

UPSC MONTHLY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER- 2017



**Russia-India-China Strategic Triangle
Myth or Reality?**



FRDI Bill
Bail In, Bail Out

LaQshya
Safe Delivery Mobile
Application

**Data protection framework:
Srikrishna Committee**
Leading the world into a digital
economy

One Stop Centre Scheme
Supporting women affected by
violence

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

5 Ranks
in Top 50

14 Ranks
in Top 100

162 Ranks
In The Final List



Rank 20
Vipin Garg



Rank 24
Khumanthem
Diana Devi



Rank 25
Chandra
Mohan Garg



Rank 27
Pulkit Garg



Rank 47
Anshul
Agarwal



Amit Yadav
Rank-51



Abhishek
Goyal
Rank-57



Varsha Singh
Rank-66



Vishal Singh
Rank-73



Aneesh
Dasgupta
Rank-74



Ankur
Rank-77



Anupam Mishra
Rank-81



Rakesh Kumar
Rank-91



Vishal
Kumar
Rank-95



Bondar Siddeshwar
Baliram
Rank-124



Vinit Agrawal
Rank-128



Yashika Mehta
Rank-136



Rajat Saklecha
Rank-141



Saurabh
Rank-142



Arpit Jain
Rank-144



Anjani Anjan
Rank-148



Vemuri V L
Ambarish
Rank-150



Amit Tolani
Rank-151



Ravindra
Goswami
Rank-152



Anubhav
Bharadwaj
Rank-161



Rishav
Kumar Jha
Rank-162



S Asker Ali
Rank-167



P Krishnakant
Rank-169



Mani Lal
Patidar
Rank-171



Patel Ravindra
Dahyabhai
Rank-176



Ankur
Aggarwal
Rank-177



Hena Kumar
Sukhna
Rank-182

IAS Result 2014

6 Ranks
in Top 50

12 Ranks
in Top 100

83 Ranks
Overall Selections



Rank 4
Vandana Rao



Rank 5
Suharsha Bhagat



Rank 16
Ananya Das



Rank 23
Anil Dhameliya



Rank 28
Kushaal Yadav



Rank 39
Vivekanand T.S

IAS Result 2013

5 Ranks
in Top 50

62 Ranks
Ranks in the final list



Rank 9
Divyanshu Jha



Rank 12
Neha Jain



Rank 23
Prabhav Joshi



Rank 40
Gaurang Rath



Rank 46
Udit Singh

CONTENT

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
1	Polity	4
2	Economy	13
3	International Relations	34
4	Social Issues	44
5	Science and Technology	52
6	Internal Security and Defence	63
7	Health Issues	68
8	Education	76
9	Art and Culture	79
10	Miscellaneous	84
11	Practice Questions	86
12	Answers Keys	102
13	Mains Practice Questions	105

POLITY

1. Data protection framework: Srikrishna Committee

Why was it needed?

- The dawn of the information age opened up great opportunities for the beneficial use of data. It also enhanced the perils of unregulated and arbitrary use of personal data.
- Unauthorised leaks, hacking and other cyber crimes have rendered data bases vulnerable. But it is the conflict between the massive scope for progress provided by the digital era and the fear of loss of individual autonomy that is foregrounded in any debates about data protection laws.
- It is against this backdrop that the White Paper made public by the Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee to elicit views from the public on the shape and substance of a comprehensive data protection law assumes significance.

India -Present Status

- India does not have a separate law for data protection, though Section 43A of the Information Technology Act provides a measure of legal protection of personal information.
- In 2012, the Justice A.P. Shah Committee recommended a set of principles for a legal framework for protecting privacy.
- Drawn from OECD guidelines, these principles were centred on sufficient notice and disclosure to citizens when data are collected, limitations on data collection and use, and norms related to data security and accountability.

To overcome this Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, MEITY had set up the committee on Data Protection in India, led by Justice B.N. Srikrishna. The justice BN Srikrishna committee mandated by the government to draft a data protection law has come out with its white paper which has laid down that sensitive personal data or information by which a person is identifiable would need to be protected and would be brought under an ambit of law that would prescribe punishments in case of violations.

Objective

- The objective is to "ensure growth of the digital economy while keeping personal data of citizens secure and protected."
- Finding a balance between the rights-based model of privacy and protecting the individual from State interference

Sensitive Personal Data or Information (SPDI)

- The Srikrishna panel has identified health information, genetic information, religious beliefs and affiliation, sexual orientation, and racial and ethnic origin as SPDI. It has also placed caste and financial information too in this category.

- It has further said that data from which an individual is identified or is identifiable/reasonably identifiable may be considered to be personal data. The identifiability can be direct or indirect.
- The white paper has, however, clarified that all information is not personal data. Only such information by which a person can be identified would be categorised as SPDI and come under the ambit of law.

The seven key principles mentioned on which such a framework could be based upon in the country include:

- Technology agnostic: The data protection law must take into account the continuous change in technology and standards of compliance.
- Holistic application: The law must cover both the private sector and the government sector.
- Informed consent: The white paper talks about "informed consent" and not just consent. It says the consent should be "informed and meaningful".
- Data minimisation: The data collected or being processed should be minimal – only that data which is necessary for the purpose for which it is being sought. However, the white paper also adds, the data will also be collected for "and other compatible purposes beneficial for the data subject".
- Controller accountability: The committee is clear on fixing accountability of data controllers.
- Structured enforcement: The committee proposes to set up "a high-powered statutory authority", which "must co-exist with appropriately decentralised enforcement mechanisms."
- Deterrent penalties: It proposes for "adequate" penalties for "wrongful processing" to ensure deterrence.

American model

- The norms are stringent for government departments processing personal information, while private entities have to abide by the norms of giving notice and receiving consent.
- The US model seeks to protecting the individual "from excessive State regulation", but recognizes the value of data to encourage innovation".
- An enlightened citizenry will only help itself in participating in the search for a good data protection framework.

European Union's General Data Protection Regulation.

- It is a regulation by which the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission intend to strengthen and unify data protection for all individuals within the European Union

- It also addresses the export of personal data outside the EU. The GDPR aims primarily to give control back to citizens and residents over their personal data and to simplify the regulatory environment for international business by unifying the regulation within the EU.
- Some of the issues that have been discussed at length in the paper—such as the right to be forgotten and the concept of adequacy in cross-border data flows—are uniquely European in design and the general flavor of the recommendations have rich Continental overtones.
 - * European model of data protection, by design, focuses on **protecting citizens against having their data processed by private entities** and doesn't concern itself with regulating how governments collect and process data.
 - * Europeans, in general, have a high level of trust in their governments.
 - * Scandinavian countries, for instance, have some of the most detailed and in-depth information about household statistics of any country in the world. This is primarily because citizens of those countries are confident that when they share deeply personal information about their families with their governments, it will not be misused.

Advantages

- This is the first time that the process of drafting a legislation of such significance has been opened up to this level of extensive public consultation.
- The breadth of issues raised and the thoroughness with which international legislations have been referenced are truly without precedent in Indian legislative history.
- The committee has used this opportunity to create a data empowerment framework that unequivocally places the citizen at the heart of the privacy construct.

Issue Area

- lack of representation of relevant stakeholders
- Concerns around notice, consent and the entire choice-based framework that is discussed at length in the paper could easily be resolved by adopting an accountability model unlike any that exists in the world.

Way forward

To Thus the issue of data protection is important both intrinsically and instrumentally. Intrinsically, a regime for data protection is synonymous with protection of informational privacy. Instrumentally, a firm legal framework for data protection is the foundation on which datadriven innovation and entrepreneurship can flourish in India. Fostering such innovation and entrepreneurship is essential if India is to lead its citizens and the world into a digital future committed to empowerment, experiment and equal access.

2. Electoral bonds likely to carry validity of 15 days

- To prevent misuse of proposed electoral bonds, the government is likely to cap the validity at 15 days within which such bonds — bearer in nature — have to be redeemed by political parties
- Such bonds would be bearer in nature so that those having it can encash through only one notified account within stipulated time
- As per the electoral bond mechanism, the proposed bonds will resemble a promissory note and not an interest-paying debt instrument

Modus operandi:

- Each party will have one notified bank account. All bonds are to be deposited in that particular account
- It is a paper currency and needs to be encashed in 15 days, otherwise, it loses validity

Advantages:

- The short duration of bonds will ensure these cannot be misused and the objective of reducing the incidence of black money in political funding is achieved

3. Good Governance Day

- It is observed annually on December 25th, the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Good Governance Day was established in 2014 to honor Mr Vajpayee by fostering awareness among the people of accountability in government.

Objectives of Good Governance Day

- To make people aware about the government commitment for providing a transparent and accountable administration in the country.
- Good Governance Day is celebrated to enhance the welfare and betterment of the people.
- It is celebrated to standardise the government functioning and to make it a highly effective and accountable governance for the citizens of the country.
- To implement the good and effective policies to complete a mission of good governance in India.
- To enhance the growth and development in the country through good governance.
- To bring citizens closer to the government to make them active participants in the good governance process.

4. National Register of Citizens, 1951

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a document manufactured by the Government which contains the names of Indian citizens. The updation of the NRC is a periodical process. It requires to be updated at regular intervals so as to ensure proper documentation of the citizens as well as to check possible illegal migration.

- In Assam, the updation of NRC could not be carried out since 1951 due to several political compulsions.
- The Assam Movement in 1980's, the language Movement and such other identity movements fought on ethnic lines have heavily impinged on the system of governance in the state thereby leading to a stalemate on the NRC updation issue. After five decades of the stalemate, the present government has initiated steps to update the NRC under the direct supervision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

Background of migration

- The history of Muslims in Assam dates back to the 8th century when, according to some scholars, Turks and Arab traders and sailors came to the Brahmaputra Valley and settled in the Darrang region.
- After the British annexed Assam as part of the Bengal Presidency in 1826, migrant labourers were brought in from central India to work in tea plantations and this necessitated the production of more food, which the local population could not manage on its own.
- Moreover, a spurt in demand in the jute market necessitated an increase in jute cultivation in Bengal, which again was not possible. Both these reasons were behind the migration of Muslim farmers of East Bengal to Assam, first in small numbers. But by the turn of the 20th century, there was a huge influx of migrants to the chars, or river islands, in lower Assam from Bogra, Rangpur, Pabna and Mymensingh districts of Bengal.

Is This the First such register?

- No. there was an NRC across the country in 1951, but that was based on the Census of that year. and this is the first time it is being revised and only In Assam and it is not based on the census

Who will be considered Indian citizen?

- Those whose names were in the 1951 NRC or in any or the electoral rolls up to the midnight of March 24, 1971 and their descendants

What is procedure?

- To apply for inclusion in the NRC, one's name or one's ancestor's name must be in the 1951 NRC or in any voter list up to the midnight of March 24, 1971, the cut-off date agreed upon in the Assam Accord.
- If the applicant's name is not on any of these lists, he can produce any of the 12 other documents dated up to March 24, 1971, like land or tenancy record, citizenship certificate or permanent residential certificate or passport or court records or refugee registration certificate. March 25, 1971 is when the Bangladesh Liberation War began.
- If the applicant's ancestor's name is on any of these lists, the applicant will have to prove his relationship to his ancestor by producing his board or university certificate, ration card or any other legally acceptable document.

- An Indian citizen from another state who moved to Assam after the specified date is not eligible for inclusion in the NRC though he can continue to vote.

What is Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955

- Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 those who came from Bangladesh between 1966 and 1971 will have to register themselves with the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer, and will be included in the NRC, but will not have voting rights for 10 years from the date of registration.
- But According to Article 6 of the Constitution, the cutoff for determining citizenship in India is July 19, 1948.

Why is an updation necessary?

- It is the struggle of those who wanted to save their culture from being extinct and be reduced to an ethnic minority section in their homeland
- The Indigenous people of Assam fear that the unabated influx or growing stream of immigrants and infiltrators from across the border would one day reduce them into a small minority
- Immigration problem has been regarded as a "Security Threat" as it creates problem not only for personal security and human rights issues but also creates internal and international security problem.
- The NRC is to be updated to comply with the demands in the Assam Accord. signed in 1985 by Rajiv Gandhi and leaders of the Assam Movement

What happens to those who came from neighboring countries after march 24, 1971?

- While the demand has been that such people be sent back to the countries they came from, India needs to sign repatriation treaties with Bangladesh and Nepal for the same

NRC and Controversies

- Many Question the validity of the 1951 NRC since it was incomplete
- People complain that the government has not made available all electoral rolls up to 1971 in all districts. The government says it has provided whatever is available
- Doubtful voters will have to have their names cleared by the Foreigners Tribunal before their inclusion in the NRC
- One of the oft-repeated complaints is the discrepancy in names in different government documents, caused by misspelling of names and inclusion of nicknames instead of actual names
- There has been concern from Indigenous tribes who may not have any pre-1971 documents to prove their identity. While all original inhabitants of Assam are to be included in Assam, the modalities for the same have not been finalized
- Many of the Muslims who had fled Assam could only return later, thereby not being included in the 1951 Census and NRC.

Opposition to NRC revision

- There are writ petition pending before Supreme Court to declare cut-off year as 1951 instead of 1971.
- There are question about validity of 1951 NRC data because it was incomplete.
- Few supports NRC be updated on the basis of 2014 electoral roll.
- Few feel this revision exercise should be carried out in entire country instead of being selective to Assam.

Post NRC revision

- The treatment to those who will be left out of NRC revision will become a political issue.
- As per Assam Accord, the foreigners who came post 1971 were to be evicted. However, it is much easier said than done. From 1985 to 2012, the government has been able to send back only around 2500 out of over 55000 identified illegal migrants.
- India needs repatriation treaty with Nepal and Bangladesh to push back those who will be excluded from NRC.
- There are claims for religion based differentiation of illegal migrants which may further complicate the settlement process. Some political parties claim that the Hindus who came from Bangladesh are not foreigners and should be given citizenship.
- Since Bangladesh is not ready to take them back, lakhs of such Indian citizens, who have had their names on the Indian electoral rolls for the past four decades, and who are in possession of Electoral Photo Identity Card, would be rendered stateless

5. Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill of 2017

- The Bill seeks to amend the Representation of People Act, 1950 and the Representation of People Act, 1951 to allow for proxy voting and to make certain provisions of the Acts gender-neutral.
- It proposes to allow non-resident Indians (NRIs) to emerge as a decisive force in the country's electoral politics on their own terms.
- The 1951 Act provides for the wife of a person holding a service qualification to vote. The Bill replaces the term 'wife' with 'spouse'.
- The amendment paves the way to remove an "unreasonable restriction" posed by Section 20A of the Representation of the People Act, which requires overseas electors to be physically present in their electoral constituencies to cast their votes.

Why was it required?

- Section 20A of the Act provides for registration and inclusion of overseas electors in the electoral rolls.

- The **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960** provide for overseas electors to register themselves in the electoral rolls of their respective constituencies on the basis of self-attested copies of their passport and valid visa, and exercise their franchise in person on production of the original passport at the time of voting at the specified polling booth.
- Thus, **the rules demand for the physical presence of overseas electors** in their respective polling stations in India on the day of polling.
- "This causes hardship to the overseas electors," the statement said. This amendment proposes facilitating an external mode of voting, that is, voting by proxy, whereby such electors can exercise their franchise from their places of residence abroad.

Significance

- If the Bill is passed, overseas voters can appoint a proxy to cast their votes on their behalf, subject to certain conditions to be laid down in the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961.
- This would considerably mitigate the difficulties presently faced by overseas electors in exercising their franchise

6. Vahan

- 'Vahan' is the name of the national vehicle registry, which intends to collate all the information available with road transport authorities for easy access by both citizens and regulators.
- Data available with over 90 per cent of all road transport authorities including RTOs and district transport offices have been computerised so far.
- As a result, Vahan now contains about 21.68 crore vehicle records in its repository.

Details

- Vahan allows access to all details related to vehicles such as registration number, chassis/engine number, body/fuel type, colour, manufacturer and model and provides various online services to citizens. Driving Licence and related data are automated through a separate application called 'Sarathi'.

Why is it important?

- Vahan has been designed to capture all the information mandated by the Central Motor Vehicle Act 1988 as well as State Motor Vehicle Rules. It has been customised to suit the varied requirements of all States and Union Territories. This way, the system ensures access to such information from anywhere.
- Besides, centralisation of data through the creation of the State and National Registries under Vahan also helps address the needs of RTOs, police and motor insurers.
- The Police Department will also have access to the registry. The information available online can help in resolving crimes such as theft of vehicles and usage of fake registration numbers.

- Traffic-check points can cross-check the validity of the documents such as licences presented by motorists through hand-held devices.
- Enforcement activities such as issue of challan and settlement of penalty amount can also be carried out through Vahan.
- Banks, which may have given out loans for vehicle purchases, will also have access to the National/State Registry to track the status of vehicles under lien.

Advantages

- With Vahan, multiple visits to the RTO, extensive paperwork, queues, middlemen and bribes, all of which are today a part of package if you own a vehicle, will be a thing of the past.
- Vahan helps carry out most of the RTO related transactions including payments, online.
- To expedite the registration process, automobile dealers have been given a login where they can enter the required data for registration of new vehicles and obtain registration certificates.
- Other services such as transfer of ownership, change of address, issue and renewal of permits and fitness certificates are also available at the click of the mouse.
- The need for 'No objection certificate' for transfers will be eliminated since all RTOs will have access to the centralised data. There are also plans to develop mobile based applications for the various services.

7. United Nations Convention against Torture

- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (commonly known as the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT)) is an international human rights treaty, under the review of the United Nations, that aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world.
- The Convention requires states to take effective measures to prevent torture in any territory under their jurisdiction, and forbids states to transport people to any country where there is reason to believe they will be tortured.

India

- The Convention Against Torture (CAT) came into force in 1987 and India signed it in 1997.
- Today, the CAT has 162 state parties; 83 are signatories.
- In refusing to ratify the CAT, India is in the inglorious company of Angola, the Bahamas, Brunei, Gambia, Haiti, Palau, and Sudan.

International Response

- In 2008, at the universal periodical review by the Human Rights Council (HRC) of the UN, country after country recommended that India expedite ratification. India's response was that ratification was "being processed".

- In 2011, desiring to be appointed on the HRC of the UN, India took the extraordinary step of voluntarily "pledging" to ratify the CAT. The pledge stated: "India has been a consistent supporter of the UN human rights system" and "remains committed to ratifying the CAT". Once on the Council, India forgot its commitment.
- In the 2012 review, once again countries overwhelmingly recommended that India "promptly" ratify the CAT to which India responded "supported", which indicates agreement.

India has been making promises but doesn't seem intent on keeping them, much to the dismay of the countries attending the review proceedings.

Case History

Meanwhile, torture cases have escalated in India.

- In *Raghubir Singh v. State of Haryana* (1980), the Supreme Court said it was "deeply disturbed by the diabolical recurrence of police torture." "Police lock-ups," it said, "are becoming more awesome cells."
- In *Shakila Abdul Gafar Khan v. Vasant Raghunath Dhoble* (2003), the Supreme Court said that "torture is assuming alarming proportions... on account of the devilish devices adopted."
- The concern which was shown in *Raghubir's* case has fallen on deaf ears."
- In *Munshi Singh Gautam v. State of M.P.* (2004), the Supreme Court said: "Civilisation itself would risk the consequence of heading towards total decay resulting in anarchy and authoritarianism reminiscent of barbarism."

What has been done in the past by parliament?

- The Prevention of Torture Bill, 2010 was an excellent attempt by Parliament to draft new legislation. Unlike Indian law, which focusses on murder and broken bones (grievous hurt), torture was expanded to include food deprivation, forcible feeding, sleep deprivation, sound bombardment, electric shocks, cigarette burning, and other forms.
- In the same year, a Select Committee of Parliament endorsed the Bill and made some positive recommendations for rehabilitation, compensation and witness protection.
- The Select Committee noted that an overwhelming number of States and Union Territories were in favor of the Bill. The Bill was allowed to lapse.
- Law Commission has strongly recommended ratification and the drafting of comprehensive legislation instead of ad hoc amendments in the Indian Penal Code.

Way forward

In showing the world that India has no intention of combating the terror of its own forces and of implementing its promises made to the UN, the government has undermined India's prestige. To be a world power, India must act like one and should ratify the treaty.

8. Ministers not under RTI, says HC

- The Delhi High Court has set aside the Central Information Commission order declaring Ministers as “public authorities” and answerable under the Right to Information law.
- The High Court’s order came on the Centre’s appeal against the CIC order.

Background:

- 2014: An application filed by a Maharashtra resident who wanted to know how to get an appointment with the Union Law Minister.
- In November 2014, the man moved an application before Additional Private Secretary, Ministry of Law and Justice, seeking to know the time period of the Minister or Minister of State meeting the public.
- As the information sought was not received, the matter reached the CIC. Here the Commission went on to frame the questions whether the Minister or his office was a “public authority” under the RTI Act.
- It gave the Cabinet Secretary at the Centre and Chief Secretaries in the States two months to appoint public information officers for each Minister’s office.
- Also, the CIC said each Minister should get a website of his/her own where information can be disclosed.

RTI and its application to Higher Judiciary

- The Delhi high court has recently held that the Right to Information (RTI) Act would not override the Supreme Court Rules (SCR) when it comes to dissemination of information.
- The RTI Act cannot be resorted to in case the information sought for is related to judicial function, which can be challenged by way of any legal proceeding.
- The SCR would be applicable with regard to the judicial functioning of the Supreme Court. Whereas for administrative functioning of the Supreme Court, RTI Act would be applicable and information could be provided under it.
- The dissemination of information under the SCR is part of judicial function, exercise of which cannot be taken away by any statute. It is settled legal position that the legislature is not competent to take away the judicial powers of the court by statutory prohibition.

Background

- The court’s order came on a plea by the Supreme Court of India, through its Registrar, who had challenged an May 2011 order of the Central Information Commission (CIC) directing the apex court to answer the queries of litigant R.S. Misra as to why his SLP was dismissed.
- No litigant can be allowed to seek information through an RTI application or a letter on the administrative side as to why and for what reasons the judge had come to a particular decision or conclusion.

- A judge is not bound to explain later on for what reasons he had come to such a conclusion.
- At issue is the right of citizens to get information from the Supreme Court, and by implication, India’s higher judiciary, which has strongly resisted the RTI.
- The apex court summarily rejects RTI requests, and insists that applicants exclusively request information under its administrative rules (Supreme Court Rules) framed in 1966, and re-issued with minor changes in 2014.

The Supreme Court Rules undermined the RTI in key ways.

- Unlike the RTI Act,
 - * The Rules do not provide for: a time frame for furnishing information;
 - * An appeal mechanism
 - * Penalties for delays or wrongful refusal of information.
- The nub of the matter is that the Supreme Court Registry wants to provide information at its absolute discretion.
- Its brazen disregard for the RTI has now got a stamp of approval from a court of record.
- The RTI has suffered another blow, not from the berated political class or the much maligned babus, but from the “gems of institutions” enjoined to protect the law.

Centre moves SC against fixed term for police chiefs

- The Union government has filed an interlocutory application in the Supreme Court to amend a 2006 order of the court that is being used by the States to appoint “favourites” as Directors-General of Police for two-year fixed term.
- Misuse of the power: some States were misusing the order and appointing officers about to retire, giving them a fixed term of two years, irrespective of the superannuation date.
- The implementation of the order was not monitored effectively.

What does the law say?

- The All India Services Act, 1951, bars any officer from remaining in office after retirement, unless cleared by the Centre.
- The Home Ministry is the cadre-controlling authority for IPS officers, and the Supreme Court order is being increasingly misused by the States to appoint officers close to the regime.

Ministry to frame norms

- Home Ministry to frame guidelines: ensure that only those who had a minimum of one-and-a-half to two years to retire were included in the panel.

9. 'Poor expertise of govt. officials in law causing pendency of cases'

- Appointment of junior officers as Litigation Conducting Officers (LCOs) for government cases, non-appearance of government pleader for hearings, lack of coordination between government officials and lawyers, and non-appearance of government officials in court hearings are among the major reasons for large pendency of cases, particularly government litigations, according to the study by NLSIU
- It found that appointment of junior officers in government departments as LCOs, who generally lack expertise in law, and absence of interaction between government lawyer and LCO contributed to pendency.
- Poor communication between the government department and office of the Advocate General is the "biggest problem" and a major factor for pending litigations.
- The study also said that no official records regarding number of government litigations pending in the different courts in the State were maintained.
- The Law Department neither monitors its litigation nor prepares annual/monthly report on the conduct of litigation.

10. Centre moves SC against fixed term for police chiefs

- The Union government has filed an interlocutory application in the Supreme Court to amend a 2006 order of the court that is being used by the States to appoint "favourites" as Directors-General of Police for two-year fixed term.
- Misuse of the power: some States were misusing the order and appointing officers about to retire, giving them a fixed term of two years, irrespective of the superannuation date.
- The implementation of the order was not monitored effectively.

What does the law say?

- The All India Services Act, 1951, bars any officer from remaining in office after retirement, unless cleared by the Centre.
- The Home Ministry is the cadre-controlling authority for IPS officers, and the Supreme Court order is being increasingly misused by the States to appoint officers close to the regime.

Ministry to frame norms

- Home Ministry to frame guidelines: ensure that only those who had a minimum of one-and-a-half to two years to retire were included in the panel.

11. Trial Courts and Speedy Justice

- Two crimes ended in death sentences for the principal perpetrators— one emblematic in the way it sought to uphold caste pride and the other an abominable instance of sexual violence against women

- The High Courts of Madras and Kerala would decide later whether to confirm the death penalty, but the trial courts have sent out a significant message that one need not always be cynical about the country's criminal justice system; that there are times when it responds well, and responds quickly, to the cry for justice.

Background

- In these cases, one involved the murder of Shankar, a Dalit youth, for marrying Kausalya, who is from an intermediate caste, and incurring her family's wrath.
- The other related to the rape and murder of a Dalit law student by a migrant worker. Both crimes took place in the first half of 2016.

Significance

- For Indian courts to render a final verdict within two years is unusual, therefore probably deserving of praise.
- This is a noteworthy and welcome departure from the uninspiring record of tardy trials and perfunctory orders.
- It is perhaps a sign of the times that both State governments bestowed considerable attention on securing justice in these cases, getting the investigation supervised at a high level and appointing special prosecutors.

Issue Area

- Trial courts appear to be under pressure to be seen as ruthless and unwavering, resulting in their reflexively awarding the death penalty.

Way forward

- In these two latest cases, the superior courts may well reduce the sentences on a balance of mitigating and aggravating circumstances. But one cannot ignore the core message that efficient investigation and speedy trials help foster trust in the justice system.

12. Punish the guilty for their crimes, not their poverty:

Supreme Court

Supreme Court's observation:

- A convict's poverty should not be the reason for him to spend years in prison even after serving a substantial prison sentence, that too, merely because he is unable to pay the fine amount the criminal court had imposed on him.
- The financial condition of the convict after a long period of incarceration and the plight of his "innocent" family should be taken into consideration to prevent, if at least reduce, the time he would spend behind bars for not being able to pay the fine imposed on him at the time of sentencing by the trial court.

Present situation:

- Penal laws, besides sentencing a person to prison, also mandate him to pay a fine, which could run to lakhs of rupees, as punishment.

