveraged, and banks have mounting bad loans. The new insolvency code and regulator and the Reserve Bank of India's aggressive intervention may resolve this puzzle.

▪ *Strengthening rupee:*

Another significant challenge to the domestic industry is the ever-strengthening rupee. Since January the rupee is 7% stronger compared to the American dollar.

- This directly hurts our export prospects. Due to this our exports are barely up 12% since January, whereas imports are up more than 30%.
- More importantly, the strong rupee hurts the domestic industry since cheaper imports flood the country and eat into the market share of domestic players.
- The GST regime has given an extra advantage to importer traders since the countervailing duty that they now pay under GST can be offset against other taxes, a concession which was not available earlier. A jump in gold imports is also due to strengthening of rupee.

The need of the hour is to take measures for safeguarding domestic manufacturing industry from strengthening of rupee.

▪ *Effects at demonetisation*

The first half of the last fiscal year, that is the period prior to demonetisation, recorded a real growth of 7.7%. The present April to June quarter's growth at 5.7% certainly includes the negative impact of demonetisation on the informal and rural economy.

Investment and consumption spending which were postponed due to cash shortage might recover. But jobs that are lost are lost forever.

▪ *Low agricultural prices*

The agriculture sector GDP shows nominal GDP growth to be lower than real GDP (values are adjusted for inflation), which is very unusual. It means that farmers' incomes will be depressed, and doubling of farm incomes in five years becomes that much more of a distant dream.

**Concerns**

The slower pace of GDP growth also means India lost the tag of the world's fastest-growing large economy for the second straight quarter to China, which grew 6.9%.



September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

The Industrial outlook survey of RBI had revealed a waning of optimism in Q2 on capacity utilisation, profit margins and employment, and hence demand would be on the lower side.

The pick-up in government expenditure was reflected by the latest Controller General of Accounts data which showed that the government exhausted 92.4% of fiscal deficit target within the first four months (April-July) of the fiscal year 2017-18.

### **Challenges**

With slower-than-expected expansion, the challenge before the government now is to work out both policy and investment measures to boost momentum.

- The risks of fiscal loosening are manifold, especially at a juncture when several State governments have either announced or are contemplating large-scale farm loan waivers, which would push up interest rates and crowd out fresh lending.
- Still, there is a thin sliver of a silver lining in the GDP data. The services sector continues to remain buoyant whereas manufacturing and mining sector showed a steepest decline.

### **Plausible solutions**

- Suspend the fiscal road map for a limited period in order to pump prime the economy through increased capital spending by the government.
- Transformational ideas are the need of the hour to boost economy.
- There is a need to modernise agricultural sector to increase productivity and income of farmers.

Restoring momentum, before the tailwinds of low inflation and affordable energy prices start reversing direction, is quintessential.

### **In conclusion**

The reforms undertaken have had transitory and negative impact, be it the GST or demonetization. However, these effects will gradually diminish. The central bank (Reserve Bank of India) has also taken steps to clean (up) bad loans. This will improve the health of the banking sector, especially public banks, and will aid private investment. As also inventories will have returned to normal levels, which will help revive economic growth in coming months.

## **AGRICULTURE AND CROPPING PATTERNS**

### **FARM LOAN WAIVERS ONLY A QUICK-FIX**

#### **Why in news?**

RBI aired concerns about farm loan waivers as being only a “quick-fix” and will lead to a lasting adverse impact on farm productivity.

#### **Fiscal implications**

The burden of farm loan waivers could be as much as 2.2-2.7 lakh crore if all states start offering the relief.

1. This could reduce aggregate demand because the states funding the loan waiver would have to prune spending and possibly raise taxes to improve revenue and stick to their fiscal deficit limits, although private demand tends to get a boost from the loan waivers.
2. Even as the central government makes significant efforts toward fiscal consolidation, the higher debt burden of the states could push up general government debt.

