

UPSC MONTHLY MAGAZINE

APRIL - 2018



Child rape

Death Penalty or Structural Reforms?

**ICICI Bank-Videocon
loan Controversy**
Indian banking in the
midst of Scams

**Blackbuck
Poaching**
Judiciary upholds law of Land

**15th Finance Commission
terms of reference**
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**Commonwealth Heads of
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(CHOGM)**
Commonwealth: A Relic of the
Past or the Face of the Future

INCREDIBLE RESULTS

— IAS 2016 —

8 Ranks
in Top 50

18 Ranks
in Top 100

215 Ranks
In The Final List



Rank 2
Anmol Sher
Singh Bedi



Rank 5
Abhilash
Mishra



Rank 12
Tejaswi
Rana



Rank 30
Prabhash
Kumar



Rank 32
Avdhesh
Meena



Ganga
Singh
Rank-33



Anu S
Rank-42



Surabhi
Gautam
Rank-50



Manuj
Jindal
Rank-53



Tanai
Sultania
Rank-63



Parikh
Mirant Jatin
Rank-67



Rohit
Vyas
Rank-69



Abhishek
Chourasiya
Rank-72



Rajarshi
Shah
Rank-81



Prateek
Jain
Rank-82



Nair Prajit
Prabhakaran
Rank-87



Sushil
Kumar
Rank-96



Devendra
Kumar
Rank-97



Swarn
Prabhat
Rank-105



Hirani
Adityavikram
Rank-113



Varun
Singla
Rank-114



Shaurya
suman
Rank-119



Nitish
Agarwal
Rank-122



Ann Mary
George
Rank-123



Anand
Shankar
Rank-127



Rishav
Kumar Jha
Rank-128



Prabhat
Ranjan Pathak
Rank-137



Akanksha
Rana
Rank-163



Padmini
Solanki
Rank-170



Amogh
Gopinath
Rank-171



Bindu
Madhav
Garikapati
Rank-172



Rahul
Gupta
Rank-182



Sagar
Bagmar
Rank-186



Abhay
Soni
Rank-188



Tare Anuj
Milind
Rank-189



Anurag
Jain
Rank-198



Arpit
Vijayvargiya
Rank-201



Deepak
Shukla
Rank-202



Videh
Khare
Rank-205



Akhil
Mahajan
Rank-213



Nitika
Pant
Rank-217



Tuhin
Sinha
Rank-219



Keshav
Kumar
Rank-222



Keshav
Kumar
Rank-230



mohit
Garg
Rank-238



Pansuria
Toral Pravinbhai
Rank-239



Odke Digvijay
Govind
Rank-247



Bogati
jagadeeswar
Rank-249



Abhishek
Surana
Rank-250



Pushkin
Jain
Rank-252



Amit
Verma
Rank-253



Shrey Vats
Rank-260



Suchismita
Kanungoe
Rank-261



Sri Hari Prasad
Gopishetty
Rank-268



Aditi Mor
Rank-277



Zade Parikshit
Sanjayrao
Rank-280



Prachi
Ailawadhi
Rank-290



Guru
Prasad
Rank-299



Shashank
Shekhar Singh
Rank-306



Aaditya
Mishra
Rank-309



Amilineni
Bhargav Teja
Rank-314



Aman
Bishla
Rank-315



Arihant
Singhi
Rank-322



Mitika
Dahiya
Rank-325



Ashima
Mittal
Rank-328



Aastha
Suman
Rank-331



Ankur
Rank-341



Avneet
Punia
Rank-356



S Chitharanjan
Rank-357



Ranjan
Rajeev
Rank-358



Godhani
Aksharkumar P
Rank-365



Sumit
Balecha
Rank-368



Basuki Nath
Jha
Rank-378



Mayank
Mishra
Rank-379



Mrinal Prakash
Mishra
Rank-380



Kaustuva
Rank-381



Sambit
Mishra
Rank-385

OUR RESULTS IN THE PAST YEARS

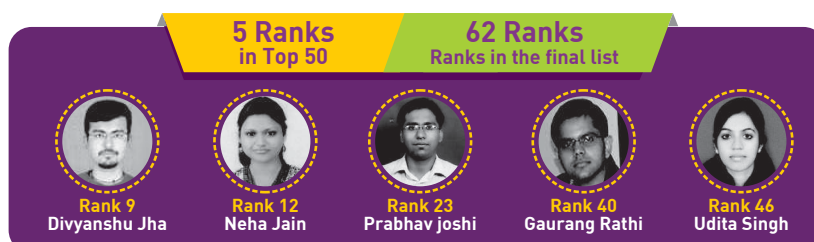
IAS Result 2015



IAS Result 2014



IAS Result 2013



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POLITY

1. 15th FC North- South Divide

Context

- 15th Finance Commission's suggestion to use population figures from 2011 census instead of 1971 census for sharing tax revenue among states has triggered opposition from South India

Comments

Using 2011 census data instead of 1971 census data to decide the allocation of tax revenue to states could lead to a major disruption of southern finances, since southern states have been more successful in bringing down population growth rates after 1971.

- DMK working President Stalin, Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah and Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu are all against this.
- Kerala finance minister Thomas Isaac -The change in census data, he has argued, is a betrayal: "Southern states contribute maximum tax revenues to the centre, but the latter is diverting the money to the development of northern states."

Constituent assembly

- The members of the constituent assembly agreed to compromise on the fiscal autonomy of the states because the individual citizen rather than the state is the locus of development.

Taxation

- States' own revenues (taxes on stamps and registration, alcohol excise duties etc) fall under the exclusive control of the States.
- In contrast, taxes levied on incomes and corporations for example, fall under the purview of the Union Finance Commission's pool.
- To indicate the relative sizes of these two revenue sources, look at these numbers: States' own revenues (tax and non-tax) in 2016-17 constituted 75% of Maharashtra's revenues, 45% of MP's revenues, 76% of Gujarat's revenues, and 56% of Karnataka's revenues respectively.
- The recommended distribution of the FC goes to the States in the form of un-tied transfers. This means that this money does not come attached with a purpose; States can spend the money as they wish to. Such transfers are known as 'general purpose transfers' in public finance literature.

14th FC

- Even the 14th Finance Commission had been explicitly asked to use the 1971 population numbers while deciding the devolution formula.
- Previous finance commission used both 1971 and 2011 census – 17.5% weightage to 1971 and 10% to 2011.

Is it only Population?

- FFC will also consider achievements made by states in implementation of flagship central schemes and building disaster resilient infrastructure, reaching sustainable development goals, and quality of expenditure. Progress made in increasing capital expenditure, improving the quality of such expenditure and promoting labour-intensive growth have also been included in the ToR for the Commission.
- The Commission will arrive at the figures after reviewing the state of finances, deficits, debt levels, cash balances and fiscal discipline efforts by the central and state governments.

It is not flawed

- The governments of the Southern States need to be accredited for bringing in better development policies for its citizens.
- 20% of India's population contributes 30% of the country's tax revenue. The South also delivers a fourth of India's GDP.
- Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah said that UP receives Rs 1.79 from the central government, while Karnataka receives Rs 0.47. This gap will be further increased if the 2011 census is used to distribute taxes.
- The policies of south Indian state in controlling population and meeting development needs is much better than north India. Both Bihar and Tamilnadu has similar populations way back in 70's but today see where is Bihar where is TN

South North Divide is a flaw

- Krishna Sinha, then prime minister of Bihar, the fourth richest province when India became independent, noted that it was the "duty of the centre to give greater assistance to the poorer provinces" in order to bring them on par with the richer provinces.
- Idea of punishing individuals elsewhere in the country just because these areas continue to languish on major indicators goes diametrically against the Indian Republic's spirit.
 - * If this argument of southern versus northern states is followed through, a direct corollary would be to also oppose money flows from Bengaluru to Bidar or from Whitefield to South Bengaluru.
- Population is not the only criteria in the horizontal devolution formula.
 - * The 14th FC, for example, also gave weightage to income distance (50% weightage), area (15% weightage), and forest cover (7.5% weightage). In fact, States such as Karnataka were beneficiaries of this change.

- * The 14th FC tax devolution received by Karnataka saw a 63 per cent jump from 2014–15 (last year of 13th FC period) to 2015–16 (first year of 14th FC period). So, it is factually incorrect to say that using new population figures will necessarily hurt (or benefit) southern States alone.
- The shift to the latest demographics is necessary since public goods expenditure by the states has to be linked to the number of citizens

Way forward

- Federalism is ultimately based on trust between its various constituent units. If a set of States perceive that their progress is being penalised, the viability of such a federation comes into question.
- While the southern States contribute to the nation economically, they don't occupy a central space politically and are further marginalised culturally.
- Finally, unless the concerns regarding fairness are addressed from constitutional, financial and cultural fronts, the fault lines developing in our federation could deepen further.

Narendra Modi assures States on sharing of funds

- Following criticism from southern States that they were being discriminated against for performing well on development parameters, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the Centre had suggested to the 15th Finance Commission to consider incentivizing States that have worked on population control.
- States which have devoted a lot of effort, energy and resources towards population control, would certainly benefit.
- The Union government is committed to cooperative federalism. Our mantra is Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas [together with all, development for all]

2. Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC)

- BCCC is an independent self-regulatory body set-up by the Indian Broadcasting Foundation in 2011, in consultation with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- The primary role of BCCC is to implement self-regulatory guidelines for non-news channels, including general entertainment channels, kids' channels and special interest channels.
- The guidelines have been formulated after deliberations from the industry and the Government of India around areas such as national interest, racial and religious harmony, ill treatment of children, social values, sex and nudity, violence and crime, gambling, drugs, smoking, tobacco consumption, alcohol, defamation, harm and offence.

- In the case of a valid complaint, the respective channel is asked to provide their view on the offending content within one working week of receipt of a letter from BCCC. Post evaluation of the channel's response, if the BCCC committee is not satisfied, it has the power to pass a directive asking necessary modifications or withdrawal of such content, failing which, the BCCC sends out a detailed report to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting within 24 hours.

3. Draft Witness Protection Scheme

Context

- Centre informed the Supreme Court that it has framed a draft witness protection scheme in consultation with the Bureau of Police Research and Development and NALSA.

Three categories of witnesses as per threat perception

- Category A: Cases where threat extends to life of witness or family members for a substantial period during investigation, trial or even thereafter
- Category B: are those where the threat extends to safety, reputation or property of the witness or family members only during the investigation or trial.
- Category C: Cases where the threat is moderate and extends to harassment or intimidation of the witness or his family members, reputation or property during the investigation

Funding

- Expenses for the programme will be met from a witness protection fund, to be established by states and Union Territories.
- States should make annual budget allocation for the fund, which will also be free to accept donations from national and international philanthropic organizations and amounts contributed as part of corporate social responsibility

Competent authority

- The application for protection will have to be filed before a "competent authority" along with supporting documents. The authority will in turn seek a threat analysis report from the Commissioner or Police or SSP concerned.
- The police officer must submit the report within five days, according to the draft. The Authority too is required to dispose of an application seeking protection within five days from date of receipt of the threat analysis report.
- In the report, the officer must categorise the threat perception and suggest protective measures.
- While processing the application, the Authority shall interact in person, and if that is not possible, through electronic means with the witness and other relevant persons. Proceedings of the authority will be held in-camera.

- According to the draft, the witness protection order passed by the competent authority will be implemented by the witness protection cell of the state or union territory. It also puts the overall responsibility for implementing the order on the police chief of the state or UT concerned. If the order is for change of identity or relocation, it will be implemented by the home department concerned.

4. Union Cabinet approves death for rape of girls under 12 years

- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance provides for stringent punishment of a jail term of minimum 20 years or life imprisonment or death for rape of a girl under 12 years.

Amendments

- Amendments would be made to the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Indian Evidence Act.

Changes in Investigation Mechanism

- To improve the capacity of the judicial system, the government plans to set up new fast track courts, special forensic labs exclusively for rape cases, forensic kits for rape cases at all police stations and hospitals and dedicated manpower for investigation of such cases.
- This will be done within three months on a "mission mode".

Stats

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) put a question mark on the effectiveness of death as a deterrence for child rape.
- In 2016, of the 64,138 child rape cases that came up before the courts under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act read with IPC Section 376, 1,869 cases — or less than three per cent — ended in convictions.

Why the act is not good?

- Moreover, of the total cases of rape of women and children before the police that year, in over 94 per cent of the cases (34,650 out of 36,657 cases), the offender was known to the victim — he was either a close family member, a neighbour, or an acquaintance.
- Given this reality, experts point to the need for more debate before any amendment of the criminal law is carried out to award death penalty for cases of child rape
- Far from reporting the crime, death penalty is going to deter the victim from reporting sexual assault when the offender is from the family or is known to them. This will lead to the crime being suppressed and the victim being left completely helpless.
- Despite the POCSO Act providing for trials to be completed within a year, at the end of 2016, 89 per cent of the cases were pending trial.

- In its 'Death Penalty India Report 2016', the National Law University (Delhi) has cited how the US Supreme Court ruled that it would be unconstitutional to extend the death penalty to non-homicide offences like rape, including rape of a minor.

Concerns in the ordinance

- sexual assaults against boys have been left unaddressed
- sentencing on the basis of age is not right because rape is rape.

Justice Verma Committee Recommendation

- The Justice Verma Committee, which was constituted in the aftermath of December 2012 gangrape in Delhi to recommend legal reforms to curb sexual assault crimes, in its report said introduction of death penalty for rape may not have a deterrent effect and recommended enhanced sentence of jail for the remainder of life.

5. Master of Roster

Meaning

- Roster is defined as a system to allocate different tasks to all the members in order to achieve higher efficiency.
- 'Master of the Roster' refers to the privilege of the Chief Justice to constitute Benches to hear cases.
- Be it the Chief Justice of India or Chief Justice of any high court it is he or she who heads the administrative side. This includes allocation of matters before a judge as well.
 - * The power to allocate matters before a Bench or judge is the power that the CJI or CJs have got and it cannot be overridden by a judicial order even if the CJI or CJ is sitting on a Constitution Bench.

Case- Prasad Institute of Medical Sciences

Background

- Prasad Institute of Medical Sciences was one among 46 institutions to be barred by the Union government from admitting students for medical courses for two academic years starting from 2017. This followed an MCI report on their substandard infrastructural facilities and failure to meet the required criteria.

Progress

- They moved both the Supreme Court and the Allahabad high court against the Centre's decision.

Bribe

- Transcripts of phone conversations College officials had indeed planned to bribe senior functionaries of the Supreme Court and Allahabad high court to get favorable orders.
- In the hearings that lasted from August 2017 to September 2017, the trust was granted multiple favorable orders in the Supreme Court, all in benches headed by Chief Justice Misra.

CBI

- The CBI, however, has clearly alleged that one judge at the Allahabad high court did receive an “illegal gratification”.
- Source has informed that Shri I. M. Qudussi approached Hon’ble Justice Narayan Shukla, high court of Allahabad at Lucknow bench for managing the matter.
 - * Qudussi, an Orissa High Court judge between 2004 and 2010, has been accused by the CBI of legally guiding the private medical colleges and assuring them of favorable settlement of their cases in the Supreme Court.

Filing of case

Campaign for Judicial Accountability & Judicial Reforms (CJAR) is a response of people’s movements, and all organizations and individuals working on public interest issues to a judicial system that has become unaccountable, inaccessible and insensitive to the poor.

- The petitions moved one by Bhushan and the other by advocate Kamini Jaiswal. Both sought an independent, court-monitored inquiry into a recent medical college scam that is under the scrutiny of the Central Bureau of Investigation.
- Senior advocate Kamini Jaiswal said that Justice Misra not be a part of the bench for the sake of propriety as he had been presiding over the Prasad Education Trust’s cases until now.
- Jaiswal’s petition demanded the constitution of a special investigation team monitored by the court to probe the alleged scam.
- She had filed the petition after the CBI’s FIR revealed details of negotiations between middlemen, a retired high court judge and senior public functionaries.
- The bench of Justices Chelameswar and Nazeer had unprecedentedly agreed to the request of the petitioner

Why issue now?

- The showdown was over the issue of supremacy of constituting a bench in which the authority of Chief Justice Dipak Misra was allegedly undermined by a bench of Justices J Chelameswar and S Abdul Nazeer, which had set up a five-judge bench to hear a case of alleged bribery of judges

Principle of natural Justice Violation

- Violation of the basic principle of law: Nemo judex in causa sua, that no one should be a judge in his own case

Question Mark on SC?

The Supreme Court of India is facing its worst crisis of credibility since the Emergency. They are already denting its authority.

- * The quality of the court’s reasoning,
- * The inconstancy of its judgment,

- * The abdication of its constitutional role in some cases, and
- * its overreach in others,
- In expanding its powers,
 - * The Supreme Court first replaced the rule of law with the rule of the court (they are not the same thing);
 - * The rule of court has been replaced with the anarchic will of individual judges.
- Communication between judges seems to have broken down to the point where the senior leadership of the court is incapable of getting together and coming up with common sense procedural solutions to cases like this.

Issue Area

- First, Can the chief justice be part of the hearing, since the scandal allegedly implicates a judgment the CJI wrote, even though he has not been named in the FIR?
- Second, could a constitution bench be constituted bypassing the chief justice in violation of the current procedure through which such benches are constituted?

Judicial Dilemma

- By setting himself up as a judge in his own cause and setting up a bench whose composition looks arbitrary, he has undermined the authority of the judiciary.
- Justice Chelameswar’s order setting up a five-judge bench also made the judiciary vulnerable who disregarded existing court procedure and appointed a constitutional bench.
- Many learned counsel have defended Justice Chelameswar’s move by invoking Article 142 that gives judges the power to do whatever it takes to secure justice. But the use of Article 142 has also become a sign of immense judicial indiscipline, where judges can easily ride roughshod over other procedural proprieties.

This issue is the court’s loss of external credibility combined with internal anarchy does not bode well for Indian democracy. Instead of becoming a constitutional lodestar in our turbulent times, the court has itself become a reflection of the worst rot afflicting Indian institutions

Impact

- This has shattered the image of Judiciary in the eye of the people
- The confidence and trust has been broken as judiciary is not able to sort out its differences
- The common man, who had absolute faith in the institution and in the impartiality of judges, is now let to suspect that court decisions may not be purely based on merit.

What should be the role of CJI?

- No doubt, he is the master of the roster, but that does not mean that he can act arbitrarily in exercising his powers.
- He has to exercise his powers reasonably, without giving scope for any justifiable criticism.
- He is also not expected to brush aside any reasonable suggestions in this regard from his colleagues
- The CJI is the first among equals and he is the captain who has to carry the whole team with him, while enjoying their goodwill and support.

International Experiences/Alternative Mechanism

Power is increasingly being centralized with the CJI. It calls for reform that brings accountability and transparency to the office without compromising on judicial independence

- US Supreme Court, for example, where all its nine judges sit together (en banc) to hear cases, or the UK's Supreme Court, where 12 judges often sit in panels of five (or more).
- The Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, therefore, has no choice in the question of which judges will hear a case, and in the UK, the choice is significantly constrained.

Way forward

- There are issues of corruption in the courts. The judiciary has failed to find a mechanism to deal with allegations of corruption within its ranks. Every justice in the court needs to be above suspicion.
- But a lot of care needs to be exercised so that the anti-corruption measures taken do not undermine the independence of the judiciary.
- At the same time the Judiciary should stay strong and settle issues with each other, as this will give an opportunity to politicians to fish in troubled waters.
- All the judges of the Supreme Court, including the CJI, will sort out their differences amicably and find a satisfactory solution to the problem.
- So the ideal way out is meaningful reform that brings accountability and transparency to the office of the chief justice, without compromising on judicial independence.

6. National Legislators' Conference

- Theme "We for development".
- It is being attended by Members of Parliament and state Assemblies where Legislators from various states coming together to discuss important issues.
- National Legislators Conference was held in Central Hall of Parliament.

7. News Broadcasters Association (NBA)

- It represents the private television news & current affairs broadcasters.
- It is the collective voice of the news & current affairs broadcasters in India.

- It is an organization funded entirely by its members.
- The NBA has presently 25 leading news and current affairs broadcasters (comprising 65 news and current affairs channels) as its members.
- The NBA presents a unified and credible voice before the Government, on matters that affect the growing industry.

8. National Sports University Bill

- The Bill establishes a National Sports University located in Manipur.
- It will promote sports education in the areas of: (i) sports sciences, (ii) sports technology, (iii) sports management, and (iv) Sports coaching.
- It will function as a national training centre for select sports disciplines. It may also establish campuses and study centres in other parts of the country. The University will be empowered to grant degrees, diplomas and certificates.
- The university will also be empowered to establish outlying campuses within and outside India.

Objectives

- research, development and dissemination of knowledge in physical education and sports sciences,
- strengthening physical education and sports training Programmes,
- generating knowledge capabilities, skills and competence at various levels,
- Training talented athletes to help them to evolve into international level athletes.

Training

- Apart from academic programmes and research, the university and its outlying campuses are to impart training to elite athletes, sports officials, referees and umpires and evolve as centres of excellence in various disciplines.

Authorities of the University:

The Bill provides for several authorities under the University. These include:

- The Court, which will review the broad policies and Programmes of the University,
- The Executive Council, which will be the principal executive body,
- The Academic and Activity Council, which will conduct the general supervision over academic policies,
- The Board of Sports Studies, which will approve subjects for research for various degrees and other requirements of research degrees,
- The Finance Committee, which will examine the accounts and proposals for expenditure

- The university's chancellor is to be appointed by the Centre. The chancellor should be an eminent person in the field of sports who is either a sportsperson himself or a sports administrator or sports academician. He or she would hold office for a term of five years and not be eligible for reappointment.

Foreign assistance

- To make the university a world class one, a memorandum of understanding has been signed by the Government of India with two Australian universities, the University of Canberra and Victoria University, for the development of curriculum, research facilities and laboratories.

The Bill was referred to the parliamentary committee on human resource development for its recommendations.

- The Committee also feels that some good incentives should be given so that world class coaches are attracted to take faculty position at the University,
- The committee has also suggested that suitable measures need to be taken by the Ministry and the concerned agencies with regard to the travel facilities and concessions so as to reduce the locational disadvantage to students, sportspersons, faculty and other related persons.

9. Project 'Samarthan': Tihar to adopt WHO's mental health drive

Context

- The Tihar Jail will soon adopt the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Psychological First Aid programme to sensitise its inmates towards mental health issues.

Details

- The project, titled 'Samarthan', the prison staff will be trained to provide assistance to those who are depressed or facing mental health issues.
- The programme will be carried out under the guidance of professor from AIIMS in collaboration with Mental health Foundation, medical professional, and prison staff working in Tihar
- The PFA programme, developed by the WHO, aims to provide "supportive and practical" assistance to those who have faced crisis situations.
- Tihar will become the second institution after Pennsylvania State Penitentiary to adopt the programme.

10. Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2018

Salient Features:

- It proposes to include "National Commission for Protection of Child Rights" as deemed Member of the Commission;
- It proposes to add a woman Member in the composition of the Commission;

- It proposes to enlarge the scope of eligibility and scope of selection of Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission as well as the State Human Rights Commission; and
- It proposes to incorporate a mechanism to look after the cases of human rights violation in the Union Territories.
- It proposes to amend the term of office of Chairperson and Members of National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commission to make it in consonance with the terms of Chairperson and Members of other Commissions.

Benefits:

- The Amendment will strengthen the Human Rights Institutions of India further for effective discharge of their mandates, roles and responsibilities.
- The amended Act will be in perfect sync with the agreed global standards and benchmarks towards ensuring the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual in the country.

Background:

- The amendment to the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 will make National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) more compliant with the Paris Principle concerning its autonomy, independence, pluralism and wide-ranging functions in order to effectively protect and promote human rights.

11. Press Council of India

- The Press Council of India is a statutory body in India that governs the conduct of the print media.
- Presently, the Council functions under the Press Council Act 1978 which arose from the recommendations of the Second Press Commission of India (1978).
- The Press Council is a quasi-judicial body which acts as a watchdog of the press. It adjudicates the complaints against and by the press for violation of ethics and for violation of the freedom of the press respectively.
- The Council's actions may not be questioned unless it is proved to be in violation of the constitution, which makes it an exceedingly powerful body.
- The Press Council is headed by a Chairman: usually, a retired judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- The Council is funded by revenue collected by it as fees levied on the registered newspapers in the country on the basis of their circulation. No fee is levied on newspapers with a circulation of less than 5000 copies. The deficit is made good by grants by the Central Government, through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

12. Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)

- It is a program by the Election Commission of India (ECI) was launched in 2009 with the objective of enhancing Electoral Participation in the country and building a culture of participative democracy.
- It is a programme of multi interventions through different modes and media designed to educate citizens, electors and voters about the electoral process in order to increase their awareness and participation in the electoral processes.
- SVEEP is designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.

Stats

- The overall turnout in all the nine phases of polling this year stood at 66.38 per cent, posting the highest in the history of Lok Sabha elections, surpassing the previous best of 64.01 per cent in 1984 in the wake of the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- The turnout in 2009 was 58.19 per cent
- The highest turnout in the 2014 Lok Sabha Election was recorded in the State of Nagaland (87.82 %) and the lowest turnout was recorded in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (49.52 %).
- The highest male turnout was reported in Nagaland (88.15%) while the highest female turnout was reported in Lakshadweep (88.42%).
 - * Female voter turnout (in percentage) was higher than male turnout in 16 States and UTs.

13. Removal of Judges and Flaws

Past

- The first attempt at pursuing an impeachment motion against a Supreme Court judge proved futile because the Lok Sabha Speaker rejected it.
- In four instances, the notices for moving impeachment motions against Supreme Court and High Court judges were followed up by forming inquiry committees.

Supreme Court Justice J C Shah

- In 1970, an impeachment notice against Supreme Court Justice J C Shah, signed by as many as 199 Lok Sabha MPs led by Samyukta Socialist Party leader S M Joshi, was submitted to Speaker G S Dhillon.
- The move came following a campaign by a former government servant, O P Gupta, charging Shah with dishonesty after the judge made certain remarks about him during a hearing.
- CJI Mohammad Hidayatullah reached out to Dhillon and convinced him that the issue was frivolous.

- Dhillon turned down the notice. Shah later became the Chief Justice of India, and after retirement headed the inquiry commission which went into the Emergency excesses.

Supreme Court Justice V Ramaswami

- In May 1993, Supreme Court Justice V Ramaswami became the first to face an impeachment motion.
- He got into trouble following media reports that he had incurred conspicuously lavish expenditure on his official residence during his tenure as Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court, Chandigarh.
- The SC Bar Association also passed a resolution calling for his impeachment. The BJP and Left parties came out with a notice for moving an impeachment motion in Lok Sabha.
- Speaker Rabi Ray accepted it in March 1991 and set up a committee comprising Supreme Court Justice P B Sawant, Bombay HC Chief Justice P D Desai and Justice O Chinnappa Reddy, a retired SC judge to probe the allegations.
- After the committee found substance in the allegations, the motion was taken up for discussion in Lok Sabha on May 10, 1993.

Concerns

- SC justice Ramaswami in 1993 was absolved by Parliament when Congress abstained in the vote. Politics triumphed over the committee's finding of corruption or conduct unbecoming.
- According to current procedures, the motion for 'removal' can only be proceeded against a sitting judge.
 - * Meanwhile, if the accused judge resigns then the tenure of the committee will be terminated.

Another case worth noting is that of Justice S.K. Gangele of the Madhya Pradesh high court, who faces a removal motion, submitted by the Rajya Sabha members to the chairman in March 2015, for alleged sexual harassment of a woman judge in Gwalior.

- The inquiry committee set up for the purpose was initially headed by then Supreme Court judge Vikramjit Sen and included then chief justice of the Calcutta high court, Manjula Chellur, and eminent advocate K.K. Venugopal.
- Justice Sen retired on December 31, 2015, creating a vacancy. Although attorney general Mukul Rohatgi had opined that Justice Sen could continue as the member of the committee after his retirement, the law ministry favoured the alternative view that he could not. As a result, Ansari decided to treat his retirement as a vacancy.
- Justice Sen was first replaced by Justice Ranjan Gogoi, who later recused himself. Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman was thus chosen to fill the vacancy in the committee

- It is obvious that both the committee and parliament are racing against time, with Justice Gangele set to retire on July 26, 2018. An in-house committee, constituted by the CJI to probe allegations against Justice Gangele, did not find any substance in them. The three-member committee headed by Justice Nariman is yet to submit its report.

In-House Procedure

- The in-house procedure, crystallised in a 1995 Supreme Court judgment in the C. Ravichandran Iyer case, details the various stages of investigation into complaints against sitting high court judges.
- The in-house procedure of 1997 was reaffirmed after the V Ramaswami controversy, giving the CJI parallel power
- This in-house procedure is extra-constitutional
- suitable remedial action against judges, who by their acts of omission or commission, do not follow the accepted values of judicial life, including the ideals expressed by the Supreme Court in the "Restatement of Values of Judicial Life"

Procedure

- According to this In-house procedure, when a complaint is received against a Judge of the High Court, by the Chief Justice of the High Court, he shall first examine it himself.
 - * If it is found by him that it is frivolous or directly related to the merits of a substantive decision in a judicial matter or does not involve any serious complaint of misconduct or impropriety, he shall file the complaint and inform the CJI accordingly.
- If however, it is found by him that the complaint is of a serious nature, involving misconduct or impropriety, he shall ask for the response thereto of the concerned Judge. If on a consideration of the allegations in the complaint, in the light of the response of the concerned Judge, the Chief Justice of the High Court is satisfied that no further action is necessary, he shall file the complaint and inform the CJI accordingly.
- Further, if the Chief Justice of the High Court is of the opinion that the allegations contained in the complaint need a deeper probe, he shall forward to the CJI, the complaint and the response of the Judge concerned along with his comments.

Steps

- The panel further suggested that if the CJI is of opinion that a deeper probe is needed against the HC judge, then a three-member committee of two Chief Justices of other High Courts and one High Court judge would be formed to conduct an inquiry by devising its own procedures.

- If the enquiry panel finds that there is substance in the allegations in the complaint and the misconduct disclosed is such that it calls for initiation of proceedings of removal of the judge, the CJI will first advise the judge concerned to either resign or seek voluntary retirement.
- If the judge refuses to put in his papers, then CJI would ask the Chief Justice of the High Court not to assign any judicial work to him and intimate the development to the President and the Prime Minister.
- The CJI will also convey to the Prime Minister the seriousness of the allegations and seek "initiation of proceedings for removal and the copy of the report of the committee may be enclosed," the report said.

CJ of HC and SC Judge

- On similar lines, the committee has prescribed procedures to deal with complaints against the Chief Justices of the High courts and the apex court judges. In relation to complaints against the CJs of High Courts, the CJI would first examine them and may seek a response of the CJ concerned, the panel said.
- If the CJI is of the opinion that the complaint needs further probe then he would constitute a three-member enquiry committee, consisting a judge of the Supreme Court and two Chief Justices of the High Courts.
- Similarly, the complaint against SC judges would be first examined by the CJI himself and if he is of the opinion that a "deeper probe" is needed, then the allegations would be enquired into by a three-judges panel of the apex court.

Issue Area

- It is designed to intimidate the judge into resigning by denying him work and subjects him to public obloquy as the CJI reports his views to the PM or President and airs them in public.
- The in-house procedure reposes too much power in the CJI not to just influence HC/SC judges but damn them in an extra constitutional manner through an unwarranted inhouse committee. This is what has happened to justice Shukla.

Reforms

- Any proposal for reform should include the continuing presence of a member of the inquiry committee even after their elevation or retirement.
- The inquiry out to be brought to its logical conclusion, irrespective of the resignation or retirement of the judge concerned.
- Many countries have a system to pull up judges by their peers. This is necessary. Some judges do not behave properly. There should be committees in all HCs and SC for this intra-court discipline as elsewhere in the worlds

14. Court acquits man in sexual assault case

Context

- A man was acquitted by Delhi high court as the victim is a Muslim and as per the Muslim law she attained the age of puberty [adulthood] at the age of 14

Judgement

- "Though she was a minor, she had attained the age of discretion. It cannot be ignored that the victim is a Muslim and as per the Muslim law she attained the age of puberty at the age of 14 years, and got married after attaining the age of puberty,"

Unreliable witness

- Further, the victim in her statement given under Section 164 CrPC as well as during her counselling before the Crime against Women Cell never made any allegations regarding kidnapping, sexual, assault and alleged unconsciousness.
- She made these allegations after more than four months in April, 2014 and there seems to be considerable improvement which makes her an unreliable witness

Muslim Personal Laws

Puberty

- Puberty means the age at which a person becomes adult (capable of performing sexual intercourse and procreation of children).
- A person is presumed to have attained the age of puberty on the completion of 15 years.
- So the boy and girl who has attained puberty can validly contract a marriage.

What does the law say?

- According to the Prohibition of child marriage act, a marriage of male below 21 years of age and female below 18 years of age is child marriage. The act prohibits such marriage.
- The Act prescribes that for a valid marriage the minimum age for male is 21 and female is 18. The parties who are violating the provisions of Child Marriage Restraint Act are liable to be punished. Thus if two Muslims marry before attaining the age prescribed under the child marriage restraint Act they are liable to be punished.
- However the marriage between two Muslims who have attained puberty is valid though they have violated the provisions Act.

Cases

Mrs. Tahra Begum v. State of Delhi and Ors (2012)

- The Delhi High Court ruled that a Muslim girl can marry as per her choice at the age of 15 years if she has attained puberty, the court held that the marriage of a minor girl valid and allowed her to stay in her matrimonial house.

- "This court notes that according to Mohammedan Law a girl can marry without the consent of her parents once she attains the age of puberty and she has the right to reside with her husband even if she is below the age of 18....," a bench of justices S Ravindra Bhat and S P Garg said.
- In view of the above judgments, it is clear that a Muslim girl who has attained puberty i.e. 15 years can marry and such a marriage would not be a void marriage. However, she has the option of treating the marriage as voidable, at the time of her attaining the age of majority, i.e 18 years.

Gujarat High Court in Yusuf Ibrahim Mohammad Lokhat v State of Gujarat (2014)

- "According to the personal Law of Muslims, the girl no sooner she attains the puberty or completes the 15 years, whichever is earlier, is competent to get married without the consent of her parents". This clearly gives the idea that according to the learned judges, the personal laws should be taken as a primary source to decide the cases of underage marriage."

Madras High Court: Child marriage act prevails over Muslim Personal Law:

- The Madras High Court has held that the act prohibiting child marriages was not against the Muslim Personal Law and would prevail over the latter as it had been enacted for the welfare of girl children.
- The Judge said such a right would run counter to the POCMA aimed at preventing the "evil practice" of child marriage besides safeguarding the health of girl children and elevating the status of women.

15. Right to convert is part of fundamental right of choice:

Supreme Court

- The Supreme Court held that a person's right to choose a religion and marry is an intrinsic part of her meaningful existence.
- Neither the State nor "patriarchal supremacy" can interfere in her decision.

Kerala High Court Order

- The SC bench set aside a Kerala High Court order annulling Ms. Hadiya's marriage to Shafin Jahan. The High Court had called the marriage a "sham" and referred to it as "love jihad".
- a girl aged 24 years is weak and vulnerable, capable of being exploited in many ways" and "her marriage being the most important decision in her life, can also be taken only with the active involvement of her parents"

What did the Judgement Say?

- Matters of belief and faith, including whether to believe, are at the core of constitutional liberty. The Constitution exists for believers as well as for agnostics.
- The fact that the society should have no role to play in determining our choice of partners and opined that the right to marry a person of one's own choice is integral to Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

- The strength of our Constitution lies in its acceptance of the plurality and diversity of our culture. Intimacies of marriage, including the choices which individuals make on whether or not to marry and on whom to marry, lie outside the control of the.
- Justice Chandrachud also rapped the High Court for its observations that Hadiya “is weak and vulnerable, capable of being exploited in many ways”, asserting that she is a major and is entitled to “lead her life exactly as she pleases”.

16. SC agrees to examine plea to bar politicians from contesting from two seats

- The Supreme Court agreed to adjudicate on whether politicians could be barred from contesting from more than one seat in an election and sought assistance from the Attorney General (AG) to decide the issue.

Law

- Section 33(7) of the Representation of People's Act permits a candidate to contest any election (Parliamentary, State Assembly, Biennial Council, or bye-elections) from up to two constituencies.
- The provision was introduced in 1996 prior to which there was no bar on the number of constituencies from which a candidate could contest.

Examples

- Narendra Modi, is going to contest from two constituencies, Vadodara and Varanasi,
- Indira Gandhi contested from two constituencies, Medak and Rae Bareilly, in 1980.
- N.T. Rama Rao, actor-turned-politician and founder of the Telugu Desam Party, contested in multiple seats
 - * 1983, he contested from Gudivada and Tirupati, winning both of them
 - * 1985, he repeated the feat in three seats, Gudivada, Hindupur and Nalgonda; retained Hindupur and relinquished the other two

Issues

The provision of allowing a candidate to contest from multiple seats is an absurd one.

- According to government records, in the 2009 Lok Sabha election, the per-constituency cost for conducting the poll was Rs 2-3 crore.
 - * The estimates 2014 Lok Sabha elections are approximately Rs 5 crore per constituency.
 - * By-elections cost more; unlike general elections, they don't have the economic advantages of scale.
- Apart from money, it is a waste of time for lakhs of voters
- It is also not fair to upcoming leaders, who have to vacate space to so that the bigger leaders can get their second seats. This is a violation of principle of equality,

What did EC say?

- EC was in favor of not allowing politicians from contesting from multiple seats saying it resulted in wastage of public money as when fresh election was conducted, the candidate had to vacate one seat after winning in both the constituencies.
- The Commission had already requested the Centre to amend the law for barring people from fighting election from multiple constituencies in an election.

Alternative

- In 2004, the Chief Election Commissioner urged the Prime Minister for amendment of Section 33(7) to provide that a person cannot contest from more than one constituency for the same office simultaneously.
- The ECI alternatively suggested that if existing provisions are retained then the candidate contesting from two seats should bear the cost of the bye-election to the seat that the contestant decides to vacate in the event of his/her winning both seats.
- The amount in such an event could be Rs 5 lakh for assembly election and Rs 10 lakh for parliament election

Way forward

- The only way out is to make a leader's candidature void if he or she files a nomination from more than one constituency. Like “one person, one vote”, the principle of “one leader, one constituency” should also be followed. Indeed, Section 70 of the RP Act prevents a leader from holding on to more than one seat.

17. Law Commission favors simultaneous elections

Context

- The commission, headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice B.S. Chauhan has recommended holding of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies

History of simultaneous elections

- The commission says simultaneous elections were held in the country during the first two decades after Independence up to 1967.
- Dissolution of certain Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 followed by the dissolution of the Lok Sabha led to the “disruption of the conduct of simultaneous elections.

Changes to be made

- Simultaneous elections may be restored in the nation by amending the Constitution, Representation of the People Act of 1951 and the Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha and Assemblies.
 - * amending the Constitution (Articles 83 (2) and 172 (1) dealing with tenures of Lok Sabha and state assemblies)
 - * Definition of “simultaneous elections” may be added to Section 2 of the 1951 Act.

- The commission says the Centre should get the Constitutional amendments, if agreed upon, to be ratified by all the States so as to avoid any challenge to them.

Key recommendations

- The leader of the majority party be elected prime minister or the chief minister by the entire house (Lok Sabha or state assembly) to ensure the stability of the government as well as the Lok Sabha or the assembly.
- It suggests that in case a government falls midterm, the term of the new government would be for the remaining period "and not for a fresh five-year term".
- A no-confidence motion against the government should be followed by a confidence motion. This would ensure that if the opposition does not have numbers to form an alternative government, the regime in office cannot be removed.
 - * Citing no-confidence motion and premature dissolution of House as major roadblocks to simultaneous elections, the commission says the parties which introduce the no-confidence motion should simultaneously give a suggestion for an alternative government.
- In order to prevent stalemate in the Lok Sabha/ Assembly in the case of Hung Parliament / Assembly, the rigour of 'Anti-defection Law' laid down under paragraph 2(1) (b) of the Tenth Schedule be removed as an exception,
- It also says that the Prime Minister/Chief Minister should be "elected" to lead by the full House like the Lok Sabha Speaker.

The law panel has sought the views of constitutional experts, political parties and other stakeholders before finalising its report.

18. '99% of MGNREGA wages remain unpaid'

Context

- Ninety-nine per cent of MGNREGA wages have remained unpaid in April 2018, as per the findings of the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha that tracks the implementation of the rural employment guarantee law.

Earlier System

- In the manual system, the fund distribution is carried out by the local bodies, which credit the money into the beneficiaries' account after getting the clearance from the headquarters, which takes nearly two weeks. However, with the e-FMS, this delay will be overcome.

National Electronic Fund Management System

- The Centre introduced the National Electronic Fund Management System in January 2016 purportedly to streamline the process of MGNREGA payments and bring down delay in payment of wages, the system has only "tightened the (Rural Development) Ministry's leash over funds".

- Also, in NEFMS, States are no longer able to make payments to workers from their revolving funds to tide over delays in release of funds by the Ministry
- The release contended that in 2017, the government froze the processing of FTOs worth over Rs. 3,000 crore due to lack of MGNREGA funds.

GeoMGNREGA

- It is a path breaking initiative that uses space technology for geo-tagging all assets created under MGNREGA for improved planning, effective monitoring, enhanced visibility and greater transparency. The initiative was implemented in FY 2016-17, and so far, nearly 65 Lakh assets have been geotagged and made available in the public domain.