- If the fine is not paid, or if the convict cannot afford it, as an alternative, he is made to suffer another prison term of up to one-fourth of the period of his substantial sentence.
- This second prison term for defaulting in payment of fine begins immediately after his substantial sentence for the crime committed comes to an end.

13. Right to Privacy after Death of a Person

- The Supreme Court has thrown open the floor for debate on whether or not an individual's fundamental right to privacy subsists after death.
- The question rose in a challenge raised against a Madras High Court order to produce the Aadhaar data records of the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalithaa for verification of her fingerprints.

Petition

- The Supreme Court stayed the High Court order on a petition filed by leaders of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.
- The party leaders argue that the fundamental right to privacy continues to remain alive even after the death of an individual.
- The petition said the "intrusion" by the High Court into Jayalithaa's privacy would not have happened had she been alive. The court would have been forced to get her consent.

Supreme Court to decide on the Issue

- The Supreme Court has decided to examine whether or not the High Court's order "amounts to intrusion into the fundamental right to privacy of a third party".
- Privacy is a concomitant of the right of the individual to exercise control over his or her personality.
- The issue raises a significant question as a part of modern human's personal life and identity is embedded in the virtual world.
- The case raises the issue whether or not courts and authorities can order to see an individual's personal data without consent after his or her death.
- The examination has to be done against the backdrop of the landmark verdict of nine judges of the Supreme Court which upheld privacy as a fundamental right.
- The judgment is silent on whether privacy continues after death. Or does the definition of "life" in the judgment extend to after-life.

14. Can EC deregister political parties?

- Can the Election Commission of India (ECI), which has power to register political parties, 'deregister' them?

Present Status

- Commission does not have powers to deregister political parties under the RPA.

What has Madras high court said in this regard?

- Madras high court has now asked the Centre to take a decision as expeditiously as possible on the recommendation made by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in 1998 to amend the Representation of People Act (RPA) so as to provide ECI power to deregister a political party violating the Constitution of India.

Observations by Court

- Unless such time the recommendations of the ECI is accepted, it is doubtful whether a political party once registered can be deregistered, except in the circumstances mentioned by Supreme Court in Indian National Congress case
- There is immediate need for such powers to the ECI, to initiate appropriate actions against registered political parties if its leaders make hate, derogatory speeches against any religion, caste or race.

15. 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.

What did EC say?

- EC was in favour 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. He said that 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

16. 'Law needed for those wrongfully imprisoned'

- The Delhi High Court has asked the Law Commission of India to see if a new legislation can be brought in to provide relief and rehabilitation to victims of wrongful prosecution and incarceration.
- There is no statutory or legal scheme at present to compensate those who spend years in jail only to be acquitted later.

NCRB data

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) says of 4,19,623 inmates lodged in various jails across the country in 2015, 67% are undertrials.
- Prison records show that 3,599 undertrials were detained in jails for five years or more in the country.
- The highest number of such undertrial prisoners were reported from Uttar Pradesh (1,364) followed by West Bengal (294) and Bihar (278). The same year, 82,585 undertrials were released after being acquitted.
- The Supreme Court in various judgments over the years has held that compensation can be awarded by constitutional courts for violation of fundamental rights under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Practice in the United States

- 32 States in the US have enacted laws that provide monetary and non-monetary compensation to people wrongfully incarcerated.

17. Plea for VVIP cars to display registration number

- The Delhi High Court asked the Centre and the city government to place before it the rules on the use of the State Emblem of India on cars of constitutional authorities and dignitaries, such as the President, instead of registration numbers.

Petition:

- NGO Nyayabhoomi claimed that the practice of displaying the State Emblem, instead of the registration numbers, makes the cars conspicuous and the dignitaries become easy targets for terrorists and anyone with malicious intent.
- It further sought directions to the Delhi government and the Delhi Police to seize the cars used by the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Vice-President, Raj Niwas and Protocol Division of the Ministry of External Affairs for not being registered under the Motor Vehicles Act.
- It also claimed that the Rashtrapati Bhavan refused to give details of the registration numbers of its cars on the ground that disclosure of this information would endanger the security of the State and life and physical safety of the President.
- It said that a person meeting with an accident involving such a car cannot bring any claim against it due to the absence of any identification mark.

18. HC view on performance of judges will prevail:**collegiums****Context:**

- The apex court collegium's recommendation of five names to the Centre for the appointment as judges in the Karnataka High Court records the objections raised by the Chief Minister and Governor of the State.
- Both are consulted in the process of judicial appointments to High Courts.

In news:

- The Supreme Court Collegium made it clear that an objective assessment made at the High Court and Supreme Court levels about the performance or merit of candidates being considered for judicial appointment in High Courts overcomes any disagreement by the Chief Minister or Governor concerned.

Present case:

- The Karnataka High Court Collegium had forwarded a list of 10 names.
- Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and Justices J. Chelameswar and Ranjan Gogoi who sat in the Collegium refer to the Karnataka Chief Minister objecting to the list, as several bodies of advocates had expressed concern that the "names recommended do not provide opportunity of representation to cross-sections of the society".
- The Governor too had raised doubts about the efficiency of some candidates.
- The apex court Collegium differed. It notes that the minutes of the High Court Collegium meetings show that it had indeed taken into account the "merit, experience, performance, character and conduct of the recommendees".
- The Supreme Court Collegium concluded that there was no need for any further examination. Addressing the Governor's apprehensions, it recorded that the assessment of the persons recommended was done objectively by the judiciary at the High Court and the Supreme Court levels.

ECONOMY

1. Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana

- Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana (AABY) is a Government of India Social Security Scheme administered through Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) that provides Death and Disability cover to persons between the age group of 18 yrs to 59 yrs, under 48 identified vocational/ occupational groups /rural landless households.
- It is a group insurance scheme implemented through a Nodal Agency such as a Central Ministry/ Department; State Government /Union Territory or other institutionalized arrangements/ registered NGO.

Insurance cover

- The AABY provides insurance cover for a sum of Rs 30,000/- on natural death,
- Rs. 75,000/- on death due to accident,
- Rs. 37,500/- for partial permanent disability (loss of one eye or one limb) due to accident and
- Rs. 75,000/- for total permanent disability (loss of two eyes or two limbs or loss of one eye and one limb) due to accident.

The Scheme also provides an add-on-benefit, wherein Scholarship of Rs 100 per month per child is paid on half-yearly basis to a maximum of two children per member, studying in 9th to 12th Standard.

Social security scheme for artisans

- To protect the interest of artisans, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has issued directions to all Khadi Institutions to ensure payment of wages directly into Aadhaar Seeded bank account of artisans.
- KVIC is releasing Market Development Assistance incentives to Khadi artisans and Khadi Institutions through a DBT Portal directly into their Aadhaar Bank Accounts.

2. Agricultural Education Day

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research had decided to celebrate the birthday (3 December) of the first Indian union agriculture minister (1946) and the first President of Independent India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad as Agricultural Education Day in India.
- By this initiative, the ICAR aims to develop interest in agriculture and allied sciences among the school and college students and to choose 'agriculture' as their professional & research career or engage themselves in farming as agri-entrepreneurs

Objective

- The objective is to attract youth including school children towards agricultural education.

Govt Initiative

- The government of India has increased the budget of Agricultural Education by 47.4% this year as compared to the financial year 2013-14.
- In order to adopt quality and holistic approach to higher agricultural education, the Fifth Dean Committee Report has been implemented in all the Agricultural Universities.
- Recognizing the immense potential of North-Eastern India, six new colleges have been opened by the Modi Government under the Central Agricultural University, Imphal

Student READY Programme

- Student READY programme has been started for graduates of agriculture and allied subjects to ensure new direction for entrepreneurship development better employability.
- The main objective of this programme is to provide confidence and complete skills to agricultural Graduates while studying at undergraduate level.
- Under this programme, there is also a provision for working with the farmers in the fourth year of the bachelor's degree.
- Apart from this, the system of training has also been widely given in the production industries. The stipends given to students under Student READY have been increased from Rs 750 / - to Rs 3000 / - per month.

3. Agrimach India

- EIMA Agrimach India 2017, the only business to business event of its kind offering a single venue interface between Indian & global players in the agri-machinery sector.
- Organized jointly by FICCI, FEDERUNACOMA in partnership with Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the event is inspired by EIMA International, the second largest exhibition and conference on farm mechanization in the world.
- EIMA Agrimach India 2017 envisages showcasing the best and latest in agri-machineries, besides providing an excellent opportunity to Indian and overseas players catering to the entire value chain through vertical based national and international pavilions.

4. Asset stripping

- This refers to the practice of buying an ongoing business with the aim of selling off its individual assets to buyers in the open market. Asset stripping usually happens when a business as an ongoing entity is no longer able to operate profitably and add value to its existing shareholders.
- In such cases, instead of incurring even more losses, it might be a better option for the shareholders to simply sell off its assets and realise the business' salvage value.
- Many businesses, however, are saved from liquidation by investors who are willing to purchase it with high hopes of turning it around into a profitable operation.

5. Bharatiya Nirdeshak Dravya

- India now has its own standard bar of gold that is 99.99% pure and can be used to verify the purity of gold sold in shops. Despite India being one of the largest markets for gold, goldsmiths so far depended on imported reference gold bars to check the purity of their biscuits, coins and jewellery.
- Called the Bharatiya Nirdeshak Dravya (BND 4201), the bar, weighing 20gm and with the dimensions of a 'Parle-G' biscuit (in the words of a scientists associated with its development), will mean that Indian jewellers will no longer need to import gold bars to check the purity of ornaments.
- the India Government Mint (IGM), a unit of Security Printing and Minting Corp of India Ltd, signed an agreement with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and CSIR-National Physical Laboratory (NPL) to develop the first gold standard.
- The NPL is the repository of standard units — such as the kilogram, the second, the centimetre — in India and provides calibration services. So far, 200 gold bars — each 35mm long, 15 mm wide and 1.5mm thick — have been made
- While the bars will be made by the IGM, technical aspects such as measurement would be done by the BARC and certifying the purity of the bars would be the responsibility of the NPL.
- The Department produces Standard Gold Bars of standard fineness and purity of 10g, 50g, 100g, 500g & 1000g denominations.

6. Commission of Railway Safety

- The Commission of Railway Safety, working under the administrative control of the Ministry of Civil Aviation of the Government of India, deals with matters pertaining to safety of rail travel and train operation and is charged with certain statutory functions as laid down in the Railways Act (1989), which are of an inspectorial, investigatory & advisory nature.

Functions

- The Commission functions according to certain rules framed under the railways Act and executive instructions issued from time to time.
- The most important duty of the Commission is to ensure that any new railway line to be opened for passenger traffic should conform to the standard and specifications prescribed by the Ministry of Railways and the new line is safe in all respects for carrying the passenger traffic.
- This is also applicable to other works such as gauge conversion, doubling of lines and electrification of existing lines etc.
- The Commission also conducts statutory inquiries into serious train accidents and makes recommendations for improving safety on the railways in India.

Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety (CMRS)

- The CMRS will be administratively under the control of Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety under Ministry of Civil Aviation.
- With a view to accord priority to passenger safety and also to ensure uniformity in safety certification, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs while enacting the "Metro railways (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2002", has assigned similar functions to Commissioner of Metro Railway safety (CMRS) in respect of Metro Railways.

Context

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the creation of one circle office of Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety (CMRS), along-with all supporting officers and staffs for carrying out the functions of Commission of Metro Railway Safety as envisaged in the "Metro Railways (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2002", in the Commission of Railway Safety under the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Why was it done?

- Creation of these posts will ensure focused attention on the passenger safety and metro rail operation related issues, in respect of existing, as well as upcoming various metro rail projects, as envisaged in the "Metro Railways (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2002", in the Commission of Railway Safety under the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Implementation strategy and targets:

- The post of Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety shall be filled from the cadre of Indian Railway Engineering Services (IRSE, IRSEE, IRSSE, RSME) & IRTS by the Ministry of Civil Aviation through nomination from willing officers from Ministry of Railways in consultation with UPSC, initially according to Recruitment Rules for Commissioner of Railway Safety in the Commission of Railway Safety.

7. "Coir Workers" Group Personal Accident Insurance Scheme

- Government is also implementing the "Coir Workers" Group Personal Accident Insurance Scheme which is aimed at providing insurance coverage against accidental death, permanent total disability and permanent partial disability to the coir workers in all coir producing States in India.
- The maximum amount of compensation payable is Rs.50,000/- in the case of death/permanent total disability and Rs.25,000/- in the case of permanent partial disability.
- The premium for the entire coir workers is paid by Coir Board to the Insurance Company as a lump sum amount towards the renewal of the policy every year.
- The coir workers aged 18 years and above engaged in the industry (no upper age limit) are covered under the scheme.
- The scheme was converged to the Core scheme Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) during July, 2016.

8. 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.

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.

9. Energy Conservation Day

- The Energy Conservation Day is organized on 14th December each year by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), with an aim to demonstrate India's achievements in energy efficiency and conservation, while working for its ambition of holistic development as part of the nation's overall effort towards climate change mitigation.
- As part of its awareness outreach, BEE recognizes and encourages endeavours of industries in reducing energy consumption by felicitating them with National Energy Conservation Awards.

- BEE also awards prizes to the national winners of the annual National Painting Competition on Energy Conservation.

Details

- In order to realize its development goals, India's energy demand is expected to double between 2013 and 2030, to approximately 1500 million tonnes of oil equivalent. The mission of BEE is to assist in developing policies and strategies that will help reduce this energy demand by promoting widespread adoption of energy efficiency measures.

Bureau of Energy Efficiency

- The Bureau of Energy Efficiency is an agency of the Government of India, under the Ministry of Power created in March 2002 under the provisions of the nation's 2001 Energy Conservation Act
- The mission of Bureau of Energy Efficiency is to "institutionalise" energy efficiency services, enable delivery mechanisms in the country and provide leadership to energy efficiency in all sectors of the country.
- The primary objective would be to reduce energy intensity in the economy.

10. FRDI Bill

- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code deals with the corporations that have taken money from the banks but are unable to pay back, the FRDI Bill outlines how the insolvency of a financial intermediary—banks, non-banks and even insurance firms—can be tackled.

The need for such a regulation stemmed from the 2008 global financial crisis which killed iconic US investment bank Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. and brought many large financial intermediaries to their knees, forcing large-scale bailouts by governments.

Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation or DICGC.

- The bill envisages setting up of a resolution corporation which will replace the existing Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation or DICGC.
- Established in 1978, DICGC is a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) arm that offers an insurance cover of up to Rs1 lakh to the depositors.

Will the existing deposit cover of Rs1 lakh be taken away?

- The answer is an emphatic no. All depositors will continue to enjoy that.

Resolution Corporation

- It will be tasked with monitoring financial firms, anticipating their risk of failure, taking corrective action and resolving them in case of failure.
- The corporation is also tasked with providing deposit insurance up to a certain limit yet to be specified, in the event of a bank failure.

- The Corporation will also be tasked with classifying financial firms on their risk of failure — low, moderate, material, imminent, or critical. It will take over the management of a company once it is deemed critical.

The proposed corporation will closely monitor financial companies, classify them in accordance with their risk profiles and step in to resolve in case of a failure (this could mean taking over a financial company)

Bail In

- A “bail-in” involves rescuing a financial institution on the brink of failure by making its creditors and depositors take a loss on their holdings.
- It is the opposite of a “bail-out”, which involves the rescue of a financial institution by external agencies, typically governments, using taxpayers’ money.
- In other words, instead of the government rescuing a failing bank or any other financial intermediary by infusing capital, depositors’ funds are being proposed to be used for this purpose. So, the depositors run the risk of losing their money or facing inordinate delays in realizing the money—and that too may not be the full amount as deposits may get converted into other financial instruments such as equity or a quasi-equity.

Resolution Corporation is powered to bail-in

- To cancel liability of a failing financial institution
- Provide measures to minimize the impact Of these failing institutions on the entire financial sector
- Provides for statutory bail-in, where consent of creditors/ depositors is not required for bail-in.

The proposed regulation will retain the insurance cover. So, what’s the problem?

- The uncertainty is about the money kept in banks beyond Rs1 lakh. Now, in case a bank goes for liquidation, depositors are entitled to get only Rs1 lakh.
- Beyond this cover, they can get money, if any, only after the liquidation proceedings are complete and the bank’s secured creditors are taken care of. A depositor is an unsecured creditor.

Merits of Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill, 2017:

- The Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill, 2017 seeks to give comfort to the consumers of financial service providers in financial distress. It also aims to inculcate discipline among financial service providers in the event of financial crises by limiting the use of public money to bail out distressed entities.
- It would help in maintaining financial stability in the economy by ensuring adequate preventive measures, while at the same time providing the necessary instruments for dealing with an event of crisis.
- The Bill aims to strengthen and streamline the current framework of deposit insurance for the benefit of a large number of retail depositors.

- The Bill seeks to decrease the time and costs involved in resolving distressed financial entities.

11. Indian Institute of Petroleum and Energy Bill

- The Lok Sabha passed a bill to establish the Indian Institute of Petroleum and Energy in Visakhapatnam. The institute will be developed as an institution of national importance, imparting high quality education and conducting advanced research in conventional hydrocarbons, and alternative sources of energy.
- The Bill establishes the Indian Institute of Petroleum and Energy, Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. It declares the Institute as an institution of national importance.
- The Institute aims to provide high quality education and research focussing on the themes of petroleum, hydrocarbons and energy.

The key authorities of the Institute are as follows:

- The General Council;
- The Board of Governors;
- The Senate; and
- Any other authorities declared by the statutes.

Powers of the Board of Governors include: (i) instituting courses of study and laying down standards of proficiency and other academic distinctions; (ii) considering proposals for taking loans for the Institute; (iii) creating academic, administrative, technical and other posts; and (iv) fixing fees and other charges.

The powers of the Council include: (i) reviewing the broad policies and Programmes of the Institute; (ii) advising the Board with respect to new technologies in the domain of energy and hydrocarbon development; and (iii) suggesting improvements in fiscal management of the Institute.

Funding: The Institute will be required to maintain a fund which will be credited with the funds that it receives from the central government, fees and money received from any other sources (grants and gifts). The accounts of the Institute shall be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India.

12. Kimberly Process Certification Scheme

- The Kimberley Process is a joint Government, International Diamond Industry and Civil Society initiative to stem the flow of Conflict Diamonds.
- “Conflict Diamonds” means rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance conflict aimed at undermining legitimate governments. It is also described in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.
- The KPCS came into effect from 1st January, 2003 and evolved into an effective mechanism for stopping the trade in conflict diamonds. India is the founding member of KPCS. At present, KPCS has 54 members representing 81 countries including the EU with 28 members.

- India is one of the founding members of the KPCS and was Chair of the KPCS for the year 2008.

Context

- A delegation consisting of Government officials and Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) representatives led by Joint Secretary, Department of Commerce, Government of India attended the KP Plenary Session held at Brisbane, Australia 2017.
- In one of a landmark decisions favoring India's leading position in Diamonds globally, India was appointed as the Kimberly Process (KP) Vice Chair for 2018 & Chair for 2019 in the last plenary held in Dubai in November, 2016.
- The EU will be KP Chair for 2018.

13. Legatum Prosperity Index

What is it?

- The Legatum Prosperity Index offers a unique insight into how prosperity is forming and changing across the world.
- The Prosperity Index determined by nine sub-indices — business environment, governance, education, health, safety and security, personal freedom, social capital and natural environment — is reviewed by a panel of academics from various disciplines and reputed schools like London School of Economics, Tufts University, Brookings Institution and University of California, San Diego.

India and its progress

- The gap between China and India's prosperity+ has narrowed by four ranks since 2016 and to a quarter of what it was in 2012, according to the latest Legatum Prosperity Index, an annual ranking developed by the London-based Legatum Institute
- The upward trend in India's prosperity is significant in view of the fact that India registered lower GDP growth following demonetisation and implementation of the GST reform in 2017.
- India closed in on China+ through gains in business environment, economic quality and governance, the report said.
- The Legatum Institute applauded India for improving governance by legislation "that increased the ability to challenge regulation in the legal system".
- The report attributed the gains in business environment and economic quality to improvement in intellectual property rights and massive rise in bank account holders.

Other details

- In the 2017 Legatum Prosperity Index, based on 104 different variables analysed across 149 nations, India has significantly improved in the economic quality and education pillars

- Overall, world prosperity increased in 2017 and now sits at its highest level in the last decade even as the world went through turbulence due to terrorism, war against Islamic State and displacement of massive number of people in West Asia and North Africa.
- The global prosperity is now 2.6% higher than in 2007. While prosperity improved around the world in 2017, no region grew as fast as Asia-Pacific.
- The Asia-Pacific region, which includes China and India, registered greatest improvement in business environment and worst performance towards natural environment.

14. Livestock Disease Forewarning –Mobile Application (LDF-Mobile App)

- Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister, Shri Radha Mohan Singh launched Livestock Disease Forewarning –Mobile Application (LDF-Mobile App), developed by ICAR-National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics (ICAR-NIVEDI),
- Union Agriculture Minister said that ICAR-NIVEDI has identified 13 priority diseases based on their past incidence patterns and has built a strong database of these diseases and has been providing monthly livestock disease alerts to the state and central animal husbandry departments.

What it does?

- ICAR-NIVEDI developed the app and used Monthly Bulletin system to send out early warning.
- The complex statistical algorithm also considers both climatic and non-climatic factors and categorizes districts into Very High Risk, High Risk, Moderate Risk, Low Risk, Very Low Risk and No Risk for a particular disease so that stakeholders can effectively plan and utilize the available resources.
- This app works on all kind of Android smartphones and takes up 2.5 MB space.

Significance

- Monthly Bulletin system used in this mobile app to send out early warning
- Apart from early warning, the app will also provide information about clinical samples for the diagnosis in case of the epidemic so that immediate action in case of the epidemic.

15. MSME Samadhaan

- Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Shri Giriraj Singh launched MSME Delayed Payment Portal – MSME Samadhaan

What it does?

- It empowers micro and small entrepreneurs across the country to directly register their cases relating to delayed payments by Central Ministries/ Departments/CPSEs/State Governments

Present Status

- As per the provisions, the buyer is liable to pay compound interest with monthly rests to the supplier on the amount at three times of the bank rate notified by Reserve Bank in case he does not make payment to the supplier for the supplies of goods or services within 45 days of the day of acceptance of the goods/ service or the deemed day of acceptance.

Advantages

- The CEO of PSEs and the Secretary of the Ministries concerned will also be able to monitor the cases of delayed payment under their jurisdiction and issue necessary instructions to resolve the issues.
- The portal will greatly facilitate the monitoring of the delayed payment in a more effective manner.
- The information on the portal will be available in public domain, thus exerting moral pressure on the defaulting organisations.
- The MSEs will also be empowered to access the portal and monitor their cases

16. MSME Sambandh

- A public procurement portal, 'MSME Sambandh', was launched by Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises Minister (Independent charge) Giriraj Singh
- The objective of the portal is to monitor the implementation of the public procurement from MSEs by Central public sector enterprises
- The procurement policy mandates the Central government departments/CSEs to procure an overall 20 per cent of their total annual purchases from MSEs.

17. MySSB APP

- The App is available on Google Play store and is user friendly.
- It contains various useful features to facilitate retired CAPFs and Assam Rifles personnel to get their genuine grievances redressed, seek skill development training through National Skill Development Corporation under "Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, re-employment and other relevant and important information.
- This mobile App shall also help retired personnel to have better co-ordination with WARB and its field formation at states/UTs and district level.
- It will cater to the general requirements and information of Force personnel i.e. accessibility to details of salary & allowance, GPF subscription, service particulars including posting profile, APAR etc.

YUVA initiative

- The 'YUVA' initiative by Delhi Police aims to connect with youth by upgrading their skill as per their competencies. It will help them to get a gainful employment under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna under the Ministry of Skill Development.

- Delhi Police has tied up with National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) for providing mass job linked skill training for the selected youth.
- National Skill Development Corporation shall be providing skill training to the youth under 'Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna' (PMKVY) and CII will provide job linked training through its Sector Skill Councils who are connected to industry and thereby provide job guarantee.
- A detailed exercise was conducted in all 13 districts of Delhi Police to select the youth in the age of 17-25 years for this training belonging to categories such as School dropouts, Juvenile offenders, Victims of crimes and families in dire state due to incarceration of the bread earner of the family, mostly from the underprivileged colonies.

Merits

- The youth coming for skill training in a police station building will be a huge step in building up their confidence and faith in police organization and
- It will go a long way in building a positive image of police in the long run.

18. National Highways Investment Promotion Cell (NHIPC)

- The National Highways Authority of India has created a National Highways Investment Promotion Cell (NHIPC) for attracting domestic and foreign investment for highways projects.
- The cell will focus on engaging with global institution investors, construction companies, developers and fund managers for building investor participation in road infrastructure projects.
- The primary focus of NHIPC will be to promote foreign and domestic investment in road infrastructure.
- The NHIPC will be working in close co-ordination with various connected Ministries and Departments of Government of India, State Governments, Apex Business Chambers like CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM, and Invest India etc.
- NHIPC will also work in close co-ordination with Foreign Embassies and Missions in India and Indian Embassies and Missions situated in foreign countries.

19. National Programme on use of Space Technology for Agriculture (NPSTA)

- It is envisaging integrated use of Space and Geospatial Tools for Mapping, Monitoring and Management of Agriculture.
- The programme will have four sub-programmes catering to various themes viz.
 - * Crop Assessment & Monitoring;
 - * Agricultural Resources Management;

- * Disaster Monitoring
- * Mitigation and Satellite Communication and Navigation Applications.

- All the current running programmes, such as FASAL (for crop forecasting), NADAMS (for drought assessment), CHAMAN (for horticultural assessment and development), KISAN (for crop insurance) and Crop Intensification planning, will be subsumed under this proposed programmes.
- In order to increase the availability of certified/quality seeds to the farmers locally, the Government has proposed to set up 500 numbers of seed production and seed processing units at Gram Panchayat Level.

20. North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS)

- It will provide 100% funding from the Central Government to fill up the gaps in creation of infrastructure in specified sectors till March, 2020.

The new scheme will broadly cover creation of infrastructure under following sectors:

- Physical infrastructure relating to water supply, power, connectivity and specially the projects promoting tourism;
- Infrastructure of social sectors of education and health.

Benefits of NESIDS:

- The assets to be created under the new scheme of NESIDS will not only strengthen health care and education facilities in the region but will also encourage tourism thereby the employment opportunities for local youth.
- The scheme will act as a catalyst in overall development of the region in the years to come.

21. Odisha recognised as 'Champion State' for exports

- The Centre has recognised Odisha as a 'Champion State' for recording the highest growth in exports during 2016-17
- The exports from the state have increased from Rs 19,082 crore in 2015-16 to Rs 40,872 crore in 2016-17 with merchandise exports from Odisha registering the highest growth rate of 114 per cent among all the states

22. Pare Hydroelectric Plant

- A Loan agreement and a Guarantee agreement for providing additional funding of Euro 20 million was signed today for the project 'Pare Hydroelectric Plant' under Indo-German Bilateral Development Cooperation.
- The broad objective of the project is generation of hydroelectric power for socio-economic development of the North Eastern Region.

- The purpose of the project is efficient and ecological friendly generation of electric power. This will contribute to the economic efficient generation of power, growth in the North East region and protection of global climate.