#### **Detrimental as a whole**

In the absence of coordinated and sustained efforts to put in place structures and mechanisms for uplift of farmers’ income, loan waivers have periodically emerged as a quick fix to ease their distress. Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra are the recent states to have announced farm loan waivers.

- Loan waivers mostly lead to faulty targeting of beneficiaries
- They incentivize willful defaulters and erode credit discipline.
- Since waiver announcements and actual dole-out come with a time lag, in this interregnum, the quality of assets deteriorates and causes crowding out of new loans.
- It impacts public finances via higher than budgeted revenue spends. This will have to be financed by additional market borrowings which push up interest rates, not just for the states but for the entire economy.
- A collateral damage is that private borrowers are crowded out as the cost of borrowing rises.

#### **Solution is elsewhere**

The recurring farm distress is because

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

1. Low infrastructure investment in agriculture
2. Archaic irrigation practices
3. Excessive Monsoon dependence
4. Fragmented land-holdings
5. Low tech adoption
6. Lack of property rights
7. Low initial net worth of farmers

Therefore, any solution should try to address the aforesaid issues both legally and economically. Building irrigation capabilities and cold storage chains, increased crop insurance coverage, farm infrastructure building, tech-enabled productivity improvement and opening the sector to market forces and open trade can be a good start.

### **SMART AGRICULTURE CONCLAVE: FARMERZONE**

**Convened by:** The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), under the Ministry of Science and Technology

**Partnership:** UK's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

**Venue:** New Delhi

**Objective:** To set the stage for "FarmerZone".

#### **FarmerZone**

It is a collective open-source data platform for smart agriculture which will use biological research and data to improve the lives of small and marginal farmers.

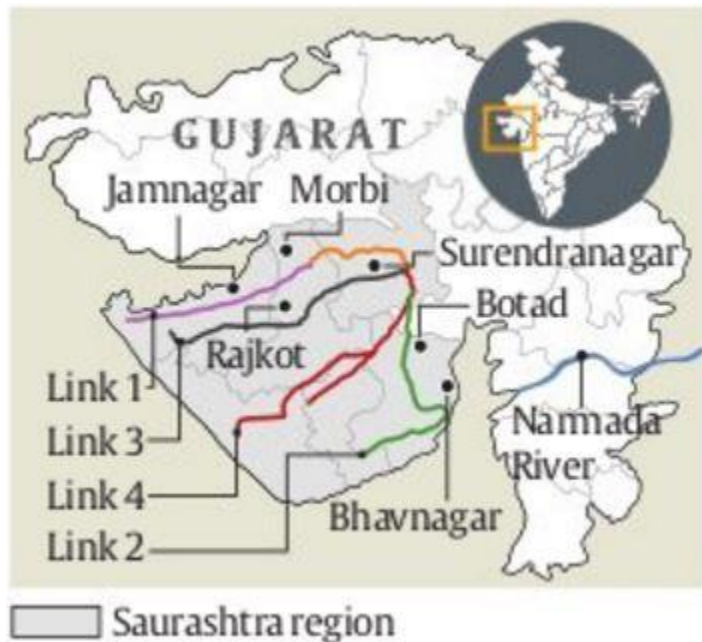
- Envisioned by the DBT, it calls for effective decision-making in agriculture that integrates science, technology, innovation and the farm ecosystem.
- It will cater to all needs of the farmer, from dealing with climate change, weather predictions and soil, water, and seed requirements to providing market intelligence.

The FarmerZone platform will connect farmers and scientists, government officials, thought leaders in agriculture, economists and representatives from global companies who work in the big-data and e-commerce space to bring about technology-based localised agri-solutions.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

## **INDUSTRY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT**

### **'SAURASHTRA NARMADA AVATARAN IRRIGATION YOJANA' (SAUNI)**



#### **Why in news?**

The President of India recently laid the foundation stone of 'Saurashtra Narmada Avataran Irrigation Yojana' (SAUNI) Phase-II Link-4 in Rajkot, Gujarat.