SC on Payment

- The situation of long and unpredictable delays in MGNREGA wage payments continues despite the ongoing public interest litigation filed by Swaraj Abhiyan in which the Supreme Court has instructed the government to ensure that workers are paid within 15 days of doing work

19. Journalists guilty of spreading fake news will lose

accreditation: Government

- The Information & Broadcasting Ministry said that it has amended the guidelines for accreditation of journalists after increasing instances of fake news have come to its notice.

What would be done?

Now on receiving any complaints of such instances of fake news,

- It would get referred to the Press Council of India (PCI) if it pertains to print media
- It would get referred to News Broadcasters Association (NBA) if it relates to electronic media,
- It said that these agencies will complete the determination process within 15 days
 - * The Accreditation Committee of the PIB which consists of representative of both PCI and NBA shall invariably be called upon to validate the accreditation request of any news media agency.
 - * If the journalist against whom the complaint is lodged is accredited with the Press Information Bureau (PIB), his or her accreditation will be suspended till the time of the complaint is determined

Criteria

- While examining the requests seeking accreditation, the regulatory agencies will examine whether the 'Norms of Journalistic Conduct' and 'Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards' prescribed by the PCI and NBA respectively are adhered to by the journalists as part of their functioning.
- It would be obligatory for journalists to abide by these guidelines

Penalty

If these agencies (PCI or NBA) confirm publication or telecast of fake news, the accreditation of the journalists (if accredited) involved with creating and/or propagating fake news

- Will be suspended for six months for first violation.
- will be suspended for one year in the case of second violation
- will be cancelled permanently in the event of the third violation

Criticism

- With its order today, government makes it clear that it only wants to penalize those who are accredited, i.e. "Mainstream media". The I&B ministry's "Fake News" threat doesn't extend to those websites that openly flout journalistic ethics, some of which are often quoted by Ministers."

Update

- The circular was pulled off after intervention from PM Modi and criticism from Opposition.

20. Confidence in the House**Context**

- MPs from numerous parties disrupt the proceedings by storming the well of the House and showing placards.
- The Speaker expresses inability to conduct the House and adjourns for the day and the cycle repeats.
- Several members of Lok Sabha gave written notices to the Speaker for a no-confidence motion against the current council of ministers.

Constitutional Principle

- The primary role of the Lower House of Parliament is to determine who forms the government.
- The Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers can hold office only as long as they have the confidence of the Lok Sabha.
- B.R. Ambedkar had also stressed that parliamentary system provided accountability on a daily basis, which was desirable for India.
 - * Parliamentary work is either designed to have the government answer on its policies and actions, or to debate government bills or sanction its budgetary proposals.

What should the speaker do when no confidence motion is asked for?

- The rules of procedure require the Speaker to verify whether 50 Members of Parliament support the motion by asking them to stand at their seats and taking a count.
- However the Speaker has every day expressed her inability to count the members supporting the motion as some members were shouting slogans and showing placards in the well of the House.

What can the Speaker do if some MPs are not allowing the House to function?

- The Constitution and the Rules of Procedure in Lok Sabha do not give her the discretion to decide whether to allow the motion.
- She is duty bound to verify whether there are 50 members in the House who support its introduction.
- In case of disruptive behaviour by some MPs, she has the powers — and the responsibility — to bring order to the House.
 - * She can ask these MPs to return to their seats, failing which they can be named and asked to withdraw from the House.
 - * If they don't, they can be forcibly removed.
 - * There are a number of occasions when MPs have been suspended. Indeed, during the term of the current Lok Sabha, 25 members were suspended in August 2015 for not allowing the House to function.

Example from the past

- This is not the first time that such a situation has arisen. During the winter session of 2013, several members had given notice for a no-confidence motion. This was during the agitation for creating Telangana, and several members disrupted the House.
- For several days, the Speaker adjourned the House, and the motion was never introduced.
- However, in the midst of the ruckus, the Bill to reorganise Andhra Pradesh into two States was passed.

The present Speaker should not follow her predecessor's path. Her duty is to put the motion to test immediately. Otherwise, the very existence of the government (as well as that of Parliament as a body representing the will of the people) is under question.

No confidence Motions

Till now, there have been 26 no-confidence motions.

- Many of these were symbolic in nature, such as the first one against Jawaharlal Nehru in 1963,
- Three against Lal Bahadur Shastri
- Two against Indira Gandhi in the next three years.
- Of these 25 were unsuccessful, and one did not get to the voting stage as Morarji Desai resigned.

On all these occasions, the no-confidence motion was given priority over all other business. It is this tradition that the Speaker must follow.

Way forward

- The Speaker has the responsibility of ensuring that the House functions and should take steps necessary for normal functioning — including suspension of members, if needed – to ensure order and check whether there is requisite support to admit the debate on the no-confidence motion.

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21. Tumultuous Budget session marked by disruptions ends**Context**

- The Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die soon after it met, marking the end of a session in which 127 hours of work were lost to protests over varied issues.
- The Rajya Sabha saw 120 working hours being wasted

No Confidence Motion

- Even no-confidence notices moved by members from the Telugu Desam Party, YSR Congress Party, the Congress, the CPI(M) and others could not be taken up, as the House was not in order.

Only one bill passed

- Passing one Bill related to payment of gratuity and farewell to retiring members was all that the House could do.

Issues

- Disruptions have become an endemic feature of the functioning of the Indian Parliament. This has led to widespread public outcry that has focused on two elements—
 - * first, the waste of taxpayers' money on a perpetually disrupted and consequently, non-functioning Parliament;
 - * Second, the legislative paralysis that has stultified governance.

Whom does this help?

- it is the Opposition which gains because it can grand stand on issues to grab voter attention, not let crucial bills get passed and force the government to take action (or not) on certain issues.
- In India, the executive has the upper hand in deciding the timing of a Parliamentary session and the agenda of a session.
 - * The legislature, by abdicating its responsibilities of oversight and representation, actually plays into the hand of the executive.

Reason behind Disruptions

- Lack of avenues for the Opposition to either force the government to convene a parliamentary session or set the agenda of Parliament.
- Increase in the number of political parties so diversified demands and competing interests.

Role of speaker and chairman

- These powers allow the Speaker and the Chairman to either impose

- * Minor penalties such as naming of MPs within official records, or
- * Major penalties that require the members engaging in disorderly conduct to immediately withdraw from the precinct of the House for the remainder of the day's sitting.

- Rule 374A of the Lok Sabha Rules also allows the Speaker to automatically suspend certain members of the Lok Sabha, who instigate grave disorder by coming into the well of the House, abuse the Lok Sabha Rules persistently, or wilfully obstruct the business of the House by shouting slogans.
- To initiate automatic suspension, the Speaker is required to identify the relevant member and name him before the House. Thereafter, the member stands suspended from the service of the House for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less.

22. I&B Ministry proposes chip in set-top boxes**Context**

- The Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry has proposed the installation of a chip in new television set-top boxes which will provide data about channels watched and their duration. i

Why?

- The move is aimed to get "more authentic" viewership figures for every channel.
- This would help advertisers and the DAVP to spend their advertising expenditure wisely. Only those channels which are widely watched will get promoted
- The move is seen to end the monopoly of the Broadcast Audience Research Council India (BARC), which measures the television audience preferences in the country.
 - * The ministry official alleged that the BARC is "almost like a monopoly and there is no alternative" and it "does not reveal how they arrive at the viewership figures, methodology they apply and the area of survey".
- The official said the ministry also "feels that Doordarshan viewership is under-reported" and if the chip is installed, it would give the real viewership figures of the channel.

People Meter

- A people meter is an electronic device used to record the television viewing habits of a household so that the information obtained can be used to compile ratings
- BARC measures viewership by installing 30,000 people meter, which are soldered to the TV's mother board.

What they intend to do?

- There is possibility of procuring about 300 people meter and randomly installing them to verify the veracity of BARC data

- 300 meter were too small number to meaningfully compare and verify data.

BARC view on accusation

- BARC a joint industry body that was set up in close consultation with all stakeholders, including government representatives and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). Our data collection and reporting methodology was arrived at post these consultations and consensus.
- BARC operates within the regulatory framework as mandated by the ministry's guidelines.
- BARC always had a government nominee on its Board and also on its technical committee.
- There are regular meetings with officials of ministry and TRAI to brief them and provide status report on our operations. The same has been done through periodic presentations

Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP)

- It is the nodal agency to undertake multi-media advertising and publicity for various Ministries and Departments of Government of India.
- It has been instrumental in creating awareness amongst masses on socio-economic themes, seeking their participation in developmental activities and for eradication of poverty and social evils.

Functions

- Advertisements - Release of press ads
- Exhibitions - Putting up exhibitions
- Outdoor Publicity - Display of hoardings, kiosks, bus panels, wall paintings, cinema slides, banners etc.

23. ECI's credibility under cloud

- The latest is the BJP's IT cell chief Amit Malviya tweeting the election date of Karnataka — May 12 — well before the formal announcement by the ECI. Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) OP Rawat has termed it a very serious issue and promised full inquiry and stringent action.
- Just the other day, the Delhi High Court gave a scathing indictment of the ECI's functioning when it quashed the presidential order disqualifying 20 Aam Aadmi Party MLAs in Delhi. For a constitutional body vested with the crucial power to determine whether lawmakers have incurred disqualification in certain circumstances and advise the President or Governor suitably, this was not only embarrassing but also mortifying. Though the court has not reviewed its decision on merits, it has ruled that the EC violated the principles of natural justice while adjudicating a lawyer's complaint against the legislators. It is said that in this 'disqualification' fiasco, the BJP fired from the shoulders of the ECI.

- Some months ago, there was a raging controversy when the ECI delayed the announcement of the dates for the Gujarat elections — close to two weeks after the Election Commission declared the dates for elections in Himachal Pradesh. Traditionally, the dates for both states are announced concurrently. The then CEC, AK Joti, had defended the delay by claiming that elections will divert government workers from pending relief work in seven districts of Gujarat impacted by floods.

Supreme Court Judgements

Mohinder Singh Gill vs. Chief Election Commissioner

- In the Mohinder Singh Gill vs. Chief Election Commissioner (1978) case, the Supreme Court ruled that Article 324 is a reservoir of power to act for the avowed purpose of pushing forward a free and fair election with expedition: "The Commission shall be responsible for the rule of law, act bona fide and be amenable to the norms of natural justice insofar as conformance to such canons can reasonably and realistically be required of it as fair play-in-action in a most important area of constitutional order, viz, elections."
- In a catena of cases, the apex court has observed that fair and free election is a basic feature of the Constitution.

Supreme Court in T.N. Seshan v. Union of India and Others (1995)

- Democracy being the basic feature of our constitutional set-up, there can be no two opinions that free and fair elections to our legislative bodies alone can guarantee the growth of a healthy democracy in the country.
- In order to ensure the purity of the election process, it was thought by our constitution-makers that the responsibility to hold free and fair elections in the country should be entrusted to an independent body which would be insulated from political and/or executive interference.

Reforms

Context

- Chief Election Commissioner N. Gopalswami sent two other letters to the President in 2009
- The first one deals with service conditions of the CEC and ECs.

Suggestions

- Our polity has undergone considerable changes in the last 60 years and from the days of dominance of a single party, we have moved away to rule by a coalition of parties and with more and more regional parties playing a national role. In such an increasingly fragmented polity where multi-party coalitions, in government as well as in opposition, are becoming the order of the day, the role of the Election Commission as a neutral umpire providing a level playing field is assuming ever greater importance.

- More than ever before, there now is a felt-need to emphasize the neutrality of the Commission and the Commissioners. With this background, it does not appear appropriate to have retired CECs and ECs accepting offices under the Government and, worse still, joining political parties.
- One way to articulate a strong sense of neutrality expected of them, in my view, is to mandate against any post-retirement employment for the ECs.
- There appears a need therefore, in order that no fingers are raised against any CEC or EC doubting their neutrality and impartiality, to consider amendment of the Conditions of Service Act to provide that no CEC or EC shall be eligible for further appointment to any office or post under the government (including the office of Governor or Lt. Governor), after his retirement and further also to provide that a CEC and EC shall be prohibited from joining any political party at least for ten years after demitting office.
- Former Chief Election Commissioner Nasim Zaidi had favored a collegium-type institution to choose the CEC and Election Commissioners.
 - * The law panel, in its March 2015 report on electoral reforms, had recommended that the appointment of all election commissioners, including the CEC, should be made by the President in consultation with a three-member collegium or selection committee, consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha) and the Chief Justice of India.

Dinesh Goswami Committee on Electoral Reforms

- Set up by the Government in 1990, had recommended that the CEC and ECs should not be eligible for any further office under the government, including the office of Governor and Lt. Governor, and that an EC should be eligible only for appointment as CEC.
- A Constitutional Amendment Bill, namely, the Constitution (Seventieth Amendment) Bill, 1990, was also introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 30th March, 1990, based on the said recommendation of the Goswami Committee.

Other Institutions

- It would be appropriate to mention here that the chairman and members of UPSC and State Public Service Commission are ineligible under Article 319 for further employment under the government of India or any state government after retirement
- Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003 also provides, in section 5(6), that on ceasing to hold office, the Central Vigilance Commissioner and every other Vigilance Commissioner shall be ineligible for (a) any diplomatic assignment or appointment which is required by law to be made by the President by warrant under his hand and seal, and (b) further employment to any office of profit under the government of India or the government of a state.

There is every justification to apply the same ratio to the ECs/CEC as applied to the C.V.C. and Vigilance Commissioners.

24. Supreme Court's life and existence under threat: Justice Kurian Joseph writes to CJI

Context

- Central government has refused to act on the collegium recommendation to appoint senior advocate Indu Malhotra and Uttarakhand Chief Justice K.M. Joseph as apex court judges.

What is the issue?

- Justice Joseph had quashed the Modi government's decision to dismiss the then government headed by Harish Rawat in Uttarakhand in 2016.
- The Supreme Court Collegium had recommended his name for the bigger high court for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana
- Modi government did not clear his transfer even though the high court in Hyderabad still does not have a full-time chief justice.

Govt Stand

- The 1993 ruling also set out guiding principles for appointments of SC judges, iterating that 'seniority among judges in High Courts and their combined seniority in All India basis is of admitted significance in matters of future prospects.'
- Justice Joseph currently stands at number 45 in the inter-state All India seniority of High Court Judges, there are 44 High Court judges who are senior to Justice Joseph, 12 of them are Chief Justices of different High Courts. So the government said how Justice Joseph can be appointed over other senior Judges.

But, according to legal sources quoted by the report that does not stand in the way of his elevation to the Supreme Court ahead of other senior High Court judges.

Principles

- The Supreme Court collegium, is under no obligation to accept the 'reconsideration' of its recommendation.
- According to the current norms, the centre cannot reject the recommendations after it is sent back by the SC collegium.
- This is akin to the constitutional position when the cabinet seeks the nod of the president of India, and the president returns the matter for the cabinet to reconsider.

Comments

- Justice Kurian said the Supreme Court had to take on the government on the judicial side.
- He said the government's deliberate delay was a threat to the independence of judiciary.
- It is the first time in the history of this court where nothing is known as to what has happened to a recommendation after three months.

- Besides, he said the depleted strength of 24 judges instead of 31 are reeling under the pressure of work.

25. Google appeals Competition Commission of India's ruling over alleged search bias

Context

- Google has appealed against a ruling by India's competition watchdog that found it guilty of "search bias", while the website that brought the case also challenged the outcome, complaining the online search giant had got off too lightly.

Background

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) fined Google 1.36 billion rupees (\$21 million), saying it was also abusing its dominance by giving its own online airline flight search product an unfair advantage over rivals.

Google's view

- Google had referred to the issues raised by the Commission as narrow concerns.
- It noted the order indicated that on the majority of issues the CCI examined, Google's conduct complied with Indian competition laws.

Matrimony.com's view

- The Indian matchmaking website that had filed the case against Google was dissatisfied with the outcome and had lodged its own appeal.
- Matrimony.com, according to the lawyer, has appealed against both the size of the fine, which it says is too small, and the CCI's ruling that neither Google's specialized search design or its advertising service, AdWords, were breaking competition rules. Google did not comment on that development.

CCI

- A CCI official called the watchdog's judgement robust and said it would defend its ruling at the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT).
- Google was found to be indulging in practices of search bias and by doing so, it causes harm to its competitors as well as to users.

What is Search bias?

- Search bias refers to the propensity for a search engine to favour certain websites over others in response to user queries, due to biases in their search algorithms or other factors. This can unduly hurt businesses that often rely on search engines to draw customers to their portals.
- The appeal filed by Matrimony.com will be the latest anti-trust headache for Google, which remains mired in similar cases elsewhere in the world.

Last year, the European Commission imposed a record 2.4 billion euro (\$3 billion) fine on the company for favoring its shopping service and demoting rival offerings. Google has appealed against the verdict.

26. PIL has become an 'industry of vested interests': SC

- Supreme Court says it is a travesty of justice for the resources of the legal system to be consumed by an avalanche of misdirected public interest petitions.
- The Supreme Court derided the Loya PIL petitions as a case in point of how public interest litigation has become an "industry of vested interests" rather than a powerful tool to espouse the cause of the marginalised and oppressed.
- A Bench of Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and D.Y. Chandrachud said the essential aspect of a genuine PIL petition was that the person who moves the court has no personal interest in the outcome of the proceedings, apart from a general standing as a citizen before the court.
- The PIL was envisioned by the Supreme Court's legendary judges as "a powerful instrument to preserve the rule of law and to ensure the accountability of and transparency within structures of governance".

Observations of the Court

- Justice Chandrachud, who authored the verdict, said it was time for the judiciary to do a reality check on the advent of PIL petitions which flooded the courts.
- The judgment said PIL had now become a façade for people hungry for publicity or those who wanted to settle personal, business or political scores. The true face of the litigant behind the façade was seldom unravelled.
- It is a travesty of justice for the resources of the legal system to be consumed by an avalanche of misdirected petitions purportedly filed in the public interest which, upon due scrutiny, are found to promote a personal, business or political agenda. This has spawned an industry of vested interests in litigation.
- This avalanche would cost the judiciary and other democratic institutions dearly. The PIL had already seriously denuded the efficacy of the judicial system by detracting from the ability of the court to devote its time and resources to cases which legitimately require attention.
- Business rivalries have to be resolved in a competitive market for goods and services. Political rivalries have to be resolved in the great hall of democracy when the electorate votes its representatives in and out of office. Courts resolve disputes about legal rights and entitlements. Courts protect the rule of law.
- Judicial process would be reduced to a charade if nothing is done to close the floodgates of PILs, the court said.

27. Aadhaar does not record caste or race, says SC judge

- The Aadhaar Act does not record the caste, religion, race, etc., of individuals, thus ensuring that these demographics are not used to discriminate among citizens, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed during the Constitution Bench hearing in the Aadhaar case

- Justice Chandrachud had, in August 2017, authored the historic verdict for the nine-judge Constitution Bench, which declared that privacy was intrinsic to life and liberty and an inherent part of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.
- The judgment had held that privacy is a natural right that inheres in human beings. The state does not bestow natural rights on citizens. Natural rights like privacy exist equally in all individuals, irrespective of class, strata, gender or orientation.
- The nine-judge Bench pronounced the verdict on a reference from a five-judge Bench deciding the Aadhaar petitions. The reference was on the question whether privacy was a fundamental right and inviolable. Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi argued that citizens have no right to privacy as far as demographic details are concerned. Demographic details are the name of the person, age, etc.
- Justice Chandrachud summarised Mr. Dwivedi's submissions, saying the latter meant that there were four levels of identification – demographics, optional demographics, biometrics and core biometrics like fingerprints and iris scans.
- Dwivedi said the UIDAI does not share core biometrics at all. However, Justice A.K. Sikri pointed out that the petitioners are still apprehensive about the aggregation of personal data in a central storage facility, and their leak.

28. BCCI should be brought under the ambit of RTI, says

Law Commission

Recommendation

- Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) should be declared a public body.
- The Board and all its member cricket associations should be brought under the Right to Information law regime
- The Board's monopolistic activities, directly and indirectly, affect the fundamental rights of citizens, players, and other functionaries.
- A private citizen should be able to move the highest court against the BCCI for any violation of his fundamental rights
- The BCCI should be held accountable, under all circumstances, for any violations of basic human rights of the stakeholders

Issues

- It has encouraged an environment of opacity and non-accountability
- It gives an impression in the minds of the general public that corruption and other forms of malpractices are adversely affecting one of the most popular sports played in India

Laws

- Justice • Registered under T.N. Societies Registration Act, it was a charitable organisation under Section 12A Of the Income Tax Act.

- This status was withdrawn in December 2009 with effect from June 2006 Draft 'National Sports Development Bill, 2013' favored all national sports federations being treated as 'public authorities' under the Right to Information Act

RTI

- BCCI virtually acts as a National Sports Federation (NSF).
- BCCI is not one of the national federations listed on the website of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- So, the Commission recommended that the ministry website should explicitly mention BCCI in the list of NSFs. This would automatically bring BCCI within the purview of RTI Act, the Commission

BCCI part of definition of State?

- Commission pointed out how BCCI, as an entity, is permitted de facto by the State to represent the country at the international stage.
- BCCI selects the Indian cricket team. The selected players wear the national colors and are the recipients of Arjuna awards.
- The ICC recognizes BCCI as the 'official' body representing India and neither the government nor BCCI have ever challenged, discussed or changed the status.
- It concluded that the government has provided with "indirect substantial funding" by means of tax exemptions, subsidies, concessions and providing land at "paltry" lease amounts
- So if the government is foregoing a significant amount of money which otherwise would have been deposited in the National/State Exchequer, it would qualify as indirect substantial funding by the government. It would follow that the body/entity receiving such benefits would be a 'public authority', even though it may be a private, non-statutory or non-government body

Previous SC Judgment

- Supreme Court in 2005 held by a 3-2 majority that the BCCI could not be termed an instrumentality of the 'State' under Article 12 of the Constitution,

29. High Court order on faculty quota will create 'greater inequity', Centre to tell SC

- The Union government is set to approach the Supreme Court this week to oppose the Allahabad High Court order, which paved the way for the UGC's new formula for calculating reservation in faculty positions across universities, on the ground that it will drastically reduce the number of reserved posts, leading to "greater inequity" and "inadequate representation" of the SC and ST community.
- The Centre will file a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court this week in a bid to rollback UGC's March 5 order, which announced that reservation for teachers will be calculated department-wise, instead of being based on the total posts in a university.

- The UGC order was based on the High Court verdict of April 2017 when, while hearing a case on teachers' recruitment at Banaras Hindu University, it had said each department, rather than the entire university, should be treated as the "unit" on which reservations are based.
- Following a row and feedback from an inter-ministerial committee, the HRD Ministry is set to appeal against the above court order on the following grounds:
 - * The government has collected empirical evidence that shows implementation of the Allahabad HC order reduces the number of reserved teaching posts drastically.
 - * Reservation based on department or subject as a unit will lead to a situation in which many departments with single post cadres (usually the position of a professor) will be outside the purview of reservation.
 - * Even in departments having two or more faculty posts, but less than, say, 15 in a cadre, only one post will be reserved for an SC candidate at serial number 7 and for an ST candidate at serial number 14. So if a department has only six associate professor-level posts, then nothing will be reserved for SC/ST candidates. Reservation will only be implemented through rotation and that could take years.
 - * As per Article 16(4) of the Constitution, the Union government is empowered to make provision for reservation in appointments to posts under the state by executive orders.
 - * The Allahabad HC order impedes the government's power to constitute as many cadres in any particular service as it may choose depending on administrative convenience and expediency.
 - * The judgments on which the High Court based its own order were concerned either with state legislations or incorrect advertisements issued by universities. These judgments did not examine the reservation policy of central government

30. Back to the court: on the impeachment controversy

- Rajya Sabha Chairman rejected the notice.
- Section 3 of the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, says the presiding officer may admit or refuse to admit the motion after holding consultations with such persons as he thinks fit, and considering the material before him.

Details

- The law is open to interpretation on whether he can reject the motion on merits without sending the charges to a committee for investigation.

- As for the legal foundation of his order, Mr. Naidu has cited the Supreme Court ruling in *M. Krishna Swami v. Union of India* (1992), which directed the Speaker (or Chairman) to act with utmost care, circumspection and responsibility and to keep equally in mind "the seriousness of the imputations, nature and quality of the record before him, and the indelible chilling effect on the public administration of justice and the independence of the judiciary in the estimate of the general public".
 - * In the same judgment the Constitution Bench held that though it is the "individual discretion" of the Speaker or the Chairman to admit or refuse a motion, this discretion is expected to be of a "reasonable man" who acts with a "high degree of responsibility".
- He has also gone by Mehar Singh Saini (2010) to elaborate on the phrase "proved misbehaviour or incapacity", used in Article 124(4) of the Constitution, the ground for impeachment of a Supreme Court judge.

Misbehavior and conduction of CJI

- The word misbehaviour used in Art. 124(4) embraces within its sweep facts of misconduct. Guarantee of tenure to a judge and its protection by the Constitution does not mean giving sanctuary for corruption or grave misbehaviour. Judiciary survives on public confidence.
- Misbehaviour, whether it is on or off the bench, undermines public confidence in the delivery of justice. It also lowers public respect for the lex loci in the eyes of public. If nothing is done about it, damage goes unrepaired. Finally, it will lead to complete loss of faith in the administration of justice.

The judiciary is not 'state' under Article 12

- Constitutionally speaking, the judiciary is not 'state' under Article 12.
- But in *Narash S. Mirajkar* (1967), the apex court itself made a distinction between 'judicial' and 'administrative' powers of the court.
- Thus, when the CJI acts in his 'administrative' capacity, his actions are certainly subject to fundamental rights, including the right to equality.

On equality

- Right to equality includes right against arbitrariness.
- In *E.P. Royappa* (1973), the Supreme Court itself expanded the protection of equality when it observed that "From a positivistic point of view, equality is antithetic to arbitrariness."
 - * In fact equality and arbitrariness are sworn enemies; one belongs to the rule of law in a republic while the other, to the whim and caprice of an absolute monarch."
- In *Tulsiram Patel* (1985), the Supreme Court itself held that non-observance of the principles of natural justice too violates right to equality.

- * Thus, the CJI's participation in cases about his own powers has not gone well with those who believe in the fundamental rule of natural justice that 'no one shall be a judge in his own case'.
- * His recusal could have enhanced his own credibility and saved the judiciary from the crises.

Master of the roaster

- The Supreme Court Rules, 2013, framed under Article 145 of the Constitution, do state that CJI is master of rolls.
- But since constitution of Benches is an 'administrative' function, this function cannot be exercised at the CJI's whims and wishes.
- Thus, the cherry-picking in Bench constitution may not be violative of 'the rule by law' but is definitely contrary to the ideals of 'the rule of law'. Spirit of law at times is more important than letter of law.

Therefore, in the wake of the current crises, some mechanism can be evolved to ensure that one individual does not have absolute power to make or unmake Benches.

31. Senior advocate Indu Malhotra to be sworn in as SC judge

- She is the first woman to be elevated to the post of Supreme Court judge from the Bar.

Lack of gender diversity in the higher judiciary

- Of the 229 judges appointed to the Supreme Court since 1950, when it was established, only six have been women.
- It took the court 39 years to get its first woman judge, Fathima Beevi, who was appointed in 1989.
- It would take another seven years for the appointment of the second woman judge, Sujata V. Manohar, in 1994.
- Justice Ruma Pal, Justice Gyan Sudha Misra, Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai
- Justice Banumathi, who at present is the only sitting woman judge
- In the 67-year history of the Supreme Court, there have been only two occasions when it has had two sitting women judges together,
 - * The first being justices Misra and Desai
 - * Later justices Desai and Banumathi.

Presence

- Besides addressing an obvious gender gap, more women judges would bring a different experience to the bench
- woman judge will understand the realities of a woman's life better

Govt has struck at the very heart of judicial freedom: former CJI RM Lodha

- wom • The Memorandum of Procedure, which lays out the terms of engagement between the Centre and the judiciary, "as is established and operational" does not talk of segregation but the "settled convention is that the government cannot segregate the names,"
- Chief Justice of India under this government, Justice T S Thakur, termed the situation and the events following the segregation and return of Justice K M Joseph's name as "unfortunate."

Past Instances

- Government that returned the collegium's recommendation to appoint Gopal Subramaniam as a judge. Subramaniam notably was amicus curie in the Sohrabuddin fake encounter case.

Executive interference

- Govt reply states that Justice Joseph was 42nd in the all-India high court judges seniority list and 12th in the high court chief justices seniority list.
- While that is true, but Justice Joseph is the senior-most chief justice of a high court in terms of experience as chief justice, having served two years more as CJ than the other current CJs.
- There are numerous examples where judges of high courts were elevated to the SC despite not being the senior-most as per all-India seniority, according to the date of initial appointment.
- In the last round of appointments to the SC, this very government approved the appointments of Justices Mohan Shantanagoudar, Navin Sinha, Deepak Gupta, S K Kaul and Abdul Nazeer, against the seniority norm.
- Further, the SC in the Second and Third Judges' case has explicitly held that seniority cannot be the sole determinative factor in deciding suitability for elevation, and that other considerations such as merit may outweigh the seniority norm.
- It is pertinent that in recommending Justice Joseph, the collegium expressly noted his all-India seniority but categorically stated that he was more deserving of the appointment than other judges.

More representation from same state

- The law minister seems to lay great emphasis on the fact that Justice K M Joseph's elevation might lead to Kerala's over-representation in the SC because Justice Kurian Joseph is already in the SC. (Justice Kurian Joseph is due to retire in November 2018).
- However, the use of state representation to send back the nomination of a judge is curious given that this very government approved the appointment of Justice S K Kaul despite the presence to two other judges (Justice Madan Lokur and Justice A K Sikri) from Delhi.

Dominance in disguise?

- It appears that government is trying to make Justice Joseph pay the price for the judgment striking down president's rule in Uttarakhand while sending a message to all judges across the country, that judges who rule against the government in important matters will face consequences.
- Supersessions of 1973 and 1977, which were attempts to browbeat an independent judiciary, and create a cadre of "committed judges".
 - * The then Congress government led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi had superseded the senior most Judge of the SC i.e. Justice Hegde (Jabalpur case) and chosen a junior judge Justice A.N. Ray as the CJI
 - * The Second supersession came in 1977 when Justice H.R. Khanna was superseded by Justice Beg
- kumaramangalam doctrine
 - * Ideology of the government to populate the court with judges who were believed to be supportive of government policies
- The capitulation of the Court to Indira Gandhi's government during the Emergency was a legacy of these interventions and should caution us about the dangers of executive interference in judicial appointments.

Way forward

- Constitutionalism is developed and maintained by all constitutional authorities acting in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Constitution.
- Every act in contravention of the Constitution detracts and chips away at the foundations of our constitutional republic.
- At important junctures on our constitutional journey, when the executive or the legislature has attempted to thwart the independence of the judiciary or the basic structure of the Constitution, the Court has risen to the occasion. While the Court is not infallible, its authority and that of the Constitution will survive only if it remains independent.

32. Death by hanging not barbaric: govt.**Context**

- Death by hanging is not as "barbaric, inhuman and cruel" as an execution by firing squad or lethal injection, the Centre told the Supreme Court

Law

- Section 354 (5) of the Code of Criminal Procedure mandates that a person sentenced to death shall "be hanged by the neck till he is dead."

Lethal chemical

- The government traced statistics of "botched-up" administration of lethal injections to condemned prisoners in the United States for 110 years to prove its point that this mode of State execution is only "designed to create an appearance of serenity and painless death."
- In lethal injections, it's the first of a three-drug cocktail,
 - * Sodium thiopental for sedation,
 - * Second drug, pancuronium bromide, paralyzes the muscles and arrests breathing,
 - * Third drug, potassium chloride, stops the heart.
- it might lead to uncomfortable death wherein the convict is unable to express his/her discomfort because of paralysis caused by the agent injected.
- Besides, the lethal chemical, if known to the public, would possibly be misused.

Firing squad

- The government graphically detailed the horrors of death by firing squad.
- If the shots miss the heart, the prisoners slowly bleeds to death.
- Besides, it would be very difficult to find volunteers for the firing squad from the country's civilian police force.

Alternatives

- Beheading
- Electrocution
- Gas chamber

SC

- The Supreme Court, in an earlier hearing, had said that a condemned convict should die in peace and not in pain. A human being is entitled to dignity even in death.
- The court has clarified that it is not questioning the constitutionality of death penalty, which has been well-settled by the apex court, including in Deena vs. Union of India and earlier in the Bachan Singh case reported in 1980.

33. The Inter-State Council needs to be rejuvenated

- The Inter-State Council is a constitutional body that has representatives of the Union government as well as chief ministers of states. The council is chaired by the prime minister, and it also has a few Union ministers as permanent invitees.
- The Inter-State Council is thus quite different from the new GST council, whose members are the finance ministers of states rather than their elected political heads.
- It is also different from the Finance Commission, whose members are technocrats tasked with providing a framework for the distribution of taxes.

What does the law state?

- The Inter-State Council was set up in 1990 following the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission. The constitutional roots of the council are to be found in Article 263, which recommends that the President of India set up such a council to deal with federal issues.
- It is important to note that the very first reason the Constitution gives for setting up the institution is that it will be useful when it comes to "inquiring into and advising upon disputes which may have arisen between states".
- The other two are to discuss subjects for which the components of the Indian union have common interests, and to figure out how to coordinate policy.ⁱ

- The council also has to have a permanent secretariat which will ensure that the periodic meetings are more fruitful.

Frictions

- A supranational federation such as the European Union has the economic and financial affairs council to coordinate tax policies.
- The Australian states came together in 2005 to set up the council for the Australian federation to jointly represent their interests in Canberra.
- The premiers of Canada's 13 provinces and territories meet as part of the council of the federation.
- The German federation operates with a strong second house that represents the interests of the states.

Point of caution

- The political idea of a country with as many centrifugal forces as India should not be held hostage to regional grandstanding. Federalism is essential, but not at the cost of political unity
- Regional divergence could lead to further inter-state tensions—and matters could get worse once the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies is unfrozen in 2026.\

Meetings not regular

- The harsh reality is that the Inter-State Council has had just 12 meetings since it was set up in 1990.
- There was a gap of a decade between the 10th meeting in 2006 and the 11th meeting in 2016, and the council met again in November 2017.

How can the council address federal issues?

- A rejuvenated Inter-State Council will thus have an important role to play in the coming years, especially since its members are the political leaders of their respective states. The council should have a greater say in federal coordination in the future.
- The GST council has an innovative voting structure, with the Union government having a third of the vote while the state's share the rest equally, irrespective of the size of their population or economy.
- If the Inter-State Council is to emerge as the key institution to manage inter-state frictions, it first needs to have a regular meeting schedule.

ECONOMY

1. **DARPAN**

- DARPAN – “Digital Advancement of Rural Post Office for A New India” Project to improve the quality of service, add value to services and achieve “financial inclusion” of un-banked rural population.
- The goal of the IT modernization project with an outlay of Rs. 1400 Crore is to provide a low power technology solution to each Branch Postmaster (BPM) which will enable each of approximately 1.29 Lakhs Branch Post Offices (BOs) to improve the level of services being offered to rural customers across all the states.
- Initiative of Ministry of Communications=

Details

- The Project shall increase the rural reach of the Department of Posts and enable BOs to increase traffic of all financial remittances, savings accounts, Rural Postal Life Insurance, and Cash Certificates; improve mail operations processes by allowing for automated booking and delivery of accountable article; increase revenue using retail post business; provide third party applications; and make disbursements for social security schemes such as MGNREGS.

History of Post offices

- The Indian postal system has an illustrious history tracing back to the origins in the Mauryan era.
- The modern postal system was established and strengthened by Lords Robert Clive and Warren Hastings and the GPOs in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were established in 1774, 1786 and 1793, respectively.
- As of March 31, 2012, there were 1,54,822 post offices in the country, making it the largest network of its kind in the world, of which 90 per cent were in rural areas. In comparison, at the time of Independence, there were only 23,344 post offices, most of which were in urban areas.
- Historically, the first postal account was opened in the UK in 1861 to encourage the poor to save. The same began in India, soon after postal savings banks started — in 1882.
- Eventually, by 1896, post offices were the sole savings bank agencies mobilising small savings. They have been in the forefront of offering not only different types of banking facilities such as time and recurring deposits but also offering certificates of different denominations and social security schemes.

How should bank collaborate?

- Banks could make arrangements with post offices for dealing with remittances, as recommended by the Rangarajan Committee on Financial Inclusion in 2008.

- Similarly, banks could be invited to locate their ATM machines in the premises of the post offices.

International Experience

- Internationally, there are a few countries which have tapped the postal institution for extending financial inclusion.
- For instance, in Brazil, financial inclusion got a boost after Brazil Post formed a partnership with financial institutions.
- Some countries have even offered a banking licence to their post offices (China, France, Morocco)
- While in some other countries banking institutions have made working arrangements to offer services through the post offices (Algeria, Italy and the UK).

Criticisms

- Important criticisms against making a bank out of postal institution are lack of technology, different work culture and experience, and staff constraints such as skills, training and computer literacy levels.

What should be done?

- There is need to inculcate banking habits in the rural unbanked population.
- To initiate banking habits with the rural population, post offices could start offering debit cards to account holders of postal bank accounts as well as providing information on those accounts through password protected internet portals.
- Post offices could also facilitate use of electronic cards, credit and debit, for postal transactions for not only convenience of the user but also to encourage the use of banking facilities.

Way forward

- While the use of plastic currency will make transacting easier and encourage banking habits among the unbanked population, it will also monetise the economy and help bring down the demand for currency notes and scarce coins significantly.
- India Post has touched the life of every Indian. To preserve its heritage and extend its glory, post offices need not become banks, but could certainly consider a symbiotic business partnership with commercial banks to enhance financial inclusion and mobilise deposits.

2. **D-SIB: Domestic Systemically Important Banks**

- D-SIBs are identified by RBI
- Currently there are three D-SIBs in India - ICICI, HDFC and SBI.

- D-SIB means that the bank is too big to fail. According to the RBI, some banks become systemically important due to their size, cross-jurisdictional activities, complexity and lack of substitute and interconnection.
- Banks whose assets exceed 2% of GDP are considered part of this group.
- The D-SIB framework requires the RBI to disclose the names of banks designated as D-SIBs every year in August starting from August 2015.

How is it helpful for banks?

- The too-big-to-fail tag also indicates that in case of distress, the government is expected to support these banks.
- Due to this perception, these banks enjoy certain advantages in funding.
- It also means that these banks have a different set of policy measures regarding systemic risks and moral hazard issues.

Classification

It classifies the banks under five buckets depending on order of importance.

- ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank are in bucket one while SBI falls in bucket three. Based on the bucket in which a D-SIB is, an additional common equity requirement applies
- Banks in bucket one need to maintain a 0.15% incremental tier-I capital from April 2018.
- Banks in bucket three have to maintain an additional 0.45%.
- With bucket three being higher than bucket one, SBI has a higher additional requirement than ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank.
- All the banks under D-SIB are required to maintain higher share of risk-weighted assets as tier-I equity.

3. E-Way Bill

- It is an electronic documentation detailing the movement of goods and has to be carried by transporters for any consignment exceeding Rs50,000 in value.
- It can be generated from the GSTN set up for the e-way bill system by the transporter before the movement of goods begins.
- The e-way bill's validity varies depending on the distance that the goods have to travel. Typically, the bill's validity is one day for every 100km of movement of goods.
 - * If validity of the E-Way bill expires, the goods are not supposed to be moved.

- * However, one can extend the validity of the E-Way bill if the consignment is not reaching the destination within the validity period due to exceptional circumstances such as natural calamity, law and order issues, trans-shipment delay, accident of conveyance, etc.

Is it mandatory for all movement of goods?

- The GST e-way bill is mandatory from 1 April for all inter-state transport of goods valued above Rs50,000.
- It will be made compulsory for the moving goods within a state in a phased manner from 15 April.
- Some goods that are out of the e-way bill's ambit include perishable items such as meat, milk and milk products and fruits and vegetables.
- Other items that don't need an e-way bill are gold and silver jewellery, cooking gas cylinders, raw silk, wool and handlooms.

Why is it important?

- The e-way bill is a key anti-tax evasion measure and is a crucial part of the GST architecture.
- Tax authorities believe its implementation will dissuade tax evaders from underreporting transactions.
- It will also check instances where the entire transaction is not recorded due to connivance between the seller and buyer.
- It will provide a boost to GST revenues, which have stabilized around Rs85,000-90,000 crore. The government is hoping that this anti-evasion measure will bring buoyancy.

What are the concerns?

- The industry is worried that the technology system may not be prepared to handle the huge e-way bill volume and that this may cause a disruption to trade.
- Another worry for industry is the potential scope for harassment by tax authorities. Taxmen have powers to stop trucks and check e-way bills and transporters fear this may lead to rent-seeking.

What safeguards have been put in place?

- To avoid technological glitches, the GSTN and the National Informatics Centre have ramped up the infrastructure. The system can now handle 75 lakh e-way bills daily, compared with 26 lakh earlier.
- To prevent harassment of taxpayers, e-way bill rules specify that goods will be inspected only once during the journey except in cases where specific information on tax evasion is received.
- Further, in case a vehicle is detained for more than 30 minutes, the transporter can report it on the portal.

4. **E Sahyog**

- It is a Project of the Income-Tax Department to Facilitate Taxpayers which reduces the need for the taxpayer to physically appear before tax authorities.
- It is aimed at reducing compliance cost, especially for small taxpayers.
- The objective of "e-Sahyog" is to provide an online mechanism to resolve mismatches in Income-tax returns of those assesses whose returns have been selected for scrutiny, without visiting the Income Tax Office.
- Under this initiative the Department will provide an end to end e-service using SMS, e-mails to inform the tax assesses of the mismatch.