Background

- It may be recalled that in 2008, Germany had signed a loan agreement with North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO) for providing Euro 80 million with Government of India's Guarantee for the project 'Pare Hydroelectric Plant' under Indo-German Bilateral Development Cooperation.

23. Petro cryptocurrency

- The petro, or petromoneda, is a cryptocurrency proposed to be adopted by Venezuela. Announced in December 2017, it would be backed by the country's oil and mineral reserves, and it is intended to supplement Venezuela's bolivar fuerte currency as a means of securing international financing.
- OPEC member Venezuela boasts the largest proven reserves of crude oil in the world, but has struggled against the plunge in oil prices which began in 2014.
- Maduro said the new cryptocurrency's value will be pegged to the country's vast reserves of oil and gas as well as its mineral wealth, including gold.
- The purpose will be to advance the country's monetary sovereignty, to carry out financial transactions and to defeat the financial blockade against the country.

24. Pod Taxi

- India's first pod taxi project moves a step forward
- The projected pod taxi scheme — also known as Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) has moved a step closer to reality
- PRT is an advanced public transport using automated electric pod cars to provide a taxi-like demand responsive feeder and shuttle services for small groups of travelers and is a green mode of uninterrupted journey
- A high-level panel recommended inviting fresh bids for the same conforming to the strictest safety standards on the lines of those prescribed by an American body

About the project

- NHAI has been mandated to execute it on Delhi-Gurgaon pilot corridor from Delhi-Haryana border to Rajiv Chowk in Gurgaon on a PPP (public-private partnership) basis
- It will be incorporating Automated People Movers (APM) standards and specifications, along with other general safety parameters with Niti Aayog recommendations.

Automated people mover (APM) standards in the US

- These are recommended by the committee for the maiden PRT in India and have been prepared by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)
- These constitute the minimum requirements for an acceptable level of safety and performance for the PRT
- These include vehicle arrival audio and video visual warning system, platform sloping, evacuation of misaligned vehicles, surveillance/CCTV, audio communication, emergency call points and fire protection, among other advanced systems

25. Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)

- Government of India has approved the introduction of a new credit linked subsidy programme called Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) by merging the two schemes that were in operation till 31.03.2008, namely Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY) and Rural Employment Generation Programme (REGP) for generation of employment opportunities through establishment of micro enterprises in rural as well as urban areas.
- PMEGP is a central sector scheme administered by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MoMSME).
- At the national level, the Scheme is being implemented by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), a statutory organization under the administrative control of the Ministry of MSME as the single nodal agency.
- At the State level, the Scheme will be implemented through State KVIC Directorates, State Khadi and Village Industries Boards (KVIBs) and District Industries Centres (DICs) and banks.
- The Government subsidy under the Scheme will be routed by KVIC through the identified Banks for eventual distribution to the beneficiaries / entrepreneurs in their Bank accounts.

Objectives

- To generate continuous and sustainable employment opportunities in Rural and Urban areas of the country
- To provide continuous and sustainable employment to a large segment of traditional and prospective artisans, rural and urban unemployed youth in the country through setting up of micro enterprises.
- To facilitate participation of financial institutions for higher credit flow to micro sector.

Eligibility

- Individuals above 18 years of age
- VIII Std. pass required for project above Rs.10.00 lakhs in manufacturing and above Rs. 5.00 lakhs for Service Sector
- Self Help Groups and Charitable Trusts

26. Project Swarn

- The Ministry of Railways has decided to launch "Project Swarn" with the objective of significantly improving the passenger experience across 9 dimensions which include coach interiors, toilets, onboard cleanliness, staff behavior, catering, linen, punctuality, security, on-board entertainment.
- Real time feedback will also be taken as part of Project Swarn.
- In total, 14 Rajdhani and 15 Shatabdi trains will be covered. Railways have been allowed to spend upto 50 lakh per rake for upgradation of trains to Swarn Standard.
- "Project Swarn" has been launched with the objective of improving the condition of Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains.
- Some of the coaches undergoing mid life rehabilitation at Bhopal workshop are being upgraded to make model rakes for Mahamana Trains.
- Presently, three such trains viz. from New Delhi to Varanasi, from Bhopal to Khajuraho and from Vadodara to Varanasi are plying.

Cabinet approves Establishing India's First National Rail and Transportation University at Vadodara

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the Ministry of Railways' transformative initiative to set up the first ever National Rail and Transport University (NRTU) in Vadodara to skill its human resources and build capability.
- This innovative idea, inspired by the Prime Minister, will be a catalyst for transformation of rail and transport sector towards New India.
- A not-for-profit Company under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013 will be created by the Ministry of Railways which shall be the Managing Company of the proposed university

Significance

- This university will set Indian Railways on the path of modernisation and help India become a global leader in transport sector by enhancing productivity and promoting 'Make in India'.
- It will create a resource pool of skilled manpower and leverage state-of-the-art technology to provide better safety, speed and service in Indian Railways.
- It will support 'Startup India' and 'Skill India' by channeling technology and delivering knowhow, and foster entrepreneurship, generating large scale employment opportunities.
- This will lead to transformation of railway and transportation sector and enable faster movement of people and goods. Through global partnerships and accessing cutting edge technologies, India will emerge as a global centre of expertise.

27. Prompt Corrective Action

- To ensure that banks don't go bust, RBI has put in place some trigger points to assess, monitor, control and take corrective actions on banks which are weak and troubled. The process or mechanism under which such actions are taken is known as Prompt Corrective Action, or PCA.

Why the need for PCA

- The 1980s and early 1990s were a period of great stress and turmoil for banks and financial institutions all over the globe. In USA, more than 1,600 commercial and savings banks insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) were either closed or given financial assistance during this period.
- The cumulative losses incurred by the failed institutions exceeded US \$100 billion. These events led to the search for appropriate supervisory strategies to avoid bank failures as they can have a destabilizing effect on the economy.

What does the RBI stipulate?

- RBI has set trigger points on the basis of CRAR (a metric to measure balance sheet strength), NPA and ROA. Based on each trigger point, the banks have to follow a mandatory action plan. Apart from this, the RBI has discretionary action plans too.
- The rationale for classifying the rule-based action points into "mandatory" and "discretionary" is that some of the actions are essential to restore the financial health of banks while other actions will be taken at the discretion of RBI depending upon the profile of each bank.

What will a bank do if PCA is triggered?

- Banks are not allowed to re new or access costly deposits or take steps to increase their fee-based income.
- Banks will also have to launch a special drive to reduce the stock of NPAs and contain generation of fresh NPAs. They will also not be allowed to enter into new lines of business. RBI will also impose restrictions on the bank on borrowings from interbank market.

28. Resource Efficiency- the key to a sustainable future

Using the resources efficiently to produce more while utilizing less has been one of the tested and trusted ways for a sustainable future. It not only ensures the security of the resources but also minimizes the environment impact. In order to ensure that the two ends meet, NITI Aayog in collaboration with the European Union delegation to India and the Confederation of Indian Industries, CII has released the first ever Strategy on Resource Efficiency for India which also includes an action plan for promoting resource efficiency in India.

The Resource Efficiency Strategy includes the core-action plan for the period 2017-2018 and medium term action plan for 2017 – 2020 with the following key elements:

- Institutional development including setting up an inter-departmental committee and Task force of experts,
- Capacity development at various levels for strengthening of capacities and sharing of best practices,
- Development of an indicator monitoring framework for baseline analysis
- Launch of Short term course on RE under the MHRD GIAN Programme
- Promotional and regulatory tools in selected sectors (automotive and construction) such as Eco labeling for Secondary Raw Material (SRM) products, recycling standards, R&D and Technology Development, Sustainable Public Procurement, development of Industrial clusters and waste-exchange platform, information sharing & awareness generation along with development of sectoral action plans.

Background:

- Resource efficiency is a strategy to achieve the maximum possible benefit with least possible resource input.
- Fostering resource efficiency aims at governing and intensifying resource utilisation in a purposeful and effective way.
- Such judicious resource use brings about multiple benefits along the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental.

29. Scheme for Capacity Building in Textiles Sector (SCBTS)

- The scheme will have National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) compliant training courses with funding norms as per the Common Norms notified by Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
- The objectives of the scheme are to provide demand driven, placement oriented skilling programme to incentivize the efforts of the industry in creating jobs in the organized textile and related sectors; to promote skilling and skill up-gradation in the traditional sectors through respective Sectoral Divisions/organizations of Ministry of Textiles; and to provide livelihood to all sections of the society across the country.

Details

- The scheme will be implemented for the benefit of all sections of the society across the country including rural, remote, LWE affected, North East, J&K by imparting skills in the identified job roles. Preference will be given to various social groups, SC, ST, differently abled, minorities and other vulnerable groups.

- Under previous scheme of skill development implemented by the Ministry of Textiles in the XII Plan period, more than 10 lakh people have been trained of which more than 70% were women. Considering that the apparel industry, a major segment to be covered under the scheme, employs majorly women (about 70%), the trend is likely to be continued in the new scheme.

30. Skill Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion Programme (SANKALP)

- Measure to leverage India's "huge demographic advantage" and maximize the employability potential of the youth, and also announced a Rs4,000 crore programme, SANKALP aimed at providing market-relevant training to 3.5 crore youth across the country.
- The next phase of Skill Strengthening For Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE) will be launched in 2017-18 at a cost of Rs2,200 crore.
- STRIVE will focus to improve on the quality and the market relevance of vocational training provided in ITIs and strengthen the apprenticeship programme through industry-cluster approach.
- The Objective of the project is to enhance institutional mechanisms for skills development and increase access to quality and market-relevant training for the work force.
- SANKALP is Rs 4,455 crore Centrally sponsored scheme including Rs. 3,300 crore loan support from World Bank whereas STRIVE is a Rs. 2,200 crore – central sector scheme, with half of the scheme outlay as World bank loan assistance.
- SANKALP and STRIVE are outcome focused schemes marking shift in government's implementation strategy in vocational education and training from inputs to results.
- The schemes will develop a skilling ecosystem that will support the country's rise in the Ease of Doing Business index by steady supply of skilled workforce to the industry. The schemes will also work towards increasing the aspirational value of skill development programs by increasing the marketability of skills, through better industry connect and quality assurance.

31. Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC)

- Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is an Autonomous Society promoted by Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India. It was registered under Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 on 18th January, 1994
- The Society is also registered as Non-Banking Financial Institution by Reserve Bank of India.

- The Government established Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC) as a Society in 1994 to facilitate agri-business ventures by catalyzing private investment through Venture Capital Assistance (VCA) Scheme in close association with financial institutions.
- The setting up of State level SFAC as counterpart agency of Central SFAC for agribusiness projects was part of the Scheme.

The role of State SFACs is to aggressively promote agribusiness project development in their respective States. The main functions of SFAC are:

- Promotion of development of small agribusiness through VCA scheme;
- Helping formation and growth of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) / Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs);
- Improving availability of working capital and development of business activities of FPOs/FPCs through Equity Grant and Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme;
- Implementation of National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Electronic Trading platform.

32. Sustainable Rooftop Implementation for Solar Transfiguration of India (SRISTI)

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has proposed SRISTI -- Sustainable Rooftop Implementation for Solar Transfiguration of India – scheme to incentivise the installation of rooftop solar projects in India.
- The concept, once approved, shall serve as the basis of revised scheme of MNRE for solar rooftop in Phase-II
- The scheme will integrate discoms as an implementing agency in Phase-II of the rooftop solar scheme
- The Ministry is implementing Grid Connected Rooftop Solar (RTS) Power Programme in which subsidy/incentives are being provided for residential, institutional, social and Government sector. States/ UTs have also taken conducive policy and regulatory measures for promotion of solar rooftop.

Details

- The proposed scheme aims to achieve a national target of solar rooftop of 40 GW till 2021-2022.
- It is proposed that Central Financial Assistance will be provided only for installation of rooftop solar plants in residential sectors.
- The residential users may install the plant of capacity in line with their requirement and the respective State Electricity Regulatory Commission regulation. But, the subsidy support will be limited up to 5 kWp capacity of plant.

33. Sweet Revolution

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi called upon the dairy industry to take up honey farming for bringing sweet revolution in the country on the lines of white revolution and green revolution.
- Modi Said "I will call upon the farmers to have 50 bee hive in their fields for honey production and this would give them an additional income of Rs two lakh per annum"
- The PM also urged various milk cooperative unions of the state to collect honey from farmers and sell it so the agriculturists get good returns.

KVIC, NDMC launches 'Honey Mission'

- To mark the 'World Honey Day', Khadi and Village Industry Commission (KVIC) in collaboration with New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) launched 'Honey Mission', with an aim to promote and popularise 'Bee-keeping' as a self-employment tool.
- Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC) with the inspiration of Rastrapita Mahatma Gandhi took the task of development of the beekeeping Industry with a view to uplift the financial status of people living in extremely interior rural areas by introducing and popularizing modern beekeeping

Status

- Since time immemorial beekeeping was practiced traditionally in India. Until 1953, the beekeeping in Indian subcontinent was disorganized till this activity was taken over by All India Khadi and Village Industries Board and subsequently by the KVIC in 1957 which established Central Bee Research & Training Institute at Pune in Nov' 1962.
- KVIC established a separate department namely Directorate of Beekeeping in Mumbai and Central Bee Research and training Institute at Pune and started beekeeping in modern and scientific way throughout the country
- Initially in 1953 there were only 230 beekeepers, who maintained around 800 bee colonies in bee boxes and were producing very less quantity of honey annually.
- Presently, around 25 Lakhs bee colonies, 2.50 Lakhs beekeepers and wild honey collectors' are harvesting around 70, 000 MT of honey in country, which is valued Rs. 770 crores.

According to the potentiality, country has been divided in to three segments for establishment of State Beekeeping Extension Centers

- MOST POTENTIAL STATES: Punjab, West Bengal, Bihar, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Uttaranchal because all these states have very high number of beekeepers and honey production is very high.
- MEDIUM POTENTIAL STATES: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, J & K, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya / Shillong and Orissa due to availability floral source but no. of beekeepers and colonies are relatively less.

- LESS POTENTIAL STATES: Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Goa, Arunachal Pradesh and Andaman Nicobar

How does it help?

- Beekeeping has been useful in pollination of crops, thereby, increasing income of the farmers/beekeepers by way of increasing crop yield and providing honey and other beehive products, viz. royal jelly, bee pollen, propolis, bees wax, etc. that serves a source of livelihood for rural poor.
- Therefore, honeybees/ beekeeping has been recognised as one of the important inputs for sustainable development of agriculture/ horticulture.
- Honey, being an important Minor Forest Produce has helped in increasing the livelihood of tribal people living in various forest areas of the country, contributing to the growth of Honey Bees population and reducing the mortality rate of Honey Bees drastically
- About 90% of the Scheduled Tribes of the country live in and around forest areas and the forests provide 60% of the food & medicinal needs of tribals and 40% of their income from Minor Forest Produce (MFP) mostly of which come from Honey.

34. Tuitial Hydroelectric Power Project in Mizoram

- The Tuitial HEPP has been constructed as a Central Sector Project and implemented by North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO), under the administrative control of the Ministry of Power, Government of India.
- The Project is the biggest power project located in the State of Mizoram and will feed the entire energy to be generated to the home State, which will facilitate all-round development of the State and achieving Government of India's ambitious and flagship Mission '24x7 Affordable Clean Power for All'.

How will this help?

- The State's current demand of electricity is only 87 MW and this is being met by State's mini power projects and availability of its share of power from central sector projects.
- With the additional 60 MW of electricity from the project, the State of Mizoram will now be the third power-surplus State in North East India after Sikkim and Tripura.
- Apart from attaining self-sufficiency in electric power, the project will fetch other spin-off benefits to the State of Mizoram like employment generation, navigation, water supply, pisciculture and wild life conservation, tourism etc.

35. Udyami Mitra Portal

- Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has launched the 'Udyami Mitra' Portal (www.udyamimitra.in) to improve accessibility of credit and handholding services to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

- It is an enabling platform which leverages IT architecture of Stand-Up Mitra portal and aims at instilling ease of access to MSMEs financial and non-financial service needs.
- Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) have been advised to ensure a target of 7.5% of Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) for Micro Enterprises, that collateral security is not required for loans upto Rs. 10 lakh to MSE sector, a simplified working capital requirement for MSEs.

36. India's first-ever mobile food testing laboratory launched

- Goa chief minister Manohar Parrikar launched country's first-ever mobile food testing laboratory.
- The laboratory mounted on a bus will be travelling across the state checking food samples on the spot.

Details

- It would be the first ever 'Food Safety on Wheel' vehicle in the entire country.
- It is entirely funded by the Centre, which will also bear the maintenance cost for five years
- It will help in on-the-spot testing of food items and curb adulteration.
- it will also educate people about nutrition and importance of safe food
- Director of Food and Drugs Administration Jyoti Sardesai said the vehicle is equipped with milk analyser, hot air oven, hot plate, mixer grinder, digital weighing scale, digital multi parameter hand-held meter, power generator, air conditioner and refrigerator.

37. Proportion of direct taxes fall below 50% first time since 2006-07

- The contribution of direct taxes in the total tax collection in 2016-17 has fallen below 50 per cent to 49.66 per cent for the first time since 2006-07.
- This is despite a 15 per cent growth witnessed in the direct tax collection during the year. In the previous year, the contribution of direct taxes was 51 per cent of the total tax collection.

Details

- Data released by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) shows direct tax collection in 2016-17 was Rs 8.5 lakh crore compared to Rs 7.42 lakh crore in the previous year. The indirect tax collection in 2016-17 was Rs 8.6 lakh crore.
- The proportion of direct tax in total tax collections has been falling for the last couple of years. Direct tax collections as a percentage of total tax collection was 56.32 per cent in 2013-14, 56.16 per cent in 2014-15 and 51.03 per cent in 2015-16.

- Meanwhile, the number of effective tax payers in 2016-17 registered a growth 2.3 per cent from 61.3 million to 62.7 million. Effective tax payers include number of income tax returns filed and cases where tax has been deducted at source from the income of the taxpayer but the taxpayers has not filed the return of income.

Why is it so?

- The reason for the fall primarily is slow growth in corporate profits in the last couple of years and a simultaneous increase in service tax collections during the last couple of years

38. Commerce ministry panel suggests change in SEZ rules

- A commerce ministry-appointed panel has suggested that the Board of Approval (BoA), the highest decision-making body for SEZs, should be given additional powers to exempt units and developers from certain rules to promote these zones.
- Under the existing SEZ (special economic zones) rules, the BoA has no power to relax any rule.
- The inter-ministerial board BoA is headed by the commerce secretary.

Other suggestions:

- Submission of GST registration certificate instead of sales tax registration.
- Setting up of an SEZ Rules Interpretation Committee. The five-member committee would include officers from commerce and finance ministries. This measure will help in ease of operations.
- Cut in paper work for setting up of SEZ units. One copy of consolidated application seeking permission for setting up of a unit and other clearances shall be made to the Development Commissioner.
- Currently, there is requirement of five copies of application for setting up of unit in SEZ to the commissioner.

39. SC panel sets deadline to States on road safety

- Supreme Court has asked states to create a lead agency to coordinate activities such as issuing driving licences, vehicle registration, road safety and features of vehicles
- States and Union territories that have not yet established a Road Safety Fund were also mandated to set up the fund by 31 March 2018.
- These funds will include fines collected for traffic violations and will be used for meeting expenses relating to road safety.

Radhakrishnan committee- retired Supreme Court judge

- The Justice Radhakrishnan committee states that 1,37,572 persons have been killed in 2013 according to statistics from the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

- It said India has one percent of total vehicle population in the world and a “staggering” 10 percent road accident related deaths.
- It sked the Transport Ministry to introduce regulations for Automatic Headlights On (AHO) on two-wheelers and uniform crash test requirements for all category of vehicles so that no discrimination is made by the manufacturers between the base model and higher models in the provision of safety features

40. To tax and to please

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has highlighted several issues in the functioning of the Government and its various departments. The one that catches the eye, though, is the finding that the income tax department made ‘exaggerated’ demands on large companies which were refunded the following financial year, along with interest.

Issue Area:

- Making exaggerated demands on corporate assesseees and refunding the excess with interest is an old trick of the income tax department.
- And it usually happens as over-zealous officers race to meet the stiff, and often unrealistic, targets set by the Government for tax collections.
- Though assesseees may be troubled by such unreasonable demands they have little choice but to comply.
- Quid pro quo deals between the assessing officer and the assessee where the latter coughs up the exaggerated demand in the understanding that it will be refunded a few months later with interest, cannot be ruled out too.

Why is it a problem for investments?

- While such practices may have been acceptable in the past, they’re out of tune with a modern economy that counts rankings in the ease of doing business as an important metric.
- Investor-friendliness does not end with helping an entrepreneur or investor start a business or in ensuring that she gets quick, trouble-free access to factors of production. It actually begins there and continues through the life of the business.
- Placing impromptu and unreasonable tax demands does not qualify for being investor-friendly and this is something that policymakers should factor into their operations.
- The CAG has also highlighted how there are “persistent and pervasive” irregularities in assessments including embarrassing arithmetic errors in calculating tax in about 500 cases adding up to over Rs 3,850 crore.

What needs to be done?

- The most obvious takeaway from the CAG report is, of course, that the functioning of the income tax department needs to be streamlined and that while revenue targets matter, going for broke to attain them, often at the cost of the assessee, is not done.

- The more important takeaway though is that the Income Tax Act needs to be simplified and the element of discretion available currently to assessing officers, plugged.
- Simple tax laws may not only help score points in ease of doing business rankings but also lead to lesser disputes with assesseees and, arguably, even to buoyant revenues.

41. Petcoke imports from US will choke India further: Experts

Background

- US oil refineries that are unable to sell a dirty fuel waste product at home are exporting vast quantities of it to India instead.

What is it?

- Petroleum coke, the bottom-of-the-barrel leftover from refining Canadian tar sands crude and other heavy oils, is cheaper and burns hotter than coal. But it also contains more planet-warming carbon and far more heart- and lung-damaging sulfur – a key reason few American companies use it.
- Refineries instead are sending it around the world, especially to energy-hungry India, which last year got almost a fourth of all the fuel-grade “petcoke” the US shipped out, an Associated Press investigation found.

Issue area

- In 2016, the US had sent more than 8 million tonnes of petcoke to India. That’s about 20 times more than in 2010, and enough to fill the Empire State Building eight times.
- The petcoke being burned in countless factories and plants is contributing to dangerously filthy air in India, which already has many of the world’s most polluted cities.
- Laboratory tests on imported petcoke used near New Delhi found it contained 17 times more sulfur than the limit set for coal, and a staggering 1,380 times more than for diesel, according to India’s court-appointed Environmental Pollution Control Authority.
- The country has seen a dramatic increase in sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions in recent years, concentrated in areas where power plants and steel factories are clustered. Those pollutants are converted into microscopic particles that lodge deep in the lungs and enter the bloodstream, causing breathing and heart problems.

SUPREME COURT BANS PETCOKE

- But the Supreme Court, which has consistently demanded or enacted tougher pollution control measures, has recently banned petcoke use by some industries as of November 1 in the three states surrounding pollution-choked New Delhi.
- It also demanded tighter pollution standards that – if enforced – could further limit its use nationwide.

42. Change in definition of 'employment'

Why is it required?

- The government's own data showed that job creation in the formal sector was slowest in almost a decade, but it has said that it felt the ground reality on jobs was not being 'properly' captured as the existing system takes into account only the formal sector.
- There is no fixed definition of formal workers currently in India.

Task force under the chairmanship of the then Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog, Arvind Panagariya.

- The panel's terms of reference included assessing the existing data systems and sources that provide information on jobs and job creation and then identifying alternate sources that could provide such data.
- The terms also included recommending mechanisms for capturing information on jobs and job creation on a regular basis for both the informal and formal sectors.
- Among the main recommendations could be a change in the definition of employment/workers as well as ways to include and measure employment in the informal sector as well, he indicated.
- It said all definitions were highly restrictive, and exclude many workers who have decent and steady jobs but either do not work in large enough enterprises or do not have written contracts. The task force said it was desirable to adopt a new, more 'pragmatic' definition of formal workers.

What will be done?

- The plan now is to include workers covered the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 (or other similar insurance), Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952 (or other similar social security scheme), workers having coverage under private insurance or pension schemes or provident funds as well as workers subject to tax deduction at source on their income through submission of Form 16 or similar Income Tax form.
- The panel had identified the Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) scheme, which provides small, unsecured loans to enterprises, as an important source of job creation.

43. WTO meet ends without consensus

Background

- The WTO's 164 members unable to reach a consensus on substantive issues such as the food security right of developing countries and the centrality of development in multilateral trade negotiations.
- The member nations though committed to secure a deal by 2019 on banning certain forms of fisheries' subsidies.

USA's Stand

- Driven by US President Donald Trump's "America First" strategy and a preference for bilateral deals, the United States had already blocked ambassadors from drafting a ministerial text in Geneva that included references to the centrality of the global trading system and to trade as a driver of development.
- U.S. blocked the demands of more than a 100 developing nations, including India and China, to implement their food security programmes without onerous conditions.
- The European Union and Japan joined the United States in vowing to combat market-distorting policies, such as those pervasive in China that have fuelled excess industrial capacity, including subsidies for state-owned enterprises and technology transfer requirements.

India's Stand

- India, for its part, thwarted attempts by several countries, both developed and developing, to initiate binding discussions on what they called the 21st century challenges to trade—including e-commerce, investment facilitation and proposed norms for small firms.
- This it did by refusing to budge from its position that members should first resolve outstanding issues (such as food sovereignty) of the ongoing Doha Round negotiations that began in 2001 with a 'development agenda' (for improving the trading prospects of developing nations), before considering 'new issues'.

What was the result?

- Since all major decisions in the WTO need to be taken by 'the membership as a whole', even a single country can end up being the deal-breaker.
- The meeting ended without a Ministerial Declaration as members could not agree on the centrality of development, which underlies the Doha Round, as well as special and differential treatment for all developing countries.
- The failure to reach any major deals meant that negotiations on the same topics will continue into 2018, with no deadline and no heavyweight ministerial momentum to get agreement.

44. Opening bank account in new city to get tough

- If you are going to move cities, you will need to submit proof of your new address as validated by your passport, driving licence or voter card, within three months of opening a bank account.
- This requirement stems from a change in the anti-money laundering rules as notified by the Finance Ministry that mandates five specific documents as proof of 'present' address that a customer needs to submit to a bank branch for opening a new account.

- The five officially valid documents — passport, driving licence, voter's identity card, job card issued by NREGA signed by an officer of the State government, letter issued by the National Population Registrar containing details of name and address — that can be accepted by banks as proof of present, or current, address

Practice at present:

- At present, one needs to submit a proof of identity and proof of address. There are six official valid documents for proof of identity — passport, driving licence, voter identity card, PAN card, Aadhaar card and NREGA job card.
- For proof of address, the RBI has allowed banks to accept documents such as rent agreement and utility bills.

India hardens stand on e-commerce, investment and small firms

- India has hardened its position at the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) meeting not only on issues relating to e-commerce, but also against investment facilitation as well as the proposed norms regarding participation of small firms in the global marketplace.

Regarding e-commerce:

- The issue pertains to a 'moratorium' that was included in the 1998 'Declaration on Global E-commerce', adopted by the WTO member nations in May 1998 at the global trade body's second Ministerial Conference (MC).
- According to the WTO, the 1998 declaration on the 'moratorium' stated that "member countries will continue their current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmission". This 'moratorium' – which is 'temporary' in nature – gets extended at every MC, which is held once in two years.