#### **What is the SAUNI Yojna about?**

Launched: 2012.

Objective: Filling 115 major dams of the arid Saurashtra region by diverting floodwaters overflowing from the Sardar Sarovar Dam across the Narmada in south Gujarat.

#### **Details**

Parts of Saurashtra are prone to drought, and irrigation water is also a politically sensitive issue in this region.

- Unlike traditional irrigation projects, SAUNI is technically a 'linking' project, where the water will be filled in irrigation dams that are already equipped with canal network. This network of canals will then help channel water into farms.

The pipelines in the SAUNI project are underground, which means that no land needs to be acquired.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

## **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

### **WORLD'S LARGEST X-RAY LASER**

**Name:** EUROPEAN X-ray Free Electron Laser (XFEL)

**Place:** Germany

#### **Details**

The project was funded by 11 countries, has been hailed as one of the largest and most ambitious European research projects ever.

#### **Applications**

It promises to shed new light onto very small things by letting scientists penetrate the inner workings of atoms, viruses and chemical reactions.

- It will allow researchers for the first time to look deep inside matter and take snapshots and films at the nano-level.
- Images of biomolecules may help understand and treat illnesses, while a peek inside a building material might explain why it tears or cracks.

The light beams can also be bundled to create extreme pressure and temperatures to study process like those at the Earth's core.

### **LOCKY RANSOMWARE**

#### **Why in news?**

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) issued an alert about spread of a new malicious software 'Locky', which is being circulated through spam messages that can potentially lock computers and demand ransom for restoring access to users. Locky Ransomware is learnt to be demanding ransom of half bitcoin.

#### **CERT-In**

CERT-In (the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) is a government-mandated information technology (IT) security organization. CERT-In was created by the Indian Department of Information Technology in 2004 and operates under the auspices of that department.

The purpose of CERT-In is to respond to computer security incidents, report on vulnerabilities and promote effective IT security practices throughout the country.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

### **Previous attacks this year**

This could be the third major ransomware attack this year after Wannacry and Petya that crippled thousands of computers, including those of multinational corporations

## **BREAKTHROUGH LISTEN PROJECT**

### **Why in news?**

Astronomers working for Stephen Hawking's Breakthrough Listen (BL) project detected a mysterious signal in a distant galaxy and termed it a possible extra-terrestrial communication which sparked a controversy. They reportedly picked up fast radio bursts (FRBs) from a source unknown, which might have been from neutron stars, black holes or extraterrestrial lives across the universe.

### **Fast radio burst**

A fast radio burst (FRB) is a high-energy astrophysical phenomenon of unknown origin manifested as a transient radio pulse lasting only a few milliseconds. Fast radio bursts are bright, unresolved, broadband (spanning a large range of radio frequencies), millisecond flashes found in parts of the sky outside the Milky Way.

### **Details of the project**

Breakthrough Listen is a program to search for intelligent extraterrestrial communications in the Universe.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **BUSINESS & CLIMATE SUMMIT 2017**

**Venue:** New Delhi, Edition 3

**Organizer:** Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)

### **Details**

It is an annual forum for businesses, investors and policymakers on climate action.



September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

- ✓ It is where business and governments come together to agree on a roadmap for reaching net zero emissions over the next half century.
- ✓ It tries to build partnerships needed to scale up and accelerate the low carbon transition.

Increase awareness of international policy makers about the wealth of solutions developed by companies and the conditions for deployment of these solutions.

### **BUXA GETS BACK TIGERS**

**Location:** Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal. Northern boundary of Buxa Tiger Reserve runs along the international border with Bhutan. The Sinchula hill range lies all along the northern side of BTR and the eastern boundary touches that of the Assam state.

The Phipsu Wildlife Sanctuary of Bhutan is contiguous to the north of BTR. Manas National Park lies on east of BTR. BTR, thus, serves as international corridor for Asian elephant migration between India and Bhutan.