5. **Cabinet approves Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance 2018**

Context

- The Union Cabinet approved a proposal to promulgate Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance 2018 that provides for confiscating properties and assets of economic offenders like loan defaulters who flee the country

Procedure

- According to the ordinance, a director or deputy director (appointed under the PMLA, 2002) may file an application before a special court (designated under the 2002 Act) to declare a person as a fugitive economic offender.
- The application will contain the reasons to believe that an individual is a fugitive economic offender.
- The application will have information about his whereabouts, a list of properties believed to be proceeds of a crime for which confiscation is sought, a list of benami properties or foreign properties for which confiscation is sought, and a list of persons having an interest in these properties.
- Upon receiving the application, the special court will issue a notice to the individual, requiring him to appear at a specified place within six weeks. If the person appears at the specified place, the special court will terminate its proceedings under the provisions of the Bill.
- Any property belonging to the fugitive economic offender may provisionally be attached without the prior permission of the special court, provided that an application is filed before the court within 30 days.
- Appeals against the orders of the special court will lie before the High Court.

FIEO GlobalLinker

- Initiative of Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- It is a digital platform for MSME exporters to digitise their businesses and join a global community of growing businesses

- The idea was proposed by Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO)
- This initiative will help in expanding India's multi-focused export strategy and also aid in connecting art and artisans to the market

Details

- It is a growing global network currently comprising over 140,000 SME firms, who are seeking business collaboration and growth opportunities through the use of their electronic business card and digital profiles created on the platform.

Benefits

- Business Opportunities: Exporters will be able to find clients, suppliers and advisors using the search and review facilities. Creating a free e-commerce store for direct sales and improved chain management.
- Improved Efficiencies: Platform provides services like company intranet, integrating email, a business calendar.
- Up-to-date Business Knowledge through business articles, industry news and common interest groups

6. **Index of Economic Freedom**

- It is an annual guide published by The Heritage Foundation a Washington based Think Tank.
- Economic freedom is the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labor and property

They are grouped into four broad categories, or pillars.

- Rule of Law (property rights, government integrity, judicial effectiveness)
- Government Size (government spending, tax burden, fiscal health)
- Regulatory Efficiency (business freedom, labor freedom, monetary freedom)
- Open Markets (trade freedom, investment freedom, financial freedom)

Each of the twelve economic freedoms within these categories is graded on a scale of 0 to 100.

2018 April

- India moved up to the 130th spot, up from 143 in 2017
- India's economic freedom score was 54.5, making its economy the 130th freest in the 2018 Index. The firm noted that India's overall score increased by 1.9 points, led by improvements in judicial effectiveness, business freedom, government integrity, and fiscal health.
- China moved one spot higher to 111, while Pakistan was ranked 131.

Issue Area

- The judiciary is independent, but Indian courts are understaffed and lack the technology necessary to clear an enormous backlog.

- Officials are often caught accepting bribes but still corruption goes unnoticed and unpunished
- The report highlighted that government openness to foreign investment is below average.

7. Indian Accounting Standards (IndAS)

Context

- The RBI has also deferred the implementation of Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) for banks by one year.
- Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs), excluding regional rural banks (RRBs), were required to implement Ind AS from April 1, 2018.

Structure

- GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) is a collection of commonly-followed accounting rules and standards for financial reporting.
- International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS): It is a set of accounting standards developed by an independent, not-for-profit organization called the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB).
- Indian Accounting Standards (Ind-AS): India accounting standards were issued under the supervision and control of Accounting Standards Board (ASB), which was constituted as a body in the year 1977.
 - * ASB is a committee under (ICAI) which consists of representatives from government department, academicians, other professional bodies viz. icai, representatives from ASSOCHAM, CII, FICCI, etc.

Current Status

They currently follow Indian Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (IGAAP) standards. They are issued by Accounting Standards Board (ASB) in India.

- IGAAP relies on the principle of prudence and historical cost of assets instead of their fair market valuation.
- IndAS relies on fair value of assets and liabilities and has a thrust on substance of contracts more than their legal forms.
 - * Ind AS provides guidance on - valuation techniques,
 - * inputs to valuation techniques (i.e. fair value hierarchy),
 - * concepts such as highest and best use,
 - * Most advantageous market and principal market and fair value disclosures.
- IGAAP fair value may be entity-specific and not market-based
 - * Unlike IGAAP, fair value is a market based measurement under Ind AS i.e. it is measured using the assumptions that market participants would use when pricing the asset or liability, including assumptions about risk.

This results in differences in the characterization of financial instruments as well as in revenue recognition.

What was the need?

Now, to be internationally compliant, countries have two options -

- Adoption of IFRS
- Convergence with IFRS

Legislative change required

The implementation of IndAS for public sector banks requires an amendment to the Banking Regulation Act.

- The schedule in BR Act relating to financial statement disclosures needs to be changed to the IndAS format
- Section 29 of the BR Act deals with the accounts and balance sheets of public sector banks.
- Private sector banks are covered by the Companies Act, which is based on the new accounting standards.
- Due to a delay in amending the BR Act, RBI is yet to issue operational guidelines for the implementation of the new accounting standards

Importance of IndAS

- Under the current rules, banks set aside money to cover loans that have turned bad.
- Under IndAS, they must make provisions after assessing the expected loss from the time a loan is originated rather than waiting for a trigger event.
- These norms, which are in line with international norms, the International Financial Reporting Standards, were designed to avoid credit shocks like those seen in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008.

Significance

- Adoption of IFRS by Indian corporates will be challenging but at the same time will be rewarding as well, since it is likely to result in improved comparability, transparency and quality of financial statements.

8. International SME Convention-2018

- It is the first ever International SME conference organized by The Ministry of MSME.
- One hundred and fifty participants from 31 countries and 400 entrepreneurs from India will participate in the four day International SME convention being held in New Delhi.
- The Ministry of MSME has engaged with over 35 International Trade Development organisations to attract and invite able and willing entrepreneurs and encourage people to people contact with select Indian Entrepreneurs from key sectors of the International counterparts.
- The convention has specific focus on inclusion of MSMEs in the Make in India program & empowering women entrepreneurs.

Background

- India is home to more than 60 million MSMEs, majority of who are in low-tech areas and serve the local domestic markets.
- Of these, a small percentage, have the ability and capability to derive access to International Markets, with the vast majority of enterprises working as ancillaries.
- Together the MSMEs constitute a single largest employer after the Agriculture sector in India.
- Highly developed economies have banked on their small and medium enterprises for both GDP Growth as well as higher employment resulting in higher per capita incomes.

9. Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP)

- MAP is an alternative available to taxpayers to resolve disputes giving rise to double taxation, whether juridical or economic in nature.
- An agreement for avoidance of double taxation between countries would give authorisation for assistance of Competent Authorities (CAs) in the respective jurisdiction under MAP.

Context

- Nokia tax dispute settled under India-Finland mutual agreement
- The Income Tax Department has confirmed that India and Finland have reached an agreement under the Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) system and that the issue surrounding the alleged tax payable by Nokia "has been resolved", paving the way for the company to sell its plant shuttered for long in Chennai.

Procedure

- Under this scheme, the taxpayer is entitled to approach the Competent Authority (CA) of their country of residence to invoke a MAP.
- Thereafter, CAs of both the jurisdictions convene a meeting (without the taxpayer's presence) and try to resolve the dispute through mutual agreement.
- Based on the MAP resolution, the taxpayer has an option to accept the agreement reached by the CAs, or decline it, and continue litigating as per the remedies available under the domestic law.
- This route can be pursued by taxpayers simultaneously with the domestic dispute resolution process. Further, the details of resolutions reached are not available within the public domain and cannot be used as a precedent by other taxpayers.
- Under the MAP system, settling an issue between two countries means closing all pending tax proceedings

Advantages

- The main benefit of pursuing MAP is the elimination of double taxation (either juridical or economic).
- The MAP resolution, once accepted, eliminates protracted litigation.

- The Government claims on having 60 MAP closures in 2017. With these right credentials in place, successful and timely closure of some of these large tax disputes under MAP will be a key trigger for making dispute resolution more effective. Delays will not only hamper global investments, but also force existing investors to reassess their market strategy in the country.

10. Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board**Structure**

- The board, formed under an Act of 2006, comprises a chairperson, a member (legal) and three other members appointed by the central government.
- The board has the power of a civil court and a bench comprising member (legal) and one or more members nominated by the chairperson decides on disputes arising among the downstream companies or with outsiders.

Functions

PNGRB's job is to regulate the refining, transport and marketing of petroleum products, ensure enough supply across the country, protect consumer interest, foster fair trade, and authorise companies that would build and operate fuel pipelines.

- Protect the interest of consumers by fostering fair trade and competition amongst the entities
- Declare pipelines as common carrier or contract carrier;
- Maintain a data bank of information on activities relating to petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas;
- In respect of notified petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas
 - * ensure adequate availability;
 - * ensure display of information about the maximum retail prices fixed by the entity for consumers at retail outlets;
 - * monitor prices and take corrective measures to prevent restrictive trade practice by the entities;

11. Penning

- One of the practices for Organic farming is Penning. Penning is done with herds of either Sheep or Goat.
- Sheep / Goat penning is one of the traditional methods of enhancing soil fertility.
- Penning is an important part of Organic Farming. In this process the sheep are made to stay in the field overnight which enables its fecal matter and urine are left in the field later incorporated to a shallow depth by working blade harrow or cultivator or cultivator.

Significance

- The sheep get their feed from field
- Field is enriched with nutrients and loads of microorganisms act on them to turn the soil more fertile than before.

- As the activities of various organisms increase in the soil makes it more porous. The physical properties of the soil are found to be greatly improved after every penning.
- Root grub dies due to the power of sheep urine.
 - * Root grubs are pests which feed on roots or loss roots.
 - * This can lead to abnormal plant height, discoloration of plant, and wilting. Root grubs generally prefer plants with fibrous root system.
- The urine reduces salinity in the soil.
- Grazing of the sheep / goat in the field helps the field with fewer weeds

12. RBI dumps GVA model, switches back to GDP to measure economy

- The Reserve Bank switched back to the gross domestic product (GDP)-based measure to offer its growth estimates from the gross value added (GVA) methodology, citing global best practices.

Key difference between GVA and GDP

Government had started analysing growth estimates using GVA methodology from January 2015 and had also changed the base year to 2018 from January.

- GVA gives a picture of the state of economic activity from the producers' side or supply side,
- The GDP model gives the picture from the consumers' side or demand perspective.

Why was it done?

- Globally, the performance of most economies is gauged in terms of gross domestic product (GDP).
- This is also the approach followed by multilateral institutions, international analysts and investors
- It facilitates easy cross-country comparisons

13. Road Safety Trust Fund: UN

- The trust fund is aimed at spurring action to help save lives in road accidents.
- UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Organisation's development arm, is the secretariat for the trust fund

Details

- The Road Safety Trust Fund will serve as a catalyst for much-needed progress towards the road safety targets of the Sustainable Development Goals
- The Trust Fund has the potential to galvanize global efforts to address the road safety situation, building on the progress made and experience gained over the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020

- The trust fund will support efforts along the five pillars of the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety, which include strengthened road safety management capacities; improved safety of road infrastructure and broader transport networks; enhanced safety of vehicles; improved behavior of road users; and improved post-crash care.
- It also urged countries to take measures to implement vehicle safety regulations to ensure that all new motor vehicles meet applicable minimum regulations for the protection of occupants and other road users, with seat belts, airbags and active safety systems fitted as standard equipment.

Stats

Road traffic deaths and injuries have become a serious and urgent global concern. Around 1.3 million drivers, passengers and pedestrians die each year, and up to 50 million are injured on the world's roads

14. South Asia Economic Focus (SAEF)

- The South Asia Economic Focus is a biannual (twice-a-year) economic update presenting recent economic developments and a near-term economic outlook for South Asia.
- It includes a Focus section presenting more in-depth analysis of an economic topic of relevance for stability, growth, and prosperity in the region as well as country briefs covering Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

India must create 8.1 million jobs annually, says World Bank report

Details

- It has projected the growth rate to increase further to 7.5% in the following two years.
- India has recovered from the withdrawal of large denomination bank notes in November 2016, and the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in July 2017.
- The bank also said that the area has regained its lead as the fastest growing region in the world, supported by recovery in India.

Need More Investment

- The report projected the country's growth to further accelerate to 7.5 per cent in 2019-20 and 2020-21 and suggested that New Delhi should strive to accelerate investments and exports to take advantage of the recovery in global growth.
- SAEF finds that the South Asia region could even extend its lead over East Asia and the Pacific.

Issue Area

Much of the progress, however, is driven by India's growth rebound and is not consistent across countries.

- Despite accelerating global growth and trade, exports remain weak.

- Progress on fiscal consolidation is slow, and deficits are high.

What should be done?

- The report argues that growth alone will not be enough to attain the higher employment rates enjoyed by other developing countries, especially among women.
- But providing opportunities to these young entrants while attracting more women into the labour market, will require generating even more jobs for every point of economic growth

15. Straddle in investing

- This refers to a strategy employed by traders to profit from any significant increase in the volatility of the price of a stock, or any other financial security. A trader employing this strategy pays a premium to purchase separately the right to both buy and sell a stock at a fixed price on a future date.
- Irrespective of whether the price of the stock drops or shoots up, as long as it moves by a sufficient amount either way, the trader will earn a profit on the trade. If not, his loss will be limited to the premium paid.
- The strategy is used when a trader expects a significant move in the price of a security but is not too sure about the direction of the move.

16. Despite Mosul massacre, Iraq still a draw for Punjab's youth

- They left home dreaming of better lives and returned in caskets.
- Yet, despite the deaths of Indian workers in Iraq, thousands of men in Punjab still hope to find a job in the war-torn land and mostly through illegal channels.
- Of the 39 labourers who went to Iraq and were killed by suspected ISIS militants, 27 were from Punjab.

Why?

- Travel agents said people still plan to go to places such as Iraq for jobs and better wages, despite the risks that such troubled regions pose.
- The main reason people go to other countries is unemployment in Punjab
- Salaries of workers in Iraq were two or three times higher than those in places such as Dubai.
 - * Many international companies required labour for infrastructure projects being built or rebuilt in the war-ravaged country.
 - * A construction worker could earn USD 800-1,000 per month (Rs 50,000-65,000) in Iraq as against monthly earnings of 1,200 Dirham (Rs 22,000) in Dubai

Issue Area

- Many travel without valid papers
- Minister of State for External Affairs V K Singh, who had brought back the bodies of the Indians killed in Mosul in caskets earlier this month, had said there was no record of the 39 men, and of another who survived, in any Indian embassy as their travel to Iraq had been facilitated by illegal agents.
- The Punjab police have sometimes been accused of colluding with the illegal agents

Laws

- To curb the practice of illicit travel agents, the state government had framed the Prevention of Human Smuggling Act 2012 which was later renamed the Punjab Travel Professional Regulation Act, 2013, making registration mandatory for travel agents or those in consultancy and ticketing for a valid licence.
- Police are holding educational campaigns to make people aware about safe and legal emigration
 - * 900 cases had been registered in 2017 against fraudulent travel agents

Way forward

- Strict enforcement of a licensing system to check the mushrooming of illegal travel agents in Punjab.

17. Payment system operators told to store data inside the country

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to ensure that all payment system operators stored the data, relating to the payment systems operated by them, within the country in six months.
- The move is intended to give unfettered access to all payment data for supervisory purposes

What should be done?

- To ensure the safety and security of payment systems data banks need to adopt to some of the best global standards
- Continuous monitoring and surveillance is a must to reduce the risks from data breaches while maintaining a healthy pace of growth in digital payments

18. ICICI Bank-Videocon loan

- ICICI -Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India
- Headquartered in Mumbai
- Chanda was conferred with the Padma Bhushan, one of India's highest civilian honours, in 2011.

Context

- CBI has launched a probe to verify the bank's loans to the Videocon group and possible nepotism in the loans extended by issuing a Rs 3,250-crore loan to Videocon Group in 2012.

Whistle Blower

- Arvind Gupta, an ICICI Bank shareholder, who is the whistleblower and brought this matter to light through a letter seeking "appropriate investigation into illicit banking and commercial relationship between Videocon Group of Venugopal Dhoot and ICICI Bank's MD & CEO Chanda Kochhar's family owned NuPower Renewable Group steered by her husband Mr. Deepak Kochhar".
- Gupta's letter alleged that Deepak benefitted from this as his firm NuPower Renewables was set up as a 50-50 joint venture between the Kochhars and Dhoots, who are family members of the Videocon Group.
- Chanda Kochhar is accused of having favoured the sanctioning of the loan to the company to benefit her husband.

How it all happened?

- Deepak Kochhar along with Venugopal Dhoot, Chairman of the Videocon Group, set up NuPower Renewables Pvt Ltd (NRPL) in December 2008
- Deepak Kochhar, Chanda Kochhar's brother's wife, and Deepak's father's firm Pacific Capital owned 50% of the company.
- The remaining 50% was held by Venugopal Dhoot.
- Soon after, in January 2009, Dhoot resigned as the director of this company and transferred his shares (24,999 shares) in NuPower to Deepak for Rs 2.5 lakh.

Chanda Kochhar becomes the CEO and MD

- The letter by the whistleblower alleges that after Chanda Kochhar became the CEO and MD of ICICI Bank in May 2009, the identity and ownership of NuPower was masked by transferring the shareholding to a trust called Pinnacle Energy, where Deepak was the Managing Trustee.
- NuPower then got a loan of Rs 64 crore in March 2010 from a company called Supreme Energy.
- Supreme Energy is 99.9% owned by Dhoot. Around the same time, the Kochhar relatives transferred their shares to Supreme Energy.
- As a result, Supreme Energy owned 94.99% in NuPower by the end of March 2010 and the remaining 4.99% stake was held by Deepak.

Web of transactions

- Widening the transactions, Dhoot transferred his entire holding in Supreme Energy to his associate Mahesh Chandra Punglia in November 2010.
- Following this between September 2012 to April 2013, Punglia transferred his holding to Pinnacle Energy. Remember, Deepak Kochhar was the managing trustee of Pinnacle.
- According to the Indian Express investigation, the total transaction value of the complete transfer of shares from Punglia to Kochhar's Pinnacle Energy trust was Rs 9 lakh

- The Videocon group account was declared an NPA by the bank in 2017.

ICICI Bank's stance

- The Bank's board gave Chanda Kochhar a clean chit. To begin with, Chanda Kochhar was not a chairperson of the committee that approved the loans
- The Board said that there was no quid pro quo, nepotism or conflict of interest in the loans extended and that it has full confidence and reposes full faith in Chanda Kochhar.

What she should have done?

- Good corporate governance dictates that Chanda Kochhar as joint MD and later as the CEO should have disclosed that her husband had this relationship with the Dhoots and therefore should have recused herself from the credit committee that sanctioned the Videocon loan.

Impact

- After news of the CBI inquiry into the loans extended to Videocon came out, shares of ICICI Bank tanked by 7%, wiping off Rs 11,353 crore from its market capitalisation.

19. Inflation targeting has zero impact on price situation:**Bhalla****Context**

- Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) member Surjit Bhalla said Inflation targeting has made zero impact on prices.

Comment

- The real interest rate, which is the difference between the nominal interest rate and inflation, is very high in India and not justified for an emerging economy.
- New Zealand started inflation targeting in 1998, and it has not gone anywhere
- He pointed out that fiscal deficit provides zero clues about the slowdown in inflation as from 1996-2007, India's fiscal deficit continuously went up but inflation systematically came down. Procurement prices explain inflation in India, not fiscal deficit or output gap.
- Oil prices do not play significant impact on inflation saying last time when oil prices went up to USD 100 per barrel, world inflation came down.

Current Status

- Under the new Monetary Policy Framework, the central bank aims to contain inflation at 4 per cent with a band of (+/-) 2 per cent.

20. No easing of mining norms

Context

- The Environment Ministry's apex forest body has shot down a joint proposal by the Coal, Petroleum and Mining ministries to fully exempt themselves from Forest department permissions to scale up the density of exploratory boreholes, used to prospect for minerals, in forests.

Current Status

- Mining companies deploy heavy machinery and rigs to dig test, or exploratory boreholes, which are thin, cylindrical caverns that usually go hundreds of metres underground to look for signs of metals, minerals and coal.
- Currently companies can dig up to 20 boreholes a square kilometre in forests without taking the Central government's permission.

What they intended to do?

- The Coal Ministry consortium wanted to be able to tunnel more boreholes per square-kilometre without seeking the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) permission.

Issue Area

- Exploration of coal and other ferrous and non-ferrous metals damages the forest area.
- Exempting large-scale non-forest activities such as drilling of 15-20 boreholes/sq km for prospecting of minerals is not acceptable

21. New vehicles to have high security plates

Context

- From January 1, 2019 onward, all classes of motor vehicles hitting the roads will come fitted with tamper-proof High Security Registration Plates (HSRP) that have a host of in-built security features.

Details

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) last week published new draft rules that make it mandatory for automobile manufacturers to provide, and dealers to affix, the "security licence plate, including the third registration mark" for all new vehicles manufactured on or after January 1 next year.

Features

- HSRPs will come with a 15-year guarantee.
- They will have in-built security features such as a self-destructive sticker with the engine and chassis number of the vehicle.
- The plates will be fitted on the front and rear of the vehicles and windscreens will have a number plate tag with hologram.
 - * A chromium-based hologram will be applied by hot stamping on the top left corner of the number plates both at the front and back.

- * A third registration plate, in the form of a self-destructive, chromium-based hologram sticker will be affixed on the inner side of the vehicle's windshield.

- A permanent identification number with a minimum of 10 digits will be laser-branded into the reflective sheeting on the bottom left of the registration plate. The permanent number will be preceded by two alphabets indicating the name of the vendor, manufacturer, or supplier, for whom the Type approval certificate was issued by the testing agencies.
- The registering authority, registration number, laser-branded permanent number, the engine number and chassis number will all be in the sticker.
- The registration plate fitted in the rear of the vehicle will be fastened with a non-removable/non-reusable snap lock system. For enhanced security, two snap locks will be used in the HSRP affixed in the rear. The replacement of an existing registration plate will also be done through the agency responsible for affixing the new plate.

Certification

- Vehicle manufacturers can themselves produce the HSRP and obtain the Type approval certificate from the Central Road Research Institute, New Delhi or any one of the six testing agencies authorized by the Centre. Alternatively, they could also procure them from an HSRP manufacturer.

Significance

- They are expected to offer increased protection against theft.
- The move to rope in automobile manufacturers and the dealers aims to end the monopoly of a few HSRP manufacturers and ensure uniformity in the quality of the HSRPs.

22. Mega SEZs

Context

- In a bid to make India an export hub for electronics, the government plans to set up at least one SEZ or special economic zone in every State under the proposed electronic policy.

Details

- Under the new policy, government also plans to sign free trade agreements (FTAs) with countries, including those in Africa and Europe, to which India can export smaller electronic products.

Costal Economic Zones (CEZs)

- CEZs can be set up, similar to what China has done.
- Pointing out that India's numerous SEZs have not taken off in the way they did in China due to issues such as size and location, Niti Aayog had said large areas near the coast can be set aside for CEZs "in which a sound ecosystem for healthy growth of export-oriented firms is fostered."

The groups — with members from the industry and the Ministry — have been focussed on individual products such as mobile handsets, LED products, medical electronics, consumer electronics and automotive electronics, including electric vehicles.

23. What govt. can do to keep fuel prices under check?

- Petrol and diesel prices touched record levels over the weekend with petrol selling at Rs. 74.40 a litre, the highest it's been under the current government's tenure and diesel at Rs. 65.65, largely due to rising global crude oil prices but also on high excise duty on the fuels.

How are oil prices behaving?

- Crude oil prices rose at a scorching 24% in the first three months of 2018 before hitting a 40-month high in April following a decline in global inventories, largely caused by the production cuts by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members and also by geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
- Agencies such as Crisil Research expect crude oil prices to settle at about \$70 a barrel during the calendar year of 2018, representing a 27% increase over last year's level. As a consequence, India's oil import bill is expected to balloon by about 26% to Rs. 6.5 lakh crore in FY19.

What is the impact of taxes?

- The other aspect has to do with the excise duty on petrol and diesel, imposed by the government, which has risen sharply over the last few years.
- According to data with the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, the excise duty on branded petrol is Rs. 20.66 a litre or almost 28% of the total price of the fuel. This proportion is 27% for branded diesel.
- Excise duties have risen significantly since 2013-14, accounting for 22-25% of the retail prices of petrol and diesel respectively, compared with 12-15% earlier when crude prices were at similar levels.

What can be done?

- The advantage of linking domestic fuel prices to the global oil market, as India has done, is that oil marketing companies (OMCs) are no longer forced to sell fuel at subsidised rates.
- But on the flip side, as can be seen now, is that the consumer is forced to buy fuel at high prices when global price levels are elevated.
- So, one thing the government can do, and which it is reportedly considering doing, is to ask the OMCs to refrain from passing on the higher oil prices to consumers.
- In other words, this would represent a return to the previous subsidy regime, albeit somewhat better. If crude price hikes are not allowed to be largely passed on to consumers, the marketing margins of OMCs will decline by 80 paise to Rs. 1 per litre.

Is that all?

- The government can always reduce the excise duty on petrol and diesel thereby earning a lower revenue but at least easing some burden on the consumers.
- However, Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan recently made it clear that the government had no plans to cut the levy as it needed revenue for developmental needs.
- Centre and States bank on tax revenues to meet developmental needs. Forty-two per cent of collections from excise duty (on petrol and diesel) goes to States and out of the remaining, 60% is used to fund Centre's share in development schemes in States.

24. Use of blockchain beyond cryptocurrencies

- With India's digital footsteps gaining significant stride, blockchain is identified with cryptocurrencies but we are yet to fully realize its disruptive potential in numerous other sectors.

Uses

- Block chain technology has the power to transform business processes and applications across sectors — from financial services to agriculture, from healthcare to education, among others.
- Block chain-powered smart contracts, where every piece of information is recorded in a traceable and irreversible manner, can play a revolutionary role in enhancing ease of doing business.
- It will augment the credibility, accuracy and efficiency of a contract while reducing the risk of frauds, substantially.

Application in different sectors

- Property deals
 - * Property transactions in India are still carried out on paper, making them prone to disputes. Application of block chain technology would bring revolutionary changes through in-built transparency, traceability and efficiency in the system
- Providing Financial services
 - * Yes Bank is an early adopter of this technology by implementing a block chain-based multi-nodal system to fully digitize vendor financing for one of its clients.
 - * The system today enables the bank to do timely processing of vendor payments without physical documents and manual intervention, while enabling both parties to track the status of transactions in real time
- Healthcare and pharmaceuticals
 - * It is one of the best prospective areas where a lot of clinical data is built up and exchanged, which, owing to its sensitive nature, demands a secure and reliable system.

- * Blockchain could play a crucial part in health insurance claims management by reducing the risk of insurance claim frauds.
- * The technology can also be used to prevent the sale of spurious drugs in the country by tracking every step of the supply chain network at every level.
- Education sector
 - * It can benefit from a blockchain-powered, time-stamped repository of pass-outs and job records of students so that it becomes easier for employers to verify the credibility of candidates.
- Agriculture
 - * The seasonal data related to crop and climatic cycles and soil testing data can be protected and used by multi-nodal blockchain application for the benefit of insurance companies, researchers, market agencies and even to predict stock prices.

International Experience

- Nasdaq Inc. has successfully tested a blockchain-powered proxy voting system on its Estonian exchange and is gearing up for full-scale implementation.
- In Russia, blockchain-based systems are being pursued for land registry management as well as for improving the local voting system.
- The Dubai government, is on its way to implement blockchain-based paperless digital systems in areas such as visa applications, licence renewals and bill payments.

How it can help Govt?

- Government of India has eliminated the possibility of considering cryptocurrencies as legal tender, it has endorsed the idea of exploring use of block chain technology for ushering in India's digital economy.
- NITI Aayog is exploring the use of block chain and AI technologies in diverse areas such as education, healthcare, agriculture, electricity distribution and land records, among others.
- The Think-Tank is reportedly building a platform called 'India Chain' — a shared, India-specific blockchain infrastructure that would leverage the trinity of Jan-Dhan-Yojana, Aadhaar and the mobile trinity.
- What may actually work for India is the version Blockchain 2.0 that allows programmable transactions (modified by a condition or a set of conditions), extending its capability from being able to do simple transactions to more complex transactions. It can also address privacy and regulatory needs, complex functions and is not limited to one vendor.
- The A.P. government is leading the way in blockchain adoption by executing pilot projects in land records and transport.

Way forward

- Blockchain's ability to enhance real-time visibility in the functioning of the supply chain offers myriad possibilities across a range of sectors to prevent leakages, and thereby increase efficiency.
- It is also crucial to lay our collective focus on identifying and resolving key issues and challenges in implementing this technology, the prime amongst those being data privacy.
- A sustainable future for blockchain would also necessitate creation and sustenance of the right kind of ecosystem in the country.

25. How the data sets stack up

Context:

- Why measuring inequality is not the same as measuring changes in the level of poverty in India

Introduction

- As of late, there has been a great deal of discourse on expanding imbalance inside a few nations of the world, including India, especially after the distribution of Thomas Piketty's book on disparity.
- Truly rising imbalance has unfavorable financial and social results.
- The Gini coefficient or different measures of disparity are being utilized to inspect slants in imbalance.
- In this segment, we inspect the patterns in disparity and demonstrate that the destitution proportion is similarly imperative as the Gini coefficient in dissecting issues identifying with development and dissemination.

Consumption inequality

- All things considered the Gini coefficient, which lies in the region of 0 and 1, is used for evaluating uniqueness. The Gini coefficient of usage use for common zones declined scarcely between 1983-84 to 1993-94 (from 0.304 to 0.286) while it recorded a minor rising in the midst of the high advancement time of 2004-05 and 2011-12 (from 0.304 to 0.311).
- Because of urban regions, it continued as before from 1983-84 to 1993-94 (0.344) while it extended subtly from 2004-05 to 2011-12 (0.376 to 0.390).
- Using long time course of action since 1951, an examination exhibits that irregularity in nation districts declined while it extended in urban locales in the post-change period, particularly in the high advancement time allotment.
- One view is that awkwardness in use may be an under-measure as National Sample Survey (NSS) data may not get the usage of the rich adequately.
- The refinement between the usage use as showed by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and national wage could be deficiently a result of this factor. In any case, there is no strong affirmation that underestimation in NSSO is simply relating to the upper-wage social events.

- In reality, the Rangarajan Committee assessed the issue of differentiations in use among NSSO and NSS.
- What is aggravating in India is that the differentiation among NAS and NSS is stretching out after some time.
- For example, the refinement was under 10% in the late 1970s; it rose to practically half in 2009-10. A couple of changes made in the report diminished the refinement from 45.8% to 32.5%. However in the meantime the qualifications are high.

Income inequality

- Income and wealth inequalities are much higher than consumption inequality. According to some estimates, consumption Gini coefficient was 0.36 in 2011-12 in India.
- On the other hand, inequality in income was high with a Gini coefficient of 0.55 while wealth Gini coefficient was 0.74 in 2011-12.
- Thus, income Gini was about 20 points higher than consumption Gini while wealth Gini was nearly almost 40 points higher than consumption Gini.

NSSO surveys have been studied for long and have gone through critical analysis.

- The reasons for sharp differences between consumption Gini coefficient and income Gini coefficient have to be analysed.
- In some other countries, such differences are no more than 5-10 points.
- Also, using income tax data for computing income distribution has many problems. In India, only 3-5% of people come under the income tax net.

Trends in poverty ratio

- People require a specific least utilization of nourishment and non-sustenance things to survive.
- In any case, the recognition with respect to what constitutes destitution fluctuates after some time and crosswise over nations.
- By and large the approach is to take a gander at it regarding certain base utilization use on nourishment and non-sustenance things.
- Any family unit neglecting to meet this level of utilization consumption can be dealt with as a poor family unit.

In the pre-reform period

- Overall poverty declined marginally during 1983 to 1993-94. The rate of decline in poverty was 0.8 percentage points per annum.
- In fact, the number of persons below the poverty line stayed almost the same at 320 million during this period.
- The number of persons below poverty declined by 5 percentage points during 1983 to 1987-88 but rose by 4 percentage points during 1987-88 to 1993-94.

- Poverty declined faster in the post-reform period, particularly in the 2004-2012 period as compared to 1993-2005.

In the post-reform period

- Overall poverty as defined by the Tendulkar Committee declined faster from 45.3% in 1993-94 to 21.9% in 2011-12 – an annual decline of 1.3 percentage points.
- The first sub-period 1993-94 to 2004-05 recorded a decline of 0.75 percentage points per annum.
- But, poverty declined by 2.2 percentage points per annum during the period 2004-05 to 2011-12. This was the period of highest economic growth since Independence. It is the fastest decline of poverty compared to earlier periods.

Conclusions on the trends in poverty

- World Bank Study (2016) mentioned above shows, poverty declined by 1.36 percentage points per annum post-1991 compared to 0.44 percentage points per annum prior to 1991. This study shows that among other things, urban growth is the most important contributor to the rapid reduction in poverty even in rural areas in the post-1991 period.
- Within the post-reform period, poverty declined faster in the 2000s than in the 1990s. The official estimates based on Tendulkar poverty lines show that poverty declined much faster during 2004-05 to 2011-12 as compared to the period 1993-94 to 2004-05. Around 135 million people were lifted above the poverty line in the post-reform period.

Growth and distribution

- The patterns in neediness demonstrate that the pace of lessening was significantly higher in the post-change period especially amid high development period.
- The effect of higher development on destitution lessening can likewise be seen from the decile-wise development in per capita utilization use.
- An examination of the development rate of per capita utilization (in genuine terms) amid the periods 1993-94 to 2004-05 and 2004-05 to 2011-12 demonstrates that the normal development of per capita utilization of the main five deciles is more than that of the last five deciles.
- Notwithstanding, the proportion of the normal development rates of the two time frames is higher for the last five deciles when contrasted with the best five. It suggests that the development of utilization of the lower deciles of the populace was more than the upper deciles.

Conclusion

- There is most likely that imbalance in itself has a few bothersome results.

- It was Simon Kuznets who had contended in a renowned paper in 1955 that in the early time of monetary development dispersion of salary has a tendency to intensify, and that simply in the wake of achieving a specific level of financial advancement a change in the circulation of pay happens.
- In this unique situation, estimating imbalance isn't the same as estimating the adjustments in the level of destitution.
- Regardless of whether the Gini coefficient continues as before or gets, the destitution proportion can be declining. This has been valid for India.
- The decrease in neediness is substantially higher especially in the period 2004-05 to 2011-12 disregarding ascend in disparity.
- Hence the progressions of the neediness proportion is a similarly essential marker to screen.

26. Power ministry unveils scheme to help 2,500 MW stranded thermal plants

- In an attempt to bring some relief to the stressed thermal power sector, the government has introduced a pilot scheme to procure electricity from power plants without PPAs. A combined capacity of 2,500 megawatt (MW) will be procured through this scheme.
- Though no time line for inviting tenders has been announced, the power ministry said PTC India would sign three-year (mid-term) power purchase agreements (PPAs) with successful bidders and contract with power distribution companies (discoms) to sell electricity.
- The pilot plan proposes that a single entity, which quotes or matches the lowest bid in the auction, would be allocated a maximum capacity of 600 MW. A company cannot quote part capacity from different power stations in the same bid. If PTC procures power less than 55% of contracted capacity in a month, the power plant would be paid a compensation, whose quantum would be linked to spot power prices at the Indian Energy Exchange.
- The competitive bidding for the pilot scheme would be conducted by PFC Consulting, a subsidiary of the Power Finance Corporation. PFC Consulting had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with PTC India in January for exploring power procurement opportunities from coal-based power plants. But, the capacity and scope of procurement were not announced then.
- Tepid rise in growth in power demand, coupled by rampant capacity addition, has resulted in power plants running at low utilisation rates, making it difficult for a lot of them to regularly service debts and raising the risk of them turning into non-performing assets.

- More than 15.6 gigawatt (GW) of operational coal-based power plants have been classified as stressed assets due to the lack of PPAs. Research firm ICRA recently noted that only 7.6 GW of bids for long-term power procurement have been invited by discoms in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh over the past four years. Of this, PPAs have been signed only for 1.4 GW by Kerala and Telangana.

27. Indian tech start-ups may struggle to comply with new EU data law

The European Union's (EU's) upcoming General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which envisages strict rules for handling personal data of users, is proving to be costly for Indian technology start-ups that have operations in Europe.

- The new regulation that takes effect on 25 May specifies new protocols for handling and storing private data and sharing it with third parties. Flouting GDPR regulations can attract fines of up to €20 million, or 4% of the company's global annual turnover.
- Europe is an important market for start-ups operating in the business-to-business (B2B) segment and mobile gaming. Hefty fines and strict regulations could hinder a firm's operations or lead to a complete shutdown, according to start-ups and policy experts.
- GDPR is enforceable even if companies do not have an office in the EU or do not operate in the EU, but handle private data of EU citizens.

Most small tech companies that export software to Europe do not sign any formal service or legal agreement, in an attempt to stay away from auditors.

Such measures to get around regulations could prove to be fatal for small organizations, legal experts said.

- The new regulations also leave a lot of room for interpretation and the level compliance differs according to the size of the company.
- For example, a part of the law suggests firms should maintain a reasonable level of data protection, but the law itself does not define what reasonable protection is.
- The biggest problem firms face while trying to comply with GDPR is the lack of clearly-defined guidelines. There is no single authority to certify the level of compliance. This leaves a lot of subjectivity and hence can cause confusion amongst smaller companies that may not have easy access to the right legal entities.
- Nevertheless, policy experts and Internet rights activists believe that GDPR also sets new data protection standards in place, which is likely to be adopted by other countries as well. GDPR will be the most comprehensive dedicated legislation on data protection ever formulated.
- This is not to say that GDPR, once in force, will immediately make things better for everyone as there certainly will be difficulties initially in adapting current industry practices to this stricter and more nuanced framework.

- It will be especially challenging for businesses that serve the European market while operating from jurisdictions with more relaxed data protection laws, as reconciling GDPR with domestic regulations will be a complicated process.

28. Modi tasks Central PSEs to come up with growth plan in 100 days

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed heads and senior officials of around 331 Central Public-Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to task them with a new mantra to emerge as the third arm of revenue generation to boost India's GDP.

- Addressing the CPSE Conclave-Vision 2022, Modi put forth five challenges and asked for roadmaps with measurable targets to be prepared within 100 days towards fulfilling the vision of New India by 2022.
- The five challenges included:
 - * How will the CPSEs increase their Geo Strategic Reach?
 - * How to reduce India's import bill?
 - * How to coordinate for innovation and research?
 - * How to use CSR funds for bringing the 115 aspirational districts on par with national indices?
 - * What new model they have to offer for the development of New India?

New India Ratnas

This was for the first time in 75 years that a conclave of all CPSEs was held. The PM outlined three mantras for CPSEs - incentives, imagination and institution building in order to bring about a transformation.

- PM Modi also tasked the companies to prepare measurable targets to integrate innovation and research of all CPSEs for better outcome, a road map by PSUs to optimally utilise their CSR funds and prepare a new development model for the country.

Contribution of PSUs

The share of CPSEs in net value addition as a ratio to the GDP stood at 4.63% in 2016-17, against 4.12% in 2015-16. CPSEs contributed more than Rs 3.85 lakh crore to the central exchequer in FY17 by way of taxes, interest, dividend, etc, up 40% year-on-year.

Competition between PSUs of China and India

- In recent years, the competition between PSUs of China and India have intensified overseas for commodities such as crude and minerals.
- With India's merchandise trade in deficit, Modi asked CPSEs to prepare an action plan to reduce their import bills by 10-15% annually.
- These firms' foreign exchange outgo on imports rose 19.2% year-on-year to Rs 3.61 lakh crore in 2016-17.
- Modi asked the executives to deliberate on the ways to improve the CPSEs' return on equity (RoE) from the present level of around 11%, which was much lower than their private sector peers.

- He also asked the CPSEs to increase the share of MSMEs in their procurement from the current level of 19% and timely release payments to these smaller units, which play an important role in job creation. He also asked the CPSEs to gear up to meet challenges posed by disruptive technologies.

The government is drawing up a plan for the CPSEs, in what could signal its intent to revamp these units so that they can more efficiently contribute to the economy and nation building.

The overall net profit of 257 operating CPSEs went up by 11.7% to Rs 1.27 lakh crore in FY17. They recorded a turnover of more than Rs 19.5 lakh crore, 6.5% higher over the previous year.

29. Adilabad Dokra

- Adilabad Dokra, an ancient bell metal craft popular in the tribal regions of Adilabad district in Telangana
- The uniqueness of this art form is that no two sculptures are the same, as they are not made out of a pre-designed cast.
- The craftsmen of this art form belong to the Woj community, commonly referred to as Wojaris or Ohjas in the rural areas of Telangana.
- They use brass as their main material and an ancient casting technique called 'cire perdue'.
- As part of this technique, the craftsmen use clay and design a model of the sculpture that they want to create. They wrap the clay with wax threads before baking the mould, so that the wax melts away and the molten metal is poured into the mould.
- The common items made by the craftsmen include small idols and statues of tribal deities, jewellery, bells, small-scale animal sculptures and others.

30. Bullet Trains

- The 508km-long Mumbai to Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) is scheduled for completion in December 2023.
- The train will have top speeds of 320-350 km per hour and it is expected to reduce travel time between the two cities to around 2 hours from the existing 7-8 hours.