India's contention:

- India has taken a stand that its consent to extension of this 'moratorium' depends on the WTO members agreeing to certain conditions.
- The matter will be subject to the decision of the other WTO members to extend a similar ('temporary') moratorium on Non-Violation Complaints (NVC) under the TRIPS (Trade-Related aspects of Intellectual Property rights agreement).
- NVC refers to a situation where a "government can go to the WTO Dispute Settlement Body even when an agreement (of the WTO) has not been violated (by another country)."

Developed countries requirement:

- Developed countries are demanding a 'permanent moratorium' on imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.
- India feels that such a move could reduce the negotiating leverage for developing countries to seek a 'permanent moratorium' on NVC.

- Such a scenario would hurt the generic pharmaceuticals industry in the world, including in India.
- However, for the time being, WTO members have agreed not to use NVC, and this

45. On taxing maintenance money

- Should maintenance money paid by parents for the welfare of their minor child be exempted from income tax?
- The issue came up before the Law Commission of India after the Punjab and Haryana High Court found that it is "desirable" that Section 64 (1A) of the Income Tax Act of 1961 be amended to exempt the interest accrued on maintenance money an estranged parent pays for his or her minor child.
- The plea taken in the case before the High Court in Payal Mehta v. Sanjay Sarin (2016) was that the interest on the amount of maintenance money deposited in the name of a minor child by the parent should not be subjected to tax, that is, such income should not be clubbed with the income of either of the parent for the purpose of imposing tax.
- Section 64 (1A), as it stands now, includes that "in computing the total income of any individual, there shall be included all such income as arises or accrues to his minor child..."

What did the court say?

- However, the High Court insisted that such an exemption should be created. It reasoned that the "circumstances of a minor receiving maintenance are different from, say, a minor in whose name some business has been started by either of the parent or who has been advanced some gift..."
- The court said the exclusion of such money paid for the welfare of a minor child residing with a single parent from the tax scanner is noteworthy. The High Court suggested that the legislature add a proviso recording such an exemption in the 1961 Act.

What did law commission comment?

The Law Commission, in its 265th Report titled 'Prospects of Exempting Income Arising Out Of The Maintenance Money of Minor', shot down the High Court's suggestion

- For one, it said the nature of giving maintenance to a child is different. The intent of such a judicial order directing for maintenance of a minor child is the welfare of the child. Such an order does not give any right to either of the child's parents under any statute.
- Second, the issue of custody of a child and determination of the amount of maintenance are of a temporary nature.
- Third, and most importantly, such an exemption would open the flood gates to evasion of tax.

46. RBI survey shows consumer confidence, perceptions of employment prospects at multi-year lows

- RBI's Consumer Confidence Index has slipped to 91.1 in November 2017, the lowest level in the last four years
- A reading of above 100 denotes optimism, while one below 100 indicates pessimism
- The RBI survey is conducted in the six metropolitan cities of Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai and New Delhi

Reasons:

- One of the main reasons for consumer confidence to be so low is the perception on employment prospects
- Clearly, demonetization and the goods and services tax have had an adverse impact on employment.

47. Why are farmers distressed across India?

- The year 2017 was marked by several farmers' protests nationwide, with a few turning violent
- The protests highlighted the plight of farmers and the extent of agrarian distress

Reasons for the crisis:

- The main reason for farm crises is the rising pressure of population on farming and land assets
- Government data show the average farm size in India is small, at 1.15 hectare
- The small and marginal land holdings (less than 2 hectares) account for 72% of land holdings
- This predominance of small operational holdings is a major limitation to reaping the benefits of economies of scale

Other factors

- Crop production is always at risk because of pests, diseases, shortage of inputs like seeds and irrigation, which could result in low productivity and declining yield
- The lower than the remunerative price in the absence of marketing infrastructure and profiteering by middlemen adds to the financial distress of farmers
- The predominance of informal sources of credit, mainly through moneylenders, and lack of capital for short term and long term loans have resulted in the absence of stable incomes and profits
- Uncertain policies and regulations such as those of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC Act), besides low irrigation coverage, drought, flooding and unseasonal rains, are some other factors that hit farmers hard

Price mechanism

- Farmers face price uncertainties due to fluctuations in demand and supply owing to bumper or poor crop production and speculation and hoarding by traders

- The government's economic survey for 2016-17 points out that the price risks emanating from an inefficient APMC market are severe for farmers in India
- This is because they have very low resilience because of the perishable nature of produce, inability to hold it, hedge in surplus-shortage scenarios or insure against losses

Way forward

- Like any other economic activity, the farming sector has its own set of risks
- To increase and ensure a stable flow of income to farmers it is vital to manage and reduce the risks by analysing, categorising and addressing them

48. Ministry of Railways introduces Online Bill tracking system for Vendors & Contractors

- This is in line with the emphasis given by Minister of Railways & Coal, Shri Piyush Goyal on increased use of information technology to go digital and online with a view to promote transparency and efficiency in the system.

Details

- The vendor/contractor need to register with the online IT platform developed in house by CRIS, New Delhi called Indian Railways E-Procurement System (IREPS).
- The registration enables the vendor/agencies to see their bill status with dates through various stages of processing of bills, the stage at which it is lying, the amount for which it is passed and other details.
- The history feature is also available so that a vendor can see the history of the bills submitted. The bill tracking facility is available to the vendors/contractors of goods and services.
- The infirmities in the bill that need to be addressed are also visible to the vendor/contractor.

49. 'India to become fifth largest economy in 2018'

- India is set to overtake the United Kingdom and France to become the world's fifth largest economy next year.
- Currently ranked seventh, India will move up to fifth place in 2018 and vault to third spot by 2032.
- The Centre for Economics and Business Research, a London-based consultancy, said in its annual rankings.

50. After an erratic monsoon, farmers struggle with pest outbreaks

- This year's monsoon season was characterised by long dry spells, followed by short spells of heavy rains that affected farmers in the nine states. And now, farmers are reporting widespread pest attacks.

Attacks in different states

- Brown plant hopper (BPH) infestation has already destroyed 180,000 hectares (ha) of rice plantations in 15 out of the 30 districts in Odisha, as per state government estimates.
- In Maharashtra, farmers are fighting White Grub pest that has attacked sugarcane, groundnuts, soyabean, onion and paddy fields.
- Even finger millet is under attack from the Ear Head caterpillar.
- In Assam's Lakhimpur district, paddy farmers have lost over 500 ha to a pest called Paddy Swarming caterpillar.
- Farmers in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have lost standing cotton crops to Pink bollworm, a type of caterpillar. Pest attacks have also been reported in banana plantations in Karnataka.
- A pest called Tuta absoluta has been regularly attacking tomato, eggplant and capsicum crops in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra since 2006

Causes

- While most states in India lose five to 10 per cent of crops to pest attacks every year, the scale and intensity of the recent attacks is a cause for concern. Experts believe climate change, along with the indiscriminate use of pesticides, could well be the reason for this sudden surge in attacks this year.
- Elevated carbon dioxide (CO₂) can increase levels of simple sugars in leaves and lower their nitrogen content. This can increase the damage caused by many insects, who will consume more leaves to meet their metabolic requirements of nitrogen. Thus, attacks will be more severe.
- Higher temperatures due to global warming will mean that more numbers of pests will survive the winter season

So what is the solution?

- Crop rotation: the outbreaks can be controlled by changing the varieties grown in the area and the cropping pattern
- Fostering Beneficial Organisms: Even pests have pests, and often there is a way to encourage those "natural enemies" sufficiently to keep crop pest populations at tolerable levels.
- Sometimes by moving the crop to a new location, the pest can be avoided

51. World Inequality Report 2018

- The World Inequality Report 2018 released by the World Inequality Lab last week says that income inequality in India has increased since economic liberalisation.

- As expected, the finding has been used by many to argue that the rich should be taxed more to help the poor. The logic is that the rich get richer at the expense of the poor, so taxes that redistribute wealth are only a rational response to inequality.
- It is true that the rich and the middle class control a major share of the world's resources, which consequently is not available to the poor. They enjoy higher incomes from better jobs and investments, which allows them to outbid the poor to purchase various goods.
- What is not true, however, is that the poor will get to enjoy many luxuries if only the rich were taxed more and the money was used to write welfare cheques to the poor, thus boosting their purchasing power.
- Instead, when taxes are high, people who help produce the goods that the rich and the middle class enjoy today will have less of an incentive to do their jobs as before.
- Workers, for instance, may no longer be attracted towards high-skill jobs when their income from such jobs is taxed at high rates. Investors too will have lesser reason to put in their money in crucial projects when their profits are taxed at high rates.
- In fact, India before economic liberalisation faced this problem when it tried to tax its way to prosperity.
- Income inequality will always exist in a market economy where people are allowed to engage in free exchange and earn incomes according to their personal capabilities.
- Doctors, for instance, earn many more times than plumbers and carpenters because they offer rare services. At the same time, however, the higher incomes of the rich and the middle class do not last forever in a marketplace that is free of legal entry barriers.
- More people will be attracted towards professions and businesses that offer higher returns, which in turn will drive up the incomes of the new entrants while driving down the returns of incumbents.
- This is why we must look at income mobility, which reflects the number of people moving up and down the economic ladder, and ways to foster it rather than inequality.
- In fact, income inequality might even widen during times when there is a lot of economic mobility.
- To enable mobility, however, the government needs to look beyond taxes and handouts, and ensure social goods — education and healthcare — for all in order to level the playing field.

52. Govt plans to set up bio-CNG plants and allied infrastructure

- To promote the use of clean fuel, the oil ministry plans to set up bio-CNG (compressed natural gas) plants and allied infrastructure

- The oil ministry will be working with state-run oil and gas retailers to set up the plants over the next two years

About Bio-CNG

- Bio-CNG is a purified form of biogas with over 95% pure methane gas
- It is similar to natural gas in its composition (97% methane) and energy potential
- While natural gas is a fossil fuel, bio-CNG is a renewable form of energy produced from agricultural and food waste
- A typical bio-CNG station comprises a biogas purification unit, a compressor, and a high-pressure storage system
- Bio-CNG is being looked at as an environment-friendly alternative to diesel

Gas-based economy:

- The government's plan is to make India a gas-based economy
- The government aims to increase the contribution of gas in India's energy mix to 15% from the current 6.5%
- India currently imports one-third of its energy requirement
- The world's third-largest crude oil importer is targeting halving its energy import bill by 2030

53. India's time to capitalize on oil and gas sector

In news:

- Oil companies are under pressure to prepare for a possible low-carbon future. There is a fear of being too late to embrace newer energy sources, matched by equally high risks in moving too fast
- In such a scenario, oil companies are likely to take a two-pronged approach: diversify into new sources of energy while capitalizing on growth opportunities in conventional forms of energy

India's scenario:

- A closer look at India's energy mix reflects a clear trend towards gas and renewable. But there is no imminent danger to demand for oil, forecast to grow at least until 2040
- Today, the major fossil fuels account for more than 90% of India's total primary commercial energy supply (TPCES).
- At present, India's import dependence in the oil and gas sector is significant and the PM has set a target to reduce dependence on crude imports by 10% by 2022

How India should react?

- India needs to be aggressive in looking out for the best prices and competing supply sources

- With 3.14 million sq. km of potential reserves lying unexplored until 2016, India's potential in the oil and gas sector is immense and there exists vast headroom for new discoveries
- Another area that calls for attention is enhanced oil recovery. With the global average recovery factor for a typical oilfield being around 40%, a substantial amount of identified oil ends up as leftover despite existing production infrastructure
- There is a need to enhance recovery from oilfields to reduce import dependence

Refining and re-gassing:

- India has emerged as a refining hub in Asia, serving a massive domestic market for refined petroleum products and even exports
- Also, the government's push towards a gas-based economy has given significant thrust to liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports, given the low domestic natural gas output
- Both these elements present an opportunity for India's downstream and midstream oil and gas sectors
- The key to enhancing efficiency lies in the optimum utilization of resources and adoption of the latest technologies
- Some of the key areas to focus in the mid- to long-term include enhancing
 - * (1) the overall operational efficiency of plants,
 - * (2) flexibility in refinery configuration,
 - * (3) improving energy efficiency,
 - * (4) upgrading the quality of fuel while upgrading facilities to produce BS-IV and BS-VI compliant fuels

Sales and distribution network:

- With major fuels in India deregulated, retailers must focus on their sale and distribution networks. Similar efforts should be made for petrochemicals too
- Strengthening the sales and distribution network for petrochemicals will ease margin pressures for distributors, while ensuring reliable supply for small to mid-sized distributors
- The current distribution network is concentrated around a few producers, calling for the development of a strong network

The way forward

- To sum up, Indian stakeholders need to adopt an aggressive but cautious approach to fully harness the opportunity created as a result of changing dynamics in the global oil and gas sector

54. CAG pulls up food regulator

- The CAG has pulled up food regulator The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for issuing licences to business operators without complete documents.

- 65 of the 72 State food laboratories, to which the FSSAI and the State authorities had sent samples, did not possess the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories accreditation.

CAG highlights:

- The FSSAI had failed in ensuring that the customs authorities followed up the 'Non-Conformance Reports' issued by the regulator and take appropriate action to ensure that unsafe foods did not enter the country.
- There were systemic inefficiencies, delays and deficiencies in the framing of various regulations and standards, amendments to regulations in violation of the Act and the specific direction of the Supreme Court.
- Shortage of qualified manpower and functional food testing equipment in State laboratories and referral laboratories resulted in deficient testing of samples.
- Neither the FSSAI nor the State authorities documented policies and procedures on risk-based inspections
- The regulator did not have any database on food business.

55. RERA's administration under Urban Affairs Ministry's domain

- The matters related to the administration of the RERA for regulation of the real estate sector and to protect the interest of consumers will be dealt by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry
- The central government has amended the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules 1961, in this regard

Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016

- It mandates the establishment of the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA)
- The RERA is for regulation and promotion of the real estate sector
- It will ensure sale of plot, apartment or building in an efficient and transparent manner and protect the interest of consumers in the real estate sector
- The law also has provisions for the establishment of an adjudicating mechanism for speedy dispute redressal related to the real estate sector

Other responsibilities:

- The administration of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, will also be done by the same ministry
- The Act is to protect the rights of urban street vendors and to regulate street vending activities
- The development, operation and maintenance of the National Public Procurement Portal Government e-Marketplace has been brought under the commerce ministry

- The government had last year launched an e-market platform for public procurement of goods and services
- The online platform followed the Centre's decision to close the Directorate General of Supplies and Disposals (DGS&D), the procurement arm of the Centre

56. Hallmarking of Gold to be made mandatory

- The government is moving ahead to implement mandatory hallmarking (HM) of gold which is likely to impart transparency to the jewellery sector.

Benefits of Hallmarking

- A BIS hallmark certifies the purity of gold used.
- With mandatory hallmarking, consumers may tend to prefer trusted names that typically comply with the law, leading to higher sales volumes for such vendors.
- Presently, a majority of the jewelry hallmarked in India is not accounted for and not reported to the BIS.
- Unaccounted hallmarking happens for several reasons:
 - * jewelers do not have BIS licence;
 - * hallmarking centers do not take samples or carry out testing and hence not recorded or invoiced;
 - * jewelers evade BIS royalty and service tax;
- Hence HM centres prefer to conduct business that is unaccounted in the books.
- Several thousands of jewellers all over India carry out hallmarking without any BIS licence [thus] cheating customers.
- Small and marginal jewellers are not interested in hallmarking
- The sector is still used by many as a conduit for unaccounted money.
- Once the mandatory hallmarking regime arrives the income from tax revenue could potentially be doubled.
- However, jewelers will get six months' time to obtain the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) license and to also sell the existing non-hallmarked stock.
- Unaccounted funds from household income are usually routed to the jewelry trade.
- A large number of jewelers are trying to resist mandatory hallmarking as they want to continue selling under-caratage jewelry and make more money.
- Mandatory hallmarking is expected to be introduced in a phased manner, starting from metro cities.

57. Can the state spur start-ups?

Context

- India's Start-up ecosystem

Start-up atmosphere in India:

- Recently held, the Global Entrepreneurship Summit has turned the spotlight once again on India's booming start-up economy
- Over the past three years, India has become the third largest start-up ecosystem
- According to data compiled by Inc42, over \$9.4 billion in funding has flowed into Indian start-ups in 2017, up 1.3 times over last year (as of September)
- There are more than a hundred funds registered with markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India alone

Central Government's effort to improve the condition:

- The Centre alone has announced a corpus of Rs. 10,000 crore to fund start-ups, of which 75 have actually received some money so far
- India's policy on foreign direct investment was specifically amended to include start-ups,
- Start-ups are now allowed to accept up to 100% of their funding requirement from foreign venture capital investors

Various schemes:

- There are many schemes run by various arms of the government, all of which provide tax breaks, incentives, grant money and other forms of assistance to wannabe technopreneurs
- Technical Assistance: The Department of Electronics and Information Technology offers technical assistance for filing patents. And up to Rs. 15 lakh per invention, or up to 50% of the costs incurred in filing a patent
- The department has multiplier grants scheme which provide up to Rs. 2 crore for start-ups in the IT services, analytics, artificial intelligence, and Internet of things space
- Funds for Borrowings: The Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small enterprises underwrites borrowings of up to Rs. 1 crore per unit
- Encouraging initiative: The Centre's Atal Innovation Mission funds up to Rs. 10 crore for each Atal Incubation Centre set up under the scheme
- The Atal Mission also provides funding to schools to set up 'Atal Tinkering Laboratories' to spur the spirit of innovation and enterprise amongst the young

State Governments initiatives:

- As many as 16 State start-up policies are listed on the Startup India hub. States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala had rolled out schemes of their own

Can start-up ecosystem actually be created through state intervention and policy?

- Israel is the most celebrated success story of state intervention and policy creating and shaping an innovations powerhouse. It set up a technology incubator programme way back in 1991, under the office of its Chief Scientist. Since then, it has gone on to become a major world power in IT innovation, as well as innovation in the pharma sector. Many countries have tried to follow the Israel model, but with far less success
- This is probably because Israel's policy was clearly focussed in a few areas of technology where
 - * (1) It enjoyed a human capital advantage,
 - * (2) The ecosystem was small and manageable, and
 - * (3) The policy was administered by science and technology experts rather than administrative generalists
- On the other hand, the U.S., with the largest start-up ecosystem has no clear start-up policy, though almost every state and several major cities have specific policies

Future and cautious approach:

- It is too early to tell in India's case. But given the proliferating schemes, the ever-growing involvement of the government. And the lack of a targeted focus, we may end up repeating the mistakes of others

58. CAG picks flaws in Centre's accountings

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has highlighted several flaws in the Union government's accounting procedures for the financial year 2015-16

- This could have led to an understatement of the fiscal deficit and revenue deficit for that year

Key issues:

- The report highlighted the fact that the government had deferred payments amounting to more than Rs. 1.87 lakh crore in 2015-16, which would have also had an impact on its fiscal and revenue deficits for that year
- Though the accounts of the government are prepared on cash basis, yet the deferment of liabilities to subsequent year cyclically has a bearing on computation of fiscal indicators
- As a result of deficiency in estimating the expenditure on grants for creation of capital assets, the provision included in the Budget for grants for creation of capital assets was underestimated which has also impacted the correct estimation of effective revenue deficit

- The report added that due to the misclassification of revenue expenditure as capital expenditure and vice versa, the revenue deficit was understated by Rs. 1,583 crore during financial year 2015-16
- Amounts collected under levies and cesses were not transferred to the relevant funds, which led to an "understatement of revenue/fiscal deficit by an equivalent amount" during 2015-16

Transparency:

- The CAG also noted that there were several issues with the transparency of the government's account statements
- Refunds of Rs. 1,29,482 crore were made from gross direct tax collections in FY2015-16 but no corresponding disclosure was available in the government accounts

FRBM targets

- CAG pointed out that the government had failed to meet the FRBM targets for 2015-16 on both the fiscal deficit and the revenue deficit
- Government had subsequently changed the targets and deadlines without making the relevant changes in the Act itself
- The annual reduction targets were not in accordance with the provisions of the FRBM Act/Rules

59. Reduce pesticide residue in rice, States told

- The pesticide level in rice exceeds the stipulated limit in the major rice producing States in South India.
- Export of rice has faced problems in the last few years in different markets such as the U.S., E.U. and Iran owing to detection of pesticides exceeding the prescribed maximum residue limits (MRLs).
- The centre has asked the Southern states to take necessary steps to reduce the pesticide residue.
- Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana have been asked by the Union Ministry of Agriculture to keep a watch on the use of pesticides by farmers that could finally enter the food chain.

Permissible limits:

- The European Union has brought the MRL of Tricyclazole to 0.01 gm/kg.
- The U.S. does not permit the presence of residue of Isoprothiolane beyond 0.01 gm/kg.

Key Fact:

- Tricyclazole and Isoprothiolane, are the two pesticides commonly used in paddy cultivation to prevent blast disease, a major threat to the Basmati and non-Basmati crops

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. "2+2" dialogue model:

- The "2+2" dialogue was held between Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary of India and their Australian counterparts.
- The dialogue indicated that the focus remains on freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, where China has been reclaiming land for infrastructure, boosting its maritime influence.
- Australia and India discussed the need to maintain the Asia-Pacific region as a "free" and "open" zone under the "2+2" dialogue model
- Both sides agreed that a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large. There is a growing convergence of strategic perspectives between the two countries.
- India already has a '2+2 dialogue' with Japan
- The '2+2 dialogue' format was first proposed by then Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott during his 2014 India visit.

Why it is called 2+2?

- As it involves dialogues b/w the Foreign and Defence Secretaries of both sides

2. AG600-China

- The AVIC AG600, code named Kunlong also known as TA-600, is the largest amphibious aircraft in the world.
- It was unveiled by the state-owned Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC).
- The aircraft, which has a maximum range of 4,500 km, is intended for fighting forest fires and performing marine rescues.
- At around the size of a Boeing 737, it is far larger than any other plane built for marine take-off and landing.
- The aircraft made its first flight in Zhuhai, Guangdong. The AG600 is one of China's three state-approved "big plane projects".

3. Ajeya Warrior

- It is a Joint Exercise between the armies of India and UK
- The Exercise is held biannually in the two countries, alternatively.
- The aim of the Exercise is to build and promote positive military relations between Indian and UK Army and to enhance their ability to undertake joint tactical level operations in Counter Insurgency/Counter Terrorism Environment under United Nations Charter.

4. ASEAN-India Connectivity Summit (AICS)

- The theme of the meeting is 'Powering Digital and Physical Linkages for Asia in the 21st Century'.
- The AICS would be bringing together policymakers, senior officials from the government, investors, industry leaders, representatives of trade associations and entrepreneurs on the same platform
- The AICS aims to accelerate existing connectivity prospects, identify issues of concern, evolve suitable policy recommendations and develop strategies to enhance economic, industrial and trade relations between ASEAN and India.
- Its focus areas are infrastructure, roadways, shipping, digital, finance, energy and aviation

5. Ekuverin

- It is Military Training Exercise between the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Forces
- The bilateral annual exercise, which commenced in 2009 in Belgaum, India, is alternately held in India and Maldives with the aim of enhancing military cooperation and interoperability between the two countries and increased understanding between both armies with emphasis on Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorist operations under UN mandate.
 - * 7th edition was held at Kadhdhoo, Laamu Atoll, Maldives.
 - * 6th at Pangode Military Station, Trivandrum, Kerala.

6. G5 Sahel

- It is an institutional framework for coordination of regional cooperation in development policies and security matters in central Africa.
- It was formed on 16 February 2014 in Nouakchott, Mauritania, at a summit of five Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.
- The purpose of G5 Sahel is to strengthen the bond between economic development and security, and together battle the threat of jihadist organisations operating in the region (AQIM, MUJWA, Al-Mourabitoun, Boko Haram).

7. New York Declaration

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants expresses the political will of world leaders to save lives, protect rights and share responsibility on a global scale. At the UN Summit on 19 September, we expect to hear from world leaders about how each country will implement these commitments. Refugees, migrants, those who assist them, and their host countries and communities will all benefit if these commitments are met.

- Protect the human rights of all refugees and migrants, regardless of status. This includes the rights of women and girls and promoting their full, equal and meaningful participation in finding solutions.
- Ensure that all refugee and migrant children are receiving education within a few months of arrival.
- Prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.
- Support those countries rescuing, receiving and hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants.
- Work towards ending the practice of detaining children for the purposes of determining their migration status.]

Context

The United States is withdrawing from a United Nations declaration intended at protecting the rights of migrants, saying in a notice to the international group that staying in the agreement would be inconsistent with American immigration policy.

8. SAMEEP

- The foreign office is on an "outreach" mission as a new programme, SAMEEP, aims to take Indian foreign policy and its global engagements to students across the country.
- The ministry of external affairs has asked all its officers on leave to travel to their hometowns and particularly their alma mater.
- Their job would be to engage students in the schools and colleges in the jobs that the ministry is engaged in, so as to give them a fair idea of how India engages with the world, what are its foreign policy priorities and how diplomacy is actually conducted.
- The programme is voluntary and gives officials the option of going back to their alma mater or to any school or college in their hometown.
- The ministry would give them a standardized presentation and officials would be free to improvise and add their personal experiences. The idea is not only to get the ordinary student to take an interest in India's place in the world and its global ambitions, but also to look at diplomacy as a career option.
- A similar programme has had IAS officers also going back to the place of their first posting to assess its development and make recommendations.
- The MEA programme even crowd-sourced its name from the My Gov portal, out of 550 entries. 'SAMEEP - Students and MEA Engagement Programme' is very much like the long acronyms which PM Modi uses to name various government programmes.

9. Ujh Project

- Looking to fast-track utilisation of India's rights under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), the Central Water Commission (CWC) has finalised a detailed report on Ujh multi-purpose project and the government made it clear the proposal aims to harness water that was flowing untapped across the border.
- The project, which is to come up in Kathua district, will store around 0.65 million acre feet (MAF) of water from Ujh (a tributary of Ravi) to irrigate 30,000 hectares and produce over 200 MW of power.
- The Ujh project is a step towards India's utilisation of waters of the Indus and its tributaries in keeping with its rights under the treaty.

10. UAE and Saudi form new group separate from GCC

- The UAE announced it has formed a new economic and partnership group with Saudi Arabia, separate from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a move that could undermine the council amid a diplomatic crisis with Qatar.
- The new committee is assigned to cooperate and coordinate between the UAE and Saudi Arabia in all military, political, economic, trade and cultural fields, as well as others, in the interest of the two countries.

11. Wassenaar Arrangement

- The Ministry of External Affairs welcomed the decision of the Wassenaar Arrangement to admit India as the 42nd member of the organisation which aims to regulate trade and use of dual use technology.
- India will get access to high technology, which will help address the demands of Indian space and defence sectors.
- It will also boost New Delhi's chances of joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

Wassenaar Arrangement:

- The Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, commonly known as the Wassenaar Arrangement, is a multilateral export control regime (MECR) with 41 participating states.
- The Wassenaar Arrangement was established to contribute to regional and international security and stability by promoting transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies, thus preventing destabilizing accumulations.
- Participating states seek, through their national policies, to ensure that transfers of these items do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military capabilities which undermine these goals, and are not diverted to support such capabilities.