**What's the move about:** It has been identified for the tiger augmentation programme by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Tigers from the forest reserves of Assam, especially Manas Tiger Reserve, which have a similar flora and fauna, will be introduced in Buxa.

**Vegetation:** It consists of moist, deciduous and evergreen forests.

### **GHAZIPUR DISASTER: LESSONS TO BE LEARNED**

One of the biggest problems of massive urban agglomerations and cosmopolitan cities such as Delhi and Mumbai is that of waste management. Solid waste generated needs to be immediately reduced, reused, and recycled if we want to save our cities from becoming choked with garbage.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

### **About the disaster**

The collapse in the Ghazipur landfill led to the death of two people. It is a warning to all civic agencies. A spell of heavy rains was possibly one of the triggers for the collapse.

### **Landscape**

The Ghazipur landfill is among four dumpsites in the national capital, spread over 70 acres and towering to a height taller than a 15-storey building. The mountain of trash is a stark reminder of administrative apathy.

Close to the landfill is the Ghazipur slum. Landfill often catches fire due to release of methane. Due to low quality of waste, little energy is generated. According to experts, due to lack of leachate treatment facility by-products released during decomposition seep into the ground water and pollute it.

### **Causes of the incident:**

- Half-hearted attempts have been made to segregate waste at source and to create waste to energy plants within these landfills.
- 50% of the generated garbage is fit for composting and 30% is recyclable; which means that only 20% should reach the landfill. But that is not happening
- Dumping should have been halted when the landfill reached a height of 20 metres, but when it collapsed, it was 50 metres high.

### **New landfills would not offer respite**

Land is available but no one would want a giant landfill in their backyard

- Leaching of hazardous chemicals into the soil is a problem
- Asthma, tuberculosis, skin diseases as some common health conditions among the rag pickers.

### **Focus has to be on Urban Solid Waste Management.**

Characteristics of waste vary based on place of generation and season in which it is generated. Sources include domestic waste, municipal waste, commercial waste, institutional waste, garbage, rubbish, ashes, bulky waste, street sweepings, dead animals, construction and demolition waste, industrial waste, hazardous waste and sewage waste.

A solid waste management (SWM) system includes collection, segregation, transportation, processing and disposal of waste.

### **Learn from practices from elsewhere**

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

Several cities in India have taken positive steps towards implementing sustainable waste management practices by involving the community in segregation, by enforcing better PPP contracts and by investing in modern technology for transportation, processing and disposal.

The role of waste pickers/ informal sector in SWM is also increasingly being recognized. These interventions have great potential for wider replication in other cities in the country.

1. Improvements in Waste Segregation, Collection and Transportation

- Segregated waste collection from households is the key to reducing landfilling.
- Segregation ensures maximum recycling and treatment at the local level, with emphasis on initiatives that have strengthened the door to door collection system.
- Segregation should at least be at the level of separation of wet and dry waste at the source
- Ideally, the separation should be in the following categories:
  - biodegradable waste, waste that is non-biodegradable, and
  - Hazardous domestic waste such as batteries, etc.

2. Waste Recovery

- The high degree of biodegradable content in municipal solid waste in India makes it ideal for techniques like composting wherein the chemical and biological transformation processes reduces the quantity of waste and products of economic value are recovered.
- Various initiatives being undertaken by cities to incorporate decentralized waste treatment options such as composting units, bio gas plants, waste to energy plants

3. Scientific waste disposal

ULBs are challenged to dispose waste in engineered/ sanitary landfill sites. The various issues that have been cited include lack of land, lack of capacity to design and operate a landfill site.

- Modernization of the Landfills accompanied by improvements in overall SWM services in the city to be taken as a priority.

4. Roping in students

- The 'Engage 14' outreach initiative was launched by the GMC(Gangtok Municipal Corporation) to engage school students

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

from classes 4 to 12 in the process of understanding aspects of waste management

### **Planning for improved solid waste management**

Comprehensive planning is the first step towards achieving an efficient and robust solid waste management system in a city. Many cities in India are keen to achieve “zero-waste” status by improving and strengthening their waste management practices.