Funding

- To fund the ambitious Rs 1,10,000-crore project, a loan of Rs 88,000 crore will be taken from Japan. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will fund it at a low rate of interest of 0.1% per annum. This loan has to be repaid to Japan in 50 years, with 15 years grace period.

Passengers will have two speed options in trains:

- High-speed: It will take 2.58 hours to reach the destination
- Rapid high-speed: It will cover the distance in 2.07 hours.

Second bullet train project

- The Indian Railways will launch the country's second high-speed train from Delhi to Amritsar via Chandigarh.
- The proposed train will cover the 458-km-long route in 2 hours and 30 minutes running at a speed of 300-350 kmph, reducing the travel time between New Delhi and Amritsar by about two and a half hours.

NO

- The Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train is a vanity project which has little or no justification on the grounds of economic viability or public service

Costs

- The Mumbai-Ahmedabad HSR costs around ₹1 lakh crore. Estimates in the project report by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad show that at least 1 lakh passengers at fares of ₹4,000-₹5,000 would be required daily for the project to break even.
- The tariff is too high — air fares between the two cities are around ₹2,500.
- Subsidies appear inevitable. Subsidies for agriculture, education and healthcare are taboo, but subsidies for the rich seem unproblematic.

Global experience

- South Korea's Seoul-Busan HSR caters to almost 70% of the population yet struggles with viability.
- France's fabled Paris-Lyon HSR service has had to periodically receive substantial subsidies.
- Taiwan's \$14 billion HSR service between Taipei and Tainan virtually became bankrupt after losses of over \$1 billion.
- Argentina gave up on HSR ambitions on cost grounds, deciding instead to upgrade its entire railway system to medium-speed infrastructure, an option India should seriously consider. Even the U.S. is tentatively initiating a San Francisco-Los Angeles corridor, and is still unsure about the densely populated industrial-commercial Philadelphia-Boston-New York-Washington DC corridor.
- Turkey's Ankara-Istanbul HSR line is the only example from a middle-income country, and the jury is still out on its viability.
- China is, of course, an exception, as it is in most things. It is known that fares have been revised downwards many times to match passenger pockets, and that the railways have run up an internal debt of over \$300 billion.

Yes

- It is unfortunate that despite being the third largest railway network in the world, in terms of kilometres of track and the number of passengers who travel, India does not have a single high-speed corridor. There are 15 countries worldwide in the exclusive high-speed rail fraternity.

Safety First

- Comparing the investment in the bullet train project with investment in renovation and upgradation of conventional railways is odious. These investments are not comparable as these are not alternative choices at all.
- Both dimensions are necessary and we should take a cue from China which has developed a network of 22,000 km of HSR over the past 15 years. It plans to expand it to 30,000 km by 2020.

Other benefits

- Unlike air travel, which is expensive and less energy-efficient, bullet trains will make the stations en route hubs for economic and industrial growth.
 - * Shorter distances i.e within 350 km can be better serviced because of absence of air connectivity in this segment and higher travel time. Bullet trains can plug this gap.
- HSR also means de-congestion of metropolitan cities as traffic will be diverted from road to rail.
- It will increase investment in infrastructure, ignite the economy
- The government said it will create around 15 lakh new jobs in India.
- A dedicated High-Speed Rail Training Institute will train about 4,000 technical staff of the bullet train project
- This deal has geostrategic meaning. Earlier Japan had lost with China in export of Bullet trains in Thailand and Indonesia. This deal is diplomatic win for Japan.

Challenges

- The project is now slated to cost ₹110,000 crore. A very conservative estimate shows that the project cost will go up by about ₹40,000 crore.
- Another dampener could be a time overrun in the project due to a long-drawn process for land acquisition.
- Number of stations: Demand for more stations would increase the catchment and reduce the average speed due to higher number of stops. One option is to have different service categories like fast (stopping at all stations) and super-fast (only at major cities).
- Efficient bus services as well as accessible parking lots for private vehicles should be provided and end point connectivity should also be looked into.
- If there is not enough ridership the whole project will be a white elephant for the already cash strapped railways

31. Draft National Energy Storage Mission**Context**

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has set up the Energy Storage Expert Committee to propose creation of the National Energy Storage Mission for India.

- The draft National Energy Storage Mission expects to kick-start grid-connected energy storage in India, set up a regulatory framework, and encourage indigenous manufacture of batteries
- The mission will focus on seven verticals: indigenous manufacturing; an assessment of technology and cost trends; a policy and regulatory framework; financing, business models and market creation; research and development; standards and testing; and grid planning for energy storage.

Issues

- Solar energy generation may be at its peak at noon, but unless stored, it will not be available when needed
- Renewable sources are inherently intermittent: there are days when the wind doesn't blow or the sky is cloudy

So, Batteries could help store surplus energy during peak generation times

The NITI Aayog has proposed a three-stage solution for promoting battery manufacturing in the country

- The incentives on offer include land grants for direct awarding of land free of charge or at highly discounted cost to companies to develop manufacturing capacity
- Sales and use tax exemptions, or tax credits per job created and lowering the number of permits required or making them available through just one or two "clearing house" agencies by lowering bureaucratic hurdles have also been proposed
- Before scaling up the battery manufacturing facilities, the NITI Aayog has insisted on developing a common technological roadmap for the battery manufacturing industry.
 - * This will allow consistency and easier adoption of the electric vehicles with minimal modifications in charging stations.

Significance

- We need a viable commercial plan for storing renewable energy and we will be able to significantly cut down import of fossil fuels once the storage of renewable energy is commercially viable.

Challenges

- Low mineral reserves
 - * India has small reserves of key minerals required for lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries.
 - * In Li-ion batteries, cathode materials vary, but common formulations include minerals such as lithium, aluminium, cobalt, manganese, and nickel, while the anode is made of graphite.
 - * India does not have reserves of some of the most important Li-ion components including lithium, cobalt, nickel, nor, for that matter, of the copper used in conductors, cables, and busbars

- High perceived risk
 - * Due to the uncoordinated efforts by different stakeholder groups and the relatively nascent stage of battery manufacturing in India, investment risks in this sector are considered to be high.
- Lack of coordination among stakeholders
 - * Strong coordination between various stakeholder groups in cell manufacturing and battery assembly can support the development of a robust and competitive battery manufacturing supply chain in India.

32. Liquidity crisis

- This refers to a situation where an individual, a business or a government is unable to gather enough cash to meet its payment obligations to lenders.
- A liquidity crisis is different from a solvency crisis where the total value of an entity's assets is less than the value of its overall liabilities.
- A business facing a liquidity crisis may be unable to meet its liabilities in a timely manner, but the value of its assets may still be much greater than that of its liabilities.
- In some cases, the inability to meet its immediate obligations can force a business to sell its assets at low prices to raise immediate cash. Such a fire sale of assets can end up threatening its solvency.

33. Nanar refinery

Background

- India's three public sector oil companies — Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum — in June 2017 signed an agreement to build one of the world's largest integrated refinery-cum-petrochemicals complexes in Ratnagiri district.
- When completed by 2022, the Rs3-trillion complex at Nanar - West Coast Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited - will be the world's biggest single-location oil refinery project with a capacity to process 60 million tonnes annually.

Current Status

- This consortium of the three oil companies signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) for setting up the project.

Incidents from the past

This is not the first project in Konkan that is strongly opposed by the local people.

- In the early nineties, it was the Dabhol Power Company, then set up by now defunct US energy major Enron. The energy plant became a major political issue with several villagers opposing acquisition of land
- The Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project, an Indo-French joint initiative, is also delayed due to the opposition by the local people.

Concerns

- Land has always been a sensitive issue because of the low amount of land holding per family, people are often reluctant to part with land for any government project. The long-pending work of expansion of Mumbai-Goa highway is a classic example.
- Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg belt has a significant number of people relying on horticulture. Pollution caused by such projects will destroy the same, they fear.
- The refinery is proposed close to Devgad area, which is famous alphonso (hapus) mango and one can see acres and acres of mango orchards in this area.

34. Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan

- It is aimed at building infrastructure and stepping up initiatives for e-governance.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the scheme on National Panchayati Raj Day on April 24.
- The scheme will focus on training, building infrastructure, stepping up initiatives for e-governance under the e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP)
- The scheme will extend to all states and Union Territories and will also include institutions of rural local government in non-Part IX areas, where panchayats do not exist.
- Under the Ministry of Panchayat Raj

Funding

- The sharing ratio for the state components will be 60:40 barring the Northeast and hilly states where it will be 90:10
- For UTs, the central share will be 100 per cent.
- The total proposed cost of the scheme is Rs 7255.50 crore

Actionsoft - Mobile Application

- As part of this initiative, a mobile application ActionSoft has been developed for field-level reporting and monitoring of physical progress of the works undertaken by the panchayats.
- This mobile application captures the geographical coordinates and photo of each asset at different stages of work for the activities included under the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).

Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Award

- A new award "Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) Award" has been introduced this year.
- It will be conferred on three-gram panchayats with the best planning across the country.
- Recognizing the fact that it is important to motivate panchayats and individuals, the ministry has laid emphasis on incentivizing the good performing panchayats through the system of annual awards in various thematic areas.

Local Government Directory Application

- A Local Government Directory Application developed by the Rural Development Ministry will be released for wide usage across all ministries to ensure interoperability across their databases.
- The directory will have unique codes for villages, panchayats and blocks.

Impact:

- The approved scheme of RGSA will help more than 2.55 lakh Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to develop governance capabilities to deliver on SDGs through inclusive local governance with focus on optimum utilisation of available resources.
- The key principles of SDGs, i.e. leaving no one behind, reaching the farthest first and universal coverage, along with gender equality will be embedded in the design of all capacity building interventions including trainings, training modules and materials.
- Priority will be given to subjects of national importance that affects the excluded groups the most, e.g. poverty, primary health services, nutrition, immunization, sanitation, education, water conservation, digital transactions etc.
- The scheme is designed keeping in view programmatic convergence with Mission Antyodaya GPs and 115 Aspirational districts as identified by NITI Aayog. As Panchayats have representation of Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and women, and are institutions closest to the grassroots, strengthening Panchayats will promote equity and inclusiveness, along with Social Justice and economic development of the community.
- Increased use of e-governance by PRIs will help achieve improved service delivery and transparency. The scheme will strengthen Gram Sabhas to function as effective institutions with social inclusion of citizens particularly the vulnerable groups.
- It will establish the institutional structure for capacity building of PRIs at the national, state and district level with adequate human resources and infrastructure. Panchayats will progressively be strengthened through incentivization on the basis of nationally important criteria which will encourage competitive spirit among them.

35. Warangal dhurries**Context**

- Geographical Indication (GI) tag has been awarded to the world famous Kothawada durries (jampakanas or cotton rugs).

Details

- In this style of durries, weavers create beautiful patterns and dye them using vegetable colours, which are washed in flowing water after the printing process.
- Warangal district became a renowned hub for weaving these rugs due to the availability of cotton, which is grown by farmers in the area.

- Bright colours, geometrically repetitive patterns and interlocking zigzag motifs in cotton and jute are the signature styles of the carpets.
- This handloom and hand-knotted durries has buyers in Japan, Australia, Germany, England and America.

Matter of Pride

- Interestingly, for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, two carpets woven in silk were sent from Warangal. They held a place of pride among over one lakh exhibits, which included the fabled Koh-i-Noor diamond.
- Today, the bright red and yellow carpets are housed in London's Victoria and Albert Museum.

Issue Area

- There are 3,000 families in Kothawada who are still part of the age-old tradition, but their income is getting progressively more meagre.
- TSCO (Telangana State Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society) is the sole buyer of our durries at present and they have asked weavers to reduce production as they are unable to find a market for products.
- The state government boasts of the mega textile park in Warangal which is bringing foreign companies, but it has failed to provide a platform for local weavers to survive.
- The mega textile park is meant for big companies with power looms. It has nothing to do with handloom weavers

Way forward

- The GI tag may be the final hope for traditional weavers to promote their products in India and abroad
- The Centre must exempt these durries from GST. That will make it affordable for the consumer and increase the market for weavers

36. Shale Gas

- Shale gas & oil is defined as natural gas & oil from shale formations.

Shale Gas extraction

- Shale gas and oil are unconventional natural resources found at 2,500-5,000 m below the earth's surface, as compared to conventional crude oil found at 1,500 m.
- The process of extracting shale oil and gas requires deep vertical drilling followed by horizontal drilling.
- The most common way to extract shale gas is 'hydraulic fracturing' (fracking), where high volumes of water mixed with certain chemicals are pushed down to break the rocks and release the trapped energy minerals.

Government policy

- India has an estimated 96 trillion cubic feet of recoverable shale gas reserves

- Because of its benefits, shale gas is being perceived by some as a 'saviour' of humanity. Fracking seems an attractive tool, both politically and economically.
- To gain such benefits, the government introduced a policy on shale gas and oil in 2013, permitting national oil companies to engage in fracking.
- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) has identified six basins as potentially shale gas bearing. These are Cambay, Assam-Arakan, Gondwana, Krishna-Godavari, Kaveri and the Indo-Gangetic plain.

Criticism

- However, environmental groups have strongly criticised this move, which they say will have adverse environmental impacts.
- Countries like Germany and France and subnational governments like Scotland have banned fracking.

Positives

- Fracking is bound to have positive economic and political impacts.
- In the U.S., where shale gas has been commercially exploited for two decades, the prices of fuel and electricity have dropped.
- Recent negotiations between the Secretary of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and American shale producers to control oil production and prices show that the U.S. has gained significant political advantage.
- Similarly, if India commercially exploits shale deposits, it could meet its ever-increasing energy demand, decrease oil and gas imports, and improve the balance of payments.
- More than half a million new jobs exist because of shale gas.
- shale gas also comes with a smaller GHG footprint than coal

Guar gum

- The other interesting contribution to shale gas development in the U.S. is the export of guar gum from India, which helps in improving the viscosity and flow of water in the fracking process.
- The gum is extracted from guar ki phalli, grown mainly by farmers in Rajasthan and Haryana. Earlier, guar gum was used mainly as an additive in ice creams and sauces, but with the discovery of its use in shale gas extraction, its production has risen enormously, earning almost \$5 billion during the period from April 2012 to January 2013.

Negatives

- Pumping hydraulic fracturing (fracking) fluids, which could contain hazardous chemicals, into the ground along with water and sand at high pressures. The result is "a super-salty brine, prone to bacterial growth, and potentially contaminated with heavy metals

- The large amount of water needed to drill for shale can affect water availability for other uses, potentially impacting aquatic habitats
- Improperly treated wastewater has been found discharged into river basins, polluting the surrounding environment
- Drilling can disrupt lives, including heightened noise levels aided by the transportation of materials, construction of facilities and drilling process itself; deterioration of air quality with the rise of diesel fumes; and implications of potentially destroying communities' access to clean water, including additional costs and efforts to transport and store water sourced from elsewhere.
- TERI's own study in 2010, 'Looking Back to Think Ahead', demonstrates that India is already a water-stressed country, it is evident that potential shale gas bearing areas, such as Cambay, Gondwana, Krishna-Godavari, and the Indo-Gangetic plains are also areas that will experience severe water stress by 2030.

Legal hurdles

- The Supreme Court of India has ruled that every person has the right to enjoy pollution-free water and air. It is also an established principle that the state holds its natural resources in trust for the benefit of the people, and has the duty to protect these resources from harm.
 - * If the risk from fracking to underground water materialises, courts can hold the state responsible for it, stop the activity, and order other corrective and preventive measures.
- Another hurdle that fracking might face is the 'precautionary principle', which has been incorporated into law. It dictates that where there is a significant risk to the environment or human health, precautionary measures must be undertaken, irrespective of any scientific uncertainty.
 - * Therefore, even though some scholars might contest the above-mentioned risks posed by fracking, the government would be obliged to adopt measures to reduce those risks.

In the light of the risks involved, the government should impose a moratorium on fracking. Unless, there is some revolutionary technological breakthrough, which does not need the use of fresh water and chemicals, it is vital that we seriously ask ourselves this question: Should we further endanger a rapidly depleting resource on which all life depends? The answer should be a resounding "NO", and instead the focus must be on removing the bottlenecks in CBM exploration and production while safeguarding the environment.

37. U.S. Trade Representative again places India on 'watch list'

- The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative has once again placed India on 'Priority Watch List' in its annual Special 301 Report on the state of intellectual property protection.

- * Office of US Trade representative (USTR) prepares a list of countries, whose IPR regime has negative impact on American products.

- * Section 306: US government can put sanctions on such countries listed under Section 301 report

- The report has slammed the Indian health ministry for "creating uncertainty in the pharmaceutical market" by demanding that pharmaceutical companies provide details of how they were using the granted patents.

Why is it placed?

- India remains on the Priority Watch List for long-standing challenges in its IP framework and lack of sufficient measurable improvements, particularly with respect to patents, copyrights, trade secrets, and enforcement, as well as for new issues that have negatively affected U.S. right holders
- The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) has also demanded the elimination of 'Form 27'—a statutory requirement unique to India's patent law that mandates patent holders to declare how a monopoly is being exercised in the country.
- The report called India's implementation of the patent act as restrictive because of threat emanating from compulsory licensing and patent revocations

Support for India

- Humanitarian aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said report has unfairly targeted India at the urging of pharmaceutical corporations as the country is the "pharmacy of the developing world" and supplies affordable quality generic medicines globally.
- At a time when people all over the world are struggling to afford their medicines, it's outrageous that the U.S. government is doing pharma's bidding and bullying other countries into taking actions that would restrict generic competition and limit access to affordable, lifesaving drugs.

38. The elephant in the Patent Office

Patents

- The first step that pharmaceutical corporations take on discovering an entirely new drug is to secure intellectual property rights for it in the form of a patent.
- A primary patent, covering a new molecular/chemical entity, rewards innovation with a free reign over the marketplace for a period of 20 years, which is the term of the patent.
- Once this expires, generics enter the fray with cheaper versions and compete in this lucrative marketplace to drive prices down. One would expect innovators to do what they do best—innovate—going back to cranking out the next life-saving drug.

- Innovators instead seek to reset the 20-year clock by subsequently filing patents that are minor variants of the parent compound, called secondary patents.
- This practice, known as evergreening, allows a prolonged monopoly that unfairly denies the public access to medicines at equitable prices

India's Tough Patent laws

- The Indian Patent Office (IPO) has set an example of having one of the toughest standards in the world to distinguish real innovation from trivial tweaks — a change brought about by the introduction of the anti-evergreening provisions in the Patents Act.
- India hit the headlines when it incorporated certain anti-evergreening provisions such as Sections 3(d), 3(e) and 3(i) into the Patents Act to restrict patentability of a host of secondary patents — essentially alternative forms of already existing patented drugs aimed at further extending their term of protection.
- These provisions together with the decision of the Supreme Court in the Novartis case have shown us a way forward to have access to affordable medicines.
- Through these provisions, India is leading by example for other developing countries such as Brazil, the Philippines, Argentina and South Africa.

Expeditious approval of patents- Pharmaceutical Patent Grants in India Study

- However, the IPO has now been focusing on granting patents expeditiously and reducing the backlog of pending applications.
- Newly recruited examiners have been sending in examination reports rapidly in a race to reduce the examination timeline and increase the grant rate.
- An analysis of pharmaceutical patent applications suggests that the IPO is operating at an error rate as high as 72%, which corresponds to all secondary patents granted by the IPO. In short, seven out of 10 patents granted by the IPO are likely granted in error.
- In the last two decades, the IPO has granted 1,654 secondary patents, of which 91% were directed to formulations, compositions and combinations.
- Much of these would come under the purview of
 - * Section 3(d), which covers “combinations and other derivatives of known substance”,
 - * Section 3(e), which covers “substance obtained by a mere admixture resulting only in the aggregation of the properties of the components or a process for producing such substance”.

Escape Channel

- Whenever an objection is raised under these sections, the law requires the applicant to submit efficacy data for the former and demonstrate synergism for the later.
 - * While Section 3(d) sets the bar high for secondary patents with the mandated requirement for clinical evidence, others such as Section 3(e) set less well-defined thresholds.

- They would direct the attention of the IPO to another provision which has traditionally governed the grant of patents for combinations—Section 3(e).
- Section 3(e) stipulates a requirement of demonstrating synergy (of any property, not solely therapeutic) where the invention is an admixture of known substances.
- The possible explanations are: demonstrating synergy under Section 3(e) is a relatively easier exercise compared to the requirements of efficacy data under Section 3(d), as mandated by the Supreme Court in the Novartis case.
- Second, Section 3(d) is being interpreted narrowly by the courts and the IPO to apply only to a new form of a known substance, and not to combinations and compositions involving known substances.
- Section 3(i) of the Act categorically excludes methods of treatments from the purview of patent protection.
 - * But a total of 63 patents were granted for methods of treating an individual for a disease, specifying a particular dosage regimen or a mode of administering a drug.
 - * However, though statutorily barred, such patents were granted by clever drafting and legal argument.

Issues in set precedence

- To remove the applicability of Section 3(d) in cases where combinations are involved, patent applicants rely on the decision of the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB) in Ajanta Pharma Ltd v. Allergan Inc, which also finds mention in the 2014 IPO guidelines for examination of pharmaceutical patent applications.
- However, in this case, the issue of applicability of Section 3(e) was not considered as the patent was rejected on other grounds.
- Moreover, a mere passing observation made by the IPAB cannot be considered as a binding authority as such a narrow interpretation of Section 3(d) would defeat the objective of the section.

Way forward

- Keeping in mind the widespread practice in the pharmaceutical industry of creating new compositions/combinations, it should be given an expansive meaning to cover combinations with other substances and at the same time the IPO should steer its focus towards grant of quality patents than on the quantity.

39. Aviation Market in India

- India is poised to become the world's third-biggest aviation market in seven years with more than 20% growth, after China and the U.S.
- To meet demand, Indian carriers have placed orders for 1,000 aircraft worth more than ₹10 lakh crore; and, more than 6,000 planes would be needed by 2050. In 2017, Indian carriers flew 117.18 million domestic passengers marking an 18% growth over 2016.

High growth

- This market is to grow to 250 million by FY23, according to CAPA, an aviation advisory firm. Boeing has forecast that the Indian market would need 2,100 new planes valued at \$290 billion by 2036. Airbus has said the Indian civil aviation market will grow by 8.1% for next 20 years which is above the world average of 4.4%.
- Union Minister for Civil Aviation Suresh Prabhu had said last week a task force would soon be set up for the manufacture of commercial planes in India. The move is intended to encourage local manufacture, create jobs and prevent the outflow of foreign exchange.

Is India, a country whose per capita GDP is \$1,700 (lower than China's \$8,123), capable of manufacturing high-end planes?

- There has been no emphatic 'yes' from any quarter, but that it can produce a viable aircraft in the future is something analysts agree upon.
- In India, only Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., the public sector unit, has forayed into the manufacture of the 19-seater Dornier 228 which can be deployed in regional sectors. Similarly Taneja Aerospace has been assembling planes for years but with limited commercial success.
- What is needed a serious and time-bound approach to encourage and develop a viable and futuristic aircraft manufacturing programme to at least reach the level achieved by Brazil which has developed and sustained the Embraer programme, breaking the glass ceiling.
- The government needs to enforce a robust government-private collaboration to take Indian aerospace manufacturing to the next level. Even the biggest aerospace powers do not have any aircraft that is 100% built in their country.
- The level of sophistication and specialisation that exists in aerospace requires sourcing of components and subsystems from all across the world.
- So far, the world has had only two major manufacturers of commercial planes and less than a handful making small aircraft. This speaks volumes for the entry barrier to successfully make and sell planes.

China began in the 1980s

- However, Sweden, Japan, Brazil and China have sustained their aerospace industries in the face of competition from the big two.
- China started investing in its aerospace ecosystem in the '80s, when it started manufacturing the MD-82, the results of which we are seeing today in the form of COMAC C919, ARJ-21 and the AVIC AG600.
- Component manufacturing in India is currently limited to a few players who have become reliable suppliers for global OEMs. The Tatas, UTAS, Dynamatic and Aecus are examples.

- In the private sector, the Mahindra group manufactures aircraft, but abroad. The Tata Group has also invested in aerospace. Tata Advanced Systems is into aerostructures. With three programmes in operation, it aims to become a global supplier of choice for OEMs.
- The company is assembling Sikorsky S92 helicopter cabins and has a joint venture with Lockheed Martin for assembly of C-130J Empennage and centre Wind-box. Another Tata Group company TAL Manufacturing Solutions makes floor beams for Boeing's 787 Dreamliner aircraft.

The government is now providing the right impetus to address this growth. The broad roadmap comprises three elements: to expand airport infrastructure; the Make in India incentive for manufacturing in India; and, to revitalise the MRO industry in India through fiscal incentives.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. '2+2' Ministerial Dialogue

- It is a dialogue between the defence and external affairs ministers of India and US
- Trump and Modi agreed to enhance peace and stability in the India-Pacific region by establishing a new two-by-two ministerial dialogue, which would elevate their strategic consultations
- This 2+2 replaces the strategic and commercial 2+2 that India and the US had been holding for a few years earlier, involving the defence and commerce ministries in discussions focussed on expanding defence and bilateral trade ties.

2. Border Personnel Meeting point

- Border Personnel Meeting points are locations along the disputed Sino-Indian border where the armies of both countries hold ceremonial and practical meetings to resolve border issues and improve relations.
- Border meetings have been held since the 1990s, the first formal Border Personnel Meeting point was established in 2013
- There are five meeting points, two in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, one in Sikkim, and two in Arunachal Pradesh.

Context

- Chinese military strongly protested against the Indian Army's transgression into the strategically sensitive Asaphila area along the disputed border in Arunachal Pradesh, but India rejected the complaint.

3. Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data Act (CLOUD Act)

- This act will enable the U.S. government to enter into agreements with like-minded states for cross-border data sharing.

How will this help?

- This will allow law enforcement agencies from states to directly obtain electronic data, held by communication service providers headquartered in the U.S., to combat crime.

Data are often rendered inaccessible, largely due to two reasons.

- One, popular service providers increasingly store electronic communications in the cloud, breaking the data into "shards" and distributing the data across different countries. While these companies offer services in India, they do not store the data locally.
- Two, the current U.S. law prohibits service providers from disclosing user data to foreign law enforcement agencies.

Experience in the past

- India in the first half of 2017 requested data from Facebook 9,853 times, of which only 54.3% were met.
- Companies like Facebook, however, can directly respond only to requests for "basic subscriber information" — that is, data that a user provides at the time of signing up for a service (name, email address, etc.).
- Indian law enforcement officials often point out that the police need access to more information on the user, such as the content of an online conversation, to further their investigations.

Issue area in accessing information

- Currently, an officer in India would have to make a request for electronic data under the India-U.S. Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty to access content data held by a U.S. company. This process has often been criticised by the Indian police for being time consuming, sometimes even taking as long as three years, as well as being cumbersome and outdated.

Advantage of cloud act

- With the enactment of the CLOUD Act, an Indian officer for the purposes of an investigation will no longer have to make a request to the U.S. government but can approach the company directly.

4. Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)

- It is a United States federal law that imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea, and Russia
- The CAATSA includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with the Russian defence and intelligence sectors.

Agenda of USA

- CAATSA is aimed at every country that has military and energy connections with Russia.
- U.S. claims it is a strategic motive but commercial objectives cannot be denied. With these the US also wants countries to knock the doors of USA rather than Russia.

India's View

- Both at the Foreign Secretary level and in the U.S., India has conveyed that the sanctions cannot impinge its relations with Russia, especially military acquisitions
- A senior MOD source pointed out that if U.S. seeks to unsettle India-Russia ties it wouldn't mean the U.S. will gain out of it through arms deals. "Today we have multiple options, from France to Israel. It would be better for the U.S. not to try and scuttle our strongest military ties"

U.S. Position

- At least two senior U.S. defence officials have conveyed to India in no uncertain terms that India would not be immune to the proposed sanctions under CAATSA.
- According to Section 231 of CAATSA, any country or entity that carries out “transactions with the intelligence or defence sectors” of the Russian government would face sanctions from the U.S.
- A top US admiral has warned Congress against imposing any sanctions on countries like India and Indonesia for purchasing defence equipment from Russia, saying any such move would pose a concern for America’s defence ties in the Indo-Pacific and increase its partners’ dependence on Moscow.

5. Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

- It is a biennial (every two years) summit meeting of the heads of government from all Commonwealth nations.
- Every two years the meeting is held in a different member state and is chaired by that nation’s respective Prime Minister or President who becomes the Commonwealth Chair-in-Office until the next meeting.
- The first CHOGM was held in 1971

‘CW offers counterpoint to protectionism’**Context**

- The Commonwealth offers a counterpoint to rising forces of protectionism globally said British Prime Minister Theresa May

Comment

- Global growth remained “fragile” faced with challenges such as protectionism and new technology, which created and supplanted jobs across industries.
- British would fund for a new Commonwealth Standards Network, which will help member-states meet international standards and cut the costs of trade across the community.

New impetus

- Forums are taking place in London for business, on gender equality, youth empowerment, and the role of civil society, ahead of the meeting of heads of governments, which its champions hope will give the Commonwealth new impetus

India’ Role

- India’s engagement with multilateral bodies has been increasing consistently and the Commonwealth is no different. There is a clear desire to play a greater leadership role in the international arena and the UK wants India, as the largest country in the Commonwealth, to take on a more important role within the organisation

- According to the ‘Commonwealth Trade Review 2018’, India is the top recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) from within the Commonwealth and is the second-most lucrative source of investment within the organisation.

- * Between 2005 and 2016, India remained the top recipient of Greenfield FDI from the Commonwealth, more than doubling the amount it received over 10 years.

Commonwealth Innovation Hub

- This brings Commonwealth organisations together in the same location to create a collaborative, dynamic and innovative way of working.
- It is aimed at providing a tool that allows member states, organisations and citizens to benchmark themselves against 53 countries of the Commonwealth, with the new innovation hub offering a dedicated online space for Commonwealth countries to showcase what they have to offer and share with other members.
- It has been created in partnership with the United Nations World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and its annual Global Innovation Index (GII).

Global Innovation Fund (GIF)

- GIF will work as the delivery partner to host a new Commonwealth Innovation Fund (CIF), which will use GIF’s existing due diligence processes for sourcing, evaluating and investing to generate a high-quality portfolio of enterprises that are aligned with the Commonwealth Secretariat’s priorities.
- The GIF will manage the fund and its investments, which will be targeted at innovative projects across Commonwealth countries that “save and improve lives”.
- The CIF will deploy grant, equity and debt investments to support innovators across the Commonwealth to accelerate the development, testing and scaling up of evidence-based and market-tested innovations.
- The target size of the new fund, with financial commitments from member-countries, is expected to be 25 million pounds of initial funds to prove the new model.

Index Ranking April 2018

- India was today ranked 10th on a new Commonwealth Innovation Index, topped by the UK, Singapore and Canada.

Sustainable growth should be a goal**Context**

- Prime Minister Modi says interests of small island states should be on the Commonwealth’s agenda

Details

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced doubling of India’s contribution to the Commonwealth fund for technical cooperation and stressed the need to focus on providing developmental assistance to small island states

- India is going to help these small island states and coastal states in capacity building through training programmes at the National Institute Of Oceanography in Goa
- The main issues discussed at session were strengthening democracy and the rule of law, the state of the international trading system, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate action, and security issues faced by the Commonwealth countries.
- the prime minister highlighted a number of important issues, including the need for working together for achieving SDGs and cooperation on climate action

Other Areas

- The prime minister also announced that with the help of the BCCI, India would organise cricket training for 30 young boys and 30 young girls under the age of 16.

India's Commonwealth

History

- When Jawaharlal Nehru decided to join the Commonwealth after Independence, voices on the left, right and centre expressed deep discomfort with what they saw as a needless affiliation with the former colonial power. Nehru, however, stood steadfast in his commitment to the Commonwealth. For him, it was a valuable political and economic link to a major Western power during the Cold War.
- While both Indira and Rajiv saw some utility in India's membership of the Commonwealth, the fact remains that India's growing divergence with Britain and the West during the Cold War and an inward economic orientation severely limited Delhi's possibilities with the forum.
- In any case, as Britain itself turned to Europe, the Commonwealth began to lose much of its lustre in London.

Post LPG

- When India opened up to the world, politically and economically, after the Cold War, Delhi could have made something out of the Commonwealth.
- But with its focus on the US and China on the one hand and South Asia on the other, the Commonwealth simply fell off India's mental map.

At a moment when its global interests are expanding, the pragmatists in Delhi argue, India must make the best use of all available multilateral forums, including the Commonwealth.

Significance for India

- From the Indian perspective, the Commonwealth offers opportunities to reach out to small states that make up around 60% of Commonwealth members. In some of these states, India has no diplomatic presence, and forging relations with these countries could help India secure crucial votes during UN or multilateral contests it is involved in

- India also views the Commonwealth as a counterpoint to China, and its expanding influence in Indian ocean region

Its relevance

- Digitization has made the slogan "round the clock and round the world" possible for the Commonwealth through a Programme called Commonwealth Connects.
 - * The Programme offers a new network of services, a centre of expertise and resources for finding solutions to bridge the digital divide within the Commonwealth.
 - * It also aims at developing ways to share the Commonwealth's vast ICT wealth and expertise to assist those countries that need it most.
 - * One of them is Common Health, a dedicated Web platform to advance public health and the leading health hub after the World Health Organisation
- It has accommodated Big-ticket ideas such as the Multilateral Debt Swap and the Climate Finance Access hub for Climate Action.
- Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) is tasked with assessing and dealing with serious or persistent violations of the core values represented in the charter.
- The Commonwealth straddles the North-South divide in the world with an immense diversity of races, religions, cultures, geographical spread and stages of development. It is thus a useful forum for dialogue and promoting understanding on global issues and forging consensus on a smaller scale than the UN.
- It leads in citizen and governance initiatives — whether in the fields of climate change, youth development, health, and electoral oversight.
- there are more than 80 intergovernmental, civil society, cultural and professional Commonwealth organisations that work on behalf of Commonwealth citizens across specialist areas from education to urban planning and nursing
- Commonwealth Games ignites passion and Sportsmanship and helps in bringing recognition to sports personality across different paths of life
- The group gives smaller states a voice in international politics and influence in diplomatic circles they might not otherwise have.

Issue Area

- CHOGM, unlike the European Union, is a loose organisation that meets rather sparsely and when it does come together it is more about bringing together men and women in their national costumes for a group photo.

- The diversion of the Commonwealth's budget from developmental to political goals has also brought out the divide between the developing and developed countries, raising questions whether the Commonwealth is losing relevance for a majority of its members.
- The Commonwealth has hardly any geopolitical role or relevance. It is a large and somewhat anomalous club, which devotes most of its energies to maintaining its strange existence.
- Unlike the United Nations, the Commonwealth cannot impose sanctions on member states, arguably making it less powerful.
- Gambia withdrew from the Commonwealth, accusing Britain of supporting his political opponents and calling the organisation a "neo-colonial institution."

What should India avoid?

- The first is the fallacy of a reformed Commonwealth as "Empire 2.0". Britain is repositioning itself in the world after Brexit as a substitute for the European Union
 - * What matters for India is not London's motivation, but the terms of engagement that are on offer for a new British relationship with India and the Commonwealth
 - * Negotiating favorable terms is far more important for Delhi than proclaiming that the Commonwealth is a colonial relic. The debate on the Commonwealth can't be about its past. It must be about its future, especially the value of the 53-nation forum for India's international relations.
- The International Monetary Fund puts Britain's GDP in 2017 at \$2.56 trillion and India's at \$2.43 trillion. It's about time India got over the defensive mindset in relation to a former colonial power.
 - * Here, the contrast between India and China is sharp. Beijing is not arguing with London about the opium wars or Britain's leading role in China's "hundred year humiliation".
 - * Instead, they are trying to seduce Britain, especially the city of London, into China's commercial and financial orbit
- The second pitfall is the pretense that reform and renewal of the Commonwealth are only about tinkering with the status quo.
 - * One role is that of a tutor of moral science. After the end of the Cold War, the Commonwealth jumped on the bandwagon of good governance and humanitarianism.
 - * The Commonwealth can offer advice and assistance when asked. It should avoid pushing democracy and human rights down the throats of other states, as the regimes in many developing states have alternatives that did not exist earlier.
- * So, what the Commonwealth needs today is not a "prescriptive approach" on rights, but a focus on bringing greater economic prosperity for the peoples of the forum through an enhanced trade and investment relationship.
- * The Commonwealth could devote considerable energies towards the promotion of sustainable development and maritime security, which pose existential challenges to the many small and island states in the forum.
- The third pitfall is the allure of leadership
 - * India can and must do a lot of things in re-energising the Commonwealth, but claiming leadership should be the last thing. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis, instead, must be on strengthening India's contribution to the Commonwealth.
 - * India can significantly increase its levels of economic assistance, give more to the maintenance of the Secretariat, boost the current efforts on capacity building, and above all, open its economy to facilitate trade liberalisation across the Commonwealth.
- Fourth, reviving the Commonwealth is not about India taking over from Britain.
 - * It is about reordering the relationship between Delhi and London. Although the relations between India and Britain have significantly improved, Britain is yet to do what most other Western powers have done.
 - * It is to recognize that India's rise is in their own national interests. Britain has remained somewhat hesitant to align with India on the regional issues in the Subcontinent and beyond.

6. Desert Tiger 5

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Malaysia concluded "Desert Tiger 5" joint military exercise aimed at sharing expertise and enhancing joint military actions.
- The military exercise was implemented within the framework of the UAE leadership's continued desire "to support and create unique partnerships between both countries in all areas".
- The drill was also aimed at raising the level of performance and combat efficiency and working together based on a strategy to improve the overall ability and combat readiness of the ground forces.

7. India - Wiesbaden Conference

- The Ministry of External Affairs, in cooperation with the Government of Germany and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is hosting the India-Wiesbaden Conference 2018 in Delhi

- The title of the Conference is 'Securing Global Supply Chains through Government-Industry Partnerships towards Effective Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540'.
- Representatives from the Government and Industry of 39 countries, as well as experts from the UNSC 1540 Committee and UN Office for Disarmament Affairs in New York, will be participating
- The conference provides an opportunity to participants to share experiences on their export control systems and to identify legal and technical assistance, action plans and challenges in the national implementation of UNSC 1540.
- The UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) establishes legally binding obligations on all States to adopt and enforce appropriate and effective measures to prevent the proliferation to non-State actors of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their delivery systems. It requires, therefore that States implement appropriate and effective measures to prevent non-state actors such as terrorists, from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD).
- The Wiesbaden Process was initiated by the Government of Germany in 2012 to strengthen the implementation of UNSC 1540 through Government-Industry partnerships.

8. Pakistan-Afghanistan-China Economic corridor (PACE)

Advantages

- The CPEC could help Afghanistan reduce its dependence on foreign aid as well as provide both Kabul and Islamabad with an opportunity to improve ties.
- Beijing, a close Islamabad ally, has urged Pakistan and Afghanistan to improve relations, which have deteriorated in the past few years over the issue of Islamist militancy and terrorist "safe havens" inside Pakistan

Issue Area

- CPEC expansion to Afghanistan would be a difficult task mainly because Afghanistan-Pakistan relations have become hostile since President Ashraf Ghani came to power in late 2014. Both countries accuse each other of backing jihadists to undermine each other's governments.
- The inclusion of Afghanistan in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor would boost the country's economy, but its implementation will be difficult for Beijing without regional consensus and a green light from the US
- China is seeking to increase its clout in Afghanistan and Pakistan and reduce US' influence in the region. CPEC, they say, has political implications also.

Challenges

- The Afghan Taliban are in a position of strength in Afghanistan, and China would not be able to implement CPEC in the country if the militant group opposed the project.
- This could also mean that Beijing and Islamabad would have to reach a deal with the Taliban in order to ensure the security of Chinese investments in Afghanistan. But a potential China-Taliban deal is unlikely to be welcomed by Kabul and Washington.

9. Persona Non Grata

- It is a foreign person who's entering or remaining in a particular country is prohibited by that country's government.
- It is the most serious form of censure which a country can apply to foreign diplomats, who are otherwise protected by diplomatic immunity from arrest and other normal kinds of prosecution.

Rules

- Under Article 9 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, a receiving state may "at any time and without having to explain its decision" declare any member of a diplomatic staff persona non grata.
 - * A person so declared is considered unacceptable and is usually recalled to his or her home nation. If not recalled, the receiving state "may refuse to recognize the person concerned as a member of the mission"
- With the protection of mission staff from prosecution for violating civil and criminal laws, depending on rank, under Articles 41 and 42 of the Vienna Convention, they are bound to respect national laws and regulations.
 - * Breaches of these articles can lead to a persona non grata declaration being used to punish erring staff. It is also used to expel diplomats suspected of espionage or any overt criminal act such as drug trafficking.

Context

- Russia now, like the erstwhile Soviet Union, may well be the country whose diplomats have perhaps suffered the largest number of expulsions.
- The recent coordinated expulsion of over 100 Russian diplomats by more than 20 countries is huge even by the standards of the coldest days of the Cold War.
- Basically, it was an act of solidarity by the U.S., the European Union and some others with the U.K. after an alleged attempt by Russia to murder a former Russian spy and his daughter.
- Russia had denied any hand in the attempted murder, but responded with expulsions symmetrically in accordance with diplomatic practice.

India's Stand

- India takes recourse to expulsion of diplomats only in extreme circumstances when it has clear evidence of wrongdoing. When it expels diplomats, it does expect reciprocal action and accepts it as a necessary evil.