- Every six months member countries exchange information on deliveries of conventional arms to non-Wassenaar members that fall under eight broad weapons categories: battle tanks, armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs), large-caliber artillery, military aircraft, military helicopters, warships, missiles or missile systems, and small arms and light weapons.

Admission requires states to:

- Be a producer or exporter of arms or sensitive industrial equipment
- Maintain non-proliferation policies and appropriate national policies, including adherence to:
 - * Non-proliferation policies, such as (where applicable) the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the Australia Group
 - * Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and, where applicable, START I (including the Lisbon Protocol)
- Maintain fully effective export controls
- The People's Republic of China and Israel are not members, but they have aligned their export controls with Wassenaar lists, and are significant arms exporters. The Arrangement is open on a global and non-discriminatory basis to prospective adherents that comply with the agreed criteria
- Admission of new members requires the consensus of all members.

12. Maldives inks Free Trade Agreement with China

- Maldives became the second country in South Asia, after Pakistan, to enter into a free trade agreement (FTA) with China,
- Under the FTA agreement, China will exempt its Maldivian imports, mostly fisheries products, from taxes.
 - * The Maldives' main exports are from its fishing industry – mainly destined for Europe. However, that market has become more difficult as EU revoked its duty-free status after the Maldives graduated from a lower income country to an upper middle-income nation.
- Maldives, on its part, would waive tariffs on its Chinese imports.

Why was it not in line with established principles of democracy?

- The Speaker of Maldivian Parliament called for an emergency sitting, to pass the nation's first-ever Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China while the opposition was absent.
- The FTA was sent to the parliamentary oversight committee on national security affairs within three minutes of submission to the floor. The committee vetting the FTA took less than 10 minutes to give its nod.

- The approval was conducted against parliamentary procedures and norms, with deliberations closed off for the public and to the media.
- Despite requests from the opposition, the MPs were not given access to the document in order to review it before passing.
- The government of President Yameen Abdul Gayoom (better known as YAG), allowed less than one hour for the entire Parliamentary process to approve the 1,000+ page document.

What does the Maldivian opposition party say about the FTA?

- While China has said the FTA serves the interests of the two countries and the region, head of the Maldives Opposition party and former President of Maldives Mohammad Nasheed openly criticised the pact saying it undermined Maldives' sovereignty and is bad for the region and leaves the country in debt for China.
- They were concerned over sudden and rushed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China, without any disclosure of details to the public or to the MPs
- The opposition further asserted that there were concerns the FTA would further increase the trade deficit, which was tilted in China's favour.

Why is India worried?

- Maldivian government has extended invitations to establish free trade agreements with countries including Japan, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and countries of the European Union. However, it doesn't name India.
- The Presence of china in Indian Ocean could be a potential security threat to India. China with its deep pockets may change the status quo and attract smaller countries to its lap.

What should be done?

- India should give special preference, commitments and incentives like it is being provided to Afghanistan.
- There should be a high-level visit as PM Modi has cancelled his visit due to political turmoil
- India should be Proactive in its approach in near future and not reactive.
- Strategy needs to be changed with close coordination by shedding big brother attitude.
- India provides donations and Chinese provides Loans. India respects and is seeking an equitable partnership and not the kind of predatory economic and physical arrangements like china. This should be expressed in India's talks.

13. Brahmaputra Dam Controversy

- The 2,880 km-long Brahmaputra originates in Tibet, where it is known as the Yarlung Tsangpo.

- It flows eastwards through southern Tibet for a distance of 1,625 kilometers and at its easternmost point it swings around to make a spectacular U-turn at the Shuomatan Point or Great Bend before it enters India's easternmost state, Arunachal Pradesh. Here it is known as the Siang River.
- After gathering the waters of several rivers it announces itself as the Brahmaputra in the state of Assam.

Zangmu Dam

- The Zangmu Dam is a gravity dam on the Yarlung Zangbo/Brahmaputra River 9 km (5.6 mi) northwest of Gyaca in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.
- This dam is built a few kilometers from the Bhutan-India border. The purpose of the dam is hydroelectric power production using run-of-the-river technology
- Construction began in 2009 and the first generator was commissioned in November 2014.
- It is the first dam on the Brahmaputra/Yarlung Zangbo River and has caused controversy in India.
- The station, believed to be positioned at the world's highest altitude, is expected to produce 2.5 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity per year.

History of water interaction

- One, the Brahmaputra agreement between China and India is a suboptimal arrangement within broader bilateral relations. As per the current agreement, China has thus far agreed to share hydrological data on the Yarlung Tsangpo/Brahmaputra (YTB) during the monsoon season.
 - * Why did China agree to cooperate in the first place when it has clearly resisted doing so for years, and with other riparian countries through which the Mekong flows?
 - * One of the explanations could be that this gesture of cooperation aligns well with China's broader political strategy of portraying an image of a 'responsible neighbour'.
 - * Despite two decades of negotiation, further cooperation on water, however, is in a state of a deadlock. The agreement, at best, is a piecemeal discount offered by China.
- Two, discussions over the YTB have often been overshadowed by the border dispute.
 - * For instance, despite border incursion by the Chinese army in the Depsang Valley in Ladakh in 2013, China and India went ahead to sign the extension of the 2002 Memorandum of Understanding on data sharing on the Brahmaputra river.

- Three, departing from the past, China's approach to transboundary water sharing is shifting towards multilateral arrangements.
 - * In 2015, China signed the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) framework along with five other countries through which the Mekong flows. This China-led multilateral agreement is an alternative to the Asian Development Bank-led Mekong River Commission, which China never signed.
 - * LMC aligns with China's Belt and Road Initiative and focuses on land and water connectivity, besides river management.
 - * In South Asia, China has been insistent in establishing greater ties with Bangladesh on flood forecasting, water technologies, and water management.
- Four, the Indian approach to the YTB issue is influenced by developmental imperatives and domestic politics.
 - * The Brahmaputra is an important resource for India's own water diversion plans – the national river interlinking project – and is considered a powerhouse to meet India's energy demands in the future.
 - * India tends to play the lower riparian card to gain sympathy from its domestic political constituencies, especially of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

India should be cautious about the latest developments on the Brahmaputra.

- First, China's attempt to build infrastructure in Tibet and improve its connectivity with the Chinese mainland has been one of China's major strategies, not only in terms of military preparedness but also to overcome the challenge of regional disparity.
 - * China has been working on improving infrastructure and connectivity with the frontier states along its border. India, on the other hand, has been rather slow in developing its frontier states, with tardy development patterns.
 - * In addition to this problem, the Brahmaputra is a major lifeline for India's north-eastern region. If the situation continues unabated, it will have long term implications for India.
- Second, while the Chinese government has made it clear that it is in constant touch with the Indian authorities on the matter, it is intriguing why a robust consultative mechanism at both Track 1 and Track 1.5 involving China, India and Bangladesh has not been set up.
 - * India needs to keep in mind that it is not the only party involved in the Brahmaputra issue.
 - * A comprehensive picture of the issue makes it evident that India is the middle riparian State, with China as the upper riparian and Bangladesh as the lower riparian State.

- Third, China's hydro-behaviour with other neighbours may serve as a key to understand its approach on the Brahmaputra as well.
 - * Along the other two big rivers that pass through China to Southeast Asia, China has shown similar trends. On both the Lancang (upper Mekong) and Nu (upper Salween) rivers, China has carried on building dams and other associated activities without taking into account the interests and concerns of the lower riparian States

Does it affect India? No

- China and India see themselves as responsible regional and global powers and a war of any kind between them will not only set back bilateral relations but also damage their reputations internationally.
- Even if the diversion project goes ahead, its impact on India will not be severe say experts
- Brahmaputra gets most of its waters after entering India. It is the Brahmaputra's tributaries in India and the heavy rainfall here that provides roughly 70 percent of the water volume of the Brahmaputra River

Does it affect India? Yes

- It has repercussions for water flow, agriculture, ecology, and lives and livelihoods downstream; it could also become another contentious issue undermining Sino-Indian relations.
- China's construction of hydropower dams on the Brahmaputra is the proposed northward rerouting of its waters at the Great Bend. This diversion would result in a significant drop in the river's water level as it enters India. It will have a serious impact on agriculture and fishing in the downstream areas as the salinity of water will increase.
- Environment in the region would be affected due its developmental process.

What India needs to do?

A decade ago, India started planning multiple hydropower projects on the Brahmaputra as a reactive strategy against Chinese dam-building activities on the upper reaches of the river. This strategy is informed by the international law of 'prior appropriation', which states that the first user gets the rights to continue using that quantity of water.

- First, it needs to clearly envision the desired end goal and strategic outcomes for dealing with impending water conflicts
- Second, it needs to de-emphasise China's role for the time being and re-strengthen its relationship with Bangladesh. It needs to push the impending Teesta river agreement and restore its image as a responsible upper riparian.
- Third, India needs to mirror its strength and firmness in negotiations with China on water rights, as it did in the case of the Doklam stand-off and in opposing the Belt and Road Initiative, rather than projecting itself as a victim.

What's darkening Brahmaputra: Landslide, not Chinese machines

- Massive landslides caused by a series of earthquakes in Tibet is darkening the Brahmaputra waters
- This report comes amidst apprehensions that contamination may have been caused due to the construction of a dam by China on a tributary of the Brahmaputra

Reason for darkened water

- Lab tests have established that the water has darkened due to turbidity typically caused by landslides
- The accumulating debris has caused partial blockages at three locations, forming natural dams on 6 km of the river across a 12-km stretch in China
- A preliminary study by two researchers from Bengaluru-based National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) and Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) shows that quake-induced landslides on the river continued for over three weeks, which probably explains the prolonged turbidity
- The evidence puts to rest fears that dam construction and tunnelling work upstream the Yarlung-Tsangpo in China were responsible for the darkening of Brahmaputra waters

Three natural dams formed

- Three natural dams have formed one behind the other
- The dams are significantly smaller than the Yigong dam, which led to catastrophic flooding of the Brahmaputra in 2000
- The worry for India is that these three dams may merge and eventually give away to result in a deluge downstream

14. Woe to Jerusalem

United States President Donald Trump made good his campaign promise of moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to occupied Jerusalem, in the process giving de jure recognition to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

What India needs to do?

- Jerusalem came under Roman rule in 63 BCE;
- Islamic rule in 637 CE;
- under the Crusaders in 1099;
- under Saladin in 1187;
- under the British in 1917;
- under the Jordanians in 1948 and
- Under Israel in 1967.

Hence, the question of 'occupation' is entirely subjective and people decide the timeframe of 'occupation' in line with their religious beliefs and political convictions.

Religious History

- According to Islamic traditions, between 610 and 623 CE, Jerusalem was the direction of prayer or Qibla until it was changed towards the Ka'aba in Mecca by Prophet Mohammed in February 624. The city is also associated with the Prophet's ascendance to heaven or the Night-Journey and his Ascension on a winged horse traced to 620 CE. Thus, Jerusalem is the third holiest place in Islam after Mecca and Medina.
- The city is also closely linked to Christianity. While Jesus Christ's birth is traced to a manger in nearby Bethlehem, the central elements of Christianity are linked to Jerusalem. Believers trace the last thirteen steps of Christ in the old city, and the crucifixion and resurrection, the very core of Christianity, is located in the city where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands today
- For the Jews, Jerusalem was the home of their two ancient temples, both being destroyed by invading armies; the first by the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BCE and the second by the Romans in 70 CE. Hence, Jerusalem is the holiest place for the Jews.

Despite all three religions tracing their origins to Abraham, interfaith accommodation over Jerusalem has been limited. Over centuries, Christians have largely diluted and even abandoned their political claims.

Partition Plan

- Under the partition plan approved by the UN General Assembly on 29 November 1947, Jerusalem and its surrounding areas including Bethlehem were declared corpus separatum. The UN thereby sought to place the city under an international regime due to the shared and contested religious claims over it.
- The Declaration of Independence which announced the establishment of Israel hours before the British departure on 14 May 1948 was conspicuously silent on the country's capital. Formally giving up Zion (another name for Jerusalem) would have meant the realization of Zionism without Zion.
- With the partition plan already dividing international opinion, the infant state did not have the luxury of ticking off international opinion at its birth. Its entry into the UN, formalized in May 1949, was another compulsion and hence the otherwise colourful and detailed Israeli declaration of independence was silent on the question of its capital.

Armistice Agreement

- Meanwhile, the UN-sponsored Armistice Agreement between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan signed on 3 April 1949 formalized the division of Jerusalem, namely Israeli control of West Jerusalem and Jordanian control and subsequent annexation of East Jerusalem, including the old city and its religious sites holy to all the three Abrahamic faiths.
- This brought in the concept of West and East Jerusalem into the political discourse of the Middle East.

- Later that year, Israel declared the Western part of the city as its capital and gradually established or moved all its sovereign institutions, such as the office of the President, the seat of the Supreme Court, Knesset and government offices. By the early 1950s all the ministries except the Ministry of Defence were shifted to West Jerusalem.
- West Jerusalem, which Israel declared as its capital has, however, not been recognized by much of the international community.
- Until President Donald Trump's sudden announcement, even the US never recognized Israel's claims to West Jerusalem as its capital.

June War

- Until the June War, East Jerusalem was under Jordanian control and occupation. Their control of the Old City and the third holiest place of Islam was a consolation for the Hashemites who lost Mecca and Medina to the al-Sauds in the 1920s.
- There were suggestions that the Hashemites were toying with the idea of declaring East Jerusalem as their capital but that they were dissuaded by the British. During this period, a number of Jewish synagogues in the old city were desecrated, damaged or even destroyed and even non-Israeli Jews were prevented from praying in the Western Wall.
- At the same time, despite international disapproval, the Armistice Agreement of 1949 institutionalized a de facto partition of the city and this status continued until 1967.
- During the June War, Israel captured, along with the West Bank, the eastern part of Jerusalem, including the Walled City and since then this has remained under its control. Even as West and East Jerusalem remained high on the international agenda, Israel sought to remove the Green Line (the pre-June armistice lines) on the ground.
- Through a host of political and legislative moves, it sought to declare Jerusalem to be its 'united, undivided and eternal capital'. And it also sought to establish this fact on the ground through the construction of settlements beyond the June 1967 border
- But the international community, including the US, never recognized the eastern part of the city as a part of Jerusalem or Israeli territory. Thus, East Jerusalem entered the political lexicon of the Middle East after the June War.

Israeli activities since 1967

- Israeli activities since 1967 have led to the introduction of nomenclatures such as Municipal Jerusalem, Greater Jerusalem and Jerusalem security perimeters.
- Though administrative in nature, they also indicate Israel's territorial expansion through the annexation and seizure of lands beyond the Green Line.
- At the height of the Oslo process, the Arab village of Abu Dis in the old city was often suggested as a possible Palestinian capital.

- However, the real problem of Jerusalem lay in the Walled City, which houses the ruins of the Western Wall, Holy Sepulchre and al-Aqsa Mosque. Despite its proximity of only a few hundred yards, the Christian holy site can be separated due to its distinct geographical location, but this is not possible for the other two sites. Al-Aqsa and Harem al-Sharif stand on top of the ruins of the Western Wall. Over the years, as noted above, Christian political claims over the city have receded leaving the other two faiths to seek exclusive claims and sovereignty.
- The Oslo process was possible partly because of the Israeli willingness to discuss contentious issues including Jerusalem during the final status negotiations. But the absence of meaningful progress on the core issues brought the peace process to a halt.

USA

- In October 1995, during the heydays of the Oslo process, the US Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act, which demanded the relocation of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and to recognize that city as Israel's capital. However, citing larger American interests, successive presidents deferred the move.
- At the same time, since 1967, various US administrations have considered areas beyond the Green Line, including East Jerusalem, to be a part of the Occupied Territories.
- On 6 December, much to the surprise of the international community, President Trump announced that he had "determined that it is time to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel" and went on to add that, like other sovereign nations, Israel has the right "to determine its own capital".

President Trump's move, which has enraged many US friends, infuriated Muslim allies and spurred massive protests in different parts of the world, has opened a Pandora's Box and raised many questions than answers.

India and Jerusalem

- Until 1992, India followed a cautious policy of recognition-without-relations towards Israel for over four decades. Like in the case of many other countries, India's normalization of relations with Israel was followed by the establishment of a diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv.
- After the establishment of the Palestine National Authority, New Delhi established a mission in the Gaza Strip in 1996, which was moved to Ramallah in 2003 when Arafat shifted his headquarters to the West Bank.
- The Indian mission in the Palestinian territories reports directly to South Bloc and not to the embassy in Tel Aviv, thus reiterating the legal separation between Israel and Palestine.

- For nearly a decade, incidentally coinciding with UPA rule, India's support for a Palestinian state was accompanied by an explicit reference to East Jerusalem being the Palestinian capital. If the international community and the UN do not recognize West Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the same holds true for East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.
- However, a major shift became noticeable during the visit of President Mahmoud Abbas in May 2017. With the Palestinian President standing by his side, Prime Minister Modi reiterated India's support to Palestinian statehood but carefully avoided any direct reference to East Jerusalem.
- This shift indicated an Indian recognition of the complexities surrounding Jerusalem and the need for a settlement among the parties concerned.
- Only a few weeks earlier, India had reversed its earlier position and abstained over a UNESCO resolution that denied any Jewish links to the city.
- India's position on Palestine is independent and consistent. It is shaped by our views and interests, and not determined by any third country.
- From India's viewpoint, let the parties concerned—Israel, Palestinians and the wider Arab-Islamic world—reach a settlement based on respect, compromise and accommodation. Thus, if India no longer recognizes East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital, it is also not recognizing West Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Jerusalem is not a legal or political issue. It is an emotional problem that defies reason, logic or evidence. Claims are absolutist with little room for compromise and accommodation. The issue is so vast and complicated one can easily pick up a particular issue, timeframe or logic and make a passionate case for it. As it is said, everyone is right to the extent of their knowledge.

15. Russia-India-China Strategic Triangle

- Russia, India and China have attempted twice to form a strategic triangle, without much success. In the 1950s, these three countries sought to counter Western influence and power by moving closer; Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru leaned closer towards the Soviet bloc and simultaneously attempted to craft a post-colonial Asian African that would be independent of the Soviet-led socialist world. This was based on the assumption of closer ties with post-colonial states of the third world, particularly China.

Sino-Soviet border conflict

- The Sino-Soviet border conflict was a seven-month undeclared military conflict between the Soviet Union and China at the height of the Sino-Soviet split in 1969. Although military clashes ceased that year, the underlying issues were not resolved until the 1991 Sino-Soviet Border Agreement.
- Chinese historians most commonly refer to the conflict as the Zhenbao Island Incident.

- In the 1960s, the US was much more powerful than either the Soviet Union or China. But for both Moscow and Beijing, their ideological clash for the leadership of the global communist movement ensured that they saw each other as much of a threat as the United States
- By the 1960s, however, the Soviet Union and China saw each other as a bigger threat than the United States. In response, the Soviet Union attempted to balance against China by moving closer to India and Vietnam
- China responded by aligning itself with the United States against the Soviet Union and with Pakistan against India.

* Though Pakistan was part of anticommunist alliances such as the CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) and SEATO (South-East Asian Treaty Organization) that were designed to counter China, Pakistan's leadership made it clear to China that their objective was to balance India, not China.

- Until the end of the Cold War, this alignment pattern persisted: Moscow and New Delhi against Beijing, while Beijing aligned with Washington and Islamabad.

Conception of the Trilateral

- The proposal for a Moscow-Beijing-Delhi 'strategic triangle' had originally come from former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov during his visit to India in 1998, when he argued that such an arrangement would represent a force for greater regional and international stability.
- The idea of a 'strategic triangle' took a tangible form when former Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, and India — Igor Ivanov, Tang Jiaxuan and Yashwant Sinha — met on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2002.

Reason for its creation

- The idea of strategic triangle took root with the end of the Cold War when the US assumed the role of global cop. The idea of the triangle raised much hope to build a multi-polar world that would enable the creation of a just and fair international economic and political order.² More importantly, since the end of the Cold War gave primacy to economics than to politics, much enthusiasm arose about a common economic agenda. This augured well for the three great Asian powers, India, China and Russia which shared the common goal of economic reform and modernisation. Being located in a single geopolitical space, they thought of a bonding to promote prosperity, security and stability in the region.
- The idea of the strategic triangle got renewed attention in the post-9/11 world order.³ This time Islamic terrorism became an additional factor. China faces separatist forces in Xinjiang which it categorises as terrorism. India has its own concerns in Jammu and Kashmir. Russia fears terrorism in Chechnya.

Importance of Cooperation

- Counter Terrorism and Cyber Security: These nations are vulnerable to terrorism. Their effective cooperation is important for containing terrorism in the region.
- "Internet- Governance: Since Governance of the internet remains limited to US multinationals, RIC can initiate a discourse and influence its outcome for equitable outcome.
- Strategic Dialog: A" the nations are also the members of BRICS, SCO, with two of them being members of UNSC, so they can initiate talks on reforming global governance.
- Convergence on Central Asia: For fighting increasing extremism in the region.
- Nuclear and Energy Cooperation: While Russia is energy rich country, both India and China are energy hungry countries.
- Peaceful resolution of conflicts: The RIC can play the role of a balancer in global affairs, as two of the members are permanent members of UNSC and all of them favor peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Russia's role

- Russia's role was key as its loss of power and influence on the world scene was a major cause of concern for its leadership. There was a growing and pervasive feeling in Russia that it surrendered its once-powerful position on the world stage for a position of little international influence and respect.
- It is against this backdrop that Russia tried to establish itself as the hub of two bilateral security partnerships that could be used to counteract U.S. power and influence in areas of mutual concern.
- It is Russia, which would gain the most in this strategic triangle. It would help Russia to check NATO's eastward expansion. It would pose as an alternative power bloc to the US and boost Russia's role in world politics. Some analysts say that Russia's aim is to solidify Moscow's place between East and the West, Atlantic and the Pacific, NATO and China.

China's role

- While Russia witnessed a downward slide in its status as a superpower since the end of the Cold War, China emerged as a rising power that saw the U.S. as the greatest obstacle, if it was to achieve a pre-eminent position in the global political hierarchy.
- As a consequence, China recognized the importance of cooperating with Russia to check U.S. expansionism in the world, even if only for the short term.
- In fact, American policies towards Russia and China moved the two states closer to each other, leading to the formation of a new balance of power against the U.S.

Challenges to RIC

- 'Imbalance: Only Russia and China are permanent members of U.N. Security Council. India's membership is not fully supported by them.
- Uneven structure: India, for example, has close political relations with Russia but little to show by way of bilateral trade. By contrast, India-China trade is booming, but the bilateral political relationship could be better.
- Different perceptions on USA: Russia and China would like to use the trilateral to send a signal to Washington that they are unhappy with its bloc-like approach to the Asia-Pacific. India, on the other hand, is decidedly wary of alienating the U.S. at this juncture.
- Alternative Grouping: The emergence of other groupings like BRIO, SCO etc. with summit level participation, has challenged the relevance Of RIC, which is merely periodic meeting Of foreign ministers.

China Factor

- The reasons can be easily found in the mutual suspicion between India and China. It is interesting to note that Jawaharlal Nehru regarded China as a threat for he felt Indian and Chinese cultures had been contesting for supremacy for hundreds of years in Central Asia, Tibet, Burma and the countries of Southeast Asia.
- India and China are two geopolitical rivals and their interests clash both in the political and economic arena. Both are vying for the same markets.
- India calls the Central Asian region its 'extended neighbourhood' while to China it is the 'strategic backyard'.
- Political analysts talk of a new flashpoint between India and China in ASEAN. Both view the Southeast Asian region as a market and crucial to their security concerns.
- In Sudan, China is already playing a proactive role. Recently, India entered the oil sector of Sudan.
- Militarily both are building their blue-water capability. While India is attempting to project its naval power through the Indian Ocean and had conducted joint military exercises with the US in the Malacca Straits to the chagrin of China, China is trying to penetrate the Indian Ocean through Myanmar much to the alarm of India.
- Given this clash of interests between China and India, it is highly unlikely for them to emerge as strong supporters of the strategic triangle.
- Pakistan is yet another major irritant in India-China relations. China is not likely to give up its strategic alliance with Pakistan. It is China's primary card to block India from emerging as a great Asian power. By playing the Pakistan card, China seeks to keep India embroiled in South Asia

Way forward

- In sum, the popularity of the strategic triangle is mainly at the Track-II level. It is unlikely to seriously influence the official policy in New Delhi. India must not be swayed by Russia's rhetoric of the strategic triangle.
- At the same time, instead of confining its relationship with Russia to defence ties, India should expand its commercial ties.
- The idea of the strategic triangle need not be dumped as futile since a more positive and persuasive global role of India-China-Russia would contribute to a more stable world order.
- The grouping must be made into a formal organization with permanent secretariat.
- Given the potential of the grouping, it must be converted into annual summit level meeting.
- Working groups: Given the multidimensional potential of the group, it is necessary to formulate dedicated working groups on terrorism, energy security, etc. This would help in more focused approach to these issues.

16. Pakistan textbooks glorifying war: UNESCO**Highlights of Global Education Monitoring Report 2017-18**

- Released by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Report expressed concern over school textbooks in many countries glorifying war and military heroes rather than teaching peace, non-violence and reconciliation.
- It says that that just 10% of the textbooks across the world include explicit statements on the need for conflict prevention and resolution.
- Textbooks in many countries fail to deal comprehensively with concepts that are crucial for social cohesion and political stability, including peace and non-violence.

Examples:

- In Pakistan, textbooks have been criticized for normalizing militarism and war and including biases and historical errors and distortions. Prominent Pakistanis other than military heroes and nationalist movement leaders are often excluded.
- Pakistani textbooks published after a 2006 curriculum reform still emphasized wars with India and largely ignored peace initiatives. They also perpetuated a narrative of conflict and historic grievances between Muslims and Hindus, rather than discussing the potential for conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- Indian history textbooks from 2002 put the blame on Pakistan and contained clear bias against Muslim elements in the region's history.

17. Hasina inaugurates nuclear power plant construction

- Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated construction work on the much-awaited Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Ishwardi, located in the western part of the country.
- The plant is expected to add 2,400 MW of electricity to the national grid by 2024, helping the country meet its increasing demand for electricity.
- The mega project is being implemented by state-run Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission with financial and technological support from Russia through its state nuclear agency, Rosatom.
- Russian company JSC Atomstroyexport had signed a general contract for construction of the plant in December 2015. The company has 68 months following the inauguration ceremony to complete its construction work.
- Though India cannot directly take part in the construction of nuclear power plants — as it is not a member of the 48-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group — it has signed individual agreements with Bangladesh and Russia.

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Amrita Haat fair

- The "Amrita Haat" fair, organised in Kota, has promoted women's self-help groups (SHGs), ensuring their financial well-being and training for skill development.
- Fair has handicraft products and utility items manufactured by SHGs, generating awareness on women's contribution to local economy and facilitating marketing of goods.
- The "Amrita Haats" are being organised at 15 districts during the current financial year.

2. App to help counter sexual abuse in schools

- The West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights (WBCPCR) is all set to launch a mobile app to teach schoolchildren how to counter the threat of sexual abuse.
- The app will also create awareness among schoolchildren about the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO).
- The app will comprise of a quiz regarding what a child should do when faced with the threat of sexual abuse.
- The app is inspired by the online game of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) called 'Against All Odds'.
- The UNHCR game — which is for children of the age group of seven years and above — seeks to create awareness among refugee children on how to face persecution and the process to seek asylum.

3. Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana

- Under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme, namely, Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojna (BJRCY), Central assistance is provided to the implementing agencies viz. State Governments/UT Administrations/Central and State Universities/ Non-Governmental Organisations/Deemed Universities in private sector, for construction of fresh hostels/expansion of existing hostel facilities for Scheduled Castes students.
- Maintenance of the hostels would be the responsibility of the concerned implementing agencies.
- Under the revised scheme, a Monitoring Committee is proposed to be constituted to review its implementation.
- The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment is entrusted with the task of educational, economic and social empowerment of Scheduled Castes.

Details

- Under this component, residential schools for SC girls are proposed to be set up for class VI to XII students in the educationally backward districts of States having large SC population.

- The State Governments will provide adequate land free of cost for construction of school complex mandatorily.
- The Central Government will provide capital cost for construction of school complex and eligible recurring cost for the first three years.
- In addition, one-time grant for procurement of essential and non-recurring items like furniture, recreation, garden, etc. is proposed to be provided by the Central Government.

4. Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade outlines actions to empower women

- For the first time in the history of the World Trade Organization, WTO members and observers have endorsed a collective initiative to increase the participation of women in trade. In order to help women reach their full potential in the world economy, 118 WTO members and observers agreed to support the Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade, which seeks to remove barriers to, and foster, women's economic empowerment.
- Nearly three-fourths of the 164-member World Trade Organisation (WTO) have supported a declaration seeking women's economic empowerment by expeditiously removing barriers to trade, a decision that the global body termed as history-making.

Why was it necessary?

- Currently, many women worldwide stand on the sidelines of the economy.
- While women comprise about half of the global population, they generate only 37% of gross domestic product (GDP) and run only about a third of small and medium-sized enterprises.
- In some developing countries, female business ownership can dip as low as 3-6%. An International Trade Centre survey in 20 countries found that just one in five exporting companies is owned by women. In more than 155 countries, there is at least one law impeding economic opportunities for women.
- No country has managed to close the gender gap on economic participation and opportunity; progress is so slow it would take, at the current rate, 170 years to reach gender equality.
- It is also apparent that international trade and trade agreements affect women and men differently.

India's Stand

- India, an influential WTO member, was among the minority group that chose not to endorse the move saying while it stoutly supports gender equality, it cannot concur with the view that gender is a trade-related issue.

- Agreeing to the proposition to link gender and trade could lead to advanced countries using their high standards in gender-related policies to not only curb exports from the developing world, but also indirectly restrict developing countries from incentivising their women citizens as part of measures to address developmental challenges, Indian officials said.
- They added that gender-related discussions should take place at appropriate fora and not at the WTO, which is purely a trade-related body. Otherwise, it will set a precedent to bring in other non-trade issues such as labour and environment standards into the WTO's ambit

Significance

- Actions outlined in the Declaration will ultimately boost economic growth worldwide and provide more and better paid jobs for women.
- These actions will also contribute to UN Global Development Goals, including the Sustainable Development Goal to achieve gender equality through the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5).

5. Cradle System

- Andhra Pradesh: Officials of the Women Development and Child Welfare (WD&CW) Department are planning to introduce cradle system at some public places to check abandonment of children.
- The cradles would allow people to safely deposit babies in them who could be handed over to interested couples.
- The cradle-bell system had been in vogue for hundreds of years in orphanages and churches.
- The cradles would be kept at the Government General Hospital, the bus and railway stations. People could keep the babies in them and alert officials by ringing the bell. Cradles will be in cabins in secluded places. Couples who don't want a child can place the babies in them. Their details will be kept confidential. The infants will be provided with shelter in 'Sisu Gruha' being run by the government.

6. Dr Ambedkar scheme for social Integration through inter caste marriage

- The 'Dr Ambedkar scheme for social Integration through inter caste marriage' was started in 2013, with a target to provide monetary incentive to at least 500 such inter-caste couples per year. As per rules, such couples whose total annual income does not exceed Rs 5 lakh are eligible to get a one-time incentive of Rs 2.5 lakh from the Centre.
- Removing the income ceiling of Rs 5 lakh per annum, the Centre has opened its scheme meant to encourage inter-caste marriages to all couples where either the bride or the bridegroom is a Dalit.

- In a recent order to states, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment directed that "the condition that the total income of the newly-wedded couple will not exceed Rs 5 lakh per annum" be scrapped, and there will be "no income limit for incentive under the scheme".
- The ministry also made it mandatory for the couples to submit their Aadhaar numbers and details of their Aadhaar-linked joint bank account.

Details

- Officials said the low approval rate is often due to the fact that the couples don't meet all the pre-conditions. For instance, only intermarriages registered under the Hindu Marriage Act are eligible, disregarding the several cases registered under the Special Marriages Act.
- Also, the proposal needs to be recommended by an MP, MLA, or District Collector. "Awareness about the scheme is very low, most of the proposals come from a few states such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra,"
- The target for each state is fixed in proportion to its share of Scheduled Caste population, though states are allowed to exceed their targets.
- The scheme's stated purpose was to counter the Hindu practice of marrying on the "traditional grounds of jatis (castes) and up-jatis (sub-castes)". The idea is derived from the teachings of Babasaheb Ambedkar, who said that caste and endogamy (custom of marrying within one's own community) are the same thing.
- There is no definite data available on inter-caste marriages, since the Centre did not release the caste data from the Socio-Economic and Caste Census. However, studies based on sample surveys show that caste rigidity in marriage continues to be deeply entrenched.

7. International Day of Persons with Disabilities

- It is an international observance promoted by the United Nations since 1992.
- It aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.
- It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.
- 2017 Theme: "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all"
- The 2030 Agenda pledges to "leave no one behind". Persons with disabilities, as both beneficiaries and agents of change, can fast track the process towards inclusive and sustainable development and promote resilient society for all, including in the context of disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action, and urban development.

- Governments, persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, academic institutions and the private sector need to work as a “team” to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

8. One Stop Centre Scheme

Background

- In India, gender based violence has many manifestations; from the more universally prevalent forms of domestic and sexual violence including rape, to harmful practices such as, dowry, honour killings, acid attacks, witch - hunting, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, child marriage, sex selective abortion, sati etc.
- Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), has formulated a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for setting up One Stop Centre, a sub-scheme of Umbrella Scheme for National Mission for Empowerment of women including Indira Gandhi Matritrav Sahyaog Yojana.

Objective

- One Stop Centres (OSC) are intended to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace.
- Women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race and culture will be facilitated with support and redressal.
- Aggrieved women facing any kind of violence due to attempted sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, honour related crimes, acid attacks or witch-hunting who have reached out or been referred to the OSC will be provided with specialized services

Target group

- The OSC will support all women including girls below 18 years of age affected by violence, irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status.

Services offered in OSCs

The Centres will be integrated with a Women Helpline to facilitate access to following services.

- Emergency Response and Rescue Services - OSC will provide rescue and referral services to the women affected by violence. For this, linkages will be developed with existing mechanisms such as National Health Mission (NHM), 108 service, police (PCR Van) so that the woman affected by violence can either be rescued from the location and referred to the nearest medical facility (Public/ Private) or shelter home.

- Medical assistance - Women affected by violence would be referred to the nearest Hospital for medical aid/examination which would be undertaken as per the guidelines and protocols developed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Assistance to women in lodging FIR /NCR/DIR
- Psycho - social support/ counseling - A skilled counselor providing psycho - social counseling services would be available on call. This counseling process will give women confidence and support to address violence or to seek justice for the violence perpetuated. Counselors shall follow a prescribed code of ethics, guidelines and protocols in providing counseling services.
- Legal aid and counseling

Funds

- The Scheme will be funded through Nirbhaya Fund. The Central Government will provide 100% financial assistance to the State Government /UT Administrations under the Scheme.

9. Safe City Surveillance scheme

- The Bihar government has launched Safe City Surveillance Scheme for keeping the crimes against women in check.
- The scheme aims to bring all major public places under a strict watch of close-circuit television (CCTV) cameras and improve the overall crime control in the state.

Highlights:

- The scheme has been launched in a phase-wise manner and will commence from the capital city Patna
- The scheme has specially been launched for checking crimes against women such as harassment, eve-teasing and molestation, snatching incidents and roadside scuffles etc.
- It will also help in keeping a track of miscreants
- Under the scheme, all major public places will be under the watch of CCTV cameras, which will be used for traffic management as well as crime control
- Bihar home department will be the nodal agency for implementation of the surveillance scheme
- The network of CCTV cameras will be connected to the control room where they will be monitored by policemen around the clock
- The policemen in the control room will coordinate with their counterparts in field and police stations to alert them about any incidents in the area

10. Welfare Schemes for Economically Backward Classes

- The Government is implementing following Schemes for Economically Backward Classes (EBCs):-

- Dr. Ambedkar Central Sector Scheme of Interest Subsidy on Educational Loans for Overseas Studies for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Economically Backward Classes (EBCs).
 - * The objective of the scheme is to award interest subsidy to meritorious OBC and EBC students so as to provide them better opportunities for higher education abroad and enhance their employability.
 - * To be eligible under the scheme, a student should come under the income ceiling of Rs. 3.00 lakh per annum for OBCs and for EBCs it is Rs 1.00 lakh per annum.
 - * 50 % of the outlay every year is earmarked for Girl students.
 - * The students should have secured admission in the approved courses at Masters, M.Phil or Ph.D levels abroad.
- Dr. Ambedkar Centrally Sponsored Post-Matric Scholarship for the Economically Backward Classes (EBC) Students.
 - * This is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme being implemented through the State Government and Union Territories w.e.f. 2014-15.
 - * The objective of the scheme is to provide financial assistance to the EBC students studying at post-matriculation or post-secondary stage.
 - * The income ceiling of parents/guardians for eligibility is Rs.1.00 lakh per annum (including self-income, if employed).
 - * The Scheme is a "Funds-Limited" Scheme. The funds will be released to the States on first-come first-served basis, subject to a maximum amount to be worked out every year based on total budget made available that year, under the scheme.

11. Crackdown on child porn, rape videos with ISP norms, portal

- The Union Home Ministry will issue guidelines for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and set up an online portal by next month for centralized reporting of complaints against child pornography and rape videos
- The Supreme Court had directed the government on setting up such a portal by January 10
- The Home Ministry is also expected to write to DGPs/IGs of all states and Union Territories, directing them to ensure reporting of such videos on social media or other online platforms

Mode of operation:

- Ministry will generate a hash value (a code) of all such videos and child sexual abuse material and share it with the content service provider, which will be used to identify such videos online

- A list of 500 keywords used in searching for such videos has also been compiled and will be shared with the ISPs, including Google, Yahoo, Facebook, WhatsApp and Microsoft
- The Home Ministry has also sanctioned Rs 80 crore for setting up forensic labs in all states and Union Territories for Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Child (CCPWC)

Changes sought by the states:

- The states urged the Centre to bring amendments to the Information Technology Act, 2000 and authorise a sub-inspector (SI)-level officer to investigate such cases.
- At present, only an inspector-level officer can investigate IT-related offences

Expert Committee Suggestions:

- Committee was headed by Ajay Kumar, then additional secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
- It suggested that the government must ensure that Search Engines other than those already implementing URL blocks for identified child porn/rape and gang rape content initiate similar processes
- Internet companies should consider providing support to Indian NGOs to help bring awareness
- WhatsApp should make further improvement in their reporting process
- This would enable easier reporting of contents in the app while maintaining the integrity of the contents and metadata available on phone at the time of reporting
- Content hosting platforms, social media platforms, and search engines should provide links for reporting child porn and rape imagery as a specific category, which must be more prominently displayed on their pages

Solution:

- The solution lay in proactively identifying rogue sites by an independent agency which can identify sites that contains child porn and rape and gang rape content and blocking these sites
- To prevent the circulation of subject imagery, the government can block any additional sites/applications if they do not remove such contents of their own

12. Rape of minors to attract death in M.P.

- The Madhya Pradesh Assembly unanimously passed a Bill awarding death to those found guilty of raping girls aged 12 and below.
- Key Fact: Madhya Pradesh becomes the first State where those convicted of such rapes will face the gallows.
- Capital punishment would be awarded to convicts under Section 376 (A), which is related to rape, and Section 376 (D, A), pertaining to gang-rape.

Martial arts to be part of govt. school curriculum

- The State and the Central governments have decided to impart self-defence courses for girls in all government-run schools in the State.
- Martial arts will be a subject in the curriculum which helps to improve their self-defence mechanism.
- The theme of introducing self-defence skills and martial arts is to enlighten the girls on self-protection techniques and also to attain physical fitness among adolescent girls.
- Self-defence training would be imparted to the girl students of eighth and ninth classes.
- About 3.88 lakh students would be provided training during 2017-18, in 5,605 schools in the State.
- The pilot project would be implemented in all Mandal Praja Parishad Upper Primary, Zilla Parishad High Schools, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, municipal, social and tribal welfare and model schools in all the districts.
- The District Educational Officers (DEOs) have been asked to take measures for successful implementation of the project and the headmasters should allocate two hours per week for the trainers in each school.

13. Rajasthan HC lays down guidelines to check 'forcible conversion'

- The Rajasthan High Court issued guidelines to check alleged "forcible conversion" in the state.
- Violation of any of the guidelines will mean an inter-faith marriage would be void if a complaint is submitted against it.

Key guiding principle:

- Anyone who wishes to convert in Rajasthan shall give information "to the District Collector/SDM/SDO of the city and Sub-Divisional Area" before conversion, and the authority will put it up on the notice board the same day.
- The marriage is to be solemnised a week after the conversion.
- If the District Collector comes to know of any forcible conversion, they/he/she "shall take appropriate action in accordance with law, so as to check the forcible conversion".

14. A woman does not mortgage herself to a man with marriage: CJI**Context:**

- The Supreme Court to decide: whether a Parsi woman can keep her religious identity intact after choosing to marry someone from another faith under the 1954 Act.

In news:

- Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra's observation: A woman does not mortgage herself to a man by marrying him and she retains her identity, including her religious identity, even after she exercises her right to marry outside her community under the Special Marriage Act.
- The Special Marriage Act of 1954 is seen as a statutory alternative for couples who choose to retain their identity in an inter-religious marriage.
- Nobody could presume that a woman has changed her faith or religion just because she chose to change her name after marrying outside her community
- Case: A petition was filed by a Parsi, who was barred by her community from offering prayers to her dead in the Tower of Silence for the sole reason that she married a Hindu under the Special Marriage Act.

Key Point:

- A decision in favour of the woman would uphold the fundamental right to religion, dignity and life and create a paradigm shift for women within the minority community.

Disagrees with widespread notion

- The Bench, prima facie, disagreed with the widespread notion in common law that a woman's religious identity merges with that of her husband after marriage.

Defence lawyer argument:

- Arguing for the petitioner, senior advocate Indira Jaising submitted that every custom, usage, customary and statutory laws had to stand the test of the Fundamental Rights principle.
- Article 372 (continuance of existing laws) of the Constitution was subject to Article 13, which mandated that laws should not violate the fundamental rights of an individual.
- Jaising argued that the fundamental right enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution guaranteed equality before the law and the equal protection of the laws. It prohibited discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. "Anything arbitrary violates the rule of law,"
- Denying a woman respect and the right to observe her religion merely because she married outside her faith was violative of her fundamental right to religion enshrined under Article 25 of the Constitution.
- Jaising argued that the 'doctrine of coverture', which held that a woman lost her identity and legal right with marriage, was violative of her fundamental rights. "The doctrine is not recognised by the Constitution."

15. Adultery law in India

Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code deals with Adultery. As per the Indian law, a woman cannot be punished for the offence of adultery. Only a man who has consensual sexual intercourse with the wife of another man without his consent can be punished under this offense in India. If someone "lives in adultery", the partner can file for divorce

Text of Section 497 of IPC

"Adultery.—Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offense of rape, is guilty of the offense of adultery, and shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years, or with fine, or with both. In such case the wife shall not be punishable as an abettor.

There are two things that this section lays down:

- Only men, and not women, are punished for committing adultery.
- The maximum punishment for adultery is five years with fine.

Judgment:

- The apex court had earlier on three separate occasions, in 1954, 1985 and 1988, upheld the constitutionality of Section 497.
- Yusuf Abdul Aziz case: wife could always initiate civil action against her unfaithful husband. The court agreed that "a man seducing the wife of another" was the most seen and felt evil in society.
 - * The protection from prosecution given to women under Section 497 is in tune with Article 15 (3) of the Constitution. Article 15 (3) allows the legislature to make "special provisions" which are "beneficial" for women and children.
- 1985: Section 497 (adultery) of the Indian Penal Code is a "flagrant instance of gender discrimination, legislative despotism and male chauvinism."
- In 1988, V. Revathi versus Union of India, the Supreme Court had denied gender discrimination in the fact that only the adulterer-man is punished and not the wife who consensually entered into the adulterous relationship.

Wife has no right to prosecute her husband:

- The law also does not take into account cases where the husband has sexual relations with an unmarried woman. Thus, the provision deems that "husbands have a free licence under the law to have extra-marital relationships with unmarried women."

Previous Instances

- In 1971, the Fifth Law Commission made some suggestions about changes in the provision, including making the law gender-neutral and reducing the prison term from five to two years. Those recommendations were also not considered.

- In 2006, the National Commission for Women rightly recommended that adultery be decriminalized.

Criminality of Adultery

- The real problem is the very fact that adultery remains a crime in the form of an archaic colonial era provision.
- Many countries across the world do not treat it as an offence any longer. In 2012, a United Nations Working Group on laws that discriminate against women wanted countries that treat adultery as a crime, to repeal such laws.
- It is one thing for adultery to be a ground for divorce, a civil proceeding, and quite another for it to be a basis for incarceration.
- It will be a travesty if in the name of empowering women the ambit of the criminal law is extended to cover both genders. The correct course will be to dispense with this archaic provision altogether; it serves no real purpose in the criminal statute.

16. Concerns of Trans-genders in India

- The community has laid stress on the point that for them, dignity, respect, and access to health care are non-negotiable basic rights.
- Self-identification should be the sole criterion for gender recognition legally without the need of any other psychological, medical, or "expert" intervention.
- Self-declared identity should also form the basis for access to social security benefits and entitlements.
- The community maintains that the basic principle of "nothing about us, without us" must be applied for all trans and hijra rights, health and welfare activities.
- The community has rejected the setting up of district screening committees to recognize transgender persons as they say they are not objects or people with a contagious disease who need to be medically screened.
- Their argument, and rightly so, is that a medical assessment violates their right to self-identification and gender autonomy which are protected under the right to life and personal liberty guaranteed by the Constitution.
- Many do not want to be labeled as transgender or third gender but instead recognized legally by their self-identified gender of "male" or "female".

The Kochi Metro example

- Will the Bill have provisions to protect them from discrimination? The experience so far has been that many who struggle to access jobs are discriminated against, forcing them to drop out.
- For example, in May, when the Kochi Metro Rail Limited formally employed 23 transgender persons, eight of them dropped out after being unable to find suitable accommodation based on the monthly wages they drew (between Rs. 9,000 and Rs. 15,000). Many households were unwilling to let out their houses to them. They faced other forms of discrimination too.

- Therefore, an effective enforcement mechanism is vital for the adjudication of anti-discrimination claims brought forward by transgender persons.
- While in 2014, based on the Census, five million acknowledged their transgender status, activists say their number could be much higher.
- Over 66% of them live in the rural areas. The Census data also highlighted the low literacy level in the community, just 46% in comparison to the general population's 74%.
- In fact there should be reservation to facilitate their admission to schools and appointment in public offices. In 2014, the Supreme Court in *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* pointed out that reservation is one of the time-tested ways of enabling historically disadvantaged populations to join the mainstream.

Stigma and discrimination

- But accessing even the rights they already have is not easy. For example, even in an enlightened city such as Mumbai, young transgender persons seeking admission to college approach the transgender group leader, normally a person with clout, who then meets the college principal and, in most cases, secures their admission. Thereafter, the transgender person has to be on "best behaviour" and not stand out as that could compromise the admission.
- Hopefully the Bill will provide protection to transgender persons from violence and stigma which is a major factor. Often they are denied passage in public spaces and harmed or injured.
- The hijra community, especially those who are a part of the 'guru-chela' structure in Hijra gharanas and practise the traditions of "mangti" and "badhai", are often harassed, detained under begging prohibition laws, and forced into begging homes.
- In the case of transgender children, their families, unable to accept their status, subject them to domestic violence, which often compels these children to leave home.
- Though several transgender persons have made a mark in the beauty and fashion industry, joined the police force, the academic world and even the Indian Navy, there is need for a comprehensive survey on the socio-economic status of the community.
- Transgender welfare boards are needed in different States. Transgender persons should take part in the national Census to generate accurate data.

Recognizing their Identity

- Transgender identity is not yet recognised in criminal law, whether as the third gender or as a self-identified male or female.
- There is also no clarity on the application of gender-specific laws to transgender persons. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is applicable to transgender persons (i.e., those who were male at birth). This amounts to double persecution.

- Finally, the community wants mental health counselling support and free gender transition surgery facilities in government hospitals.
- There are other issues that worry transgender persons such as their right to property, adoption, marriage, pension, and care for the old and the disabled.
- Some of these issues may be resolved when the Bill, taking note of their concerns, is passed. The Bill could be the first big step towards equality and their recognition in the mainstream.

17. Procedure for inclusion into ST list

The criteria presently followed for specification of a community as a Scheduled Tribe are :

- indications of primitive traits,
- distinctive culture,
- geographical isolation,
- shyness of contact with the community at large,
- backwardness

However, these criteria are not spelt out in the Constitution.

Procedure

- Only those proposals which have been recommended and justified by concerned State Government / UT Administration can be processed further.
- Thereafter, it has to be concurred with by Registrar General of India (RGI) and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) for consideration for amendment of legislation.

18. India's digital gender gap could further marginalise women: Unicef

UNICEF's "State of the World's Children Report-2017"

- With less than one-third of India's internet users being females, the country's girls and women risk becoming further marginalised in society and at home if they remain digitally illiterate
- This is in the backdrop of the country making a public push towards a more digital economy
- There is a digital gender gap as well. Globally, 12% more men than women used the internet in 2017

Report:

- Themed "Children in a digital world", the latest report provides country-level examples to give a sense of the kinds of barriers girls and women confront
- Pointing out that digital connection and literacy offer advantages in a knowledge-based society, improving children's lives and their future earning potential, the report says: "At the same time, connectivity doesn't always equalise opportunity."
- Digital divides can mirror broader societal divides — between rich and poor, cities and rural areas, between those with or without an education — and between women and men

Factors behind digital gender divide in India

- Social norms
- Education levels
- Lack of technical literacy and lack of confidence among them
- It is more often rooted in parents' concern for the safety of their daughters
- There is also a fear that allowing girls to use the internet will lead to liaisons with men, bringing shame on the family
- For most girls, if they are allowed to use the internet, their every move is monitored by their parents or brothers
- For girls, traits like deference and obedience are often valued over intelligence and curiosity
- In some households, technology is not seen as necessary or beneficial for girls and women

19. 'Schemes for women to do BPO work from home in the offing'**BPO Promotion Scheme:**

- The government is planning to expand the scope of its rural BPO (business process outsourcing) scheme.
- The main aim is to encourage greater participation of women, particularly housewives.
- Till now, of the 48,300 seats under the BPO Promotion Scheme, as many as 35,160 seats have been allocated.

Viability gap funding: The scheme provides special incentives up to Rs 1 lakh per seat in the form of viability gap funding.

Via About BPO Scheme: The India BPO Promotion Scheme (IBPS) has been approved under Digital India Programme, to incentivize BPO/ITES Operations across the country [excluding certain Cities and the States in North East Region (NER)], for creation of employment opportunities for the youths and growth of IT-ITES Industry. IBPS aims to incentivize establishment of 48,300 seats distributed among each State in proportion of State's population, with financial support up to Rs. 1lakh/seat in the form of Viability Gap Funding (VGF), with an outlay of Rs. 493 crore up to 31.03.2019.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Dark Matter Particle Explorer (DAMPE)

- A Chinese satellite which was sent to the skies to look for evidence of the annihilation or decay of dark matter particles in space has detected unexpected and mysterious signals in its measurement of high-energy cosmic rays, bringing scientists closer to proving the existence of the invisible matter.
- The satellite, Dark Matter Particle Explorer (DAMPE), also called Wukong or “Monkey King”, has measured more than 3.5 billion cosmic ray particles with the highest energy up to 100 tera-electron-volts (TeV), including 20 million electrons and positrons, with unprecedented high energy resolution
- Precise measurement of cosmic rays, especially at the very high energy range, are important for scientists to look for traces of dark matter annihilation or decay, as well as to understand the universe’s most energetic astrophysical phenomena, such as pulsars, active galaxy nuclei and supernova explosions.
- “DAMPE has opened a new window for observing the high-energy universe, unveiling new physical phenomena beyond our current understanding
- The initial detection results on the precise measurement of the electron and positron spectrum in an energy range between 25 giga-electron-volts (GeV) and 4.6 TeV were published in the latest issue of the journal Nature.

2. Deep Learning Neural Network

- An artificial intelligence tool that mimics the workings of a human brain.
- Deep learning is a machine learning technique that teaches computers to do what comes naturally to humans: learn by example. Deep learning is a key technology behind driverless cars, enabling them to recognize a stop sign, or to distinguish a pedestrian from a lamppost.
- It is the key to voice control in consumer devices like phones, tablets, TVs, and hands-free speakers.
- In deep learning, a computer model learns to perform classification tasks directly from images, text, or sound. Deep learning models can achieve state-of-the-art accuracy, sometimes exceeding human-level performance.
- Models are trained by using a large set of labeled data and neural network architectures that contain many layers.

Difference between Machine Learning and Deep Learning

- Deep learning is a specialized form of machine learning.
- A machine learning workflow starts with relevant features being manually extracted from images. The features are then used to create a model that categorizes the objects in the image.

- With a deep learning workflow, relevant features are automatically extracted from images. In addition, deep learning performs “end-to-end learning” – where a network is given raw data and a task to perform, such as classification, and it learns how to do this automatically.
- Another key difference is deep learning algorithms scale with data, whereas shallow learning converges.
- Shallow learning refers to machine learning methods that plateau at a certain level of performance when you add more examples and training data to the network. A key advantage of deep learning networks is that they often continue to improve as the size of your data increases.

Scientists have announced the discovery of two new exoplanets, Kepler-90i and Kepler-80g.

- First, with the discovery of the planet Kepler 90i, orbiting the star Kepler 90, we now know of another star besides the Sun that has eight planets orbiting it.
- Second they have discovered it using a deep learning neural network — an artificial intelligence tool that mimics the workings of a human brain.
- They “trained” their computer to analyse light readings made by NASA’s Kepler Space Telescope, which are archived and made available for anyone to use.
- Deep learning and neural networks have been used in other applications successfully, as in the AlphaGo AI player of the Go game.

3. ‘Excitonium’ Discovered

- Scientists have proven the existence of new form of matter called excitonium - which was first theorised almost 50 years ago.
- Researchers from University of California and University of Illinois studied non-doped crystals of a transition metal— dichalcogenide titanium diselenide (1T-TiSe2).