The concept of Zero Waste aims to minimize use of resources and maximize the on-going benefits of the intrinsic value within the waste generated by society.

- Preparing an integrated solid waste management master plan, allows an urban local body to assess its current and future waste management needs
- Identify problems and efficiencies within the current system and identify strategies and solutions to address those gaps.
- The plan should be accompanied with a strong enforcement framework, community involvement and awareness campaigns.

### **In Conclusion**

Dedicated civic agencies and aid from the citizens to effectively implement segregation of waste at source to reduce the amount of garbage that reaches landfills, is quintessential to address the overall concerns related waste.

### **BEING CLIMATE-SMART**

Heavy rains from the southwest monsoon and accompanying floods have devastated people’s lives in parts of Mumbai, Chandigarh and Rajasthan. Also, Hurricane Harvey has wreaked havoc through Houston.

### **Climate models**

Global climate models (GCMs) are mathematical formulations which quantify the processes that comprise the climate system. Climate models simulate the interactions of the important drivers of climate, including atmosphere, oceans, land surface and ice.

Climate models can be used to make projections about future climate, as also the effects of different green house gases, and the knowledge gained can contribute to policy decisions regarding climate change.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Extreme Events has predicted that global warming leads to “changes in the frequency, intensity, spatial extent, duration, and timing of extreme weather and climate events, and can result in unprecedented extreme weather and climate events”.

### **Indian scenario**

For India, examining daily rainfall data between 1951 and 2000 showed that there has been a significant increase in the magnitude and frequency of extreme rainfall events along with a decrease in the number of moderate events over central India. These changes interacting with land-use patterns are contributing to floods and droughts simultaneously in several parts of the country.

### **Urbanisation and Inundation**

The actual patterns of flooding in Chennai, Mumbai and Houston, however, were due to several human-induced activities:

- Rampant increase in built-up area across natural drainage channels,
- The diversion or damming of rivers upstream leading to sediment transport and siltation,
- Coastal subsidence and other effects of development.

Any rain that falls on soil or vegetation is mostly absorbed into the earth's surface. Some of it slowly trickles into shallow or deep protected aquifers that make up what we call groundwater. The rest usually flows downhill along surface or subsurface stream channels. The spread of infrastructure such as roads, highways, buildings, and residential complexes, tiled or asphalt-covered land obstructs rainwater from percolating into the soil. Often there are further barriers that block movement of water and increase flooding.

In India too, urban growth over the past few decades has casually ignored the hydrology of the land.

### **Solutions**

Development needs to be climate-smart

- No investments should be made in places where severe impacts are likely
- Construction on existing lake beds and other water bodies needs to be removed or redesigned to allow flood drainage along natural water channels.

September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>

- Construction in cities or in urbanising areas should take into consideration the existing topography, surface water bodies, stream flows or other parts of terrestrial ecosystems.
- Forecasting models and emergency response plans should be established.
  - ✓ Water Resources monitoring like routine measurements of river flow
  - ✓ Water quality monitoring of surface water, groundwater and drinking water.

### **In Conclusion**

As the frequency of extreme weather events increases around the world, losses in rich countries are higher in terms of GDP, but in terms of the number of people at risk, it is the poor countries that suffer the most.

For decades, urbanisation has ignored ecological principles. These are not 'environmental' issues to be disregarded or attended to only after we have attained 'growth'. Rather, they are part and parcel of and integral to how we live and decides whether we prosper or not.

## **SECURITY CHALLENGES**

### **SURYA KIRAN EXERCISE**

**Countries involved:** India and Nepal

**Edition and Venue:** 12th edition, Nepal

**Focus of the exercise:** Counter-terror operations, Disaster management and disaster relief

### **Other details**

The Surya Kiran military exercise are being conducted annually, alternatively in Nepal and India. Surya Kiran series with Nepal is the largest in terms of troop's participation, when it comes to India