10. Sahyog –Hyeoblyeog

- It is a joint search and rescue exercise between Korea Coast Guard and India Coast Guard to strengthen the bilateral ties.
- The joint exercise is a part of the ongoing cooperative arrangements between the two coast guards since the past 12 years and as a part of the memorandum on cooperation signed by Indian and Korean Coast Guard in 2004.
- The exercise will include scenarios of the hijacking of a merchant vessel and its subsequent rescue, interdiction of a pirate vessel, cross boarding, external firefighting and the SAR (search and rescue) demonstration.

11. 11th World Hindi Conference

- The conference is scheduled to be held in Mauritius in August.
- The first memorandum of understanding between India and Mauritius to establish a World Hindi Secretariat was signed in August 1998

Background

- First World Hindi Conference was inaugurated in 1975 by then Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi organized by Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, Wardha, a voluntary organisation set up by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930s.
- There have been ten World Hindi Conferences held since then, with more regularity since the 1990s – every 3-5 years.
- The last one was held in 2015 in Bhopal.
- Incidentally, the tradition of a World Hindi Day was started by the UPA government in 2006. It has since been an annual activity in Indian missions, with sponsored quizzes and special functions.
- The MEA currently only funds the World Hindi Conference.

12. CIPB axis**Context**

- India-Pakistan rivalry, India-China hostility, souring of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations and India-China tug of war over Bangladesh has made south Asia relationship complicated.

Issues with Integration

- The big three of South Asia are caught up in a complex quagmire, both within and beyond the region.

- The remaining five — i.e. Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan — are paying the price of regional disintegration caused by unresolved puzzles having roots in the China-IPB (CIPB) axis.
- If the big three can have a strategic partnership that also factors in China, the remaining five can effortlessly fit into positive regionalism with a win-win situation for all.

Economical boost and rethinking

- IPB account for approximately 95% of South Asia's GDP and population. Along with China, they account for 18.5% of global GDP and 41% of global population.
- South Asia's intra-regional trade, currently 5% of total trade, can grow to \$80 billion from the current \$28 billion, the lion's share being within IPB.
- Pakistan and India have potential trade capacity of \$20 billion compared to the current \$3 billion.
- Underdeveloped transport and logistics services and bureaucratic procedures are deterring India-Bangladesh cross border trade, which can grow by 300%.
- The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) has a pivotal position in developing joint investment agreements but sluggish progress in infrastructural development has rendered the corridor nearly comatose

Issue Area

- Cross-border barriers and lack of transport facilitation among IPB, freight movement is taking place along expensive routes, escalating investment cost.
- Movement of trucks across the international frontier is confined by absence of cross-border agreements between India and Bangladesh and India and Pakistan.
- Rail connectivity is restricted due to technical problems of different gauges, track structures, signalling and so forth.
- Absence of a multilateral agreement has restricted the realization of the railway potential.
- India and Bangladesh have started exploring opportunities using Ashuganj inland port, regional inland waterways remain unexplored.
- Air cargo flights are encumbered by limited access to Indian airspace by Pakistan and vice-versa.

Cooperation a must in energy and water

- The supply-demand gap of power in IPB is estimated to be 18,707 MW. i
 - * To unravel the full potential, energy treaties based on renewable sources have become imperative.

- * With greater electricity generation and utilisation of domestic energy endowments, combined efforts of BCIM, CPEC and the proposed China-Nepal-India (CNI) Economic Corridor under BRI, can capitalise on regional energy potential.
- By 2050, China, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh will experience water shortages
 - * The three largest trans-boundary river basins, Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra, are all within CIPB. This represents a huge potential for water-sharing and hydro power projects across the basins, but political mistrust is an impediment.
 - * The Zangmu hydroelectricity dam, situated in the middle reaches of the Brahmaputra, has raised concerns in India over downstream water supply. This damming, along with that of the Ganga, could exacerbate Bangladesh's downstream water scarcity.
- While there exist bilateral river-water sharing treaties between India and Pakistan as well as India and Bangladesh, China is absent except for a hydrological data-sharing collaboration. China has expressed interest to pursue water-sharing treaties and the other three affected can come together in a collaborative framework. This can boost the livelihoods of millions across the region.

Tourism and educational Sector

- IPB fail to attract sufficient tourists due to poor civil aviation connectivity, complex regulations and lack of visa liberalization procedures.
- Inadequate, expensive and mediocre travelling facilities against the backdrop of pickpockets, burglary, and sexual assaults have resulted in tourists lacking interest in the region.
- Rooms that cost \$400 a night in Delhi or Mumbai would cost hardly \$100 in most parts of China.
- China is unable to attract students from South Asia against the improved facilities provided by the U.S. and U.K. Only 5% of outbound students of IPB go to China, compared to 22% to the U.S.

If these opportunities are tapped, it would enhance mobility of both tourists and students.

CIPB Axis

- So the CIPB axis is an open-ended chess game played out against cross-border conflicts. A strategic collaboration that rises to the occasion, looking beyond historical animosity and misgivings, can unlock a new era of regionalism whose benefits far outweigh negatives

Way forward

- Solving the jigsaw puzzle will need political statesmanship which will see friends and foes, living next to each other, knowing where to connect and when to disconnect. So forging a China-India-Pakistan-Bangladesh axis would be a game changer for entire South Asia

- So Politics and religion should be set aside, across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (IPB) and common sociocultural bonds and people-to-people connectivity has to be enhanced and upgraded.

13. Thousands of Indian engineers in Kuwait may get deported

Context

- Industry associations estimate that as many as 15,000-40,000 engineers could be affected by the March 11, regulation, which mandates a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the Kuwait Society of Engineers (KSOE) to get their residency and work permits.

Details

- Indian engineers are particularly aggrieved that they have to face scrutiny from the KSOE, which is not a government body, but a public benefit association. KSOE has now said that NOC will be granted only to those engineers, who have studied in colleges accredited by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA).
- The move may affect 90% of engineers in Kuwait as not even premier institutions like IITs, RECs, Anna University have NBA accreditation but have All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) or University Grants Commission (UGC).
- NBA, despite being formed in 1994, became proactive in handing out accreditations only since 2005 onwards.

Issue

- Most engineers are aged between 30-45 and graduated long before NBA got into the act. Even for the few who have degrees from NAB-accredited college — the accreditation being recent — will be of no use to them as their certificate would not reflect the same
- The issue, is more pressing for those, whose children go to local schools and have family roots for decades in the country.
- The problem faced by Indian engineers has been precipitated by the fact that the KSOE does not have the manpower to handle 300-400 applications a day.
- People line up as early as 2AM outside the office so that they can get their NOC from KSOE — to apply for resident and work permits. For a crowd of 300 plus, they issue only 60 tokens a day
- Thousands of Indian Engineers will lose their jobs and be forced to leave with their children and families. This will create financial and social turmoil and be a loss running to millions of dollars in foreign exchange to our country.
- The process will also affect the reputation of Indian engineers globally and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries may follow the line

14. India, Nepal to reset ties with rail, water links

- The two countries agreed to construct a new electrified rail line, with India's financial support, connecting the border city of Raxaul to Kathmandu in Nepal.
 - * This could be seen as an attempt by New Delhi to counter China's reported moves to build a rail link between Tibet and Kathmandu.
- Development of inland waterways
 - * It will help the movement of cargo, within the framework of trade and transit arrangements, providing additional access to sea for Nepal
- South Asia's first transnational petroleum pipeline will supply fuel from India to Nepal. The 69km pipeline from Motihari in Bihar to Amlekhganj in Nepal will deliver 2 Million Tonnes Per Annum (MTPA) of petroleum products to the fuel-starved country and will be built at a cost of around Rs200 crore.
- The two sides also decided to launch a New Partnership in Agriculture that will focus on collaborative projects in farm research and development, education, strengthening of supply and value chains, climate resilience, research in seed technology, soil health, strengthening the infrastructure of plant protection laboratories, research in indigenous genetic resources, animal husbandry, veterinary research and development facilities, agro-forestry, bio-pesticides and bio-fertilisers.

'Nepal First' policy

'Background

- Nepal's act of "stand up" against India means Nepal's engagement with China where in the past Oli headed to Beijing, soon after his visit to Delhi
- In this context standing up against India has unfortunately become an important part of Nepal's definition of sovereignty

Oli and his Policies

- During the 2017 campaign, he often targeted India, and by extension, the Madhesi who claimed support from India

What is his politics?

- At 18, he signed up for the Communist party, and was almost immediately arrested. Now an ultranationalist, he was once a part of ultra left wing plots against Nepal's elite, inspired by India's Naxal movement.
- He balances his communist beliefs with a hearty dose of religiosity, including attending all religious events and frequently quotes Sanskrit slokas. Asked whether he felt he faced more challenges ahead, Mr. Oli said he feared nothing as long as he "had the blessings of Pashupatinath."
- Perhaps as an acknowledgement to his earlier motivators Marx and Lenin, however, Mr. Oli took his oath in the name of the Nepali people, not God as is the norm, when he was sworn in as Prime Minister.

Historical Imperialism

- Delhi inherited from the Raj, the sense of paramountcy over the Subcontinent.
- The idea of protectorates worked well for both the Raj and the feudal regimes and tribal federations along the Subcontinent's periphery.
- The Raj offered economic subsidies and assured non-interference in the internal affairs of these regimes.
- In return, the feudal and tribal chieftains agreed to assist the Raj in fending off the forays of rival powers into the Subcontinent.

Power shift in the Indian Subcontinent

- This mutually beneficial arrangement was unsustainable for independent India and the notion of an exclusive sphere of influence for India in the Subcontinent was the casualty.
- The Raj was more than dominant in the Subcontinent and had the power to prevent rival powers from encroaching the glaciis surrounding fortress India.
- The partition of the Subcontinent, the US-Soviet Cold War and the emergence of a unified and strong China under communists introduced extraordinary constraints on Indian policy.
- With time Delhi was torn between aligning with the monarchies and responding to the democratic aspirations of the people in the peripheral states.
 - * One way or another, India was inevitably sucked into the internal affairs of its neighbors, including Nepal. The most recent case was India's involvement in Nepal's constitution-making.

What should Delhi do to avoid backlash and win trust of Nepal?

- First, is to acknowledge Nepal's sovereignty and promise to conduct relations on that basis.
 - * Delhi needs to shift from underlining "the special relationship" with Nepal to one based on "sovereign equality".
 - * That would inevitably mean that India should stop meddling in Nepal's internal affairs and focus more on the state-to-state relationship.
- Second, instead of demanding an "India first policy" Delhi must affirm India's strong support for a "Nepal first" policy.
 - * Situated between the world's two fastest growing economies, Nepal has every reason to benefit from its location.
- Third Delhi's economic policies have prevented the full development of the natural economic complementarity between the two countries.
 - * The rotting trade infrastructure on the long and open border, Delhi's cumbersome procedures for administering economic assistance and the inability to implement infrastructure projects in reasonable time, have all added to India's woes in Nepal.

Focus on Grey Area

- First, in Kathmandu, leaders of the Nepali Congress (NC) feel let down by India. NC leaders visited Delhi have met a range of political leaders and officials with broadly the same message - Oli and Maoists are consolidating; they are taking over state institutions and the democratic space is shrinking.
 - * They are of the view that by 'appeasing' Oli and almost 'bending over backwards', India is enabling Oli to become stronger at the cost of its older friends. If this continues they too would be forced to take an 'ultra nationalist' position--since criticising India helps domestically and has no cost externally.
- Second, those who have sounded an alarm bell are senior Madhesi political figures, but more vocally, the civil society.
 - * They believe that Delhi's entire rapprochement with Oli has come at the cost of Madhesi rights.
 - * India has dropped the agenda of a constitutional amendment to address issues of federal re-demarcation, which was at the heart of a prolonged India backed agitation in 2015-16. So community leaders and opinion makers have a strong sense of resentment at what they see as Delhi's betrayal.
- Few Diplomats of India believe while engaging with Oli is a necessity, India is underestimating the inherent dangers.
 - * They argue China has brought Oli and Maoists together; Oli's primary loyalty will be to the 'north'; India should not get misled by optics; Oli will sooner or later cross the strategic 'redlines';
 - * It is important that India has alternatives at that point; the current approach will leave Oli so strong that it will be difficult to dislodge him;
 - * Delhi must continue to engage with Maoist leader Prachanda and seek to wean him away from Oli to break their alliance;
 - * it must also work to strengthen the NC and Madhesi and create a coalition which can take on the UML eventually; India is currently appearing weak and Nepali political actors will not take Indian power and messages seriously.

Way forward

- So the two sides must focus on the already committed projects and the ones that promise early returns to the people on both sides of the border is a good one.
- An emphasis on projects relating to cross-border trade, transport and tourism could be the beginning of a solid economic foundation for a sustainable political partnership with sovereign Nepal.

- At the same time Oli must be given a chance and it is important to wait and watch how Oli engages with both India and China; that if he wants to indeed develop Nepal and leave a legacy, he cannot antagonise India; and that India does not have much of a choice either - Prachanda is unreliable, the NC is weak, and Madhesi parties are geographically limited to eight districts and backing them publicly invites the wrath of Kathmandu's political elites and pushes it towards China further.

15. Three nation Tour of President Kovind

- President Ram Nath Kovind travelled to energy-rich Equatorial Guinea, Swaziland and copper-rich Zambia from 7-13 April

Equatorial Guinea (Malabo)

- President Ram Nath Kovind was conferred with the Condecoracion, the highest honour accorded to a non-citizen by the government of Equatorial Guinea
- He was bestowed with the medal of the Gran Colar de la Independencia by his counterpart Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, for his contribution to the cause of development, security and world peace.
- This is the first time ever that a head of state from India is visiting Equatorial Guinea.

Details

- India's relationship with Equatorial Guinea is dominated by the strong partnership in the oil and gas sector. Equatorial Guinea is the fourth largest supplier of natural gas to India
- Both leaders shared the view that terrorism is a grave threat to mankind and global peace and security. They expressed their willingness to join hands with the international community in eradication of the menace of terrorism from society. They agreed on the need to take strong measures against terrorist organizations, terrorists and their networks.
- Both countries agreed to work closely to intensify their cooperation in the United Nations and other multilateral fora in order to address the challenges being faced by mankind including climate change and to foster global peace, security and sustainable development.

Swaziland (Mbabane)

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, addressed members of the Parliament of Swaziland
- He became the first visiting Head of State to address the Parliament of the country.
- The King conferred the country's highest honour 'Order of the Lion' on Ram Nath Kovind.

MoU

- The two sides signed MoUs on cooperation in health sector and exemption of visas for diplomat/service passport holders.

Details

- India today donated USD 1 million to support Swaziland's national disaster management agency and expressed commitment to developmental partnership to create local capacities in the country and across Africa.
- India is the main source of affordable generic drugs including anti-retroviral drugs for fighting HIV. Swaziland has made remarkable progress in slowing the spread of HIV
- India will establish a Centre of Agricultural Excellence in Swaziland for sharing its experience in the sector
- India also announced concessional finance for constructing a new parliament building in Swaziland.

India, Zambia sign 4 agreements during President Kovind's visit

- The two sides signed four agreements - on double taxation avoidance; on judicial cooperation; on mutual visa waivers for officials and diplomats, and on the Entrepreneurship Development Institute that India will build in Zambia.
- This is the first visit to the country by an Indian president since 1989.
- Indian companies have invested significantly in Zambia, especially in mining, telecom, energy and manufacturing
- India has agreed in principle to provide concessional finance and support towards the construction of the Mahatma Gandhi Convention Centre in Lusaka. India has also gifted Zambia medicines and medical equipment worth USD 3 million as well as presented USD 100,000 for the Mahatma Gandhi School in Lusaka.

Why India, not China, is a better investment partner for Africa?

Chinese firms are most attracted to African markets because of a troubling combination of factors: vast stores of natural resources, and a noticeable lack of industrial regulation.

- India's non-prescriptive and non-interfering development partnership model is fast finding favour in resource-rich Africa, where China's push, ostensibly for capacity building, is receiving bad press for being hard and exploitative
- China, meanwhile, is caricatured as a predatory swindler, bent on becoming an eastern superpower, while also cashing in on a growing global consumer class hungry for smartphone processors and tablet screens, and therefore the African minerals that facilitate them

Indian Investments

- According to the World Investment Report published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD),

- * China's total FDI in Africa is much more than India's.
- * Both India and China were minuscule players in terms of FDI in Africa, and India was ahead of China till 2009.
- * However, China has surged much ahead of India between 2009 and 2014
- Statistics cited in the African Economic Outlook 2017 show that India is ranked second (after China) in terms of trade share with Africa.
 - * Here too, there is a wide gap in actual value of trade, with China's total trade with Africa being more than 2.6 times its trade with India in 2015. I
 - * Interestingly, both India and China were almost at par in terms of total value of trade with Africa in 2000.

Why is Africa feeling so?

- Recent media reports have carried allegations that Chinese business houses are treating African workers as slaves, and that the Asian giant is exploiting local resources, including agricultural, mineral and marine
- Indo-Japan Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) is being seen as providing an alternative to the One-Belt-One-Road (OBOR) initiative of China, its key priorities — rural development and agriculture, energy, education and skill development, regional connectivity and quality of life—contrast that of China, which subject experts and media reports say wants to harness resources
- China-funded projects are also seen pushing African countries towards a debt trap as the 6-8% interest charged on loans are neither soft nor long term.
- The slowdown in the Chinese economy is further contributing to Beijing's exploitative strategy and reduction in salaries paid to workers in Africa
- "Most Indian firms in Africa acquire established businesses," contrary to their Chinese counterparts, which tend to drive out local competition.
- India relies more on local labor than imported contractors. Chinese investment has contributed to these dismal numbers. Most firms bring in labor from China on a temporary basis, rather than extending employment to local Africans.
- Indian businesses have a cultural advantage the Chinese lack: shared history. A shared Commonwealth past means that many of these countries are home to thriving South Asian diaspora communities. Durban, South Africa, for instance, is nicknamed "the largest Indian city outside of India."

16. India Sweden Relations

- This is the first prime ministerial visit from India to Sweden in 30 years after that by Rajiv Gandhi in 1988
- Pranab Mukherjee became the first President of India to make a state visit to Sweden in June 2015.

Joint Action Plan (JAP)

- Both countries will take forward a wide range of initiatives in defence, trade and investment, counterterrorism, renewable energy, smart cities, women's skill development, space and science and healthcare.

On defence

- There was Sweden's interest in proposing the Saab Group's Gripen-E single-engine jet fighter for the Indian Air Force
 - * It will tie-up with Adani Group to manufacture the Gripen E fighter jets in India
- On counterterrorism they emphasised that the global counterterrorism legal framework should be regularly updated to address the changing threat of terrorism with strength.

Sweden-India Innovation Partnership for a Sustainable Future

- It will cover co-operation across a wide spectrum, from the creation of effective innovation systems to the commercialization of new technologies
- Modi said innovation, investment, start-ups, manufacturing etc. are the key aspects of cooperation
- Along with them, we are also giving importance to areas such as renewable energy, urban transport, waste management, that are connected with the quality of life of the people
- Sweden will provide 50 million kronas (approx. Rs 40 crore) for innovation corporation with India for the Smart Cities project and for achieving sustainable development. This will also help to facilitate job creation

Economic cooperation

- Bilateral trade stands at over US\$2 billion.
- The main Swedish exports to India are pharmaceuticals, paper & pulp products, chemicals, engineering products and telecom equipment; India's primary exports to Sweden are chemical products, food products and semi-manufactured and manufactured goods
- Today, more than 150 Swedish companies are established in India, and one new company is estimated to be registered every month. These companies provide employment — directly and indirectly for almost 7,50,000 people in India

17. India Nordic Summit

- PM Modi will hold a series of bilateral meetings with the counterparts of Nordic countries such as Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway
- It will be first-ever India Nordic summit, being co-hosted by India and Sweden.

Why they are important?

- They all rate between 95 and 100 out of 100 for the quality of their democracy according to Freedom House (with Norway, Sweden, and Finland getting perfect scores).
- Four of them are among the six least corrupt countries, according to Transparency International.
- They are all among the eight least fragile states according to the Fund for Peace.
- Denmark, Norway, and Finland rank among the top eight in government effectiveness according to the World Bank.
- Their socio-economic performances are no less impressive. All five countries have life expectancies of over 80 and feature among the top advanced economies in educational outcomes. Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland rank in the top four of the World Happiness Report

Support for NSG and UNSC

- The Nordic countries agree that India is a strong candidate for a permanent seat in a reformed Security Council expanded with both permanent and non-permanent members.
- The PMs also discussed export control and non-proliferation. The Nordic countries welcomed India's application for membership of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and reaffirmed their commitment to work constructively within the Group with the aim of reaching a positive outcome at the earliest

Details

- The Summit welcomed the Nordic Sustainable Cities Project aimed at supporting the Smart Cities Program of the Indian government.
- They acknowledged that terrorism and violent extremism are major challenges for the international community. They discussed global security, including cyber security, based on their shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and their commitment to uphold the rules-based international system in the backdrop of China's ambitions that has challenged rules based global order.
- Nordic solutions in clean technologies, maritime solutions, port modernisation, food processing, health, life-sciences and agriculture were mentioned.

On trade

- Annual trade between the Nordic countries and India is only \$4.5 billion, compared with \$50 billion with China.
- While Sweden in particular and the Nordic region in general are looking for a new market to export their goods and services, Modi will be looking to attract investment for his 'Make in India' campaign.

- They reaffirmed the importance of free trade as a catalyst for achieving inclusive growth and realising the Sustainable Development Goals amid rising protectionist tendencies displayed powerful economies.

Significance

- This is confirming a new trend in Indian diplomacy — collective engagement with key regional groups
 - * In 2018 Republic Day celebrations, the PM hosted all the 10 leaders of the Association of South East Asian Nations.
 - * In 2016, the PM had invited colleagues from the Bay of Bengal littoral to join the BRICS summit in Goa.
 - * in 2015, he hosted all leaders from Africa in Delhi.
- This marks an end to the prolonged Indian neglect of a very important sub-region
- India can reap significant long-term rewards if Modi's visit can lay the foundation for a sustained engagement with a part of the world that is often called the "Norden" — or simply the north.
- There is a deep engineering talent in the Norden and the region is an impressive champion of technological innovation. That fits in well with Delhi's current hopes for igniting the innovation revolution in India.
- They have tended to reject Europe's martial tradition and colonial legacies. The Nordic enthusiasm for moralpolitik inevitably found great affinity with Nehruvian India.
 - * If India was non-aligned, Sweden was neutral. Both championed decolonisation and a more just global order. From the 1950s to the mid 1980s, as leaders of the neutral and non-aligned nations, India and Sweden led the campaign for nuclear arms control and disarmament.
- As a region that helped advance the idea of an efficient welfare state, the Norden can be important partner for India's own experiments to strengthen its social sector through technological and policy innovation.

Unique Identity

- The Nordics do not see themselves as a mere sub-region of Europe. They value their own unique international identity.
- Two of the five Nordic countries, Iceland and Norway, have stayed out of the European Union.
- Copenhagen's attitude has, for long, been regarded as a barometer of Euro-scepticism and Greenland, an autonomous part of Denmark, had walked out of the EU.

On peace

- The special significance of the Norden was underlined by former US President Barack Obama, when he hosted the leaders of the group at the White House at the end of 2016.

- The world might be a better place, Obama said, if the Nordic leaders were left in charge for a while. The Nordics are widely admired for their instinct for promoting peace, strengthening universal human values and more broadly for doing good.

- * Norway's successful role in launching the Middle East peace process in 1993
- * Norway sought to promote peace between Tamils and Colombo during the 2000s but the effort was unsuccessful but since then it opened up paths to peace that remain relevant for Sri Lanka and India

Do they believe only in Pacifism?

- The Nordics are not all about utopian idealism. They also have a strong pragmatic streak that is quite evident in their current strategic outreach to emerging Asian powers.
- If Sweden and Finland stayed out of NATO, Denmark, Iceland and Norway are active members of the NATO.
- But they have managed, through strong sub-regional cooperation, to insulate the Norden from the negative impact of great power rivalries.
- Sweden might be neutral but it always had strong defence industry.
 - * If the Bofors purchase was not trapped in the kind of political controversies that followed, it could have laid the foundation for a strong defence industrial cooperation with Sweden

Issues in Nordic countries

- Influx of refugees has sometimes tested the inclusiveness of the otherwise rather homogeneous Nordic societies.
- In 2015 and 2016, some travel links between Denmark and Sweden were briefly suspended and border controls were re-established due to concerns about illegal migration

Way forward

- India's political discovery of the Norden should also be the first step towards a more substantive outreach to different sub-regions of a very diverse continent — from the Baltics to the Balkans to Iberia to Mitteleuropa.
- So, if India is genuinely interested in finding ways to balance social welfare with market reforms, improve governance at the local level, and increase entrepreneurship, focus on these small northern European nations is important

18. In Response to chemical Attacks by Syria, U.S., Britain, France rain over 100 missiles

Context

- Syria which has been accused of using chemicals to target its citizens was bombarded with more than 100 missiles by U.S., British and French forces against the Damascus government targeting what they called chemical weapons sites in retaliation for a suspected poison gas attack.

Target Area

- Washington described its targets as a centre near Damascus for the research, development, production and testing of chemical and biological weapons, a chemical weapons storage site near the city of Homs and another site near Homs that stored chemical weapons equipment and housed a command post.

19. Pakistan denies Sikh pilgrims consular access

Context

- Pakistan has violated established diplomatic protocols by preventing visiting Sikh pilgrims from meeting the Indian envoy and other diplomats based in Islamabad

Background

- The Sikh pilgrims are visiting Pakistan as part of the Vaisakhi celebrations which mark the beginning of the Punjabi New Year.
- As part of a bilateral understanding between two sides, Sikh pilgrims have been visiting Pakistan on important religious and cultural occasions every year.
- The total number of Sikh visitors visiting Pakistan this year is 1800.

Protocol

- A standard practice has been that the Indian High Commission's consular/protocol team is attached with visiting pilgrims, to perform consular and protocol duties, like helping out in medical or family emergencies.
- However, this year, the consular team has been denied access to Indian Sikh pilgrims.
- The team could not meet the pilgrims on their arrival at Wagah Railway Station
- The Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, was also not allowed to visit the Gurdwara Panja Sahib. He was suddenly asked to return while en route to the shrine for unspecified 'security' reasons,"

Violations

- These incidents constitute a clear violation of the Vienna Convention of 1961,
- The bilateral Protocol to visit Religious Shrines, 1974
- The Code of Conduct (for the treatment of diplomatic/ consular personnel in India and Pakistan) of 1992

Pakistan View

- The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) had extended an invitation to the High Commissioner of India to attend the main function of Baisakhi and Khalsa Janamdi n at the Gurdwara Panja Sahib on 14 April 2018.
- However, in the run-up to the main function, the ETPB authorities noticed strong resentment among segments of Sikh Yatrees, gathered there from different parts of the world, allegedly protesting the release of some film on Baba Guru Nanak Devji in India.
- Considering an emotionally charged environment and the possibility of any untoward situation, the ETPB authorities contacted the Indian High Commission officials and suggested cancellation of the visit

Pakistan had also accused India in March of not granting permission to pilgrims to attend the annual festivities at the Shrine of Hazrat Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer.

20. India, Bangladesh discuss Teesta water sharing issue, Rohingya refugee crisis

India and Bangladesh signed six pacts including one for the construction of a 129.5 km-long oil pipeline between Siliguri and Parbatipur and discussed the Teesta river water sharing issue.

- The pacts were signed on the sidelines of a visit to Dhaka by foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale who met his Bangladeshi counterpart Mohammed Shahidul Haque.
- The discussions also covered the Rohingya refugee crisis between Bangladesh and Myanmar, a PTI report from Dhaka said.
- Six MoUs including India-Bangladesh Friendship pipeline between Siliguri & Parbatipur, agreement between Department of Atomic Energy, India and Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, were signed during the visit.
- This is part of India's endeavour to undertake projects in Bangladesh in various socio-economic sectors, including education, culture, health, community welfare, road infrastructure for which India was providing funds under grant financing.
- The MoU on the oil pipeline is aimed at transporting diesel from India to Bangladesh with a capacity of 1 million tonnes per annum.
- It focuses on deepening bilateral cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector and the mutual benefits for both sides that would accrue from the proposed construction of approximate 129.5 km long oil pipeline from the Siliguri Marketing Terminal of the Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) in India to the Parbaripur depot of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC).

- New Delhi remained a committed development partner of Dhaka and has extended lines of credit of over \$8 billion to Bangladesh in the last seven years. This is the largest amount of credit India has ever committed to any single country.
- India also extended full support to Bangladesh's efforts for resolving the Rohingya crisis, including the early repatriation of the displaced people to Myanmar.
- India sent relief materials for 300,000 Rohingyas in September under 'Operation Insaniyat' to support Bangladesh in its humanitarian efforts.
- The assistance included field hospitals with all facilities to extend women and child healthcare while the relief supplies planned for the second phase included milk powder, baby food, dried fish, cooking stoves and cooking fuel, raincoats and gumboots.
- On the Myanmar side, India is providing socio-economic support under our Rakhine State Development Programme including construction of pre-fabricated housing in order to meet the needs of the returning people.

The two countries discussed all aspects of the relations between the two nations, including the pending Teesta water sharing issue.

21. Concern over decline in Indo-Pak. trade

Context

- There is rising concern about declining trade between India and Pakistan due to escalation in tensions along the borders. So there is need for concerted efforts on both sides to ease tensions through people-centric measures.

How to improve relationship?

- Sporting events could play a pivotal role in boosting people-to-people relations on both sides of the Punjab border
- More people-level contacts between the two nations could help pave the way for long-term peace and stability in the region.

Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) Study

- Informal trade between India and Pakistan is almost twice the value of formal trade between the two countries.
- Informal trade is broadly defined as all trade between two countries that should be included in the national income statistics, according to conventional national income accounting, but is not.

What drives informal trade?

- Factors such as high tariffs, political tension, infrastructure impediments, and ease of trading goods via third countries have generated a thriving industry for informal trade between the two South Asian giants.

- Pakistan's negative list of 1,209 items as the most important factor pushing informal exports from India.
 - * Items on the negative list are those that are not allowed to be imported from India.
 - * More than one in every two items exported informally to Pakistan were on Pakistan's negative list.

Which commodities are traded?

- Real jewellery, including gold, diamond and precious stones, accounted for the largest share of 23% of informal exports from India to Pakistan. It also included chemicals, tyres, alcohol and tobacco products, among several others.
- While India's imports from Pakistan included items such as dry fruits and spices,
- Informal exports from India to Pakistan in 2012-13 stood at \$3.9 billion, much higher than the just over \$2 billion worth of formal exports.
- Informal imports, on the other hand, from Pakistan valued \$0.7 billion, slightly more than formal imports of \$0.5 billion.

How does informal trade take place?

- Most of informal trade between the two countries were also found to be via a third country, in particular Dubai. About 68% of India's informal export to Pakistan was found to be routed via Dubai.

Land or water route?

- The efficiency of transport of goods via two routes
 - * The Delhi-Lahore route
 - * The Delhi-Mumbai-Dubai-Karachi-Lahore route
- Found that the latter route was 2.75 times more efficient in terms of transport per transaction cost incurred per container-kilometre.
- Higher transaction cost per-tonne-per-kilometre on the direct route is because of factors such as limited number of items that can be exported via road route, cumbersome customs checks at Attari/Wagah customs station, transaction costs in the form of bribes incurred in getting customs clearances, physical examination of goods and poor infrastructure, among others.
- While the total cost of shipping would still be lower in the formal channel, given the fact that the distance is one-tenth of the route via Dubai, predictability and comfort encourages traders to incur these high costs.

However, if appropriate measures are taken, a significant share of informal trade can be diverted to formal channels. The benefits of direct trade is much more than informal.

22. Trump administration plans to end work permits for H-1B visa spouses

Context

- The Trump administration is planning to propose to end allowing spouses of H1-B visa holders to work legally in the US

What is the intended change?

- A 2015 rule issued by the Obama administration allows work permits for spouses who otherwise could not be employed while H-1B visa holders seek permanent resident status -- a process that can take a decade or longer.
- A 2015 rule allows work permits for spouses who otherwise could not be employed while H-1B visa holders seek permanent resident status
- Plans include proposing regulatory changes to remove H-4 dependent spouses from the class of aliens eligible for employment authorisation, thereby reversing the 2015 final rule that granted such eligibility

Stats

- According to a recent study by the Migration Policy Institute, the US has issued employment authorization documents to more than 71,000 spouses of H-1B visa holders, over 90 per cent of whom are Indians.
- Of those H-4 spouses with work authorisation as of early 2017, a total of 94 per cent were women, and the vast majority, 93 per cent, were from India, while four per cent were from China, the study said

Impact

- H-4 is issued to the spouse of H-1B visa holders, a significantly large number of whom are high-skilled professionals from India
- The move to end the Obama-era rule could have an impact on more than 70,000 H-4 visas holders, who have work permits.

23. Informal Summit in Wuhan on the banks of the Yangtze

- The first informal summit between Modi and Xi in Wuhan - the favorite holiday spot of revolutionary Chinese leader Mao Zedong - is being seen as an effort by India and China to rebuild trust and improve ties that were hit by the 73-day-long Doklam standoff.
- "Informal" summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping will not be "issue-based", but rather broad-based to foster "strategic communication" at the highest political level.

Why Wuhan?

- Situated on Yangtze River Wuhan can be described as China's Ganga and Gangetic river port and therefore has a parallel with the Gangetic Belt of India which is key in running the Central government in Delhi.
- Xi is in the process of trying to position himself as a Mao-like leader, though obviously without the zaniness of the Great Leap forward and Cultural Revolution, and this summit will harken back to that era at least in the minds of senior party leaders and others who Xi cares about, according to persons familiar with the Chinese party hierarchy.

- Wuhan has a historic villa that is famous from the Mao era where the Chairman would hold important party meetings and host some special foreign guests at the time when China did not have many friends. Mao also hosted Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon at the Meiling summer villa as well.
- Wuhan is the most populous city in Central China. Arising out of the conglomeration of three cities, Wuchang, Hankou, and Hanyang, Wuhan is known as 'China's Thoroughfare' -- it is a major transportation hub, with dozens of railways, roads and expressways passing through the city and connecting to other major cities. Because of its key role in domestic transportation, Wuhan is sometimes referred to as "the Chicago of China"
- Happiest city in the country by China's Economic Life Survey, is also home to more than 120 higher education institutions and more than a million students, making it an important university town. Its Wuhan University and Huazhong University of Science and Technology are on the list of top ten universities in China.

Why it was a necessity?

- First, it is becoming apparent to the realists inside the government that an adversarial relationship with China brings no advantages and amplifies security problems that India can neither solve on its own nor address with the assistance of external powers who have shown little inclination to deflect Chinese influence in the subcontinent and its littoral.
- Second, India-China friction enhances Pakistan's ability to shape Beijing's South Asia hand even though the latter itself would prefer a more balanced regional posture and a constructive equation with New Delhi.
- Third, a contentious India-China relationship also reduces India's bargaining leverage vis-à-vis the U.S. and Japan.
 - * New Delhi must have also noticed that despite their differences with Beijing, both the U.S. and Japan truly value their interdependence with China.
 - * Sino-American cooperation on the Korean nuclear question and efforts to transform North East Asian geopolitics is just one example.
 - * Japan, with a \$300 billion trading relationship with China, too wants to ensure it remains engaged with the world's second largest economy. Recently, Tokyo has even endorsed the prospect of a "case-by-case" cooperation with the BRI.
- Finally, the Modi government is also recognizing that the promise of economic cooperation with China can only translate into meaningful outcomes if there is overall geopolitical stability. Few economic actors will enter the fray if the forecast for bilateral ties is one of uncertainty and turbulence.

Nodes of Alignment

- They are expected to align India-China ties to counter the headwinds of growing protectionism. The U.S.-led protectionism provides the strategic cement for bonding China and India.
- The two countries are preparing to emerge as the twin engines of a new wave of globalisation, in which Asia and the emerging economies will play a leading role.

The Horse and Sparrows and Grass

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented a special gift to President Xi the reprints of two paintings done by celebrated Chinese painter Xu Beihong (1895-1953) during his stay at Santiniketan in West Bengal between 1939 and 1940.
- These paintings are part of the collection of Visva-Bharati University, a government varsity located in Santiniketan.

24. India, Pak. to take part in war games

- In a first, arch-rivals India and Pakistan will be part of a multi-nation counter-terror exercise in Russia in September. It will also be joined by China and several other countries. The exercise will take place under the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a China-dominated security grouping which is increasingly seen as a counterweight to NATO.
- Officials said the drill would be held in the Ural mountains of Russia, and almost all SCO member countries would be part of it. They said the main aim of the exercise, Peace Mission, would be to enhance counter-terror cooperation among the eight members.
- The officials said India's participation was confirmed by Nirmala Sitharaman during an SCO Defence Ministers' meeting in Beijing last week.
- It will be for the first time since Independence that India and Pakistan will be part of a military exercise, though the armies of the two nations have worked together in U.N. peacekeeping missions, they said.
- The SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the Presidents of Russia, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Bakarwal

Context

- Kathua rape murder case of Asifa

Bakarwal

- They are a mostly-Sunni Muslim nomadic tribe based in the Pir Panjal and Himalayan mountains
- They are found in the entire Kashmir region between India and Pakistan
- The name "Bakarwal" implies "high-altitude goatherds/shepherds".
- Bakherwals are a nomadic tribe who migrate along with their herds of animals to the Valley and Ladakh in summer and return to the forests of Jammu in winter. They have been camping in these forests for decades.

What traditional rights do the Gujjar-Bakherwal have over forest lands in J&K?

- The two communities, together 11% of J&K's population, are the single largest Muslim group and were together designated a Scheduled Tribe in 1991. Both groups are pastoral.
- The Gujjars are in the dairy business, and settled in several parts of Jammu through to the Chenab Valley.
- The Section 1(2) of the Forest Rights Act says it extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir
 - * Tribal communities by demanding the Forest Rights Act are basically asking for two kinds of rights- the 'title rights' and 'use rights'.
 - * These demands are not unjustified as a large chunk of tribals, especially Gujjars and Bakerwals are landless and have been dependent on forest resources for centuries for livelihood.
 - * Tribals in J&K demand extension of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 to the state so that they too can enjoy rights on forest land as are available to the people belonging to Scheduled Tribe communities across India.

Allegation

- With both Gujjars and Bakherwals being Muslims, few political parties are feeding into fears of Jammu's Hindu community that the two communities are changing the demography.
- The rape was a deliberate plan to terrorise the Bakherwal community to leave the area.

Tribal policy

- J&K's nomadic population should not be evicted from forest land.

- In cases where their dislocation was considered necessary, according to the purported minutes, it would be carried only in prior consultation with the Tribal Affairs Department.
- But the talks was not into enforcement.

What are Gujjars-Bakherwals saying?

- They say they have been on the side of Indian security forces since 1947. In Kashmir, they are perceived as helping security forces against militants.
- So the tribal leaders have sought laws safeguarding the rights of nomads over forests.

2. International Transgender Day of Visibility

- It is an annual event occurring on March 31
- It is dedicated to celebrating transgender people and raising awareness of discrimination faced by transgender people worldwide.

Incidents of discrimination

- Shanavi Ponnusamy, a transwoman from Tamil Nadu, wrote to the President alleging that Air India had denied her a cabin crew job despite her clearing the written exam
- K. Prithika Yashini, the first transwoman Sub-Inspector of Police in India. It took an order from the Madras High Court for the Tamil Nadu Uniformed Services Recruitment Board to appoint her.
- Manabi Bandopadhyay, a transgender who was appointed as India's first college principal in 2015. However, she resigned from the post in 2016 citing "immense mental pressure" due to continued agitations against her by faculty and students. Nevertheless, her resignation wasn't accepted and she remains the principal.

Stats

- The 2011 Indian census estimates the country's transgender population to be over 500,000 and trans activists declare that the number is much higher.

Supreme Court recognizes transgender as third gender

- The Bench said "recognition of transgender as a third gender is not a social or medical issue but a human rights issue. Transgenders are also citizens of India. The spirit of the Constitution is to provide equal opportunity to every citizen to grow and attain their potential, irrespective of caste, religion or gender.
- Supreme Court recognized transgender as the third gender and safeguarding their rights under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2016

Definition

- The Bill defines a transgender person as one who is partly female or male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male. In addition, the person's gender must not match the gender assigned at birth, and includes trans-men, trans-women, persons with intersex variations and gender-queers.
 - * The definition of 'transgender persons' in the Bill is at variance with the definitions recognised by international bodies and experts in India.
 - * The Bill includes terms like 'trans-men', 'trans-women', persons with 'intersex variations' and 'gender-queers' in its definition of transgender persons. However, these terms have not been defined.

Details

- A transgender person must obtain a certificate of identity as proof of recognition of identity as a transgender person and to invoke rights under the Bill.
- Such a certificate would be granted by the District Magistrate on the recommendation of a Screening Committee. The Committee would comprise a medical officer, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a district welfare officer, a government official, and a transgender person.
 - * This is in stark contrast to the 2014 Bill which gives individuals the right to self-identify their sex.
- Certain criminal and personal laws that are currently in force only recognize the genders of 'man' and 'woman'. It is unclear how such laws would apply to transgender persons who may not identify with either of the two genders.
- It is silent on the count of police violence against the community, which serves as an important reason why the community is relegated to the margins in India.

Penal Actions

- The Bill prohibits discrimination against a transgender person in areas such as education, employment, and healthcare. It directs the central and state governments to provide welfare schemes in these areas.
- Offences like compelling a transgender person to beg, denial of access to a public place, physical and sexual abuse, etc. would attract up to two years' imprisonment and a fine.

Recommendation

- The Bill recommends the formation of a National Council for Transgender Persons that is tasked with monitoring and evaluating policies formulated for transgender persons.