Details

- Excitonium exhibits macroscopic quantum phenomena, like a superconductor and is made up of excitations, particles that are formed in a very strange quantum mechanical pairing.
- When an electron, seated at the edge of the crowded-with-electrons valence band in a semiconductor, gets excited and jumps over the energy gap to the otherwise empty conduction band, it leaves behind a “hole” in the valence band. That hole behaves as though it were a particle with positive charge, and it attracts the escaped electron. When the escaped electron with its negative charge, pairs up with the hole, the two remarkably form a composite particle, a boson - an exciting.

- "Ever since the term 'excitonium' was coined in the 1960s by Harvard theoretical physicist Bert Halpern, physicists have sought to demonstrate its existence

4. Sentinel-5P sends images of global air pollution

What is it?

- Sentinel-5P is the latest spacecraft in a fleet of Earth observers being commissioned by the European Union and the European Space Agency.
- It was launched into an 824 kilometre high orbit by a Russian rocket on October 13 this year.
- It carries an instrument called Tropomi – a spectrometer that observes the reflected sunlight coming up off the Earth, analysing its many different colours.
- This helps detect the presence of trace gases such as nitrogen dioxide, ozone, sulphur dioxide, methane, and carbon monoxide in the atmosphere.

What has it done?

- A European satellite tracking the levels air pollutants around the world has beamed back new views of the Earth's atmosphere, including images of pollution drifting away from power plants in India.
- The worst of this pollution runs from north of Patna in Bihar to south of Raipur in Chhattisgarh, scientists said. The Sentinel-5P satellite is designed to make daily global maps of the gases and particles that pollute the air.

Details

- The first sample images released by mission scientists show plumes of nitrogen dioxide flowing away from power plants and traffic-choked cities.
- S5P has even captured the ash and sulphur emissions from Agung volcano on the Indonesian island of Bali, which is in the midst of a big eruption.
- Researchers from the Netherlands Met Office (KNMI) still need to complete five months of calibration work to get the satellite's data ready for public use.

5. IIT researchers create a bioartificial liver model using silk

- The silk scaffold is capable of supporting growth, distribution as well as sustaining the functionality of liver cells.

Enhanced functions

- In studies carried out in petri dishes in a laboratory, the researchers found that the scaffold made from mixing mulberry and non-mulberry silk fibroins showed enhanced liver-specific functions. A fibroin is a protein which is the chief constituent of silk.
- The blended scaffold showed enhanced liver-specific functions such as increased albumin production and urea synthesis, and enhanced detoxification

Details

- The researchers tested scaffolds made of mulberry and non-mulberry silk fibroins and a blend of the two silk varieties in petri dishes in the lab and in animal models. The silk-blend mixed in equal proportions was found to be superior on several counts to the other two varieties used individually.
- It also showed a better ability to retain stable primary liver clusters that exhibited optimal size, showed higher proliferation leading to high cell density, and prolonged cell survival and better functionality. This paves the way for its use in liver tissue engineering at a later stage.
- Unlike mulberry silk, non-mulberry silk has cell binding sites (RGD) that help in better cell attachment and proliferation. Also, the water-loving (hydrophilic) nature of non-mulberry silk allows for better cell attachment. The two silk varieties performed equally well in most other parameters.

6. National EMF Portal

Background

- Keen to address the concerns arising out of fears over electromagnetic frequency (EMF) exposure due to installation of base stations receivers (mobile phone towers), the government has decided to launch a National EMF portal, which will provide all the relevant data in this regard along with the location of BTS within a certain locality.

What is it?

- An EMF portal aims at providing the reader with information about EMF and its effects on humans, backed by scientific studies.
- The EMF portal provides a public interface where an easy map-based search feature has been provided for viewing the mobile towers in vicinity of any locality.
- The portal also has 'EMF Overview' and 'Learn' Sections, which provide numerous articles, booklets and videos, to further educate the citizens about EMF and coverage of telecom services.

Issue Area

- The Indian telecom sector has made rapid strides over the last 20 years, and majority of the country's phone connections are now based on mobile telephony.
- However, this form of connectivity has led to proliferation of cell phone towers across the country and its effect on human beings due to radiation has raised much apprehension. It is now being feared that shortage of towers may hinder India's overall progress.
- Mobile phone service providers have been facing problems regarding locating their towers, atop of which the receivers are perched.

- Although the government has issued guidelines in this regard to state governments on safety norms and procedures to be followed for setting up towers, people are still hesitant about hiring out their roof tops for locating the BTS.

7. Pollen Count Station

- Coming as a big relief for patients with asthma and other respiratory disorders, the Vallabhbhai Patel Chest Institute (VPCI) has opened a pollen count station in Delhi, which will be Delhi-NCR's first ever such station to monitor levels of airborne grass pollen.
- Having a pollen count station will help people with asthma and those with other respiratory ailments to check the forecast and take preventive measures, like taking antihistamines or staying indoors and minimize health risk.
- Many studies found that apart from vehicular and industrial emissions, pollen grains, fungal spores, dust mites, insect debris and animal epithelial are also major contributors towards allergies, breathing problems and respiratory disorders

Details

- A recent study found that 30% of the population is reportedly suffering from one or the other allergic ailment and most of them are not even aware what exactly is causing their condition to flare up and how to avoid it.

Background

- Pollen is a fine yellowish powder that is transported from plant to plant by the wind, by birds, by insects or by other animals. The spread of pollen helps to fertilize plants — and can mean misery for seasonal allergy sufferers.

If you have a pollen allergy and breathe in pollen-heavy air, you may experience symptoms such as:

- Sneezing, Nasal congestion, Runny nose, Watery eyes, Itchy throat and eyes Wheezing Pollen can also aggravate asthma symptoms, including increased coughing and wheezing.

8. A new LIGO gravitational wave detector to be built in India by 2025

- A new gravitational wave detector to measure ripples in the fabric of space and time is set to be built in India by 2025
- World's third LIGO detector.
- It will be built in collaboration with universities from across the globe

Project: IndIGO

- The new Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) detector will add to the two already operational in the US
- The location for the new detector in India has been selected, and the acquisition has started. However, the site has not been revealed yet

- IndIGO, the Indian Initiative in Gravitational-wave Observations, is an initiative to set up advanced experimental facilities, for a multi-institutional Indian national project in gravitational-wave astronomy
- The IndIGO Consortium includes
 - * Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT),
 - * Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISER) and
 - * Delhi University, among others

Importance:

- A third LIGO detector will help pinpoint the origin of the gravitational waves that are detected in future
- The LIGO detectors discovered the first gravitational waves produced by two giant merging black holes last year

9. Reservoir Computing System

- Scientists have developed a new type of neural network chip that can dramatically improve the efficiency of teaching machines to think like humans
- The network, called a reservoir computing system, could predict words before they are said during conversation, and help predict future outcomes based on the present.
- Reservoir computing systems, which improve on a typical neural network's capacity and reduce the required training time, have been created in the past with larger optical components.
- Researchers from University of Michigan in the U.S. created their system using memristors, which require less space and can be integrated more easily into existing silicon-based electronics.
- Memristors are a special type of resistive device that can both perform logic and store data.
- This contrasts with typical computer systems, where processors perform logic separate from memory modules.

10. Smart Robo Cop

- A life-sized robot, claimed to be the world's first smart policing robot, was launched in Hyderabad
- The five-foot-seven-inch, suave looking bot called the Smart Robo Cop is equipped with cameras, and an array of sensors connected to GPS in its beta version and has been developed by H-Bots Robotics, a Hyderabad-based robotics technology company
- All the components have been sourced from within the country. It has been created to support security systems in the city

Functions

- The robot can move, recognise people, take complaints, detect bombs, identify suspects, interact with people and answer to queries

How does it work?

- Placed in any locality, the robot has been equipped with a system where people can lodge a complaint with the police from where it is stationed. The complaints can be lodged through video, audio and photos.
- People can also make use of emergency services. For example, an accident can be reported from the spot or even if one wants to complain to the SHE Teams with the help of capture option that is available. A complaint number is provided which can help track the status. There are plans to also integrate the E-challan system. It can also do a 360-degree surveillance, face and gesture recognition and is also said to control theft.

11. Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA)

- NASA's Flying Observatory SOFIA to Explore Magnetic Universe and Beyond
- It is preparing for its 2018 observing campaign, which will include observations of celestial magnetic fields, star-forming regions, comets, Saturn's giant moon Titan and more.
- SOFIA is a Boeing 747SP jetliner modified to carry a 100-inch diameter telescope. It is a joint project of NASA and the German Aerospace Center, DLR.

Instruments

- The observatory's newest instrument, the High-resolution Airborne Wideband Camera-Plus, called HAWC+, will continue research with its polarimeter, a device that measures the alignment of incoming light waves. These investigations will help researchers understand how magnetic fields affect the rate at which interstellar clouds condense to form new stars.

Significance

- These observations could help them learn whether the luminosity of these active black holes is driven by star formation or accretion of material onto the central black hole.
- Sofia will also conduct observations to better understand how methane levels change with seasons on Mars.
- Another team of researchers is planning to study comet 46P/Wirtanen as it passes close to the Earth, to search for clues in the comet's dust that may help better understand the evolution of the early solar system, the US space agency said.
- Researchers also plan to utilise Sofia's mobility to study the atmosphere of Saturn's moon Titan by studying its shadow as it passes in front of a star during an eclipse-like event called an occultation.

12. Now, a big bubble theory

- Despite the many impressive discoveries humans have made about the universe, scientists are yet to come to a consensus about the birth story of the solar system.

- The prevailing theory is that the solar system formed billions of years ago near a supernova.

Details

- Scientists have said that the solar system could have formed in the bubbles produced by a giant, long-dead star, which was 40 to 50 times the size of the sun.
- The new scenario, explained in a paper in the Astrophysical Journal, begins with a giant type of star called a Wolf-Rayet star.
 - They burn the hottest of all stars, producing tonnes of elements which are flung off the surface in an intense stellar wind.
 - As the Wolf-Rayet star sheds its mass, the stellar wind ploughs through the material around it, forming a bubble structure with a dense shell.
 - The shell of such a bubble is a good place to produce stars, because dust and gas become trapped inside where they can condense into stars.
 - The researchers estimate that 1% to 16% of all sun-like stars could be formed in such stellar nurseries.
 - Meteorites left over from the early solar system suggests there was a lot of aluminium-26. In addition, studies increasingly suggest the solar system had less of the isotope iron-60.
 - Supernovae produce both isotopes.
 - Wolf-Rayet stars release lots of aluminium-26, but no iron-60.
 - As for the fate of the giant Wolf-Rayet star, the researchers believe that its life ended long ago, likely in a supernova explosion or a direct collapse to a black hole.

13. Tarang Sanchar

- Tarang Sanchar is a web portal for information sharing on Mobile Towers and Electromagnetic frequency (EMF) Emission Compliance.
- It has been developed in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode by Department of Telecommunications with Industry.
- It allows people to track radiation emitted from mobile towers within a locality and check their compliance with the stipulated norms.
- It is aimed at clearing "myths and misconceptions" about mobile towers and emissions from them.

Additional features

- In addition to Government to Citizen services, the portal facilitates Government to Business service delivery in a transparent and eco-friendly manner.
- The portal enables a method of maintenance and retention of end-to-end records, including submission of compliance by Telecom Service Providers and paperless processing by TERM cells.

- The Tarang Sanchar portal is a unique initiative and is one of the largest and most complex inter-operator databases of its kind in the world.
- It has the complete collated technical details of over 14.5 lakh base stations spread across the country.

14. Yaogan-30

- Yaogan refers to a series of Chinese reconnaissance satellites launched in the early 21st century.
- China has successfully launched a remote sensing satellite to carry out land surveys and disaster relief.
- The satellite named Yaogan-30 was launched from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwestern China's Gobi Desert.
- The satellite will be used for experiments, land surveys, crop yield estimates and disaster relief.
- Yaogan-30 was carried by a Long March-2D rocket, the 227th mission for the Long March rocket family. China launched the first "Yaogan" series satellite, Yaogan-1, in 2006.

15. MIT scientists create plants that can glow

- MIT scientists have found a way to induce plants to give off dim light by embedding specialised nanoparticles into their leaves, a major step towards using plants to illuminate the workspace.
- This technology could also be used to provide low-intensity indoor lighting, or to transform trees into self-powered streetlights

Vision

- The vision is to make a plant that will function as a desk lamp - a lamp that you don't have to plug in. The light is ultimately powered by the energy metabolism of the plant itself

How was it done?

- To create the glowing plants, the team turned to luciferase, the enzyme that gives fireflies their glow.
- Luciferase acts on a molecule called luciferin, causing it to emit light.
- Another molecule called co-enzyme A helps the process along by removing a reaction byproduct that can inhibit luciferase activity.
- The team packaged each of these three components into a different type of nanoparticle carrier.
- The nanoparticles, which are all made of materials that the US Food and Drug Administration classifies as "generally regarded as safe," help each component get to the right part of the plant.
- They also prevent the components from reaching concentrations that could be toxic to the plants.

What was done for the glow?

- The researchers used silica nanoparticles about 10 nanometres in diameter to carry luciferase, and they used slightly larger particles of the polymers PLGA and chitosan to carry luciferin and coenzyme A, respectively.

- To get the particles into plant leaves, the researchers first suspended the particles in a solution.
- Plants were immersed in the solution and then exposed to high pressure, allowing the particles to enter the leaves through tiny pores called stomata.
- Particles releasing luciferin and coenzyme A were designed to accumulate in the extracellular space of the mesophyll, an inner layer of the leaf, while the smaller particles carrying luciferase enter the cells that make up the mesophyll.
- The PLGA particles gradually release luciferin, which then enters the plant cells, where luciferase performs the chemical reaction that makes luciferin glow.

Significance

- The researchers' early efforts at the start of the project yielded plants that could glow for about 45 minutes, which they have since improved to 3.5 hours.
- The light generated by one 10-centimetre watercress seedling is currently about one-thousandth of the amount needed to read by.
- However, the researchers believe they can boost the light emitted, as well as the duration of light, by further optimising the concentration and release rates of the components.

16. IISc: Etched aluminium keeps surfaces bacteria-free

Background

- Bacteria such as E. coli are responsible for up to 70% of infections in ICU alone

Details

- Now, hospital-acquired infections can be reduced by using etched aluminium surfaces in ICUs, operation theatres and other places as well as by using them on regularly used objects such as taps, bedside tables, hand rails to name a few where transmission of bacterial infections is high.
- A team from IISc etched aluminium to kill both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant bacteria and also prevent bacteria from attaching and growing on the surfaces.
- The aluminium surfaces have very minute textures produced through chemical etching which kills the bacteria and is responsible for antifouling.
- In the case of drug-resistant bacteria isolated from a hospital, the etched surface that had both nano and microscale features killed 82% of E. coli (control 10%), 25% of K. pneumoniae (control was just 1%) and 86% of P. aeruginosa (control 10%). The etched surface also showed effective antifouling property against all the three drug-resistant strains.
- While surfaces with both nano and microscale features killed 94% of E. coli and resisted bacterial adhesion and growth, surfaces those that had only microfeatures killed only 18% of E. coli and prevented the bacteria from adhering to it.

Chemical Composition

- Using sodium hydroxide and potassium hydroxide of different concentrations to etch the aluminium alloy for different time periods (10 to 60 minutes), the researchers were able to keep the surfaces nearly free of Gram-negative bacteria.

17. New island offers clues in search for life on Mars: NASA

- According to NASA, the world's newest island — formed during a volcanic eruption in the remote Pacific three years ago — may offer clues to how life potentially developed on Mars.
- The island of Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai rose from the seabed about 65 km northwest of the Tongan capital Nuku'alofa in late 2014 or early 2015.
- Scientists initially expected the island — created when vast quantities of rock and dense ash spewed from the earth's crust — to wash away within a few months.
- But NASA said it had proved more resilient than expected, possibly because warm sea water combined with ash during the volcanic explosion to create a concrete-like substance known as "tuff".
- Mars had many similar volcanic islands that appeared to have been surrounded by water when they were created. Such spots may be prime locations to look for evidence of past life because they combined a wet environment with heat from volcanic processes.
- Examining how life gained a foothold on the Tongan island could help scientists pinpoint where to look for evidence of life on Mars.

18. Arctic sea ice melt to exacerbate California droughts: study

Highlights of a new study:

- Melting Arctic sea ice could render sun-soaked California vulnerable to a recurrence of the severe drought suffered in recent years as it is likely to cause high pressure systems that push away rain-bearing storms.
- As temperatures rise, the Arctic Ocean is expected to become ice-free within two or three decades, resulting in more of the sun's heat being stored in the Arctic Ocean, leading to atmospheric circulation changes and cloud formations in the tropical Pacific that move north.
- That will lead to the building of high pressure system known as an atmospheric ridge in the northern Pacific off California's coast, steering storms north into Alaska and Canada.
- Modeling by the scientists showed that the loss of sea ice could cause a 10 to 15 percent decrease in California's rainfall when considering a 20-year mean, with some years becoming much drier and others becoming wetter

Socio-Economic impact:

- The recent five-year drought cost California's farmers billions of dollars in lost production, slashed seasonal agriculture jobs by the thousands, and spiked electricity bills for residents as hydroelectric systems failed.
- Key Point: California's temperatures have risen about 2 degrees Fahrenheit over the last century and the warmer air holds more water, sucking moisture out of soil, rivers and streams.

19. Biodiversity under alien attack

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has for the first time compiled a list of alien invasive animal species.

- *Paracoccus marginatus* (Papaya Mealy Bug), which belongs to Mexico and Central America but is believed to have destroyed huge crops of papaya in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.
- *Phenacoccus solenopsis* (Cotton Mealybug) is a native of North America but has severely affected cotton crops in the Deccan.
- Among the invasive fish species, *Pterygoplichthys pardalis* (Amazon sailfin catfish) has been destroying fish populations in the wetlands of Kolkata.
- *Achatina fulica* (African apple snail) is said to be most invasive among all alien fauna. It is a mollusc and was first reported in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. But today it is found all across the country and is threatening the habitats of several native species.
- *Tubastrea coccinea* (Orange Cup-Coral), which originated in Indo-East Pacific but has now been reported in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Gulf of Kutch, Kerala and Lakshadweep.

20. Blue Flag Beach Certificate

- With prime objective of enhancing standards of cleanliness, upkeep and basic amenities at beaches, this Ministry has launched a pilot project for beach cleanup and development, also striving for the "Blue Flag" Certification for such identified beaches.
- Under the pilot programme, each of the coastal State/ UT was requested to identify/nominate a beach, to be funded through the ongoing Integrated Coastal Management Programme.
- All the coastal States have nominated the pilot beaches in their receptive territories including Goa.
- Formal nominations are, however, awaited from the coastal UTs viz., Daman & Diu, Puducherry, Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar"

21. Clean Sea-2017

- The Regional Level Marine Oil Pollution Response Exercise titled 'Clean Sea – 2017', was conducted at sea off Port Blair
- The objective of the exercise was to ascertain preparedness of the Indian Coast Guard, resource agencies and other stakeholders in responding to a major oil spill in line with the provisions of NOS-DCP (National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan).

- The highlight of the exercise was participation of one ICG Pollution Control Vessel (PCV) and integration of Indian Coast Guard Dornier/Chetak aircraft into the Oil Spill Disaster Management System for aerial assessment/ delivery of Oil Spill Dispersant (OSD) for mitigation of the spilled oil.

Details

- Indian Coast Guard is responsible for marine environment protection in the maritime zones of India and is the coordinating authority for response to oil spills in Indian waters.
- The Force has drawn up a National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP) and has established three pollution response centres at Mumbai, Chennai and Port Blair.
- The exercise was therefore planned to evaluate the preparedness for Response Operations for any such oil pollution incident in this highly sensitive area. The support and cooperation provided by all stakeholders, is indicative of the resolve and firmness in combating oil spills in such sensitive areas. The exercise was conducted in two phases.

22. India Awarded Certificate of Commendation for Its Effort to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade

- India has been awarded with the Certificate of Commendation for its exemplary enforcement action in its regional and global effort to combat illegal wildlife trade.
- The award was given to Wildlife Crime Control Bureau
- The award has been presented to WCCB under the Ministry for its efforts in conducting and coordinating a species specific wildlife enforcement Operation, codenamed "Operation Save Kurma".

"Operation Save Kurma"

- It was conducted in the country by the WCCB to combat the proliferating illegal trade in live turtles and its parts from the country to destinations abroad.
- The operation was also aimed to invite attention of the enforcement agencies towards such illegal trade.
- During the 'Operation Save Kurma' conducted from December 15, 2016 to January 30, 2017, approximately 16, 000 live turtles/tortoises were seized and released back into the wild.
- WCCB worked in close collaboration with regional law enforcement agencies, including West Bengal Criminal Investigation Department, State Police and Forest Department, the Special Task Force of Uttar Pradesh Police, Karnataka Forest and Police departments and Maharashtra and Rajasthan Forest Departments.

23. International conference on Ground water

- An International conference is being organized on the Ground water issues in the country with a theme of "Ground water Vision 2030- Water Security, Challenges and Climate Change Adaptation"

- The conference has been organized by the National Institute of Hydrology (NIH), Roorkee and Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) under the aegis of Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation

Details

- During the past decades, groundwater usage in the country has grown many folds and today 80% of the rural domestic needs and 65% of the irrigation water requirement and 50% of industrial and urban water needs are sourced from our ground water resources.
- Over exploitation of ground water has started threatening the sustenance of agricultural activities in many key regions in the country including Punjab, Bundelkhand and Rajasthan posing a grave threat to the food security in future.
- Moreover, climate change is expected to alter the ground water recharge regimes across the country due to increase in extreme rainfall events. Over exploitation of ground water has also started affecting the ground water quality in many areas from the geogenic source of contaminants such as arsenic.
- The Conference will discuss these burning issues in 10 focal themes spread over three days.
- It is expected to look into the synergistic policy options between various sectors linked with water resources in the country and draw a roadmap to address these challenges for the development goals of 2030.

24. 2 kiwi birds are rare bright spot in grim extinction report

- The International Union for the Conservation of Nature upgraded the Okarito kiwi and the Northern Brown kiwi from endangered to vulnerable.
- Credits to New Zealand's progress in controlling predators like stoats and cats.
- Three reptile species are now considered extinct in the wild. The whiptail-skink, the blue-tailed skink and Lister's gecko from Australia's Christmas Island all have mysteriously disappeared. The group said a disease or the arrival of an invasive species, the yellow crazy ant, might be to blame.

25. Light pollution rises on a global scale

- The world is getting brighter, but scientists say that may not be a good thing
- According to Researchers, satellite data showed that Earth's artificially lit outdoor surface at night grew by about 2% annually in brightness and area from 2012 to 2016
- This underscores concerns about the ecological effects of light pollution on people and animals

Growth in nighttime light

- With few exceptions, growth in nighttime light was observed throughout South America, Africa and Asia
- Light remained stable in only a few countries

What is Light pollution?

- Light pollution, also known as photopollution, is the presence of anthropogenic light in the night environment
- It is exacerbated by excessive, misdirected or obtrusive uses of light, but even carefully used light fundamentally alters natural conditions
- As a major side-effect of urbanization, it is blamed for compromising health, disrupting ecosystems and spoiling aesthetic environments
- It has a disruptive effect on natural cycles and inhibits the observation of stars and planets
- It washes out starlight in the night sky, interferes with astronomical research, disrupts ecosystems, has adverse health effects and wastes energy

26. Monsoon Mission Program

- To build a working partnership between the academic and R&D organisations both national and international and the operational agencies to improve the operational monsoon forecast skill over the country.
- To set up a state of the art dynamic modelling framework for improving the prediction skill of:
 - * Seasonal and extended range prediction system (16 days to one season)
 - * Short to medium range prediction system (up to 15 days).

Significance

- The National Monsoon Mission after its implementation will help to implement a dynamic prediction system for the prediction of monsoon in all time scales, short range to seasonal time scale at appropriate spatial scales with improved prediction skill.
- The forecasts based on this prediction system will cater to the needs of various sectors like agriculture, water resources management, power generation, disaster management, tourism and transport.

27. Narcondam Hornbill

- The Narcondam hornbill (*Rhyticeros narcondami*) is a species of hornbill in the Bucerotidae family
- It is endemic to the Indian island of Narcondam in the Andamans. Males and females have a distinct plumage.
- The Narcondam hornbill has the smallest home range out of all the species of Asian hornbills.
- IUCN- Endangered

28. Odorrana Arunachalensis

- *Odorrana arunachalensis* is a species of frog in the Ranidae family that is found in streams of Lower Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh

- *Odorrana* (commonly known as the odorous frog) is a genus of true frogs (family Ranidae) from East Asia and surrounding regions.
- The medium-sized green frog adapted for a life in torrential waters
- The frog inhabits fern-covered rocky areas along hill streams in mixed wet tropical forests.
- There are over 50 species of frogs belonging to the genus *Odorrana* with many species exhibiting overlapping morphological characters, making their identification in the field difficult.
- But in the case of *Odorrana arunachalensis*, the presence of a black band-like mark between the eyes is a distinguishing character that separates it from all the other frog species of this genus

29. System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)

- A Research based initiative of integrating Air Quality with Health Advisories and Food Security. A dedicated Air Quality Information Service for Indian Metropolitan Cities to make India self-sufficient in providing frontier research based Scientific accredited robust Air Quality Forecasting system.
- One of the major objectives of this project is to increase the awareness among general public regarding the air quality
- The SAFAR system is developed by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, along with ESSO partner institutions namely India Meteorological Department (IMD) and National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF).

30. Tetramorium krishnani and Tetramorium jarawa

- Scientists have discovered two new ant species of the genus *Tetramorium* in the evergreen forests of the archipelago.
- The species are named in honour of late scientist K.S. Krishnan of the NCBS, and after the Jarawas, an indigenous people of the islands, who are thought to have inhabited the islands for at least several thousand years.
- The newly discovered ants dwell in leaf litter in the evergreen forests of Havelock Island and are endemic to the Andamans
- In a first for India, the team used a novel X-ray micro CT technology to build 3D models of the ant specimens to observe anatomical structures in detail for easier taxonomic identification of the species. These 3D images can be mapped with the genetic profiles of species using the new technology to study the evolution of ant morphology.

31. Environment ministry notifies new wetland rules

In a major decision, the union environment ministry notified the new Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017 which prohibit a range of activities in wetlands like setting up and expansion of industries, waste dumping and discharge of effluents.

Details

- The new rules stipulate setting up of a State Wetlands Authority in each State and union territories that will be headed by the State's environment minister and include a range of government officials. They will also include one expert each in the fields of wetland ecology, hydrology, fisheries, landscape planning and socioeconomics to be nominated by the state government.
- These authorities will need to develop a comprehensive list of activities to be regulated and permitted within the notified wetlands and their zone of influence, recommend additional prohibited activities for specific wetlands, define strategies for conservation and wise use of wetlands, and undertake measures for enhancing awareness within stakeholders and local communities on values and functions of wetlands. Wise use is defined as the principle of sustainable uses that is compatible with conservation.
- The State authorities will also need to prepare a list of all wetlands of the State or union territory within three months, a list of wetlands to be notified within six months, a comprehensive digital inventory of all wetlands within one year which will be updated every ten years.
- The rules prohibit activities like conversion of wetland for non-wetland uses including encroachment of any kind, setting up of any industry and expansion of existing industries, manufacture or handling or storage or disposal of hazardous substances and construction and demolition waste, solid waste dumping, discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from industries, cities, towns, villages and other human settlements.