- Right of residence: Every transgender person shall have a right to reside and be included in his household. If the immediate family is unable to care for the transgender person, the person may be placed in a rehabilitation centre, on the orders of a competent court.

What needs to be done?

- An enabling environment needs to be created, be it in education institutes or workplaces. This can only be achieved by sensitising the workforce in protecting the rights and dignity of the community.

3. Mahua

- Mahua is held sacred by the Raj Gond and Kolam aboriginals not just for its religious association with their gods and goddesses, but also for its multifarious uses, provision of food security and raising supplemental income during the harsh summer months.
- Mahua, also called Ippa (in Telugu) or Irp (in Gondi) is a large-sized tree, found mostly in the dry deciduous and miscellaneous forests spread across the four districts
- An independent estimate has the number of these trees at five lakh, spread all over the four districts which cumulatively produce enormous quantities of edible flowers and seeds, which yield edible oil

Importance

- The dried-up flowers also are fermented to make wine called ippa sara in Telugu.
- The flowers, fruits, seeds and the bark of the tree are all known to have medicinal value.
- They are consumed in different ways, like in the form of rotis or vadas.
- its liquor being sacred was offered to our gods and goddesses during festivals

Issue

- According to sources in the Telangana Girijan Cooperative Corporation, which purchases dried mahua flowers from the Adivasis, the price of the MFP (Minor Forest Produce) has been slashed by a steep 50 percent this year.
- From the Rs 2000 per quintal that was offered last year, the GCC is offering only Rs 1000 per quintal this season

Adivasis-Lambadas rift

- The tussle is over the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, with Adivasis saying Lambada youths corner the six per cent ST quota in jobs and educational institutions. They want the ST status for Lambadas, which the government instituted in 1971, to be withdrawn.
- Adivasis – a collective term used to refer to Gonds, Thotis and other Scheduled Tribe groups, minus Lambadas

Stats

- There are an estimated 25 lakh Lambadas in Telangana, which makes them the largest tribal group in the state. The 30 tribal communities that make up the rest of the ST population, including the second largest tribal group of Koyas, together number about 5 lakh

Why the rift?

- Lambadas are under the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in neighbouring Maharashtra “but lakhs of them came and settled in Adilabad decades ago and they were included in the ST list. Due to their large population and better education, they ended up taking all the jobs
- The differences between the Lambadas and the Adivasis came to the fore after a statue of a Lambada deity, which went missing from the Kumaram Bheem Tribal Museum, was destroyed allegedly by Adivasis.
- “Lambadas are not tribals... why are they being represented in the museum of Kumaram Bheem (Adivasi leader) who is like God to us? In Hyderabad, the government is building separate community halls for Lambadas and Adivasis, then why did they build this common museum here,”

4. Minorities' commission to seek constitutional status**Context**

- The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has decided to approach the government for granting it Constitutional status to protect the rights of minority communities more effectively.

Current Status

- In its present form, the NCM has powers to summon officials, including chief secretaries and director generals of police, but has to rely on departments concerned to take action against them.

Why is it required?

- NCM will be able to act against errant officials who do not attend hearings, follow its order or are found guilty of dereliction of duty
- If granted constitutional status, the NCM can penalise or suspend an officer for two days or send him/her to jail.
- The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (2017-18), in its 53rd report noted that the NCM is “almost ineffective” in its current state to deal with cases of atrocities against minorities. The committee recommended constitutional status to the body “without any delay”.

5. POSHAN Abhiyaan

- The Abhiyaan targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively

- It will address Malnutrition through Convergence, Use of Technology and a Targeted approach
- POSHAN Abhiyaan under Innovation component, envisages undertaking activities to be implemented intended to improve the service delivery system, capacity building of front line functionaries and community engagement for better nutritional outcomes.
- Initiated by Ministry of Women and Child Development

e-ILA (e-Incremental Learning Approach)

- e-ILA is an online system where programme functionaries will become more effective by learning to plan and execute each task correctly and consistently through methodical and ongoing capacity building.

ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education)

- The purpose of the ECCE module is to guide trainers to train Anganwadi Workers so that they are able to plan and conduct appropriate ECE activities.

6. Regional 3R Forum

- ‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’
- The event will be a series of sessions with mayors focusing on sustainable urban development and forging of inter-municipal partnerships and cooperation at the national and international level.
- The theme of the event at Indore is ‘Achieving Clean Water, Clean Land and Clean Air through 3R and Resource Efficiency a 21st-Century Vision for Asia-Pacific Communities’.
- The Forum will also recognise and reward industries and civil society organisations carrying out exceptional work in the area of 3R for waste management.
- The Eighth Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific will be hosted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, government of India, and co-organised by the Environment Ministry, government of Japan, and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development of the Division for Sustainable Development/United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- The forum also seeks to engage the public and private sectors in exploring partnership opportunities in areas of 3R and waste management for moving towards a zero-waste society.

7. Tiwa (Lalung)

- It is an indigenous tribal community inhabiting the states of Assam and Meghalaya (main region) and also found in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur in Northeast India
- They are recognized as a Scheduled tribe within the State of Assam.
- Tiwa (meaning “the people who were lifted from below”). Some of their neighbours still call them Lalung.

- A striking peculiarity of the Tiwa is their division into two sub-groups, Hill Tiwa and Plains Tiwas, displaying contrasting cultural features

8. Van Dhan Vikas Kendra

- It will be an important milestone in economic development of tribals involved in collection of MFPs by helping them in optimum utilization of natural resources and provide sustainable MFP-based livelihood in MFP-rich districts.

First multipurpose "Van Dhan Vikas Kendra"

- It was established in Bijapur District of Chhattisgarh State for providing skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility.

Minor Forest Produce (MFP)

- It is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas.
- Around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income.
- It provides them critical subsistence during the lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups
- Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from MFP

9. Centre ties up with IIT-Delhi for safety switches on vehicles

Context

- With the increase in violence against the women, the Ministry of Electronics and IT in partnership with IIT-Delhi is working on a switch-based device in cars and buses to aid safety of women.

Proposed Plan

- The Proposed Panic Switch System when invoked will generate a loud alarm in the vehicle which will attract public attention, and send the coordinates of the person to a server (police control room) to provide necessary help

Funding

- The project, being developed by IIT-Delhi, is being funded by the Nirbhaya Fund, set up in 2013 for implementation of initiatives aimed at enhancing the safety and security of women in the country.

10. Sexual intercourse in the course of long-term relationship cannot be classified as rape, says SC

- The SC on hearing the case has said that a man and a woman living in a long-term relationship does not amount to rape as consent is taken in this scenario

Section 90 of Indian Penal Code- Consent known to be given under fear or misconception

- A consent is not such a consent as is intended by any section of this Code, if the consent is given by a person under fear of injury, or under a misconception of fact, and if the person doing the act knows, or has reason to believe, that the consent was given in consequence of such fear or misconception
- Consent of insane person if the consent is given by a person who, from unsoundness of mind, or intoxication, is unable to understand the nature and consequence of that to which he gives his consent; or
- Consent of child unless the contrary appears from the context, if the consent is given by a person who is under twelve years of age

Tilak Raj vs. State of Himachal Pradesh

- "The prosecutrix has said a line in her examination-in-chief, but her cross-examination shows that no doubt the two were in relationship, but the question of marriage apparently had not been deliberated upon by any of the two. After the sexual contact, come talk about marriage had cropped up between the two. Thus, it also cannot be said that the consent for sexual intercourse had been given by the prosecutrix under some misconception of marriage.

Madras High Court bench

- In November 2012 said that rape as under IPC section 376 does not include the indulgence in consensual sex with a woman under false marriage promise within its fold but cheating as defined under IPC section 417 is a punishable offence under the said act.

Delhi HC

- "This Court had observed on number of occasions that the number of cases where both persons, out of their own will and choice, develop consensual physical relationship, when the relationship breaks due to some reason, the women use the law as a weapon for vengeance and personal vendetta. They tend to convert such consensual acts as an incident of rape may be out of anger and frustration thereby defeating the very purpose of the provision. This requires a clear demarcation between the rape and consensual sex especially in the case where complaint is that consent was given on promise to marry," said Justice Rani.

State of UP v Naushad

- Supreme Court in State of UP v Naushad gave the punishment of Life Imprisonment to man found guilty of rape charges arising out of false promise to marry
- Naushad enticed and cheated her. She was raped, and she got pregnant.

Conclusion

- At all instances, breach of promise to marry after establishing sexual relationships does not simply, in itself, constitute the offence of rape within the purview of the Indian criminal laws. Due to lack of a testamentary guidelines, it ultimately depends on the court's discretion relying on the merits of facts and circumstances in the particular case while deciding the question of rape on false promise to marry.

11. Food first**Stats**

- An estimated 35.7% children are underweight and 38.4% are stunted in that age group. The body mass index of 22.9% women aged 15-49 indicates chronic energy deficiency. These figures should cause alarm that even after a long period of robust economic growth, India has not achieved a transformation.

Changing existing method is recipe for disaster

- The central principle that should guide the Centre in improving maternal and child nutrition is that early childhood is the foundation for the health and well-being of an individual.
- Tinkering with the existing national programme of providing hot-cooked meals to children three to six years old, and take-home rations for younger children and pregnant and lactating mothers is fraught with danger.
- Attempts to substitute meals or rations with factory-made nutrients will inject commercialization into a key mission, and upset the nutritional basis of the scheme.
- Good sense has prevailed, and the newly-formed inter-ministerial National Council on India's Nutrition Challenges has chosen to continue the current practice, overruling the Minister for Women and Child Development, Maneka Gandhi, who proposed distribution of packaged nutrients to beneficiaries.

Welcome Step

- Raising nutritional standards for young children has become a policy imperative with the National Food Security Act, 2013, incorporating the mandate in Schedule II, and the Supplementary Nutrition (Integrated Child Development Services Scheme) Rules, 2017, laying down entitlements.
- Food and Public Distribution Minister Ram Vilas Paswan's emphasis on strengthening these legal guarantees by providing more nutritious hot-cooked meals and rations with the help of local self-help groups is to be welcomed.
- If the ICDS scheme, now called the Anganwadi Services Scheme, is to achieve better outcomes, it must focus on the provision of physical infrastructure and funding, besides closer monitoring of the nutrition mission. Theoretically, the mission covers every child, but in practice it is not accessible to all.

Reformation a must

- When the Centre recently launched POSHAN Abhiyaan, an integrator that will build capacity among nutrition workers, it acknowledged that while official data show a reduction in some of the depressing aspects of women and child health, the ground reality is far from comforting: the National Family Health Survey-4 shows a drop in underweight and stunted children under five years of age compared to the previous survey, but the absolute numbers are still high.
- It should be pointed out that NFHS data show several States performing worse than the national average.
- In a recent report, Nourishing India, the NITI Aayog refers to acute malnutrition levels of about 25% in some States.
- To accelerate the pace of progress, POSHAN Abhiyaan should rigorously measure levels of access and quality of nutrition, and publish the data periodically.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Advanced Supersonic Parachute Inflation Research Experiment (ASPIRE)

- It is a supersonic parachute that will help NASA missions to land on Mars
- It was launched aboard a sounding rocket on March 31 from NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in the US.

2. Icarus

- It is Residing 9.3 billion lights years away from Earth
- it is about twice as hot as our sun
- It is named after the ancient Greek mythological figure Icarus.
- The star was formally named MACS J1149+2223 Lensed Star-1
- It is a type of star called a blue supergiant.

How was it detected?

- The scientists took advantage of a phenomenon called "gravitational lensing" to spot the star.
 - * Einstein predicted lensing in 1912- mass bends light
 - * The gravitational field of a massive object will extend far into space, and cause light rays passing close to that object (and thus through its gravitational field) to be bent and refocused somewhere else.
 - * The more massive the object, the stronger its gravitational field and hence the greater the bending of light rays
 - * It involves the bending of light by massive galaxy clusters in the line of sight, which magnifies more distant celestial objects.
 - * This makes dim, faraway objects that otherwise would be undetectable, like an individual star, visible.

Significance

- It will help study what universe was like
- It will help to know how stars evolved and what their natures are — almost all the way back to the earliest stages of the universe and the first generations of stars
- Because its light has taken so long to reach Earth, looking at this star is like peering back in time to when the universe was less than a third of its current age. The Big Bang that gave rise to the universe occurred 13.8 billion years ago.

3. Insight Mission

- InSight, short for Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport, is a Mars lander designed to give the Red Planet its first thorough checkup

- It is the first outer space robotic explorer to study in-depth the "inner space" of Mars: its crust, mantle, and core
- Studying Mars' interior structure answers key questions about the early formation of rocky planets in our inner solar system - Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars - more than 4 billion years ago, as well as rocky exoplanets. InSight also measures tectonic activity and meteorite impacts on Mars today.
- This mission is part of NASA's Discovery Program for highly focused science missions that ask critical questions in solar system science.
- It will be the first Nasa mission since the Apollo moon landings to place a seismometer, on the soil of another planet
- This is the first launch to another planet from the West Coast.

Study Quakes

- It will use seismology (the study of quakes) to determine the makeup and structure of the Red Planet's core, mantle, and crust.
- Currently, we know that Mars' crust consists of lighter rocks and minerals, while heavier materials sank down to form its core and mantel.
- To learn more about its internal composition, the lander will use specialized instruments to observe seismic waves during "marsquakes."

4. IRNSS-1I

Background

- There are currently seven IRNSS satellites (1A to 1G) in orbit.
 - * A, B, F, G are placed in a geosynchronous orbit, which means they seem to be at a fixed location above the Earth and they orbit along with the Earth.
 - * The remaining three, C, D, E, are located in geostationary orbit-they seem to be at a fixed location above the Earth along the equator and orbit along with the Earth.
- So this will be the ninth navigational satellite launch under the project which has seen seven successful launches and one unsuccessful launch.

Details

- ISRO is attempting to launch one of the backup satellites to replace NavIC navigation satellite constellation's IRNSS-1A whose three rubidium clocks failed
- PSLV in 43rd flight will lift off IRNSS-1I which weighs 1425 kg. It will replace IRNSS-1A and join the constellation of seven satellites.

- It will have L5 and S-band navigation payload with rubidium atomic clocks.
- It will be placed in a sub-geosynchronous transfer orbit and at its closest point will be 284 km above the Earth and at its farthest will be 20,650 km above the Earth.
- Like all other IRNSS satellites, IRNSS-1I will also carry two payloads – navigation payload and ranging payload –
 - * The former to transmit signals for determining position, velocity and time and
 - * The latter for determining the frequency range of the satellite.

Past attempts at replacement

- The launch will be ISRO'S second attempt at sending a replacement satellite. The previous mission in August 2017 where a PSLV carried IRNSS-1H failed after the heat shield covering the satellite failed to separate. All the launches except IRNSS-1H have been successful.

Atomic Clock

- An Atomic clock is the most accurate type of clock which is regulated by the vibrations of an atomic or molecular system such as caesium or ammonia.
- The principle of operation of an atomic clock is based on atomic physics; it uses the microwave signal that electrons in atoms emit when they change energy levels.
- Atomic physics is the field of physics that studies atoms as an isolated system of electrons and an atomic nucleus. It is primarily concerned with the arrangement of electrons around the nucleus and the processes by which these arrangements change.
- They provide accurate time and frequency standards and are used as primary standards for international time distribution services, to control the wave frequency of television broadcasts, and in global navigation satellite systems such as GPS.
- An atomic clock is a clock that uses the resonance frequencies of atoms as its resonator.
- The resonator is regulated by the frequency of the microwave electromagnetic radiation emitted or absorbed by the quantum transition (energy change) of an atom or molecule.
- The advantage of this approach is that atoms resonate at extremely consistent frequencies.

5. Lindy Effect

- This refers to the observation that the probable future survival of a technology, or any other non-perishable entity, increases with its age. So, according to the Lindy effect, a technology that has been around for a hundred years is likely to last longer than one that has been around for only a decade or less.

- This is in direct contrast to perishable entities, like human beings, whose life expectancy drops with age. The Lindy effect, named after a deli in New York, was first proposed by American author Albert Goldman.
- It has been further elaborated by others including Lebanese intellectual Nassim Taleb in his 2012 book *Antifragile*.

6. NASA lunar 'Gateway' space station

- The Lunar Orbital Platform-Gateway is Nasa's planned "staging" area intended for studies of the moon and the deep-space environment.
- NASA awards its first contract for the lunar "Gateway" program

Details

- The gateway would also further Nasa's goal of another human landing on the moon and will help determine whether water near the surface could be used to manufacture propellant for deep-space missions. The moon's gravity could also help a spacecraft reduce the blistering speeds used for six-month
- It will function as a way station for astronauts travelling to and from Mars.
- The platform should be orbiting the moon in 2025
- It will carry a four-astronaut crew on 30-day missions

7. New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative (NMITLI)

- NMITLI is the largest public-private-partnership effort within the R&D domain in the country. It looks beyond today's technology and thus seeks to build, capture and retain for India a leadership position by synergising the best competencies of publicly funded R&D institutions, academia and private industry.
- It was rolled out in 2001; where companies receive unsecured, soft loans at 3% interest per annum to develop prototypes as well as position them for emerging markets.
- The key principle of the NMITLI is to encourage entrepreneurs and technologists to try out novel, risky ideas with government support and mentoring.
- The criteria for selection of the project are based on the novelty of the proposal, potential technological benefits, and the ability of industry to capture those benefits
- The technologies encompass a wide range of subjects — developing new drugs, making novel liquid crystal displays, innovating in low-cost computers and diagnostic devices.

8. North Atlantic Aerosols and Marine Ecosystems Study (NAAMES) mission

Context

- A team of scientists from NASA are on a research mission to study phytoplankton – the tiny sea creatures – and their impact on the atmosphere and climate on Earth.

Details

- This will study how phytoplanktons give rise to small organic particles that leave the ocean and end up in the atmosphere, ultimately influencing clouds and climate.
- It is the first research mission to conduct an integrated study of all four distinct phases of the world's largest phytoplankton bloom.
- The NAAMES campaign provides a unique opportunity for researchers aboard Atlantis to do experiments that study growth and decay of the phytoplankton population.
- Satellites such as CALIPSO, a joint NASA and CNES mission, also help to study the ocean and the atmosphere – from the depths of the phytoplankton bloom, to the clouds and atmospheric particles in the sky above.

Why was it required?

- Rates of phytoplankton accumulation are critical for understanding the ocean conditions that lead to phytoplankton growth and its timing, a key to unlocking the environmental drivers and controls of biological dynamics.
- It will help scientists to know the link between the ocean, atmospheric particles and clouds

9. RH300 sounding rocketContext

- The RH300 sounding rocket, developed by Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) as part of a study to enrich available atmospheric data, would be launched from Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station (TERLS)

Sounding Rockets

- ISRO started launching indigenously made sounding rockets from 1965
- Sounding rockets are one or two stage solid propellant rockets used for probing the upper atmospheric regions and for space research.
- They also serve as easily affordable platforms to test or prove prototypes of new components or subsystems intended for use in launch vehicles and satellites.

Details

- It is part of a study undertaken by VSSC under the Sounding Rocket Experiment (SOUREX) Programme, which utilises the RH-300 MKII sounding rocket to study the Equatorial E and lower ionosphere regions of the atmosphere
- The study will enrich available atmospheric data and refine the models used for tropical weather prediction
- The objective of the experiment is to measure neutral wind in the dynamo region (80-120 km) of equatorial ionosphere using the indigenously developed Electron Density and Neutral Wind Probe (ENWi) and perform cross-validation using an independent Tri Methyl Aluminium (TMA) release technique

TMA experiment

- Atmospheric studies with TMA were done in the 60's utilizing sounding rockets of foreign countries and the first launch was on May 2, 1965 using a Centaure rocket.
- After a long gap, the TMA experiment is now being attempted with indigenously made payload and rocket.

10. X-plane

- NASA has inked a deal with Lockheed Martin to develop a supersonic "X-plane" that could break the sound barrier without a sonic boom.
- The goal is to enable quieter supersonic flight and create "new commercial cargo and passenger markets in faster-than-sound air travel,"

11. National portal to share research facilities soonIn news

- Soon researchers in any college or institution and research organisations can check, reserve and have easy access to even expensive research equipment and facilities anywhere in India, thanks to the efforts by the Centre for Nano Science and Engineering (CeNSE) at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.
- The centre is in the process of collating information about scientific and research equipment and facilities available at academic institutions and research organizations across the country.

Online reservation

- The portal — Indian Science, Technology and Engineering Facilities Map (I-STEM) — will soon become operational. The government green signaled the project last month.
- The institutions and organizations that have the equipment and facilities will provide access to researchers for both academic and non-academic work through an online reservation system.

Many benefits

- This initiative will have many benefits. It will provide access to researchers to any equipment or facility that has been procured using public funds, the equipment will be better utilised and it will avoid duplication of expensive equipment as much as possible. Sharing expensive equipment can bring down the cost of doing research in India.
- Putting to rest the fear that this initiative may come in the way of premier institutions which are just coming up from procuring essential equipment. Each institute will need certain equipment that is absolutely necessary and essential for regular use. It is not at all the intent of this initiative to stop such institutes from procuring equipment but to ensure that each instrument is better used.

12. AI can predict alien life

- Developments in artificial intelligence (AI) may help us to predict the probability of life on other planets, according to a study.
- Researchers at Plymouth University in the UK used artificial neural networks (ANNs) to classify planets into five types, estimating a probability of life in each case, which could be used in future interstellar exploration missions.

What are ANNs?

- ANNs are systems that attempt to replicate the way the human brain learns. They are one of the main tools used in machine learning, and are particularly good at identifying patterns that are too complex for a biological brain to process.
- The team has trained the network to classify planets into five different types, based on whether they are most like the present-day Earth, the early Earth, Mars, Venus or Saturn's moon Titan.
- All five of these objects are rocky bodies known to have atmospheres, and are among the most potentially habitable objects in our Solar System.
- As life is currently known only to exist on Earth, the classification uses a 'probability of life' metric which is based on the relatively well-understood atmospheric and orbital properties of the five target types.
- Given the results so far, this method may prove to be extremely useful for categorising different types of exoplanets using results from ground-based and near Earth observatories.

13. How gut bacteria affect immunity?

Context

- A study by researchers has revealed that abundance and type of bacteria in the intestine gets altered when infected with tuberculosis
- "Good" gut bacteria improve digestion, strengthen the immune system, and manufacture the vitamins your body needs.
- On the other hand, "bad" gut bacteria can cause digestion nightmares, mental problems, skin conditions,

Experiments

- The team studied the gut bacteria of six patients diagnosed with TB and compared them with one healthy relative from each household.
- Despite the food consumed by the patients and healthy individuals remaining the same, there were significant differences in the type and abundance of gut bacteria.

Results

- They found that Prevotella and Bifidobacterium were abundant in the healthy individuals.

- * These bacteria are important for normal digestion and metabolism of the body.
- * They are found in abundance in the Indian gut due to the carbohydrate-rich diet
- In TB patients, bacteria like Faecalibacterium, Roseburia, Eubacterium and Phascolarctobacterium were significantly higher.
 - * These bacteria are known to produce short-chain fatty acids like butyrate and propionate, which are important for our gut, but their increased abundance can also lead to anti-inflammatory response, altering the immunity of our body
 - * The high number of these bacteria can also alter the normal metabolism of our body and can even reduce the appetite.

Significance

- This novel study may help further in understanding how drugs alter the gut microbiome and if probiotics/prebiotics and nutritional supplements should be given along with certain prescribed drugs.

14. IASST researchers use smart bandage for faster wound healing

Context

- A smart bandage material that can heal wounds better and faster and has antimicrobial properties has been fabricated by a team of researchers from the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST), Guwahati.

Components

- The bandage is made of cotton patch coated with chitosan-based hydrogel that is loaded with curcumin and graphene oxide.
 - * Cotton Patch can be utilised for loading nanomaterials and antimicrobials to impart wound-healing properties
 - * Graphene Oxide Nanomaterial was used for its antimicrobial properties and biocompatibility
- The researchers used curcumin as a model drug and Different drugs can be loaded on the patch depending on the nature of the wound

Why is Chitosan used?

- Cotton tends to stick to wounds and being fibrous it is difficult to remove it.
- By coating the cotton with chitosan and compressing the bandage we get a material with similar properties (porosity and ability to absorb water) as cotton but one that does not stick to the wound
- Chitosan is a sugar that is obtained from the hard outer skeleton of shellfish, including crab, lobster, and shrimp. It is used for medicine.

- * Chitosan is used to treat obesity, high cholesterol, and Crohn's disease. It is also used to treat complications that kidney failure patients on dialysis often face, including high cholesterol, "tired blood" (anemia), loss of strength and appetite, and trouble sleeping (insomnia).
- * In pharmaceutical manufacturing, chitosan is used as a filler in tablets; as a carrier in controlled-release drugs; to improve the way certain drugs dissolve; and to mask bitter tastes in solutions taken by mouth.

Testing

- The antimicrobial property of four cotton patches was tested in vitro using *Staphylococcus aureus* and *E. coli* bacteria.
- While no antimicrobial property was seen in the case of cotton coated with chitosan, patches that had either graphene oxide or curcumin exhibited antimicrobial activity
- Patches that had both graphene oxide and curcumin had only minimal or no growth of bacterial colonies.
- The superior antibacterial activity comes from combined action of the antimicrobials

Conclusion

- Cotton patch with graphene oxide or curcumin showed almost similar wound-healing capacity at the end of 21 days.
- But wounds treated with the patch containing both graphene oxide and curcumin showed faster and satisfactory healing along with hair growth in the wounded area by the end of three weeks.
- The cotton patch containing graphene oxide and curcumin served as a smart dressing material for wounds infected with bacteria
- The high absorption capacity of the patch takes care of the pus and porous nature provides good oxygen supply for faster healing.

15. Earth BioGenome Project (EBP)

- It proposes a detailed genome-sequence draft of every eukaryote species (organisms with a defined nucleus and to which belong all plants and animals).
- There are about eight million eukaryotic species and that being able to create their detailed genetic sequences will reveal unexpected, evolutionary connections among the genus, orders and families that make up the so-called Tree of Life.
- The EBP has a 10-year road map and hopes to sequence about 1.5 million eukaryote species in three phases. This exercise needs global collaboration and can have many benefits.
 - * For instance, the Large Hadron Collider at CERN has not only helped Indian physicists but also given a boost to Indian industries, in that they have designed specialised equipment for the machine.

- * The EBP will have similar spin-off benefits, the authors say. Sequencing such a large number of organisms will require innovative computation-and-storage solutions and the programming acumen of many thousands across the world.
- * The greatest legacy of the EBP will be the gift of knowledge — a complete Digital Library of Life that contains the collective biological intelligence of 3.5 billion years of evolutionary history

16. Gaia satellite

- Gaia is a space observatory of the European Space Agency (ESA)
- Gaia is an ambitious mission to chart a three-dimensional map of our Galaxy, the Milky Way, in the process revealing the composition, formation and evolution of the Galaxy. Gaia will provide unprecedented positional and radial velocity measurements with the accuracies needed to produce a stereoscopic and kinematic census of about one billion stars in our Galaxy
- Launched in 2013, Gaia started operating the following year, gathering data on 1,00,000 stars per minute — some 500 million measurements per day.
- Its first map was published in September 2016, based on a year's worth of observations of about 1.15 billion stars.

17. i-motif

- A new DNA structure inside human cells known as the "i-motif", has been identified by scientists.
- This form resembles a twisted "knot" of DNA, instead of the well-known double helix
- The scientists are not exactly sure what the function the i-motif is, but they suspect it is involved with the process of "reading" DNA sequences and converting them into useful substances.

How is it different?

- "The i-motif is a four-stranded 'knot' of DNA,"
- "In the knot structure, C [cytosine] letters on the same strand of DNA bind to each other – so this is very different from a double helix, where 'letters' on opposite strands recognise each other, and where Cs bind to Gs [guanines]."

SECURITY AND DEFENSE RELATED

1. Harimau Shakti

- The Indian and Malaysian armies will hold military exercise as part of efforts to bolster defence cooperation.
- The joint exercise 'Harimau Shakti' will take place in the dense forests of Sengai Perdik in Hulu Langat district of Malaysia

2. Tejas

Context

- Tejas has successfully fired an air-to-air beyond visual (BVR) range missile, demonstrating its overall capability as an effective combat jet

Details

- It is indigenously developed Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)
- The aircraft is developed by state-run aerospace behemoth Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) of DRDO.
- It is single-seat, single-jet engine, multirole light fighter
- LCA was officially named "Tejas" in 2003, meaning "Radiant" in Sanskrit by the then Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Advantages

- It reacts very smoothly, fly-by-wire, its turn radius is very good, maneuverability is very good
- The aircraft is equipped to handle air-to-air missiles, air-to-surface missiles, anti-ship missiles, bombs and rockets. It is considered to be the lightest multi-role supersonic aircraft of its class.
- It is meant to facilitate all weather use

Limitation

- it is a light combatant
- It cannot go into deep penetration
- It is mostly good for dogfights in our own sky or to degrade the opponent Army's command posts.

3. Fidayeen

- The term fedayi is derived from Arabic literally meaning: "those who sacrifice themselves"
- The fidayeen attack is a term used to describe suicidal strikes that are launched by militants
- Theologically, the suicide bombings and fidayeen attacks are a Salafi tradition.

Context

- Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM) has the new strategy of recruiting and training young, local boys for fidayeen attacks.

- The outfit was first to introduce local fidayeen on November 3, 1999
- An internal report of the Jammu and Kashmir police, details the outfit's game plan of recruiting youth and indoctrinating them to fight the state and the police.
 - * The youth are asked to join jihad, saying there is no freedom without sacrifice.
 - * Jem has gained strength and is now focused on the induction of locals into the fidayeen squads
 - * Inducting local youth as fidayeen, the report said, has become relatively easier in south Kashmir, where there is considerable support for militancy.
- Media reports point out that militant outfits like the JeM and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have so far turned to Pakistani militants to carry out these attacks as they better trained, specially in the use of ammunition.

Limitation

The outfit's stronghold remains Tral-Awantipora-Pulwama belt in south Kashmir. The adjacent Srinagar-Jammu National Highway has thus become vulnerable to attacks.

- The challenge now is to keep the Jaish confined to this area and not allow it to spread, the report says. If it were to expand to Srinagar, the security costs it would impose would be severe, the report warns.
- JeM has carried out four major fidayeen attacks in the past 12 months, including attacks on the Pulwama District Police Lines, the CRPF camp at Humhama and the Sunjuwan Army Camp attack in Jammu.

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. **Blackbuck Poaching- Salman gets 5year jail term**

Context

- A local court sentenced actor Salman Khan to five years in jail for having poached two blackbucks in a case from 19 years ago.
- He was also imposed a fine of ₹10,000 .

Background

- While shooting for the movie 'Hum Saath Saath Hain' in 1998 in Rajasthan, Salman allegedly went on a shooting expedition along with Saif, Neelam, Bendre and Tabu, and is believed to have killed two blackbucks in Jodhpur's Kankani village.
- Mr. Khan was charged with killing two endangered blackbucks in Kankani village

Other cases

- He has also been accused of killing two chinkaras, or Indian gazelles, at Bhavad village in 1998,
- a chinkara at the Ghoda farms
- Besides, he is also accused of using two firearms with licenses that had allegedly expired.

Blackbuck

- The blackbuck is a species of antelope protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- They are considered sacred by the Bishnoi community of Rajasthan.

Concerns

- Gangster Lawrence Bishnoi had recently issued a death threat to Khan when he was brought to Jodhpur during the trial of a case.
- The jail administration is taking precautions because several of Bishnoi's associates are lodged here. "We have made special security arrangements for Salman Khan inside the prison," Central Jail Superintendent Vikram Singh said.

Blackbuck/ Indian Antelope

- IUCN: Near Threatened

Spread

- The blackbuck (Antelope cervicapra) is a large species of antelope native to the Indian subcontinent.
- The blackbuck population is confined to areas in Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, with a few small pockets in central India.
- They are found in Nepal and Pakistan too.
- They are the "state animal" of Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.

Details

- The blackbuck is the only living species of the genus Antelope.
- Only males have horns that are diverging, cylindrical, spiral, and ringed throughout.
- In India, hunting of blackbucks is prohibited under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.
- Black buck show sexual dimorphism.

Where are they found?

- In India, blackbucks can be spotted in Kanha National Park, Ranthambore National Park, Corbett National Park, Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, Gir National Park, Velavadar Blackbuck National Park and Bandhavgarh National Park.

Threat

- Excessive hunting for meat and sporting trophies, as well as habitat loss.

Bishnoi community

- The Bishnoi community of Jodhpur consider the blackbuck to be the reincarnation of their religious Guru Bhagwan Jambheshwar also known as Guru Jambhoji.
- Jambaji or Jambheshwar Bhagwan had advocated 29 commandments to his followers who came to be known as Bishnois. The word Bishnoi means followers of 29 virtue - bish is 20 and noi means nine.
- The principles followed by Bishnois preach various aspects of brotherhood, penance, fighting social evils, reserving rights for women, wildlife preservation and kindness towards animals.
- The Bishnoi community is known for their love for nature worship and wildlife conservation. They are known to even sacrifice their life to save the blackbucks.
- According to Bishnoi folklore, Jambaji is believed to have instructed his followers that blackbuck was to be revered as his manifestation. When these animals, which are voracious eaters, raid the crop of the Bishnios, they prefer losing the crop than raising sticks or stones to drive them away.

2. **Earth Day**

- The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970,
- Earth Day Network's mission is to diversify, educate and activate the environmental movement worldwide to build environmental democracy.
- This year's Earth Day is dedicated to providing the information and inspiration needed to eventually end plastic pollution

- Earth Day Network will mobilize its global network of non-governmental organizations and grassroots groups, as well as local elected officials, faith leaders, artists, athletes, students and teachers “to build a world of educated consumers, voters and activists of all ages who understand the environmental, climate and health consequences of using plastic,”

3. Guiana dolphins perish

Context

- Over the last few months, over 200 Guiana dolphins have died in Brazil’s Sepetiba Bay due to viral infection. But now scientists wonder if there’s more to the tragedy than just a virus

Other causes

- The dolphins are sentinels. When something is wrong with them, that indicates the whole ecosystem is fractured.
- The number of industries and ventures along Sepetiba Bay has been growing exponentially in recent years. What that generates is a greater concentration of pollutants in the seafloor and in the food chain.
- Scientists have attributed the rash of dolphin deaths to morbillivirus, an airborne virus from the family that causes measles in humans. They are now seeking to understand how the dolphins became so highly vulnerable to the virus, and are examining the role of pollution and environment degradation.
- The effects of the virus — rash, fever, respiratory infection, disorientation — suggest an agonising death.
- Dying dolphins were seen swimming sideways and alone. Some carcasses had deformations. Outbreaks have been reported among dolphins in other parts of the world, but this is the first for the species in the South Atlantic.
- The Guiana dolphin, a species found from Central America to southern Brazil, is considered a sentinel because, as a top predator and mammal, it is prone to disease linked to polluted waters.

4. Javan Green Magpie

- IUCN: Critically Endangered
- It is endemic to montane forests on the Indonesian island of Java

Unique Attribute

- In the wild, they naturally dye themselves bright green by eating green insects that contain a yellow pigment called lutein.
- When they’re kept in cages, their colour can change from green to bright blue due to inadequate diet

Threat

- On Java, most forest below 1,000 m, and in some areas up to 1,500 m, has been cleared, which is suspected to have caused serious decline

- Habitat and loss and degradation is driven primarily by agricultural expansion, logging and mining.
- Excessive trapping for the cage-bird trade is also thought to be a significant threat

5. Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate (MOSAIC)

- It is yearlong expedition in arctic. The project with a total budget exceeding 60 Million € has been designed by an international consortium of leading polar research institutions, under the umbrella of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC)
- The expedition will gather data observing the ocean, ice and atmosphere, helping to better understand the physical, chemical and biological properties of the Arctic environment and how it is changing.
- The results of MOSAIC will contribute to enhance understanding of the regional and global consequences of Arctic climate change and sea-ice loss and improve weather and climate predictions. As such it will support safer maritime and offshore operations, contribute to an improved scientific basis for future fishery and traffic along northern sea routes, increase coastal-community resilience, and support science-informed decision-making and policy development.

6. Owls in demand in election season

Context

- There has been an upswing in the demand for owls, which are included in the schedule of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act after the announcement of Karnataka Elections

Why?

- This is because some candidates and their supporters believe that it brings them good luck.

Issue Area

- cases of poaching have been registered in Kollegal in Chamarajanagar district, Doddaballapur in Bengaluru Rural, and Chintamani in Chickballapur district
- Poachers have been using social media to sell the birds. Birds’ photographs and prices are being circulated through WhatsApp

Govt Action

- Forest mobile squads have stepped up vigilance around villages in Kollegal and other forest ranges to prevent poaching of owls

7. Palytoxins

- Corals can be pretty little things to look at, but many don’t know that some of them carry toxins.
- Palytoxin is a potentially life-threatening toxin that can act via dermal, inhalation, and oral routes of exposure.
- Palytoxin kills only when ingested but inhaling its fumes can cause disruption of “normal corneal function and irreversible blindness.

In cases of severe palytoxin poisoning

- While it has been suggested that a vasodilator may be an effective treatment if immediately injected into the ventricle of the heart, the reliability of this treatment is not good, especially as poisoning with this toxin may not be known until post-mortem analysis.
- The most effective treatment, as per the magazine, is prevention. Reef keepers handling any marine invertebrates should use great caution, and gloves are highly recommended for zoanthids and corals, whether the specimen is known to be dangerous or not. Tools, like a pair of tongs, are even better for moving and handling specimens.

8. Ban on sale of cattle for slaughter**Context**

- Centre has sought to withdraw the ban on sale of cattle for slaughter in animal markets.
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules 2017 was passed.

Allegations

- In the name of preventing cruelty to animals and regulating livestock markets the government was surreptitiously throttling the cattle trade and furthering the cow protection agenda.
- The rules were criticized for restricting legitimate animal trade and interfering with dietary habits

State View

- Chief Ministers were opposing it on the ground that regulating livestock trade was essentially a State subject.
- Even assuming that the Centre had jurisdiction under the law against animal cruelty to notify the rules, it was obvious that only the States could enforce them.
- There was an impression that under the guise of stiff regulations, the Centre was making it impossible for cattle, a term that covers cows, buffalo, bulls and camels, to be slaughtered even for food, despite the PCA Act recognizing explicitly that animals can be food for humans.

What the law Says?

- Prevention of Cruelty Act 1960, particularly in exercise of powers under Section 38(1), which enables the Central government to make Rules to carry out the purposes of the Act. The objective of the Act, as revealed by its preamble is to prevent infliction of unnecessary pain
- The Act does not prevent slaughtering of animals. In fact, the Act saves and permits killing of animals for the purposes of food. It is very clear from the proviso of Section 11, which excludes acts done for destruction of any animal for food of mankind

Violations

- The rules infringe one's fundamental right to practise trade and business, guaranteed under Article 19(1)(g). The said right can be restricted only by means of an enacted law, and not through a delegated legislation framed by the executive.
- The Rules also infringe one's right to livelihood, which emanates from Article 21

Impact

- The meat trade, valued at thousands of crores of rupees, would have suffered a serious setback had the rules been implemented

Therefore Good governance is not only about regulating human and economic activities, but also about avoiding perceptions of sectarianism.

9. Scramble Competition

- This refers to a form of ecological competition wherein a number of species compete for a resource that is limited in supply, which in turn lowers the survival chances of all the competing species.
- Since there is no limit placed on the exploitation of the resource, it may be used up aggressively by all the species that have free access to it.
- This, in turn, might cause most, or even all, species in need of the resource to go without enough of it to sustain themselves.
- Scramble competition can lead to mass extinction even when the competition for a resource is limited exclusively to the members of only a particular species.

10. Tel River

- The Tel river flows in Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Balangir, Sonpur District of Odisha
- Tel is an important tributary of Mahanadi.
- Baidyanath temple, which is famous for the Kosaleshwar Shiva temple, is located on the left bank of the Tel River.

11. Umred Pauni Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is about 48 km from Nagpur, in Maharashtra
- This Sanctuary has also connection with Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve through forest along Wainganga River.
- It is bounded roughly by the Wainganga river and the Gose Khurd Dam on the northeast

12. Draft National Forest Policy, 2018**Background**

The current National Forest Policy dates back to 1988 before India's economic liberalization started f

- One is a natural forest, nature's complex multi-layered ecosystem and a landscaped home to 80% of all terrestrial biodiversity where thousands of species of plants, animals and microorganisms interact and thrive.
- The second forest is a human creation, a single-layered monotonous plantation of commercially viable plants and trees. Ecologists often call it the silent forest for the lack of biodiversity.

Importance

- Although both types have a role to play in human society, the ecological importance of a natural forest far outweighs a plantation.
- It's common knowledge that our survival on earth is linked inextricably to the health of natural forests and its ecosystem services.

Stats

- The State of Forest Report says that forest cover had increased in India by 0.21% in 2017 from 2015, and that some areas had become 'Very Dense Forest' in this period.
- At the same time, the Ministry itself admits that between 2014 and 2017, India lost, or legally diverted, 36,575 hectares of forest area towards 1,419 development projects.

So, two things are clear: even if forest cover is being increased, it is also simultaneously being lost, and new forest may also be subsequently lost.

Issue Area

- India doesn't have a legal definition of the term "forest".
 - * Forestry in India is classified into four categories—Protection Forests, National Forests, Village Forests and Tree Lands.
 - * Whereas, the Forest Survey of India defines forest types—natural forest into 16 different types, plus an additional category known as "Plantation/Trees Outside Forest (TOF)".
- Tea estates and commercial plantations, have been counted as forests.
- Environmentalists stress that it is difficult to believe that India's forest cover has become denser in the last two years simply because this process takes much longer.

Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and its contribution to Forest Conservation

- The Biological Diversity Act, 2002, calls for setting up a Biodiversity Management Committee in each local body.
- The Committee will prepare People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs), with tribals as members or people living in natural areas not classified legally as forest.
- The Registers entail a complete documentation of biodiversity in the area — plants, food sources, wildlife, medicinal sources, etc.

- They are meant to enable the creation of local biodiversity funds for conservation, and aid in decision-making.

Uses of Act

- A good PBR will not just be a powerful text, it can also help to trace how habitats are changing, and to understand and estimate parts of our forests.
- Being a bottom-up exercise, it is also a means of understanding the overlap of cultural and natural biodiversity. For instance, several Endemic Birds Areas, like in the Western Ghats, are those where tribals like the Todas live.
- These communities have specific ways of interacting with the environment and have helped conserve it in a sustainable way.
- Outside protected forest areas which are under immediate threat, PBRs will help identify forests that require conservation.

What should be done?

- PBRs and Biodiversity Management Committees are not integrated into the heart of the draft Forest Policy. So the policy should make changes to incorporate this sustainable treasure.
- The policy should take forward an existing legislation to achieve that elusive blend of tradition and modernity and also create digitized maps with truths from the ground.

Decentralisation

- The view of forests in India has been that of a natural resource which requires management and effective commercial use. This is a largely centralized, government-run exercise.
- Forests are managed by forest departments, and their estimation and range is calculated by government agencies.
- Draft Forest Policy talks about increasing forests, including for commercial purposes, through public-private partnerships, it does not create a mechanism for including those who live around forests.

Threats

- There are various threats to Forests due to encroachments, illegal tree felling, forest fires, invasive weeds, grazing, etc. will be addressed within the framework of the approved Working Plan/Management Plan but it fails to provide systems for community involvement.
- A major concern is that existing forests should not be used for industrial use, as diversion is one of the biggest threats to forests.

A move towards decentralisation of forest wealth — wealth which is beyond commerce and embraces cultural values and oft-forgotten knowledge — will provide transparency as well as an actual and felt recognition of our heritage.

Way forward

- So there is a need to create mechanisms to calculate our actual forest cover and natural wealth, and this should form the basis for a forest policy.
- For this, we need a more rigorous integration of the forest policy with other existing environmental legislation and policy. This, in turn, will help decentralize information on forests.

13. At home and in exileExternal Side

- Syrian and Rohingya crises grabbed world's attention turned to forced displacement and refugees. Both exemplified the typical conditions under which people are forcibly displaced: war, political persecution, economic instability and repression.

Internal Front

- But most of the world's migration is internal, i.e. within the same country.
- Among the tens of millions displaced in 2015, 21.3 million were refugees, but 40.8 million were internally displaced.
- People usually change their homes to improve household income, for marriage or other purposes relating to family.

Impact of Climate change

- With climate change effects like droughts, increase in sea level and water shortages will cause many more to leave their homes and move to safer places.
- The gradual rise in sea levels wherein people are compelled to leave their island nations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and become climate exiles is one such ongoing process that will likely increase out-migration over time

Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration

- It is a report by the World Bank
- it is estimated that in Latin America, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa over 143 million people would be forced to move within borders by 2050 as a result of slow onset climate events alone.
- In the worst-case scenario, about 40 million of these migrants would be in South Asia, which is the most populous of the regions studied, with a number of climate change effects anticipated.

The report examines countries in East Africa, South Asia and Central America more closely.

Three possible scenarios are described:

- **Pessimistic Reference Scenario:** high greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions along with unequal development paths
- **Inclusive Development Scenario:** with high GHG emissions but development paths that improve access to services for the poor and consider their priorities and unmet needs;

- **Climate-Friendly Scenario** involving lower GHG emissions but with unequal development.

Issue Area

South Asia is characterized by rain-fed farmland in large parts of the region.

- With variability in the monsoons and warmer temperatures, crop failures will lead to migration from the Gangetic plains and from the rice-growing northeast of Bangladesh and the inundated coasts.
 - * In the pessimistic scenario, the numbers forced to move internally in South Asia are expected to increase six-fold between 2020 and 2050 and will continue to rise beyond 2050 without appropriate climate action.
 - * Even in the inclusive development and climate-friendly scenarios, tens of millions will be forced to migrate.
- While people normally gravitate to big cities, those along the coast such as Mumbai, Chennai, Chittagong and Dhaka will themselves be vulnerable to storm surges and other effects from sea level rise.

Rural Migration

- The poor would be the worst affected by these slow onset events and most of them would migrate out of rural areas to nearby urban settlements, which would be cities and the peri-urban surroundings.
- Such "hotspots" of in and out migration would be stressed for natural resources, public services and livelihoods.
- In India, areas between Chennai and Bengaluru have been highlighted in the report along with those around Mexico City, Guatemala City and Nairobi.

In India, there are already signs of unplanned and frontier-led growth in peri-urban areas. Past experience shows that planning that ignores the ecosystem services provided by local natural resources such as water tanks and forested areas generates further problems particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable.

Steps to be taken

- Cut greenhouse gases now
 - * Strong global climate action is needed to meet the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting the future temperature increase to less than 2°C by the end of this century.
 - * Even at this level of warming, countries will be locked into a certain level of internal climate migration.
 - * Still higher levels of greenhouse gas emissions could lead to the severe disruption of livelihoods and ecosystems, further creating the conditions for increased climate migration.
 - * Without rapid greenhouse gas emissions reductions over the next two decades, the report's pessimistic scenario is likely to become reality.

- Embed climate migration in development planning
 - * There is an urgent need for countries to integrate climate migration into national development plans. Most regions have poorly prepared laws, policies, and strategies to deal with people moving from areas of increasing climate risk into areas that may already be heavily populated.
- Invest now to improve understanding of internal climate migration
 - * More investment is needed to better contextualize and understand climate migration, particularly at scales ranging from regional to local, where climate impacts may deviate from the broader trends identified in a global-scale analysis.
 - * In many cases, a richer, more detailed set of climate, biophysical, socioeconomic, and political indicators is available at regional, national, and local levels.

So, ignoring issues of social justice and equity in adaptation can lead to serious governance failure.

Way forward

- Therefore, understanding migration patterns, getting better socioeconomic data on migration and preparing in advance through appropriate planning become critical.
- The scenarios used in the Bank report could be extended to cover other time periods and could also be more localised.

14. Concern over disappearing lions

Context

- Gir in Gujarat is the last abode of Asiatic lions in Asia but it has lost an alarmingly large number of the endangered wild cats in two years

Reasons

- The number of lion attacks on livestock and humans in 2016 and 2017 was pegged at 398, raising serious concerns about a man-lion conflict
- As many as 32 died of "unnatural causes" like falling into wells or getting run over by trains in the same period at the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary.

Steps taken by Govt

- Government has promised to build parapet walls "as soon as possible."
- Construction of fences along the rail track in Amreli district and building speedhumps on roads in the sanctuary.

Way forward

The Gujarat government, which has always taken pride in showcasing Gujarat as the only habitat of Asiatic lions, refuses to translocate some of them to Madhya Pradesh despite a Supreme Court order.

- It must make sincere efforts to provide adequate protection to the animals moving out to non-protected areas.
- It must increase the size of the protected areas to prevent more lions from dying.

15. Dams in India did more harm than good, says UN

Water report

Sounding a warning that over five billion people across the globe may run into water shortage, a United Nations report has pointed out that dams in India have done more harm than good to the cause of water security.

- Suggesting natural solutions to handle the water crisis, the UN World Water Development Report, 2018, notes that large-scale water development projects have led to major impacts like human displacement, and achieved only limited food security – one of the main objectives of such projects.

What does the report say?

- The report lays emphasis on the importance of "nature-based solutions" to meet the crisis and calls for ancestral and indigenous solutions.
- The World Commission on Dams country study on India concluded that a century or more of large-scale water development had resulted in major social and ecological impacts, including substantial human displacement, soil erosion and widespread waterlogging while, contrary to stated objectives, achieving only limited food security benefits.

With India being world's largest extractor of ground water, followed by the US, China, Iran and Pakistan – together accounting for 67 per cent of total abstractions worldwide, the report stated that even the water-rich high flood-prone regions like Gangetic basins are facing groundwater depletion.

- Water withdrawals for irrigation purposes have been identified as the primary driver of groundwater depletion worldwide, according to the report. About 800 cubic-km water is extracted globally for irrigation.
- Even though large-scale groundwater recharge programmes have been operating in India for decades, the focus has been on water-scarce areas, with no real emphasis on flood risk management. Highly flood-prone basins such as the Ganges are now showing clear signs of groundwater depletion.
- Warning conflicts over water, the report stresses that global food production by 2050 has to double to feed an estimated nine billion population. Currently, almost 800 million people are hungry across the world.
- Currently, an estimated 3.6 billion people (nearly half the global population) live in areas that are potentially water-scarce at least one month per year. This population could increase to some 4.8 to 5.7 billion by 2050.
- The stakes are high with two-thirds of forests and wetland lost globally, soil is eroding and deteriorating in quality.

- Since the 1990s, water pollution has worsened in almost all rivers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Water scarcity can lead to civil unrest, mass migration, and even to conflicts within and between countries."

Pushing for watershed and water harvesting projects on a larger scale, the report acknowledges India's efforts to generate awareness among communities on "ancestral survival systems", which talk of ancient ways to ensure water security.

- The report also hails the success of solution presented by NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh -- led by India's Waterman Rajendra Singh -- which is credited to have brought water back to 1,000 drought-stricken villages in Rajasthan.
- Through small-scale water harvesting structures in Rajasthan, the NGO successfully revived five rivers, recharged ground water level by six meters and increased agriculture production by 20 to 80 per cent.
- These solutions can also contribute to other aspects of sustainable development, from ensuring food security and reducing disaster risk to building sustainable urban settlements and boosting decent work.

16. India and China jointly contribute to over 50% of global deaths attributed to pollution

- More than 95% of the world's population is breathing unhealthy air, with India and China jointly contributing to over 50% of global deaths attributed to pollution, a new report has found.

Highlights of the Report

- According to the annual State of Global Air Report, published by the Boston-based Health Effects Institute, long-term exposure to air pollution contributed to an estimated 6.1 million deaths across the globe in 2016. The report found that India topped China for early deaths from outdoor air pollution with 1.1 mn in 2016.
- While China had made some progress in declining air pollution, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have experienced the steepest increases in air pollution levels since 2010, it added.
- Air pollution was the fourth-highest cause of death among all health risks globally, coming in below high blood pressure, diet and smoking, it said.
- Air pollution takes a huge personal toll worldwide, making it difficult to breathe for those with respiratory disease, sending the young and old to hospital, missing school and work, and contributing to early death.

17. Centre proposes relaxation of coastal regulation zone norms

- The Centre has allowed India's coasts to be made more accessible to tourism and industrial infrastructure and given individual States considerable leeway to decide how they should plan such development, according to a draft version of the proposed modification to India's coastal regulation zone plan made public on the Environment Ministry website.
- The coastal regulation zone, or CRZ, 2011, refers to regions in the proximity of India's 7000-km-long shoreline where buildings, tourism facilities, industrial projects, residential facilities etc are highly regulated. In most cases it begins from the high tide line (HTL) to about 500 metres towards the landward side. The zone is subdivided into regions, with varying leeway for infrastructure development, depending on population and ecological sensitivity.
- The CRZ-1, for instance, includes the most ecologically sensitive areas and according to current laws is off-limits for tourism activities and infrastructure development except for defence, strategic and rare public utilities projects.
- According to the new CRZ, 2018 notification "...nature trails and eco-tourism activities..." may be permitted in CRZ-1 regions provided they conform to state-approved coastal zone management plans.

Present Law

- The current law, called the CRZ, 2011 also defines as 'coastal zone,' the region from the HTL to 100 m of the creek along 'tidal-influenced bodies' such as bays, estuaries, rivers, backwaters, lagoons and ponds etc. that are connected to the sea. The proposed laws relax this to 50 metres.
- Earlier, rural habitations or relatively undisturbed areas close to the shore, called CRZ-II, possessed a 200 metre 'no development zone'. This has now been reduced to 50 metres, provided the area has a population density exceeding 2161 per square kilometre as per the 2011 Census.
- Environmentalists say that the new regulations have been framed without a transparent public consultation process. A committee headed by Shailesh Nayak, former secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, had framed a report to reconsider the limits of the existing coastal zone regulations.
- The report, however, wasn't made public by the Environment Ministry.

18. New system to measure air quality

Context

- India is tying up with the United States and Finland to develop a pollution-forecast system that will help anticipate particulate matter (PM) levels at least two days in advance and at a greater resolution than what is possible now

Current System

- Currently, the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), run out of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, serves as the apex forecaster of pollution trends in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and Ahmedabad.
- It generates a likely air quality profile, a day in advance, for these cities.
- IITM is an organisation under the MoES.

Details

- The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) will be coordinating this exercise and the plan is to have a system in place by winter
- The new system, to be jointly developed with expertise from the Finnish Meteorological Institute and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, will use a different modelling approach as well as computational techniques from that employed in the SAFAR model.

National Clean Air Programme

- It is a medium term national level strategy to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner.
- The overall objective is to augment and evolve effective ambient air quality monitoring network across the country besides ensuring comprehensive management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.
- The NCAP focuses on collaborative and participatory approach covering all sources of pollution and coordination between relevant Central Ministries, State Governments, local bodies and other stakeholders.
- In order to ensure use of new technologies to combat the rising challenge of air pollution in India, a separate component on 'Technology Assessment Cell' has been envisaged under NCAP to evaluate the technologies for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution."
- It envisions setting up 1,000 manual air-quality-monitoring stations (a 45% increase from the present number) and 268 automatic stations (triple the current 84).
- It also, for the first time, plans to set up pollution-monitoring stations in rural areas.
- Other measures include air quality forecasting system, issuance of notification on dust management, a three-tier mechanism for review, assessment and inspection for implementation and a national emission inventory.

Concerns

- The government has refrained from specifying pollution-reduction targets

The absence of pollution reduction targets of 35 per cent in three years and 50 per cent in five years in the draft National Clean Air Program (NCAP) of the Environment Ministry is a cause of "grave concern"

HEALTH ISSUES

1. B cells

- They are a type of white blood cell of the lymphocyte subtype
- Many B cells mature into what are called plasma cells that produce antibodies (proteins) necessary to fight off infections while other B cells mature into memory B cells.
- B cells mature in the bone marrow, which is at the core of most bones

Details

- B Cells are the mainstay of the body's immune systems as they produce antibodies to fight infection
- However, there is also what is called a 'silenced' army of B Cells. Unlike the regular B cells, cells of this army pose a danger to the body. This is because they can make 'bad' antibodies which can attack oneself and cause autoimmune diseases.
- For this reason, they are kept in a long-term silenced state (known as anergy)
- However, researchers have now discovered that with a few minor tweaks these silent B cells can be changed to behave like traditional B cells. Therefore, they bode hope for future vaccine development

2. Beta-amyloid

- It is also known as amyloid beta — is a sticky protein that can accumulate between brain cells and form "plaques."
- These plaques disrupt brain cell communication, and this is believed to play a key role in Alzheimer's disease.

Context

- Scientists from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) discovered that adults who experienced one single night of sleep deprivation showed an immediate increase in levels of beta-amyloid.
- The researchers noticed an increase in beta-amyloid levels in the right hippocampus of the subjects' brains, as well as in the thalamus.
- The hippocampus is the brain region associated with long-term memory, and the thalamus is a brain region involved in processing sensory information.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive cognitive disorder characterized by memory loss and changes in behavior. It is the most common form of dementia, affecting around 5.7 million adults in the United States alone.

3. Govt. bans imports of hormone oxytocin

Context

- The Union government banned imports of the hormone oxytocin to stop its misuse in the livestock industry

What was it used for?

- The drug is used by dairy owners and farmers to boost milk production and make vegetables look bigger and fresher.
- In mammals, Oxytocin stimulates ejection of milk from the mammary glands. But, its use can cause reproductive damage in animals and even their death.
- It is used to speed up child birth which is wrong and should be shunned

Why?

- It causes hormonal imbalances and shortens the lives of milch animals.
- Misuse of Oxytocin is leading to early sterility in milch animals at an unprecedented rate
- Overdose of the drug in humans can lead to haemorrhage, palpitation, low blood pressure and in some cases even death.

What is Oxytocin?

- Often called the 'love hormone', oxytocin is released naturally in human bonding activities such as sex, childbirth and breastfeeding

HC order in the past

- In March 2016, the Himachal Pradesh High Court directed the Central government to "consider the feasibility of restricting the manufacture of Oxytocin only in public sector companies and also restricting and limiting the manufacture by companies to whom licences have already been granted."

Laws

- The drug Oxytocin is banned in India under Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and Food and Drug Adulteration Prevention Act, 1960.
- The manufacture and sale of Oxytocin without a licence is a cognisable.
- It is a Schedule H drug
 - * The Drugs and Cosmetic Rule, 1945 is an Act passed by the parliament of India which contain provisions for the classification of drugs under different schedules
 - * From the medical point, the most important schedules listed in it are G, H, X and J.

- * Schedule H : These are drugs that are to be sold on the prescription of a Registered Medical Practitioner.
- * A very simple example would be antibiotics
- * These drugs can be easily abused and if abused may lead to further complications or may render the drug ineffective in the future if not used properly.

Govt Move

- The government has decided to rely on domestic production to satisfy requirements of the hormone.

4. Project Dhoopj

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) launched a nationwide campaign in Delhi to spread awareness about availing Vitamin D through natural sunlight and consuming fortified food among school-going children.
- Project Dhoop urges schools to shift their morning assembly to noon time, mainly between 11am and 1pm to ensure maximum absorption of Vitamin D in students through natural sunlight.
- The school uniforms need to be designed in a way that at least face and arms are exposed to sunlight, which would be equivalent to 18 per cent of body surface, and the exposure has to be at least for 30-40 minutes
- Vitamin D deficiency occurs due to overuse of sunscreen, wearing clothes that cover most of the skin, working all day in an air-conditioned atmosphere, and other factors

5. Alzheimer's gene neutralised in human brain for first time

- In a first, scientists have identified and successfully erased the effects of a key gene that significantly increases the risk for Alzheimer's disease.
- Having one copy of the apoE4 gene more than doubles a person's likelihood of developing Alzheimer's disease, and having two copies of the gene increases the risk by 12-fold, as compared to the most common version of the gene, apoE3.
- The apoE4 gene creates a protein of the same name. The apoE4 protein differs from the apoE3 protein at only one point, but that single change is enough to alter its main structure and, thus, its function.
- Researchers from the Gladstone Institutes in the US were also able to erase the damage caused by apoE4 by changing it, with a small molecule, into a harmless apoE3-like version.
- This discovery indicates that the presence of apoE4 - and not the absence of apoE3 - promotes the disease.
- Finally, researchers looked for ways to repair the abnormalities caused by apoE4.
- They developed a class of compounds that can change the structure of the harmful apoE4 protein so it resembles the innocuous apoE3 protein, referred to as apoE4 structure correctors.

- Treating human apoE4 neurons with a structure corrector eliminated the signs of Alzheimer's disease, restored normal function to the cells, and improved cell survival.

6. IIT Ropar develops technique for early diagnosis of breast cancer

- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ropar, has proposed a technique for early detection of breast cancer in women of all ages, including pregnant or nursing women, irrespective of the breast type.

Infrared Thermography (IRT)

- A novel pulse compression favourable active infrared thermography makes use of infrared emission emanating from the breast to detect hidden tumours inside it at very early stage for predefined thermal stimulus (a stimulus produced by a change in skin temperature) on a breast under examination.
- Infrared Thermography (IRT) is a fast, painless, non-contact and non-invasive imaging method, complementary to mammography, ultrasound and magnetic resonance imaging methods for early diagnosis of breast cancer.
- The widely used mammography showed its limitations in detecting tumours present in the dense breast.
 - * Dense breasts had less fat and more gland tissue in comparison to the fatty breasts which restricts mammography to detect tumours with confidence.
- Especially for the tumours situated in the gland region of breast due to the insignificant density variations between the gland and tumour regions, mammography fails to provide enough radiographic contrast between the tumour location and healthy region of the breast.
- This limits the applicability of mammography in screening of dense breasts. Also, mammography provides discomfort to the patient and exposure to harmful ionising radiation further restricts its applicability. However, the present active IRT technique outperforms the standard method of mammography by providing patient friendly breast screening.

7. Centre to snuff out 'toxic' e-cigarettes

- The Centre has informed the Delhi High Court that it is in the process of issuing guidelines to ban the manufacture, import, sale and any kind of trade in e-cigarettes, dubbing it a "new emerging threat".
- It said the flavouring agent in e-cigarettes was intended towards attracting the youth to a "new nicotine delivery product".
- The glamorising marketing techniques of ENDS as a less harmful product purely mimics the marketing techniques used by the cigarette industry for slim- or low-tar cigarettes and are youth-oriented.

- The Ministry submitted that the chief constituent of e-cigarettes was nicotine, which was addictive.
- It also has a high level of toxicity and can lead to development of cardiovascular diseases, lung diseases, have adverse effect on the immune and gastrointestinal systems, and raise the risk of miscarriage in pregnant women.
- Though there are no specific guidelines to deal with e-cigarettes, several State governments and Union Territories have taken steps to prohibit it.

E-Cigarettes

- An electronic cigarette or e-cigarette is a handheld electronic device that simulates the feeling of tobacco smoking. It works by heating a liquid to generate an aerosol, commonly called a "vapor", that the user inhales.
- Using e-cigarettes is sometimes called vaping. The liquid in the e-cigarette, called e-liquid, is usually made of nicotine, propylene glycol, glycerine, and flavorings. Not all e-liquids contain nicotine.
- The health risks of e-cigarettes are uncertain. They are likely safer than tobacco cigarettes but are of unclear effect in relation to other methods of stopping smoking. Their long-term health effects are not known.
- They may help some smokers quit. When used by non-smokers, e-cigarettes can lead to nicotine addiction, and there is concern that children could start smoking after using e-cigarettes
- E-cigarettes create an aerosol, commonly called vapor. Its exact composition varies. The majority of toxic chemicals found in tobacco smoke are absent in e-cigarette aerosol.
- Those present are mostly below 1% corresponding levels in tobacco smoke. The aerosol can contain toxicants and traces of heavy metals at levels permissible in inhalation medicines, and potentially harmful chemicals not found in tobacco smoke at concentrations permissible by workplace safety standards.
- However, chemical concentrations may exceed the stricter public safety limits.

8. WHO directives call for support for breastfeeding

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) issued a new 10-step guidance to increase support for breastfeeding in health facilities that provide maternity and newborn services, which provide the immediate health system platform to help mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour and breastfeed exclusively for six months.
- Breastfeeding all babies for the first 2 years would save the lives of more than 8,20,000 children under age 5 annually, noted a release issued by the WHO.

- The guidelines describe how hospitals should have a written breastfeeding policy in place, required staff competencies, and antenatal and post-birth care, including breastfeeding support for mothers.
- It also recommends limited use of breast milk substitutes, rooming-in, responsive feeding, educating parents on the use of bottles and pacifiers, and support when mothers and babies are discharged from hospital.
- Breastfeeding saves lives. Its benefits help keep babies healthy in their first days and last well into adulthood.
- But breastfeeding requires support, encouragement and guidance. With these basic steps, implemented properly, we can significantly improve breastfeeding rates around the world and give children the best possible start in life.
- WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that in many hospitals and communities across the world, the question whether a child can be breastfed or not can make the difference between life and death.

9. Rabies

- It is a viral disease that causes inflammation of the brain in humans and other mammals
- Symptoms include fever, headache, excess salivation, muscle spasms, paralysis and mental confusion.

Stats

- More than 26,000 people in the region die of rabies every year.
- Eight of the 11 countries in the region account for around 45% of the world's rabies burden, with over 1.5 billion people at risk of exposure.
- More than 6 million patients receive at least one dose of the rabies vaccine every year.

Initiatives

- Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Thailand have sharply cut rabies-related infection and mortality using mass canine vaccination campaigns and improving access to life-saving, Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) treatments.
- In India, similar initiatives in Goa, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu have saved countless lives.
- All World Health Organisation-South East Asia countries have, meanwhile, phased out the production and use of nerve-tissue vaccines; six have introduced cost-effective, intradermal vaccination schedules to improve the accessibility, affordability and availability of the modern rabies vaccine.

Control Measures

- vaccinating dogs, a prime reservoir of rabies, is a good point to start from
- This requires countries to develop efficient vaccine procurement systems as well as sustainable logistics and infrastructure for canine vaccination.

- It requires leaders to fully grasp that mass canine vaccination and animal birth control is the most efficient way to prevent dog-mediated rabies.
- Public information campaigns are critical to building awareness of what responsible dog ownership looks like, and preventing and treating bites or scratches when they occur

EDUCATION

1. National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)

- NIRF has been launched by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), in 2015. This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country.
- The methodology draws from the overall recommendations broad understanding arrived at by a Core Committee set up by MHRD, to identify the broad parameters for ranking various universities and institutions.
- The framework follows an Indian approach which considers India-centric parameters like diversity and inclusiveness apart from excellence in teaching learning and research.
- As decided by the Ministry of HRD, Ranking of institutions of Higher Education will be an annual exercise. Ranks will be declared on the 1st Monday of April every year.

The parameters broadly cover the following

- Teaching Learning and Resources - These parameters are related to the core activities of any place of learning. These lay emphasis on measuring numbers and quality of faculty, library and lab resources and general facilities for development of young persons. These are organized into the following sub-parameters:
 - * Student Strength including Doctoral Students
 - * Faculty-student ratio with emphasis on permanent faculty (FSR)
 - * Combined metric for Faculty with PhD (or equivalent) and Experience (FQE)
 - * Total Budget and Its Utilisation: (CBTU)
- Research, consulting and collaborative performance- These parameters attempt to measure the quantity and quality of research output as seen through international data bases, IPR generation and interface with industry and fellow professionals.
- Graduation outcomes- This parameter forms the ultimate test of the effectiveness of the core teaching/learning activity, and measures the student graduation rate and their success in finding appropriate placement in industry and Government or taking up higher studies.
- Outreach & Inclusivity - The Ranking framework lays special emphasis on representation of women and socially challenged persons in student and/or faculty populations, and also on outreach activities of the institution. These are detailed below:

- * Percent Students from other states/countries (Region Diversity RD)
- * Region Diversity
- * Percentage of Women (WF) + (WS) + (WA)
- * Economically and Socially Challenged Students (ESCS)
- * Facilities for Physically Challenged Students (PCS)

- Perception- The ranking methodology gives a significant importance to the perception of the institutes by its stakeholders. This will be accomplished through Stakeholder Surveys.

Importance

- It would enable parents, students, teachers, educational institutions and other stakeholders to rank institutions on the basis of a set of objective parameters and a transparent process.
- The NIRF will facilitate a level playing field in ranking for institutions
- Institutions which have been working in languages other than English and excelled relatively in the recent past will be identified and will be benefitted.

Why do we need a national framework?

- The two most important world university rankings — QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) and Times Higher Education rankings, there are almost no Indian universities in the top 100. According to a study on the importance of national rankings, a combination study of the national and international rankings of universities will help create better research policies and help universities become better.
- A national ranking system, and one that is as exhaustive as this one, will propel institutions into higher world rankings.
- International rankings do not entirely suit Indian realities.
- As the Indian system of evaluation evolves and when the Indian educational institutes excel by competing with each other to become role models for the rest of the society for their teaching, research and social commitment, the world is going to take note of it.
- To provide benchmarks to measure the productivity of Indian universities and creating a sense of movement and competition among them.
- International ranking agencies does not consider inclusivity of our institutions and the body of work in regional languages.

Why not NAAC?

- The first government effort at quality assessment in the education sector at the national level was initiated with the creation of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC – for colleges and universities)
- The NAAC currently uses seven criteria to evaluate and grade higher education institutions.
- The NAAC's methodological problem is that there is no uniform evaluation – even though the parameters are uniform, results have been unpredictable because there is a different visiting team to each institution leading to much subjectivity and criticism.

Criticism

- NIRF 2017, however, still suffers from a methodological bias resulting in larger higher education institutions occupying more positions in the top 100.
- One of the five criteria used by NIRF 2017 for rank calculation is “perception” by peers, with a weight of 10%.
 - * It is possible that the size of the institution influences ranking outcomes through perception, apart from the other four criteria used by NIRF.
 - * A bigger institution will have higher student and faculty strength that generates more aggregate research.
 - * Therefore, by rule of probability, the larger institutions are more “visible” but not necessarily efficient academic performers.
- If this flaw in the methodology continues, small-sized higher education institutions will have very little chance of being in the top 100 – not because they are laggards but for their size.
 - * This is evidenced by the fact that only eight higher education institutions with less than 150 faculty members and nine higher education institutions with less than 300 students feature in the top 100 NIRF 2017 ranks.

2. It's time to replace the UGC Act**Changes that have taken place**

The Prime Minister's vision to create 20 institutions of eminence and the Ministry of Human Resource Development's reforms push have set the stage for an overhaul of higher education in India

- The HRD Ministry first saw the passage of the Indian Institutes of Management Bill, 2017, which will extend greater autonomy to the IIMs.
- It followed this up with reforms in the rules and regulations of the University Grants Commission (UGC), giving autonomy to India's best-ranked universities and colleges.

- Union Cabinet approved the continuation of the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan, which has been working quietly to improve the quality of higher educational institutions in the States through outcome-based grants.

Replace UGC act?

- With the number of initiatives taken by the Govt, the time is now ripe for another change: to replace the UGC Act, 1956, with a new law that should respond to the current needs of higher education

What should be done to bring about the change?

- The new Act should establish a Higher Education Regulatory Commission (HERC), which will subsume the functions of all the three existing regulatory agencies under the HRD Ministry.
- Recognizing the critical role of States in higher education, it should further establish an advisory council consisting of representatives of all States and the Central government.
- In addition, it must have as members leading educationists from diverse fields. The council should advise the HERC on all matters, though the final decision-making power needs to be vested in the Commission and its different bodies.

The UGC recently issued new rules and regulations under which it divided universities into three categories

- Category I and II universities were awarded autonomy
- Category I universities receiving greater autonomy than Category II.
- Under the Act, we propose merging Category I and Category II universities under the recent rules into a single category.

The HERC should not be in the business of writing curriculums for universities and colleges.

- Under the proposed Act, Category I universities will be free to write their own curriculums. In addition, they will oversee the curriculums of the colleges affiliated to them.
 - * Autonomous colleges will write their own curriculums as well.
- Category II universities and the colleges affiliated to them will adopt the curriculums of one or more Category I universities. Colleges affiliated to these universities will adopt curriculums of colleges affiliated to Category I colleges or autonomous colleges.
 - * There may be courses that exist in Category II universities or in colleges affiliated to them, or courses that these institutions wish to start which do not exist in any of the autonomous universities, colleges affiliated to them, or autonomous colleges.
 - * In such cases, the HERC will appoint a small committee of experts from the relevant field to approve or reject the proposed course in a time-bound manner.

If this reform is adopted, a major function on which the UGC currently spends a vast amount of time will be eliminated

HERC then will have two major tasks: decisions on the disbursement of funds and accreditation.

- To fulfil the first function, the HERC should have a finance board.
- To discharge the second function, it should have an accreditation board.
- Both these boards should have full autonomy in discharging their functions once the broad policy is formulated at the level of the Commission.
- Presidents of the boards should be ex-officio members of the Commission.

Establishment of new institutions

The HERC should formulate guidelines for the establishment of new institutions.

- A new institution should be able to enter on honor basis once it posts in a transparent statement on its website explaining how it has satisfied all the criteria stipulated by the Commission.
- The HERC should have the power to review whether the entering institution has genuinely fulfilled all the entry criteria, and in cases of deviations from the criteria, to close it down.
- The Commission in cooperation with the accreditation board will have the responsibility to draw up standards and a grading system for colleges and universities

Structure

- Multiple accreditation agencies will be permitted, with the board serving as the approval authority for them.
 - * Universities and colleges may be asked to deposit an accreditation fee in a fund held by the accreditation board from which accreditation agencies can be paid.
- The Commission in cooperation with the finance board will also develop guidelines for funding universities and colleges.
 - * Once these are framed, the board will have autonomy in implementing them.
 - * The Commission must also formulate policies on tuition fees and teacher salaries.
- The HERC will have a secretariat to maintain a separate grievance and redress office.
 - * The office will receive complaints from students, the faculty and university authorities

Entry of foreign institutions

- The Act should lay down a clear path for the entry of foreign institutions.
- The top 200-300 institutions in the world, according to generally accepted rankings, may be allowed entry as Category I institutions.

- India stands to benefit from the expertise and reputation of these institutions.

Integrating Teaching and Research

- The separation between teaching at universities and colleges and research at research councils has not served the cause of either higher education or research well.
- To be motivated to do research, students must have access to state-of-the-art laboratories and opportunities to interact regularly with scholars actively engaged at the frontiers of research.
- Conversely, scholars stand to benefit from interacting with young, inquisitive minds.

So, it is critical for this interaction to be brought to the centre of university education.

3. Forging a culture of innovation

Context

- India's innovation policy has to shift beyond a mere focus on R&D spending to transforming the ecosystem

Some facts

- India is ranked third in the world in number of science and technology PhDs awarded and
- India has improved ranking in the Global Innovation Index, from 66 to 60.
- there is no Indian university in the top hundred (QS World University Rankings, 2018)
- Only 46,904 patents were filed in India in 2016 (China filed over a million patents).

Somehow, we have enabled an ethos of publishing, but not "patenting, publishing and prospering".

Investments in R&D

- India's gross expenditure on R&D has increased by three times over the decade 2005-15, crossing the ₹1 lakh crore mark in 2016-17.
- The Centre spent 45.1% of the total amount in 2015, while private industry contributed 38.1%.
- In comparison to the West, the contribution of higher educational institutions in R&D spending was lacklustre.
- The government's R&D spending is equivalent to an Amazon or Alphabet's R&D spend, while only 26 Indian companies figure in the list of top 2,500 companies globally by R&D spend.
- Our R&D activities still seem to be conducted in an ivory tower, instead of being market-focussed.

R&D spending, as a percentage of GDP

- India's R&D spending, as a percentage of GDP, still lags significantly, at 0.69% in 2015 — this share has been stagnating for the last decade.
- Even among other BRICS countries, only South Africa lags behind India in terms of R&D expenditure.

- South Korea increased its GDP 12 times over the past 45 years,
 - * while R&D spend rose from 0.26% of GDP in 1965 to well over 4.04% in 2011;
 - * Private players accounted for 76.5% of total R&D spending in 2011.

Issue Area

- Over 90% of Indian start-ups face a risk of failure in their initial failure, partially due to a lack of access to financing.
- Patent pendency times in India are among the highest in the major economies, with a patent taking about 6-7 years between a request for examination and a final office action.
 - * In comparison, South Korea and China have pendency timings of 16 and 22 months
- Over 77% of Indian venture capitalists believe that India lacks unique business models or new technologies.
- R&D, as a professional function, fails to attract top talent — our 216 researchers per million compare with China's 1,177, Russia's 3,131 and the U.S.'s 4,232.
- The number of scientific publications has risen from 62,955 papers in 2009 to over 106,065 papers in 2013, with India's share of global research publications rising from 2.2% in 2000 to 3.7% in 2013. And yet, over 35% of publications in "bogus journals" comes from India

What needs to be done?

- Access to such financing streams, to public and private players needs to be improved significantly, with a reduction in institutional barriers.
- We need to push beyond metrics, papers and patents to focus on providing solutions to development and economic challenges. A focus on building an innovation culture is necessary
- Our innovation policy has to shift beyond a focus on increasing R&D spending to inculcating a mindset of "out-of-the-box" thinking in our universities, start-ups and corporates.
- India's educational policies need to be redesigned, with a focus on building cognitive abilities, beyond rote learning and focus on quantitative subjects.

Way forward

- So to enforce all these ideas we need to take advantage of the data analytics boom, improve educational qualities beyond our existing islands of excellence to the whole university system.
- A supporting ecosystem for this will require providing greater access to public data, through the Right to Information Act and a push to providing public data (for example, on train punctuality, water scarcity, air pollution metrics) for building innovative applications on a real-time basis.
- So, the future state of India's R&D activities demands significant attention.

4. Unnat Bharat Abhiyan

- The Ministry of HRD has launched a programme with an aim to connect institutions of higher education, including Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs) and Indian Institutes of Science Education & Research (IISERs) etc. with local communities to address the development challenges through appropriate technologies.
- It is being coordinated and steered by IIT Delhi.
- Building institutional capacity in Institutes of higher education in research & training relevant to the needs of rural India.
- Provide rural India with professional resource support from institutes of higher education, especially those which have acquired academic excellence in the field of Science, Engineering & Technology and Management
- Institutes through their faculty and students, will carry out studies of living conditions in the adopted villages, assess the local problems and needs, work out the possibilities of leveraging the technological interventions and the need to improve the processes in implementation of various government schemes, prepare workable action plans for the selected villages.
- The institutes would be expected to closely coordinate with the district administration, elected public representatives of panchayat/villages and other stakeholders and will become a part of the process of development planning and implementation.

Significance

- Students will learn about the basic challenges faced by the rural people and to bring out practical solutions for their betterment.

India had witnessed the migration of rural population this will help to reverse this migration

ART AND CULTURE

1. Aihole

- It is on the banks of the river Malaprabha
- Aihole was known in ancient India as Aryapur or Ayyavole
- The western Chalukya dynasty, established by Pulakeshin I has contributed to this site

Mythology

- It is believed that Parashurama came to the river Malaprabha to wash his bloodied axe after avenging the death of his father Jamadagni and killing the entire Kshatriya clan.
- At the sight of blood in the river, he apparently cried, "Ai, ai holey! (Ah, the river!)"

Temples

- The oldest temple in Aihole is the Lad Khan temple named after a Lad Khan who lived on its premises
- Durga temple: there is a magnificent statue of goddess Durga in her Mahishasura Mardini form, this was probably a Shiva or Vishnu temple and got its name from the word 'Durg' (fortress). At some later point, this temple was used as part of the region's fortifications.
- striking feature about the Durga temple is that it is built to resemble a Buddhist chaitya hall in imitation of Buddhist rock-cut architecture

2. National Culture Fund (NCF)

NCF is under the Ministry of Culture, aims at inviting the participation of the Corporate Sector, Non-Government agencies, State Governments, Private/Public Sector and individuals in the task of promoting, protecting and preserving India's cultural heritage both tangible and intangible.

- The NCF is managed and administered by a council to decide the policies and an Executive Committee – to actualize those policies. The Council is chaired by the Union Minister of Tourism & Culture and has a maximum strength of 24 including both the Chairman and Member Secretary,
- NCF sanctions grants to Government and Non-Government Organizations largely out of interest accrued on the Corpus Fund and out of the contributions of the donors.
- NCF strives to keep in readiness a number of projects requiring funding and shall, from time to time, renew, upgrade and add to them. The donors would be free to choose any projects or suggest new ones for funding and support.
- The donations/contributions to NCF are eligible for

100% tax deduction under Section 80G(2)(iii hh) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 subject to the limits and conditions prescribed in the said Section and relevant Rules.

3. Nyatapola Temple

- Meaning is Five Storeys Roofed Temple.
- It is a Pagoda Style temple located in Bhaktapur, Nepal.
- It is part of the UNESCO World Heritage site
- The name Bhaktapur means "City of Devotees"

4. Vaisakhi/Baisakhi

- It is a historical and religious festival in Sikhism.
- It is celebrated on 13 or 14 April every year as per the Nanakshahi calendar
- Vaisakhi marks birth of the Khalsa way of living in the Sikh religion and commemorates the formation of Khalsa panth of warriors under Guru Gobind Singh in 1699
- It is additionally a spring harvest festival for the Sikhs

5. Walmiki and Malhar Languages

- They are spoken in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.
- Only a few people living in the forest and hilly areas speak these languages

Walmiki

- Walmiki is spoken in Koraput of Odisha and on the bordering districts of Andhra Pradesh
- Walmiki is an isolate language i.e. it does not belong to a family of languages. The name of the language is also interesting and indicative because the speech community claims descent from the great Indian saint-poet Valmiki.

Malhar

- It is spoken in a remote and isolated hamlet which is almost 165 km from Bhubaneswar.
- The community consists of about 75 speakers including children. Fortunately, most of them are fluent in this language because they live in a place isolated from the Odia speaking neighbours and survive on daily labour and collections from the nearby forest.
- The preliminary data collected clearly shows that it belongs to the North Dravidian subgroup of the Dravidian family of languages and has close affinities with the other North Dravidian languages like Malto

and Kurux spoken in West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar

6. Nanak Shah Fakir Movie Release

Context

- The film has faced protests from the Sikh Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) and the Akal Takht who say that no person must portray the Sikh Guru and his family members.
- They feel such portrayals hurt the sentiments of the community, these groups have demanded a ban on the movie.

Background

- In May 2003, the Dharam Prachar Committee of SGPC passed a resolution (number 5566) which stated that characters of Sikh Gurus and their family members cannot be portrayed by real-life actors.

Details

- Nanak Shah Fakir had first released in 2015 after getting the green light from the Akal Takht, the supreme temporal body of the Sikh community.
- However, after a few Sikh bodies protested against the movie, SGPC stepped in demanding a ban. The request was accepted by the Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP government in Punjab as well as Chandigarh administration which suspended the screening of the movie.
- The SGPC finally gave its approval to the film in 2016. By then, Sikka had modified the film to present Nanak's character in animation. In Sikka's original film on Nanak, the Guru was played by actor Harish Khanna.
- The SGPC decided to take back approval after Sikh bodies, including organisations such as Dal Khalsa, Sarbat Khalsa, Damdami Taksal, and others started objecting to the movie.
- Sikh bodies objected to the film since the characters of Nanak's parents are played by real-life actors.

Examples from the past

- SGPC has long demanded representation in the Central Film Certificate Board to address the concerns of the community.
- Several times in the past, SGPC has raised objections to the manner in which Sikhs or Sikhism are presented in Bollywood movies.
- Many Bollywood movies, such as Bole So Nihal starring Sunny Deol, had to first satisfy SGPC officials for a smooth release.

Supreme Court

- It ruled in favor of the release of the movie by saying that once the Central Board of Film Certification gives a film the go-ahead, no one can be allowed to

obstruct it.

Punjab government's stand on the issue

- "While authors, film-makers had the creative freedom of expression, such freedom could not be allowed to violate the religious sensitivities of any community".
- Sikka has said he will not be releasing the movie in the state given the "sensitivities".

Sikh Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC)

- It is a democratically elected body responsible for the management of gurdwaras, Sikh places of worship in three states of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh and union territory of Chandigarh
- The SGPC manages the security, financial, facility maintenance and religious aspects of Gurdwaras as well as keeping archaeologically rare and sacred artifacts, including weapons, clothes, books and writings of the Sikh Gurus
- SGPC is also referred to as Parliament of the Sikhs
- It plays an important role in both clerical and temporal matters such as the appointments of the Panj Pyare, and over the three Takhts under it – the Akal Takht, Takht Damdami Sahib, and Takht Keshgarh Sahib.

Takht

- It means a throne or seat of authority resulting from the historical growth of the religion of Sikhism.
- There are five Takhts and these Takhts are the five gurdwaras which have a very special significance for the Sikh community
- The first and the most important one was established by Guru Hargobind in 1609.
- It is called 'Akal Takht' (the Throne of the Timeless God) and is situated just opposite the gate of Harmandir Sahib – The Golden Temple, Amritsar. "Akal" means "The Timeless One"

Other four Takhat

- Takhat Keshgarh Sahib at Anandpur,
- Takhat Patna Sahib in Bihar District,
- Takhat Hazur Sahib in Nanded and
- Takhat Damdama Sahib in Talwandi Sabo, Bhatinda.

7. Supreme Court seeks Shah Jahan's 'signature' in Taj Mahal case

Background

- The court was hearing a 2010 appeal filed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) over the ownership of the historic monument against the waqf board's decision to declare the Taj Mahal as its property.

Context

- The Supreme Court has asked the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Waqf Board to show documents signed by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan to prove its claim that it owns

the iconic Taj Mahal.

- The Bench also asked counsel how Shah Jahan could sign a document when he was imprisoned by his son Aurangzeb at the Agra Fort in 1658 after a bitter war of succession.
- It told counsel that the 17th century monument and other heritage structures, built by the Mughals, were taken over by the British after the Mughal rule. After India's independence, the monuments came under the Government of India and were being managed by the ASI.

Waqfnama

- Waqfnama is a deed or a document through which a person expresses intention to donate a property or land for charitable purposes or waqf.

8. Adopt a Heritage Scheme

- The 'Adopt a Heritage Scheme' of Ministry of Tourism was launched on World Tourism Day i.e. 27th September, 2017 by the President of India.
- It will allow private and public sector corporations to adopt most of India's top heritage sites.
 - * The response to the project has been very encouraging as the agencies who have come forward for adoption includes not only public and private industry/individuals but also schools and law firms.
- These agencies are referred as Monument Mitras
 - * It is clarified that 'The Adopt a Heritage' is essentially a non-revenue generating project.
 - * The agency will be selected on the basis of unique concept of vision bid and no financial bid is involved.
- The companies will be responsible for building, operating and maintaining tourism infrastructure at 105 monuments and natural heritage sites up for adoption.
- This scheme is a unique endeavour of Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) which envisages developing monuments, heritage and tourist sites across India and making them tourist friendly to enhance their tourism potential and cultural importance, in a planned and phased manner.
- Power of termination of MoU of Monument Mitras in case of noncompliance of guidelines and EoI, or any other reason of non-performance.

Company's Action Plan

- The project primarily focuses on development and maintenance of world-class tourist infrastructure and amenities which includes basic civic amenities and advanced amenities like Cleanliness, Public Conveniences, Ease of access, secure environment, illumination and night viewing facilities for an overall inclusive tourist experience that will result in more footfall from both domestic and foreign tourists.

Advantages for Govt

- Modi administration's plan to allow corporate control of some monuments and heritage sites, so that their maintenance and operations could be handled more professionally.

Advantages for a company

- Agency with best vision for the heritage site will be given an opportunity to associate pride with their CSR activities.
- They would also get limited visibility in the premises and the Incredible India website.

Dalmia Bharat Group bagged the deal to adopt the iconic Red

- As per the MoU, the Dalmia Bharat Group would maintain the monument and build basic infrastructure around it within a budget of Rs 25 crore for the next five years.
- The Dalmia Bharat group won the contract by beating IndiGo Airlines and the GMR group in the race to bag one of the most prestigious contracts under the Indian government's 'Adopt A Heritage' scheme.

What company intends to do?

- Keeping in mind the easy accessibility to the differently-abled visitors, there will be ramps and toilet facilities for the differently-abled. Facilities like wheelchairs, battery-operated vehicles, braille signages are some of the key additions, which will make the Red Fort a barrier-free monument.
- Advanced surveillance system like pan-tilt-zoom CCTV cameras will be installed
- It will also assist in controlling the advanced tourist flow management system linked with carrying capacity of the monuments, including light and sound shows with regular cultural shows and facilitation of night visits to the monuments.

Charges

- The Dalmia Bharat group will charge people visiting the Red Fort after getting specific clearances from the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism.
- Any revenue generated through the activities planned by the corporate house would also have to be ploughed back into the Fort's development and maintenance.
- The Dalmia Bharat Group would be allowed to charge visitors for semi-commercial activities that it plans to conduct.
 - * All revenues generated from these "semi-commercial activities" would need to be deposited in a separate bank account that would be used only for developing and maintaining the monument.
- The "reasonability of the rates charged for the services" would be determined by a joint committee headed by representatives of the Archaeological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture and the Dalmia Bharat Group.

Criticism

- The Congress questioned the Centre's commitment to the "idea" and history of India in the wake of a private entity bagging a contract to maintain the iconic Red Fort through an agreement with the Tourism Ministry
- West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said it was a "sad and dark day in our history". "Why can't the Government even take care of our historic Lal Qila ? Red Fort is a symbol of our nation. It is where India's flag is hoisted on Independence Day. Why should it be leased out ? Sad and dark day in our history,"

9. Padmasambhava

- He is also known as Guru Rinpoche, was an 8th-century Indian Buddhist master
- he is widely venerated as a 'second Buddha' across Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Himalayan states of India, and whomever believes in Tibetan Buddhism
- The Nyingma school considers Padmasambhava to be a founder of their tradition

10. Urdu and patriotism**Urdu usage in Indian Independence movement**

- "Inquilab zindabad" or "long live the revolution," coined by Urdu poet and freedom fighter Hasrat Mohani in 1921, became the principal slogan of millions who marched under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership to demand the end to British rule.
- Subhas Chandra Bose chose three Urdu words as the motto for his Indian National Army: ittehad, itmad, qurbani, or unity, confidence, sacrifice.
- Poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal's Ode to India, "Saare jahan se accha, Hindostan hamara", or "Our India is unrivalled in the world", came close to being adopted as the national anthem.
- During the independence movement it reverberated throughout the country with stirring verses such as "Mazhab nahi sikhata, apas mein bair rakhna; Hindi hain hum watan hai Hindostan hamara", or "Religion does not teach us to bear malice towards one another; We are all Indians and India is our homeland."
- Ramprasad Bismil's "Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai" ("The desire for martyrdom burns in our hearts") became extremely popular once word spread that Bhagat Singh recited it on his way to the gallows.

So, Urdu poetry was a major vehicle for the expression of patriotism and defiance of British rule.

What is the problem now?

- The language that gave the country the most popular slogan of the independence movement and produced unmatched patriotic verses during the freedom struggle suffered the most from Partition.
- Wrongly associated exclusively with Muslims and

appropriated by Pakistan as its official language, Urdu has languished in India since Independence.

Way forward

- Urdu is not merely a language in India, rather it is a fusion of myriad cultural sensibilities. Languages do not belong to any borders, laws, governments or divisive forces. They reside deep inside the ordinary sentiments and shared cultural memories of the people and have an intuitive way of seeping into their intimate lives.
- Post-partition politics has certainly impacted acceptance of the language, as it has been identified with a particular religion. Also, there is a perception that Urdu is a foreign language.
- Both these perceptions are erroneous as Urdu is spoken across the entire sub-continent by people of all religious communities.
- Also, Urdu vocabulary has a majority of words from the sub-continent and the remaining have been borrowed from Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

1. Antarctic expedition

Context

- In February 2018, 30 Indian scientists on an expedition to one of India's base stations in Antarctica had to be evacuated after their ship collided with an iceberg.
- India's scientific expeditions to Antarctica since 1981 have had their share of misadventures, this is the "first time", that m.v. Ivan Papanin, a 28-year-old ice-breaker owned by Murmansk Shipping and frequently commissioned by India, suffered from a breach of this kind.

Details

- The hired Russian ship, m.v. Ivan Papanin, was on its way to Maitri, India's inland research base, from Bharati, another India station.
- The impact punctured a three - foot hole into the hull and led to water seeping in.
- There wasn't an oil spill or else, even though we are using a Russian ship, India would have been guilty of polluting Antarctica and violating the Antarctica treaty.

India's Missions

- The Indian Antarctic Program is a multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional program under the control of the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research, Ministry of Earth Sciences. It was initiated in 1981 with the first Indian expedition to Antarctica.
- The program gained global acceptance with India's signing of the Antarctic Treaty and subsequent construction of the Dakshin Gangotri Antarctic research base in 1983, superseded by the Maitri base from 1990.
- The newest base commissioned in 2015 is Bharati, constructed out of 134 shipping containers.
 - * Under the program, atmospheric, biological, earth, chemical, and medical sciences are studied by India, which has carried out 30 scientific expeditions to the Antarctic as of 14 October 2010.
 - * Located beside Larsmann Hill at 69°S, 76°E, Bharati is proposed for oceanographic research and will collect evidence of continental breakup to reveal the 120-million-year-old ancient history of the Indian subcontinent.

2. Satyagraha se Swachhagraha campaign

- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, in coordination with the Government of Bihar, is working to spread the message of Swachhata across the country by initiating the "Satyagraha se Swachhagraha" campaign

- More than 10,000 Swachhagrahis from different parts of the country have been invited to Bihar, where they have been working with 10,000 Swachhagrahis from Bihar to "trigger" behaviour change throughout the 38 districts of the State and build momentum of the jan andolan further.

3. Hospital Fire

- Disasters have an uncanny ability to bring to the forefront vulnerabilities of systems, structures, processes and people which in turn cause large scale damages; and hospitals are no exception to this rule.

Causes

- Inadequate or non-compliance of structural elements of hospitals to building codes and other safety norms which result in the failure of hospital structures and their component non-structural elements;
- Absence of an operational Hospital Disaster Management Plan;
- Lack of planning and preparedness to respond to disasters;
- Inadequate or complete lack of internal and external communication;
- Lack of networking amongst hospitals.

Safe Hospitals

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have defined: "a Safe Hospital as one that:

- will not collapse in disasters, killing patients and staff;
- can continue to function and provide its services as a critical community facility when it is most needed; and,
- Is organized, with contingency plans in place and health workforce trained to keep the network operational."

Institutional Mechanisms

- Both Health and Disaster Management being state subjects, it implies that the respective state health departments and state disaster management authorities, along with the state public works department, will play a crucial role in implementing these guidelines on the ground.
- However, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Central Public Works Department and other licensing agencies at the Central or State levels will also undertake the necessary actions to implement these guidelines for effective compliance.

- Wherever necessary, the National Disaster Management Authority, the Bureau of Indian Standards, technical institutions like IITs and other relevant agencies shall extend their support to further the agenda of Hospital Safety in our country.

Solutions

- Each and every building should have at least a minimum of 4 emergency exits and a maximum of 6
- Large buildings should be easily accessible by road
- Inspection of Hospitals should be carried out every 6 months and it should be videographed
- Air ambulances a must as it may help in rescuing large no of people in a short time.
- Each and every room in the hospital should have a map of where they are located and where are the emergency escape routes
- Sprinklers should be installed to prevent fire accidents
- Hospital Main Entrance should be more than 30 metre in length (A Size of a bus)
- Hospitals should be earthquake proof.
- Walls of the hospital should have fire-resistant coatings.

4. Pakistan's first school for transgenders to open on April 15

- Walking on the path of social reform, Pakistan is to inaugurate country's first ever institute for educational and vocational training for transgender community.
- As per a news report by the Dawn , The Gender Guardian school will be inaugurated on April 15 at Lahore under the aegis of Asif Shahzad, who is also school's founder.
- The school has been built by an NGO named Exploring Future Foundation which is set to open two more branches of the school in Islamabad and Karachi
- The school will also host crash courses for fashion designing, beautician and hair styling courses, graphic designing, computer, and mobile repairing.
- It will have separate wings for primary, matriculation and also graduation-level classes.
- Further, it has been reported that more than 40 students from the transgender community have already taken admission in the school which will be formally launched through an opening ceremony at Gaddafi Stadium Lahore's Alhamra Hall in Lahore.

5. Gohain Uliuwa Mela

- Villagers performed a ritual during the 'Gohain Uliuwa Mela' at Mayong in Morigaon district of Assam.
- The event is organized to enhance the spiritual powers of Mayong, once considered a cradle of black magic.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Rongali Bihu festival marks the onset of

- A. Karnataka New Year and the arrival of spring
- B. Punjabi New Year and the arrival of spring.
- C. Assamese New Year and the arrival of spring.
- D. Bengali New Year and the arrival of spring

2. Consider the following statements about Basavanna

1. He served as the head of the state exchequer in Kalachuri Immadi Bijjala, a feudatory of the Chalukyan Kings.
2. He was born a Brahmin
3. He advocated his own ideology based on the principles of equality and fraternity, dignity of labour, creation and distribution of wealth.
4. Sharanas (those who believed in his ideology) and their poems are called Vachanas (sayings).

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only 1 and 4
- B. Only 1, 2 and 3
- C. All of the above
- D. Only 3 and 4

3. Look at the following statements about B Cells

1. They are a type of red blood cell of the lymphocyte subtype
2. Many B cells mature into what are called plasma cells that produce antibodies (proteins) necessary to fight off infections while other B cells mature into memory B cells.
3. B cells mature in the bone marrow, which is at the core of most bones

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 3 only
- D. All the above

4. Beta amyloid is associated with which disease

- A. Cancer
- B. Alzheimer's
- C. TB
- D. Diabetes

5. With reference to Aihole consider the statements

1. It is on the banks of the river Malaprabha
2. Aihole was known in ancient India as Aryapur or Ayyavole
3. The western Chalukya dynasty, established by Pulakeshin I has contributed to this site

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. All of the above
- B. Only 1 and 3
- C. Only 1
- D. None of the above

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Broadcast Audience Research Council India (BARC):

1. Broadcast Audience Research Council India (BARC) measures the television audience preferences in the country.
2. BARC a joint industry body that was set up in close consultation with all stakeholders, including government representatives and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

7. Consider the following statements with respect to Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP):

1. It is the nodal agency to undertake multi-media advertising and publicity for various Ministries and Departments of Government of India.
2. It has been instrumental in creating awareness amongst masses on socio-economic themes, seeking their participation in developmental activities and for eradication of poverty and social evils.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

8. Consider the following statements:

1. The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is not a predicate-offence-oriented law.
2. A predicate offence is an offence whose earnings may become the subject of any of the money-laundering offences established under the Convention.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

9. Consider the following statements about benefits of GM Crops:

1. Shelf life of foods can be extended.
2. Crops can be engineered to withstand extreme weather.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

10. Consider the following statements:

1. The only genetically modified cash crop under commercial cultivation in India is cotton.
2. The GEAC is responsible for granting permits to conduct experimental and large-scale open field trials and also grant approval for commercial release of biotech crops.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

11. Consider the following statements about Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM):

1. It is a biennial (every two years) summit meeting of the heads of government from all Commonwealth nations..
2. Every two years the meeting is held in a different member state.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

12. Consider the following statements about South Asia Economic Focus (SAEF):

1. The South Asia Economic Focus is a biannual (twice-a-year) economic update.
2. It presents recent economic developments and a near-term economic outlook for South Asia.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

13. Consider the following statements:

1. Zika is a vector-borne disease spread by the bite of an infected Aedes Aegypti mosquito.
2. Zika virus can be transmitted through body fluids including saliva, urine, seminal fluids, blood..

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

14. Consider the following statements:

1. Antibiotic resistance is when our bodies become resistant to antibiotics.
2. WHO has declared antibiotic resistance the 2nd biggest public threat currently.

Which of the above statements are correct? W

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

15. Consider the following statements about Javan Green Magpie:

1. It is listed as a critically endangered species by IUCN.
2. It is endemic to montane forests in Asia and Europe.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

16. Consider the following statements about India - Wiesbaden Conference:

1. The Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, in cooperation with the Government of Germany and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is hosting the India-Wiesbaden Conference 2018 in Delhi.
2. The Wiesbaden Process was initiated by the Government of Germany to strengthen the implementation of UNSC 1540 through Government-Industry partnerships.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

17. Consider the following statements about UNSCR 1540:

1. In resolution 1540 (2004), the Security Council decided that all States shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors.
2. The restriction is with respect to nuclear weapons only.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

18. Consider the following statements about Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM):

1. The CADTM is an international network of activists working on cancellation of illegitimate debt.
2. It is based in Vienna, Austria.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

19. Consider the following statements about NASA's James Webb Space Telescope:

1. Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) is a type of plastic that is used widely in plastic bottles.
2. Ideonella sakaiensis is a type of bacteria that feeds on all types of plastics.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

20. Consider the following statements:

1. State of Global Air Report is published by UNEP.
2. Air pollution was the fourth-highest cause of death among all health risks globally.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

21. Consider the following statements about Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve:

1. Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve is spread across the States of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
2. It includes the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

22. Consider the following statements about Study India Initiative:

1. The scheme will entail the admission of foreign students from 30 countries — with a focus on South Asia, South East Asia, West Asia and Africa — to study in 160 quality higher educational institutions of India as per NIRF ranks and NAAC grades.
2. The goal of the ambitious scheme is to increase the number of foreign students in India to 2 lakh by 2023.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

23. Consider the following statements:

1. The portal — Indian Science, Technology and Engineering Facilities Map (I-STEM) is a National portal to share research facilities.
2. The institutions and organisations that have the equipment and facilities will provide access to researchers for both academic and non-academic work through an online reservation system.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

24. Consider the following statements about National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):

1. The draft NCAP envisions setting up 1,000 manual air-quality-monitoring stations.
2. It also plans to set up pollution-monitoring stations in rural areas.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

25. Consider the following statements with respect to High Security Registration Plates (HSRP):

1. They have a host of in-built security features..
2. HSRPs will come with a 15-year guarantee.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

26. Consider the following statements with respect to Defence Planning Committee (DPC):

1. It will draft reports on national security strategy, international defence engagement strategy.
2. The committee will have the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, three service chiefs, secretaries of the Ministries of Defence, Expenditure and Foreign Affairs as its members

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

27. Consider the following statements with respect Tiwa (Lalung):

1. It is an indigenous tribal community inhabiting the states of Assam and Meghalaya.
2. They are recognized as a Scheduled tribe within the State of Assam.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

28. Consider the following statements with respect to Polymer sponge:

1. Polymer sponge is developed using waste products from the petroleum and refining industries.
2. This application can consume excess waste sulphur that is stockpiled around the globe.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

29. Consider the following statements with respect to London Declaration:

1. The London Declaration was a declaration issued by the 1949 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference
2. It was declared on the issue of India's continued membership.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

30. Consider the following statements:

1. According to RBI norms, if the principal or interest is overdue for one day to 30 days, the account is identified as Special Mention Account – 0 (SMA-0) category.
2. If a loan is not repaid for more than 60 days, it is classified as non-performing asset (NPA)..

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

31. Consider the following statements about Promoter pledging:

1. Promoter pledging refers to the practice of promoters giving their shares as collateral.
2. Promoters, in order to raise funds for either personal or company needs, pledge their holding shares to any financial institution.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

32. Consider the following statements:

1. Shares which are pledged are more vulnerable than the market.
2. Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has made it mandatory for companies to disclose to the stock exchanges every time a pledge that is part of derivative market is created.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

33. Consider the following statements:

1. Under provisioning, banks have to set aside or provide funds to a prescribed percentage of their bad assets.
2. The percentage of bad asset that has to be 'provided for' is called provisioning coverage ratio.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

34. Consider the following statements about NAVIC Scheme:

1. NAVIC will provide two levels of service, the 'standard positioning service' will be open for civilian use, and a 'restricted service' (an encrypted one) for authorized users (including military).
2. The system is intended to provide an absolute position accuracy of better than 20 meters throughout Indian landmass and better than 40 meters in the Indian Ocean.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

35. Consider the following statements about National Film Awards:

1. It has been administered, along with the International Film Festival of India and the Indian Panorama, by the Indian government's Directorate of Film Festivals since 1973.
2. Every year, a national panel appointed by the government selects the winning entry.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

36. Consider the following statements about Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

1. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is purely an economic organization.
2. China and Russia are members of the organization.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

37. Consider the following statements:

1. The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted for protection of plants and animal species.
2. Schedule I and part II of Schedule II provide absolute protection – offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

38. Consider the following statements about the Impeachment procedure of the Judges.

1. 100 Lok Sabha MPs or 50 Rajya Sabha MPs is the minimum number of signatories required to issue the notice for initiation of Impeachment.
2. The notice has to be handed over either to the Speaker if it is from Lok Sabha MPs or to the Chairman if it is from the Rajya Sabha MPs.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

39. Consider the following statements about Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccination.

1. India has resolved to eliminate measles and control rubella/congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) by 2020.
2. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has initiated measles-rubella (MR) vaccination campaign in the age group of 9 months to less than 15 years across the nation.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

40. Consider the following statements about Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccination.

1. Measles and Rubella are highly contagious viral diseases that are spread by contact with an infected person through coughing and sneezing.
2. One-third of all measles-related deaths worldwide occur in India.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

41. Consider the following statements about Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccination.

1. Rubella is a mild viral infection that occurs most often in children and young adults.
2. Rubella infection during pregnancy can cause abortion, stillbirth and may lead to multiple birth defects in the newborn; like blindness, deafness, heart defects; known as Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS).
3. India accounts for one-third of all children born worldwide with congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. All of the above

42. Consider the following statements:

1. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental organization founded in Shanghai in 2001 by six countries.
2. Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are founding members of SCO.
3. With assistance from the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, SCO members have developed an intergovernmental agreement on facilitating international road transport.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. All of the above

43. Consider the following Statements in reference to MOSAiC

1. It will help study Arctic region
2. It will help address issue of Climate Change
3. It was initiated by EU in Partnership with NASA and ISRO

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only 1 and 2
- B. Only 2 and 3
- C. Only 3 and 1
- D. All of the above

44. With respect to removal of Judges in SC consider the following statements

1. Rajya Sabha chairman has the discretion to accept or reject the motion for removal of CJI.
2. An inquiry committee should be constituted after the recommendation of President only.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

45. Which of the states have not come with a bill to punish child rape by awarding death penalty

- A. Rajasthan
- B. Madhya Pradesh
- C. Karnataka
- D. Haryana

46. With reference earth day

1. It is globally coordinated by Earth Day Network.
2. The event is held annually encouraging individuals, communities, and businesses to turn off non-essential electric lights for one hour, from 8:30 to 9:30 pm

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

47. CAATSA by USA is sanction on which of these countries?

1. Iran
2. Pakistan
3. Russia
4. North Korea
5. Syria

Select the correct code

- A. Only 1, 3 and 5
- B. Only 2, 4 and 5
- C. Only 1, 3 and 4
- D. Only 2, 3, 4 and 5

48. Consider the following statements about Coastal Economic Zone (CEZ).

1. CEZs are spatial economic regions comprising group of coastal districts or districts with strong linkage to ports in region to tap into synergies with planned industrial corridor projects.
2. CEZ will be developed as part of plan for developing 14 such industrial clusters to spur manufacturing and generate jobs.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

49. Consider the following statements about Coastal Economic Zone (CEZ).

1. India's first mega coastal economic zone (CEZ) will be setup at Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNPT) in Maharashtra.
2. Coastal Economic Zone (CEZ) are being setup under the National Perspective Plan of Sagarmala Programme.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

50. Consider the following statements about National Commission for Minorities:

1. It is a statutory body set up under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992..
2. It looks into complaints from members of five religious communities — Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis).

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

51. Consider the following statements about Minorities:

1. Constitution of India has not defined word 'Minority' and only refers to 'Minorities'.
2. Constitution speaks of minorities 'based on religion or language'.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

52. Consider the following statements about Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006:

1. It concerns the rights of forest-dwelling communities to land and other resources, denied to them over decades as a result of the continuance of colonial forest laws in India.
2. The Act grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities, partially correcting the injustice caused by the forest laws.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

53. Consider the following statements about Earth Bio-Genome Project (EBP):

1. The initiative will analyze and catalog the DNA of every documented eukaryotic species.
2. Eukaryotic species include all plants, animals, fungi and other organisms whose cells have a clearly defined nucleus surrounded by a membrane.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

54. Consider the following statements about Endo-ultrasound (EUS).

1. A new equipment, endoultrasound (EUS) has been able to identify and manage malignant tumours.
2. The EUS can be used to identify tumours starting from oesophagus.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

55. Consider the following statements about North Atlantic right whale:

1. Climate change poses a threat to the North Atlantic right whale.
2. Right whales have such a long reproduction and migratory cycle that the population was greatly affected by the minimal food availability..

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

56. Consider the following statements about In Vitro Fertilization (IVF):

1. Consider the following statements about In Vitro Fertilization (IVF):
2. Fertility therapies are collectively called Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART).

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

57. Consider the following statements about Malaria:

1. Malaria is a life-threatening disease which is caused by mosquito bites.
2. Malaria is caused by plasmodium parasite and is transmitted in humans through the bite of Anopheles mosquito..
3. After an infected mosquito bites a human, the parasites begin to multiply in the person's liver.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. All of the above

58. Consider the following statements:

1. Geographical Indication Registry has awarded Geographical Indication (GI) Tag to two more craft forms from Telangana viz. Adilabad dokra and Warangal Dhurries.
2. Adilabad Dokra is an ancient bell metal craft and Warangal Dhurries is a popular traditional cotton rug.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

59. Consider the following statements about Geographical Indication (GI) Tag:

1. GI tag is name or sign used on certain products which correspond to specific geographical location or origin.
2. The registration of a GI is valid for 20 years after which it needs to be renewed.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

60. Consider the following statements:

1. Under Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958, all areas falling between Inner line and Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir, some parts of Sikkim fall under protected area regime while others under restricted area regime.
2. Under Protected areas Regime, foreign nationals are not normally allowed to visit protected or restricted area unless Government is satisfied that there are extraordinary reasons to justify their visit.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

61. Consider the following statements about National Clean Air Programme:

1. It is a medium term national level strategy to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner..
2. It envisions setting up only automatic air-quality-monitoring stations.

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

62. Consider the following statements about Liquidity Crisis:

1. This refers to a situation where an individual, a business or a government is unable to gather enough cash to meet its payment obligations to lenders.
2. A liquidity crisis is similar to a solvency crisis.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

63. Consider the following statements:

1. The Report "Migration and Development Brief" is published by International Labour Organisation (ILO).
2. India has retained top position as recipient of remittances in 2017.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

64. Consider the following statements about Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project:

1. The initiative will be supported by Ministry of Finance and World Bank.
2. The objective of project is to nurture indigenous innovation, foster local product development and accelerate commercialization process in biopharmaceutical and medical devices industry in India.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

65. Consider the following statements about Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan:

1. It is central government scheme that aims at making rural local bodies self-sustainable, financially stable and more efficient.
2. Its intended objective is to train and build capacity of elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

66. Consider the following statements about Kaziranga national park:

1. Kaziranga national park is located in Assam.
2. The park is a home to two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

67. Consider the following statements:

1. Mumbai to Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) is scheduled for completion in December 2023.
2. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will fund it at a low rate of interest..

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

68. Consider the following statements about Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):

1. AIM is flagship initiative to promote culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in country.
2. Its mandated is to create umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of country.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

69. Consider the following statements about Virtual Bronchoscopy Navigation (VBN):

1. All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has become the country's first hospital to set up Virtual Bronchoscopy Navigation (VBN).
2. VBN is an advanced facility for diagnosis and treatment of patients with small tumour-like spots in the lungs, which can be cancerous.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

70. Consider the following statements about World Press Freedom Index (WPFI):

1. WPFI is produced by France-based international non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders (RWB).
2. WPFI aims to promotes and defends freedom of information and freedom of the press..

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

71. Consider the following statements about Zonal Councils:

1. Zonal Councils were set up under the States Reorganization Act, 1956..
2. They are not constitutional bodies and they are only deliberative and advisory bodies.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

72. Consider the following statements about United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD):

1. It is only legally binding international agreement to address problem of desertification.

2. India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is the nodal Ministry for this Convention.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

73. Consider the following statements about CSIR:

1. CSIR is an autonomous body and India's premier research and development (R&D) organisation.

2. It is mainly funded by the Union Ministry of Science and Technology.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

74. Consider the following statements:

1. Saraswati Samman is an annual award bestowed upon Indian citizen.
2. Saraswati Samman is considered one of the highest literary awards in India.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

75. Consider the following statements about National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA):

1. It is a statutory body under the aegis of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

2. Its mandate is to coordinate response to natural or man-made disasters.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

76. Sarmat is an intercontinental ballistic missile from

- A. China
- B. Russia
- C. USA
- D. North Korea

77. Which of the following is correctly matched?

- 1. SAMADHAN: Vehicle Management System.
- 2. SUVIDHA: Single Window Permission System
- 3. SUGAM: Public Grievance Redressal and Monitoring System.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only 1 and 2
- B. Only 2 and 3
- C. Only 2
- D. Only 3

78. Consider the following statements with respect to Insight Mission

- 1. It is a mission by NASA
- 2. It will study the microbial activity in Jupiter.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

79. With reference to Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana consider the following statements:

- 1. It is implemented by Ministry of Labor
- 2. It incentivizes the employers for new employment generation

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

80. Consider the following statements with respect to South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP):

- 1. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka established the SACEP in 1982 in Sri Lanka..
- 2. It facilitates international co-operation and mutual assistance in preparing and responding to a major oil pollution incident

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

81. Consider the following statements about Tiangong-1:

- 1. Tiangong-1 (Heavenly Palace or Celestial Palace-1) was China's first prototype space station or space laboratory.
- 2. It was placed in orbit as part of China's efforts towards building its own space station.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

82. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Delhi became the first city in India to supply ultra-clean Bharat Stage (BS) VI grade fuel
- 2. The major difference in standards between the existing BS-IV and new BS-VI auto fuel norms is presence of sulphur.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

83. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Hybrid vehicles have two sources available to them—a battery that powers an electric motor and a fuel tank that powers a normal petrol engine.
- 2. All EVs need to be charged from a charging point.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

84. Consider the following statements::

1. CVC is India's apex body for checking corruption in the government..
2. Private sector banks are out of the CVC's purview.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

85. Consider the following statements about Umred Pauni Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary:

1. It is located near Nagpur in Maharashtra..
2. It is bounded roughly by the Wainganga river.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

86. Consider the following statements:

1. The Press Council of India is a statutory body in India that governs the conduct of the print media.
2. The Press Council is a quasi-judicial body which acts as a watchdog of the press

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

87. Consider the following statements about Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC):

1. BCCC is an independent self-regulatory body set-up by the Indian Broadcasting Foundation in 2011, in consultation with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
2. The primary role of BCCC is to implement self-regulatory guidelines for non-news channels, including general entertainment channels, kids' channels and special interest channels

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

88. Consider the following statements about Straddle in investing:

1. This refers to a strategy employed by traders to profit from any significant increase in the volatility of the price of a stock, or any other financial security.

2. The strategy is used when a trader expects a significant move in the price of a security but is not too sure about the direction of the move.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

89. Consider the following statements about National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF):

1. NIRF has been launched by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)..

2. Ranking of institutions of Higher Education will be an annual exercise.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

90. Consider the following statements about Mahua Tree:

1. Mahua is held sacred by the Raj Gond and Kolam aboriginals.

2. The flowers, fruits, seeds and the bark of the tree are all known to have medicinal value

Which of the statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

91. Consider the following statements about E-way bill:

1. It is an electronic documentation detailing the movement of goods and has to be carried by transporters for any consignment exceeding Rs50,000 in value.

2. It will be made compulsory for the moving goods within a state.

Which of the statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

92. Consider the following statements :

1. The Paris Principles are a set of international standards which frame and guide the work of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs).
2. The internationally agreed Paris Principles define the role, composition, status and functions of national human rights institutions.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

93. Consider the following statements about Crypto jacking:

1. Crypto jacking is defined as the secret use of your computing device to mine crypto currency.
2. Crypto jacking used to be confined to the victim knowingly installing a program that secretly mines crypto currency

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

94. Consider the following statements about Sentinel species :

1. Sentinel species do not readily accumulate pollutants.
2. This species serve as indicators of ecosystem health.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

95. Consider the following statements about Nifty equity savings index:

1. The index is total return index capturing price return and dividend or coupon income..
2. It will help to fill gap that was there due to absence of relevant benchmark for performance comparison of popular equity savings funds category offered by mutual funds in India..

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

96. Consider the following statements:

1. A sovereign credit rating is credit rating of country or sovereign entity.
2. It gives investors insight into level of risk associated with investing in particular country, including its political risk..

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

97. Consider the following statements about Index Services & Products Ltd (IISL):

1. It is subsidiary of National Stock Exchange of India (NSE).
2. It provides variety of indices and index related services and products for Indian capital markets.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

98. Consider the following statements about Carry Trade:

1. A carry trade is a strategy in which an investor borrows money at a low interest rate in order to invest in an asset that is likely to provide a higher return.
2. This strategy relies on relative stability in asset prices..

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

99. Consider the following statements about Google Street View:

1. It displays panoramic views of public spaces where the images captured by Google's moving vehicles, adding a layer of depth and reality to the maps.
2. The application allows users to explore places around the world through 360 degree panoramic street level imagery and view public area.

Which of the above statements are incorrect? W

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

100. Consider the following statements about Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA):

1. It is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2013 to provide strategic funding to all State higher educational institutions.
2. It is a voluntary scheme.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

101. Consider the following statements about Google Street View:

1. It displays panoramic views of public spaces where the images captured by Google's moving vehicles, adding a layer of depth and reality to the maps.
2. The application allows users to explore places around the world through 360 degree panoramic street level imagery and view public area.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

102. Consider the following statements:

1. Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by troubles with social interaction and communication, and by restricted and repetitive behavior.
2. Autism spectrum disorder impacts the nervous system and affects the overall cognitive, emotional, social and physical health of the affected individual.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

103. In the assessment of autism, two types of assessment tools are being recommended, consider the following statements:

1. One is International Clinical Epidemiology Network INCLEN Tool developed under INCLEN study – "Neuro Developmental Disorder in Children in India"
2. The other tool is Indian Scale of Assessment of Autism (ISAA) developed by the Ministry of SJ&E.

Which of the statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

ANSWER KEYS

Question No	Answer Keys
1.	C
2.	C
3.	B
4.	B
5.	D
6.	C
7.	C
8.	B
9.	C
10.	C
11.	C
12.	C
13.	C
14.	A
15.	A
16.	C
17.	B
18.	A
19.	A
20.	B
21.	D
22.	D
23.	C
24.	C
25.	C

Question No	Answer Keys
26.	C
27.	C
28.	C
29.	C
30.	A
31.	C
32.	C
33.	C
34.	A
35.	C
36.	C
37.	C
38.	C
39.	D
40.	C
41.	D
42.	D
43.	A
44.	A
45.	A
46.	B
47.	C
48.	C
49.	D
50.	C

Question No	Answer Keys
51.	C
52.	C
53.	C
54.	D
55.	C
56.	C
57.	D
58.	C
59.	B
60.	C
61.	A
62.	A
63.	B
64.	C
65.	C
66.	C
67.	C
68.	D
69.	C
70.	C
71.	C
72.	C
73.	D
74.	C
75.	C

Question No	Answer Keys
76.	B
77.	C
78.	B
79.	C
80.	B
81.	C
82.	C
83.	C
84.	C
85.	C
86.	C
87.	C
88.	C
89.	C
90.	C
91.	C
92.	C
93.	A
94.	B
95.	C
96.	D
97.	C
98.	C
99.	C
100.	B

Question No	Answer Keys
101.	C
102.	C
103.	C

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Paper- 2

1. Private Sector banks need to be regulated on par with Public Sector banks. Critically analyse.
2. What is National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)? What was the need and what should be done to address the challenges?
3. The India Pakistan Bangladesh relationship needs to move away from doubts, religion, and animosity to trust, culture and cooperation to establish regional stability and economic goodwill
4. Was the SC right on the anti-atrocities law? Critically Comment.
5. Disruptions have become an endemic feature of the functioning of the Indian Parliament leading to public outcry. What is the Role of speaker and chairman in preventing disruptions?
6. From "India first policy" Delhi must affirm India's strong support for a "Nepal first" policy. Critically Analyze.
7. The credibility of the ECI and the democratic process in the State is at stake. Illustrate with examples and suggest possible measures.
8. The Supreme court has been a true guardian of Fundamental rights. Illustrate with examples. Also, comment on why SC was shown in a negative limelight.
9. The tussle between the SC Judges and CJI was a black mark on the white wall of Justice. Explain the impact and also its implications and move to overcome this wrong precedent.
10. The Ban on sale of cattle for slaughter by the central Govt was an act of infringement of Fundamental Rights. Discuss
11. Can Ayushman Bharat make for a healthier India? Critically Comment.
12. The call for "One Nation, One Poll" improves governance but compromises on federal Structure. Critically Analyze.
13. Discuss the need for making BCCI a public organisation that will be more accountable to the Government
14. India and Sweden have a huge potential for mutual cooperation. Discuss the scope of the relationship between these two nations
15. Commonwealth is still an important Organisation for India helping to forge diplomatic relationships but it is questioned about its relevance. Critically comment.
16. Funds appear necessary, but the military first needs to review its organizational philosophy. Critically analyze in relation to Increase of defence budget.
17. India's process to impeach judges is flawed and needs urgent reforms. Explain
18. India's diplomatic outreach to Nordic nations is both historic and important. Comment.
19. Death penalty to child rapists was a knee jerk reaction by the Government. Critically examine.
20. The move by few MP's for removal of CJI was more Political in Nature rather than serving the Purpose of Judicial Scrutiny. Discuss the possible implications
21. Is AFSPA a Necessary Evil? Critically analyze. Also, comment on various recommendations by different Committees .
22. With decline in trade between India and Pakistan, it has given rise to informal channels of trade. What are the possible implications and ways to address this issue?
23. With more than 100 countries abolishing death penalty should India also consider abolishing it? How is death penalty executed in India and also discuss possible alternatives?

Paper- 3

1. The draft defence production policy 2018 envisions India as one of the world's top five defence producers by 2025. This ambitious policy needs to be backed by granular detailing. Discuss
2. E-way bill not only enhances transparency but also increases tax buoyancy. Explain.
3. Compensatory Afforestation Fund is a deeply flawed and unjust law for both forest dwellers and forest. Analyze.
4. What is IndAS? What was the need for its introduction? Also, explain how is it different from IGAAP.
5. India's innovation policy has to shift beyond a mere focus on R&D spending to transforming the ecosystem. Also, discuss the possible impediments.
6. The pride of India Asiatic lions have been reducing in number. What are the causes and what steps have been taken ? Also suggest future course of action.
7. SMEs play an important role in achieving the goal of financial inclusion in India. The Indian government could help SMEs to identify their strengths and weaknesses in a systematic manner and then provide them with access to international best practices. Discuss.
8. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) was passed in 2017 with the intention to herald a new era for banking. Critically analyse the provisions of IBC in resolving the issues of insolvency in India.
9. Demand for many plant and animal ingredients today is driven by nothing other than superstition. Elaborate.
10. The Draft Forest Policy dilutes a number of Provisions and does not consider the community in its legislation. Discuss the possible implications.
11. What are the objectives of National Sports University Bill? Why was its introduction a necessity?
12. Is organic farming a Panacea for growing Agricultural issues? Critically Analyze.
13. The demonetization with multiple objectives was not a success but tax revenues have increased. Justify your view.
14. Blockchain technology has the power to transform business processes and applications across sectors. Discuss.
15. India's SEZs have not taken off in the way they did in China. Comment.
16. What is a GI Tag? Explain in detail how this is useful and also comment on issues with GI tag.
17. How does fracking work, what are the environmental concerns? Discuss its implications.
18. Is Bullet train a white elephant for India or will it leap-frog India into a new era of advanced technology? Critically Analyze.
19. Indian Patent laws are assumed to be one of the toughest to prevent evergreening, but its focus has shifted to quantity from Quality. What are the various issues involved and how can India address them?
20. USA has placed India under Priority Watch List (PWL). What are the reasons for this move and how will this impact India?

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for Start-up of the Year 2016



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