Environmental experts, however, are unhappy as they felt the new wetland rules seriously weakens the existing regulations.

- The new rules will replace the 2010 version of the rules. They were severely criticized by conservationists who had alleged that the draft rules don't mention anything about a national regulator and don't list specific activities prohibited in these ecologically sensitive areas.
- They pointed out that provisions like "central government may consider proposals from the state government or union territory administration for omitting any of the (prohibited) activities on the recommendation of the authority" in the new rules can be misused.
- They also stated that as per the 2010 version of the rules, there was a Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA) which will now be replaced by a national committee.

- Another major objection is about the process of appeal against the decisions of wetland authorities. According to the 2010 rules, anyone aggrieved with the CWRA's decisions could have filed an appeal with the National Green Tribunal, but the new 2017 rules are silent on the appeal process.
- In the 2010 Rules, some related criteria were made explicit, such as natural beauty, ecological sensitivity, genetic diversity, historical value, etc. These have been omitted in the 2017 Rules.
- Salt pans as 'wetlands' have been omitted from the new Rules. They were identified as wetlands in the 2010 Rules, as they are often important sites of migratory birds and other forms of biodiversity. The omission in the 2017 Rules suggests that while saltpans do exist as wetlands, they do not require any conservation or ecological balance.
- Restriction of activities on wetlands will be done as per the principle of 'wise use', determined by the State wetland authority. Whether wise use will include maintaining ecological character remains to be seen. Under the new Rules, no authority to issue directions, which are binding in nature to desist from any activity detrimental to wetland conservation, has been prescribed to State wetland authorities.

Conclusion

- Wetlands jurisdiction is diffused and falls under various departments like agriculture, fisheries, irrigation, revenue, tourism, water resources and local bodies. For instance, all mangroves in the country fall under the direct control of forest department.
- The lack of a comprehensive wetland policy, with each department having its own developmental priorities, works against the interests of conservation of wetlands resulting in intended or unintended spill-over that further aggravates the problem.
- Wetland ecosystems are interconnected and interactive within a watershed. In India, unplanned urbanization and a growing population have taken their toll on wetlands. To counter these, management of wetlands has to be an integrated approach in terms of planning, execution and monitoring. Effective tie-ups of trained academicians and professionals, including ecologists, hydrologists, economists, watershed management specialists, planners and decision makers must be linked with local expertise for overall management of wetlands.

32. Bali declares 'garbage emergency' amid sea of waste

- World's second-biggest contributor to marine debris: A colossal 1.29 million metric tons is estimated to be produced annually by Indonesia
- The archipelago of more than 17,000 islands is the world's second-biggest contributor to marine debris after China

Plastic wastes:

- The waves of plastic flooding into rivers and oceans have been causing problems for years. It has been clogging waterways in cities, increasing the risk of floods, and injuring or killing marine animals that ingest or become trapped by plastic packaging
- Micro plastics can contaminate fish which, if eaten by humans, could cause health problems including cancer
- The problem has grown so bad that officials in Bali last month declared a “garbage emergency” across a six-kilometer stretch of coast

Clean Seas campaign

- Indonesia is one of nearly 40 countries that are part of UN Environment’s Clean Seas campaign
- As part of its commitment, the Indonesian government has pledged to reduce marine plastic waste by 70 % by 2025

33. Government gives green light for single-judge NGT Benches

- In a bid to address the festering problem of vacancies in the National Green Tribunal, the government has amended rules to allow the court to constitute single member Benches.
- Current rules require that every Bench of the NGT consist of “two or more” members and made up of at least one judicial and one expert member.
- The balance of judicial and independent experts was necessary to ensure that technical aspects of disputes were adequately addressed.
- The NGT specializes in adjudicating on matters relating to environment, forests and harm to people or property due to the neglect of environmental obligations of infrastructure projects.
- Like in 2015, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh remained the highest contributor — about 75% — to all environmental crimes reported in 2016. With 2,130 cases, Uttar Pradesh contributed to 45% of all cases, while Rajasthan recorded 1,381 cases, accounting for 29.2% of all crimes related to environment.
- Other States recorded far less crimes, with Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh accounting for 178 cases each, Maharashtra 170 cases and Assam 149 cases.
- Most of the crimes related to environment were reported under the Indian Forest Act, 1927 — 3,715 cases accounting for 78% of all environment-related crimes.
- Delhi, which is reeling under severe air pollution for the past few weeks, did not record a single case under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, in 2016. Only 11 cases were registered under Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, in the country last year, according to the NCRB data.

Technology alone isn’t the solution**Background**

- In Delhi, in recent weeks, concentrations of particulates below 2.5 thousandths of a millimetre in size, which settle deep in the lungs, were 22 times the World Health Organisation (WHO) standard.
- In November 2016, they were 16 times the standard. Other cities are slightly better, but still worse than the standard.
- Polluting gases are mostly colourless and odourless and include carbon monoxide, oxides of sulphur and nitrogen, ozone, and volatile organic compounds.
- Monitoring air pollution requires well-calibrated and spatially well-represented networks of measurement equipment, which do not exist in most parts of India.

So the trick has been to try to find ways to reduce the emissions per activity, referred to as emissions intensity. Emissions intensity can be divided into technological and non-technological elements.

Technological

- In cars, for instance, engine technology that uses less polluting fuels could improve efficiency.
 - * Cars now offer the tantalising prospect of reducing emissions intensity to zero, with battery and other energy-storage technologies.
 - * But it will take at least three decades for the current fleet to turn over sufficiently towards zero-emission vehicles, before their contribution to air pollution reduces significantly.
- Studio Roosegarde, a Dutch design company, has developed the “Smog Free Tower” – an air purifying tower which sucks in pollution and expels clean air. The extracted pollution is, somewhat bizarrely, turned into pieces of jewellery.
- Hydrogen Fuel Additives: reductions in emissions can also be achieved by improving the fuel combustion cycle in existing vehicles through the use of additives.

Non-technological

- Urban planning, to reduce driving, and to increase cycling, walking, and use of public transport.
 - * The need for travel may also have to go down by voluntary reductions in consumption, not viewed as loss of welfare but rather as opportunities to enhance leisure time, health, and recreation. This would be a reduction in activity, not just in emissions intensity.
- There are also opportunities to reduce polluting activities in other sectors such as power generation and industrial production. This would mean reducing emissions intensity, but also avoiding certain activities or substituting them with others.
- Policymakers need to overcome the corruptive and overwhelming influence of motor vehicle manufacturers, power producers, developers, and other large stakeholders on decisions taken.

- While small changes in a few cities and some protests have been seen, other transformative movements are needed by voters in partnership with social institutions to take back urban space.

They are few examples of the many technologies out there to reduce pollution. The challenge for policymakers will be how to support new technologies, to key question of research budget, to creating awareness and enforcing strict rules and enforcement. A right mix of all is the key to breathe clean air.

34. Cyclone Ockhi

- It was the most intense tropical cyclone in the Arabian Sea since Cyclone Megh in 2015. The third and the strongest storm of the 2017 North Indian Ocean cyclone season, Ockhi originated as a low pressure area in the Gulf of Thailand
- While traversing the southern part of the Bay of Bengal, favorable conditions enabled it to consolidate into a deep depression. As a deep depression, it caused damage to property and life in Sri Lanka
- While near Kanyakumari in mainland India, Cyclone Ockhi changed its path and headed towards Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea, while intensifying
- Although it headed away from the coast of mainland India, it caused severe damages to structures and property and also claiming the lives of at least 218 people in the Southern parts of Tamilnadu and Kerala in India.
- Cyclone Ockhi is noted for its very unusual course, originating in the Gulf of Thailand and ending near the coast of Gujarat in western India, traveling nearly 4000 nautical miles
- The name Ockhi was given by Bangladesh which in Bengali means 'eye'.

Administrative failures

There are three basic failings in the government's response:

- The cyclone warning was delayed;
- The warning was ineffective because it could not be conveyed to thousands of fisher folk who were already out at sea;
- Once the cyclone struck, there was no war-like mobilization and action, which are the hallmarks of good disaster management.

Role of Indian Coast Guard

- Indian Coast Guard, with its seaborne vessels and helicopters, should have launched emergency search and rescue operations.
- Coast Guard ships should have taken along a few fishermen from the villages as navigation assistants and should have intensely combed the area so that fishing boats and fishermen would have been found and rescued within the shortest possible time.

- The Coast Guard did not go beyond 60 nautical miles saying that it cannot go beyond its jurisdiction. Indian Navy with its vast array of ships, aircraft and state-of-the-art technology should have stepped in immediately.
- Later, the government announced the rescue/recovery of several hundred mechanised/motorised fishing boats and over 3,000 fishermen who had landed on the coasts of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala.
- While the Coast Guard and the Indian Navy staked claim to this "rescue" mission, the fishing community leaders say that all these boats and the fishermen drifted to the coast on their own.

Why was the warning futile?

- Cyclone Ockhi's devastation started within 12 hours of the first "rough seas" warning that was put out on November 29.
- Kanyakumari has among the highest density of fisher folk in India.
- Given the limited quantity of fish in near shore waters, many fisher folk have diversified into deep-sea and long-distance fishing.
- Fishing voyages sometimes last from ten days to more than a month, the Indian Meteorological Department's timing of the cyclone forecast was futile.
- The government's estimates suggest that 3,677 fishermen from Kanniyakumari and Kerala were lost in sea.

35. Tropical Storm Tembin

- Tembin, which is being called Vinta in the Philippines, is being blamed for the deaths of more than 200 people as it crossed Mindanao with heavy rain and strong winds late this week.
- Landslides wiped out entire villages are being blamed for a majority of the deaths.

INTERNAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE RELATED

1. Ballistic Missile Defense Systems

- They are a type of missile defense intended to shield a country against incoming missiles, such as intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBMs) or other ballistic missiles.
- India is the fifth nation in the world along with US, Russia, Israel and China.
- Introduced in light of the ballistic missile threat from Pakistan, it is a double-tiered system consisting of two interceptor missiles, namely the
 - * Phase I - Development of interceptors to destroy incoming missiles with a range of 2,000 km.
 - * Phase II - Aims to build such weapons to destroy missiles with a longer range.
- India has so far conducted 10 interceptor missile tests, eight of them successful. Most of the trials were conducted in the endo-atmosphere, and a few in the exo-atmosphere.
- The first phase of the system is expected to be deployed after some more interceptor trials in deployable configuration.

Advanced Air Defence (AAD)

- AAD/ Ashwin Ballistic Missile Interceptor for lower altitude interception. [Endo atmosphere – (less than 30 Km)]
- 7.5-metre-long, single stage solid rocket propelled, guided, supersonic missile.
- The missile comes with an inbuilt navigator, an advanced computer and an electro-mechanical activator.
- The technology in the missile is encrypted using a secure data link independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars.

Prithvi Air Defence (PAD)

- Prithvi Air Defence (PAD)/ Pradyumna for high altitude interception Exo-atmospheres. (50 - 80 Km)
- Prithvi Defence Vehicle is the interceptor indigenously developed by DRDO.
- Prithvi Defence Vehicle interceptor missile is capable of killing an incoming missile with a strike range of around 2,000 km outside the earth's atmosphere.

2. Hamesha Vijayee

- In a significant show of strength, formations of Southern Command are conducting a major exercise called 'HAMESHA VIJAYEE' in the deserts of Rajasthan to evaluate the capability of the armed forces to strike deep into enemy territory in an integrated air-land battle.

Details

- Unique in scope and scale, the exercise being conducted in battle like conditions, aims at fine tuning surveillance and destruction mechanisms to support precision strikes and manoeuvres by network enabled forces.
- With emphasis on joint operations, the exercise would test robust sensor to shooter grids by employing a vast array of surveillance and air assets networked with land based strategic and tactical vectors.
- Besides conventional warfare, troops will also be rehearsed to operate in the back drop of chemical and nuclear contingencies.
- The exercise showcasing a high degree of synergy between the Army and Air Force along with new generation aviation assets of the army will be reviewed by a large number of senior officers of both the Services to obtain inputs for further refinement of operational procedures.
- The Southern Command undertakes such exercises at regular intervals to ensure a high degree of battle readiness as well as validation of operational plans using modern weapons and equipment.

3. 'Joint Training Doctrine' for armed forces

- In a first, the Indian armed forces released a joint training doctrine meant to facilitate joint training and planning.
- Titled 'Joint Training Doctrine Indian Armed Forces – 2017', it was released by Admiral Sunil Lanba, Navy Chief and Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, in the presence of other two Service Chiefs.

Aim

- The aim of the doctrine is to promote 'synergy' and 'integration' among the three Services and other stake-holders leading to an enhanced efficiency and optimum utilisation of resources.
- It will also go a long way in 'fostering initiative' and 'stimulating creativity' for promoting 'integration' between the three services in times to come

What is the doctrine about?

- The Doctrine brings out our approach to Joint training at macro-level, Fundamentals, Objectives, Joint Structures, Planning, Organisation amongst other aspects in existence and in use in the Armed Forces which have matured over 15 years of the existence of Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS).
- The concept includes 'Joint Training' as a leverage for promoting 'Diplomacy' and 'Civil – Military interface' issues have also been highlighted in the document.

- It will serve as a 'foundation' and 'knowledge base' from which specific directives and strategies will be derived, from time to time.
- Consequent to consolidation of Joint Training, this maiden Doctrine will be further developed in due course as Doctrines are always 'unfinished products' being 'Evolving in nature', for ready reference as 'Distilled wisdom' and a 'Referral document' for the policy makers, armed forces personnel, academia, etc

4. **Kalavari- Scorpene Class Submarines**

- Kalvari is first of Indian Navy's Scorpene class stealth submarines being built under the Project 75.

Scorpene-class submarine:

- The Scorpene class submarines are a class of diesel-electric attack submarine jointly being developed by the French DCN and the Spanish company Navantia and now by DCNS.
- It features diesel propulsion and an additional air-independent propulsion (AIP) system.
- The state-of-art features of the Scorpene include superior stealth and the ability to launch an attack on the enemy using precision-guided weapons.
- The attack can be launched with torpedoes, as well as tube launched anti-ship missiles, underwater or on surface.
- Designed to operate in all theatres including the tropics, the submarines can undertake multifarious missions including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, operations by special forces and mine laying etc.
- The Scorpene is believed to be stealthier than the average submarine because of its advanced combat management system and low acoustic signature.
- It also uses a noise-cancelling technique, whereby its equipment is mounted on elastic to prevent noisy vibrations from travelling outside the vessel. Its body is also designed to be more difficult for sonar to detect.

What is Air-independent propulsion?

- AIP is any technology which allows a non-nuclear submarine to operate without the need to access atmospheric oxygen (by surfacing or using a snorkel).
- It can augment or replace the diesel-electric propulsion system of non-nuclear vessels.
- It is based on the combustion of stored oxygen and ethanol to augment battery-powered propulsion.

Significance of AIP:

- Significantly improves stealth because it enables a submarine to generate electricity for services and battery charging and propulsion while completely submerged. AIP systems also generate electricity, powering a submarine's to operate and also generate oxygen, lighting and amenities for crew.

- They enable conventional diesel-electric submarines to remain submerged for two to three weeks at a time. This significantly increases the risk of detection. Another advantage is that the Non-nuclear submarines running on battery power or AIP can be virtually silent.

Project 75I-class submarine

- It is follow-on of the Project 75 Kalvari-class submarine for the Indian navy.
- Under this project, the Indian Navy intends to acquire 6 diesel-electric submarines, which will also feature advanced Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) systems to enable them to stay submerged for longer duration and substantially increase their operational range.
- All six submarines are expected to be constructed in Indian shipyards.

5. **Kangleipak Communist Party**

Objectives

- The main objective of KCP is to restore the independence of the erstwhile Manipur kingdom and to bring about an egalitarian society, which is to be achieved by uniting all ethnic-Mongoloid groups belonging to South-East of Himalayan region, liberating Manipur from the Indian rule, building up the strength of the working class and reviving the indigenous culture.

Areas of Operation

- The KCP is mostly active in the valley areas of Manipur, though it has also been found to be engaged in extortion and other activities in the hill districts, such as Churchandpur.

Funding

- Like most other insurgent groups in the northeast, the KCP funds its activities through extortion of local villagers and businessmen.

Background

- Six militants, including a woman, belonging to different underground outfits, were arrested by security forces from different places in Manipur
- The police arrested two active members of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)

6. **National Policy on Drug Demand Reduction**

Aims and objectives

- The objective of the policy is to undertake drug demand reduction efforts to address all forms of drug use, including misuse and dependence, to create awareness about the ill-effects of drugs abuse on the individual, family, workplace and the society at large.

- It also aims to provide for a whole range of community-based services for the identification, motivation, counselling, de-addiction, aftercare and rehabilitation for Whole Person Recovery (WPR) of addicts and facilitate research, training, documentation and collection of relevant information to strengthen these objectives.

The key features of the National policy for Drug Demand Reduction are as follows:

- Education & Awareness Building at all levels.
- Treatment and Rehabilitation (whole person recovery).
- Networking of Service Providers.
- Capacity Building & Training of service providers in the field of drug with a view to build up skilled manpower.
- Data Collection and Management.
- Inter-Sectoral Collaboration and International Cooperation.
- The policy also proposes a system of Accreditation of de-addiction Centres in order to standardize the treatment/ facilities provided in coordination with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and other stakeholders.

7. NIC-CERT

- NIC-CERT has been setup with the objective of creating a comprehensive framework that integrates world class security components and inbuilt threat intelligence for detection, prevention and incident response.

Significance

- Using the tools the team will correlate events that would help in generating a canvas of the attack surface and identify the vulnerabilities and possible exploits.
- The gathered intelligence assimilated with the knowledge of the open web would give the CERT the ability prevent and predict attacks.
- NIC's PAN-India connectivity and reach is one of its key strengths and this coupled with its enhanced ability to detect and prevent attacks would collectively upscale the Government's ability to protect its data.
- Setting up NIC-CERT, as per Hon'ble Minister, is MeitY's initiative under Digital India aimed at enhancing the security posture of NIC and the Government which will in turn lead to enhanced trust of the citizens as the services offered to them would be configured in a framework that is secure by design. NIC-CERT will operate in close coordination and collaboration with sectoral CERT's and more so with Cert-in.

8. Seven Summits

- The Seven Summits are the highest mountains of each of the seven continents. Summiting all of them is regarded as a mountaineering challenge, first achieved on 30 April 1985 by Richard Bass.

- The Seven Summits achievement has become noted as an exploration and mountaineering accomplishment
- After scaling of Mt Everest in 2005, IAF launched a unique and unprecedented series of mountaineering expedition 'Mission Seven Summits' with an aim to fly the tricolour and the IAF flag on the highest peaks in every continent.

9. Uttar Pradesh Control of Organized Crime Act, 2017 (UPCOCA)

- Opposition claim: UPCOCA could potentially be used as a tool to suppress rivals, settle political vendetta and target specific communities.
- Government's claim: the proposed law is a remedy against organised crime.

Features of the UPCOCA:

- The UPCOCA law would give special powers to the police to arrest offenders and members of the crime syndicates.
- The State would be empowered to seize the property of such people after taking the consent of a special court constituted to hear the cases.
- Properties acquired through illegal activities and organised crime would also be seized.
- Some of the crimes defined under the UPCOCA are: land grab [government and non-state property], illegal mining, manufacture and sale of illegal medicines and illicit liquor, money laundering, wildlife smuggling, extortion, abduction syndicate, hafta collection, murder and conspiracy to murder and white-collar offences.
- If found guilty, offenders would face a minimum jail term of three years and a maximum of life imprisonment or even death sentence.
- The accused will not be granted bail for six months after the arrest.

10. Many cybercrime cases not investigated

- More than 12,000 incidents of cybercrime were reported in 2016, but nearly the same number of such crimes carried forward from the previous years had not been investigated, the data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) said.

Details

- In 2016, 12,317 such incidents were reported and in 2015 the figure stood at 11,592, a jump of 6.3%.
- Only in 30% cases reported in 2016, the police or the investigating agency filed a charge sheet. In absolute numbers, 7,990 persons were arrested for the crimes, which included 147 women and charge sheets were filed against 4,913 accused.

- Illegal gain (5,987 incidents) and revenge (1,056) were the two top motives that accounted for cybercrimes. Sexual exploitation (686), insulting the modesty of women (569) and causing disrepute (448) constituted 13% of the crimes.
- There were 40 cases that were done with a “political” motive and 14 cases pertained to sale and purchase of illegal drugs.
- There were 149 cases of inciting crimes against a community and three cases of inciting hate crimes against the country.
- Uttar Pradesh with 2,639 cases reported the highest number of incidents accounting for 21.4%, followed by Maharashtra with 2,380, Karnataka 1,101 and Rajasthan 941 cases.

Crimes against State

- Tamil Nadu topped the list when it came to booking people for committing crimes against the State, which includes cases of sedition. Of the 6,986 cases registered in 2016, 1,827 or 26% cases were reported from Tamil Nadu, followed by U.P. 1,414, Haryana 1,286 and Assam 343 cases. While 35 cases of sedition were reported in 2016, there were 31 cases related to imputation and assertions prejudicial to national integration.
- Under the Official Secrets Act, 30 cases were reported and 922 cases were registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. In 2016, the police across India were investigating 12,637 cases of crimes against the State, of this 5,651 had been pending since 2015.
- Meghalaya with 42 cases registered the most number of cases under Sections pertaining to sedition and waging war against the country.

Watch out for ransomware in 2018: report

- Cybersecurity giant McAfee Inc. prediction in its latest report- Threats Predictions: Ransomware attacks in cyberspace are likely to increase and become more sophisticated in 2018, targeting high net worth individuals and corporates.
- The report also warns individual home users that greater inter-connected home devices will surrender consumer privacy to corporates.

Cyber sabotage

- The report identified five key trends to watch next year
- The pivot from the traditional would see ransomware technologies applied beyond the objective of extortion of individuals, to cybersabotage and disruption of organisations.
- 2017 witnessed a major explosion in ransomware attacks such as the ‘WannaCry’ epidemic in which attackers limit user access to their own systems till a certain ransom is paid to unlock them.

- The evolution of ransomware in 2017 should remind us of how aggressively a threat can reinvent itself as attackers dramatically innovate and adjust to the successful efforts of defenders.

‘Arms race’

- There was an ‘arms race’ between attackers and defenders, and “human intelligence amplified by technology will be the winning factor”.
- As consumers increasingly network their homes, the report warns that connected home device manufacturers and service providers will seek to overcome “thin profit margins by gathering more of our personal data — with or without our agreement — turning the home into a corporate store front”.

11. Tackling Maoism

- The Central Reserve Police Force lost 40 personnel in two Maoist attacks in the first half of 2017 in Sukma, the most severely Maoist-affected district of Chhattisgarh.
- Though the forces were jolted by these attacks, their spirit to fight back has not dampened. Rather, they continue to undertake challenging development work in these areas.
- This shows how the paradigm on tackling Maoism has changed over time. The government’s response has matured in terms of deliverance — from reactive it has become proactive, and from localised it has become holistic.

Proactive policing

- Security forces are no longer reactive. When the Maoists decided to deepen their roots into Gariaband, the State government notified this division as a new district, which gave a fillip to development work.
- Many new police stations and security camps were set up to prevent any major Maoist attack. The cadre strength of the Maoists has consequently reduced.
- Similarly, a police action in Raigarh district eventually forced the Maoists to abandon their plan of expansion. The Ministry of Home Affairs, too, subsequently removed Raigarh from its Security Related Expenditure scheme.
- When the Maoists decided to create a new zone in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, the target districts were immediately put on alert, so as not to allow them to gain ground.
- Security forces were redeployed to ensure better territorial command. As the Chhattisgarh police have experience in tackling Maoists in Bastar, they are now coordinating with the bordering States to strengthen intelligence and ground presence. Such coordinated proactive policing will dampen the Maoists’ plans.

Development problem

- The Maoist problem is not merely a law and order issue. A permanent solution lies in eliminating the root cause of the problem that led to the alienation of tribals in this area.
 - The focus now is to build roads and install communication towers to increase administrative and political access of the tribals, and improve the reach of government schemes.
 - The government has enhanced the support price of minor forest produce like imli(tamarind). More bank branches have been opened to ensure financial inclusion.
 - All India Radio stations in the three southern districts of Bastar will now broadcast regional programmes to increase entertainment options. And a new rail service in Bastar is set to throw open a new market for wooden artefacts and bell metal.
 - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said in the latest annual report on 'Children in Armed Conflict' that the Maoists are providing combat training to children in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.
 - Despite the Maoists not wanting their children to study and get government jobs, remarkable work has been done in the field of school education and skill development.
 - Earlier, the hostel of the Ramakrishna Mission in Narainpur was the only place where children could get quality education. Then, an educational hub and a livelihood centre in Dantewada district sprang up.
 - Seeing its success, the government has now opened up livelihood centres, known as Livelihood Colleges, in all the districts. If the youth are constructively engaged by the government, the recruitment of youth by the Maoists will slowly stop.
- The two-pronged policy of direct action by the security forces combined with development is showing results — the government has already made a dent in most of the affected districts and is determined to check the expansion of Maoists. The paradigm of proactive policing and holistic development should ensure more such significant results in the future.

Role of civil society

- However, winning a psychological war against the Maoists remains an unfinished task. Though the government's rehabilitation policies have helped the surrendered cadres turn their lives around, security personnel are still accused of being informers and are killed.
- To end this, civil society must join hands with the government in realising the villagers' right to development. Loopholes in implementing government schemes must not be used as a tool to strengthen the hands of the Maoists. Indian democracy is strong enough to absorb even its adversaries if they abjure violence.
- The last two major attacks call for some serious introspection on the tactics used by the forces and their fitness to prevent any future attacks.

HEALTH ISSUES

1. Arogya 2017

- First ever International Conference cum Exhibition on AYUSH and Wellness 'Arogya 2017' inaugurated in New Delhi.
- 'Arogya 2017' has been jointly organized by Ministry of AYUSH and Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Government of India including Pharmexcil in partnership with FICCI to showcase the strength and scientific valuation of traditional system of medicine.
- Nearly 1500 delegates from India and 60 countries are participating in 'Arogya 2017'.

Details

- 'Arogya 2017' is a comprehensive exhibition cum conference on Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa, Homoeopathy and wellness. More than 250 manufacturers of alternative medicine are showcasing their products and services at International Arogya 2017.
- The mega event has brought key stakeholders of AYUSH sector together under one roof to showcase latest research and developments in alternative medicine systems of India and boost exports of AYUSH products.

Event Objectives

- To showcase the strength and scientific validation of Indian System of Medicine in the Global Context.
- To promote and strengthen awareness and interest about AYUSH
- To facilitate International promotion, development and recognition of Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy.
- To foster interaction of stakeholders and market development of AYUSH at international level.
- To give boost to AYUSH Products in International Market.
- To exhibit the research and latest developments in AYUSH SECTOR.
- To harness the potential of this fast growing and globally emerging sector

2. Asian Harmonization Working Party (AHWP)

- Asian Harmonization Working Party (AHWP) was established in 1999 as a voluntary non-profit organization of the 30 national regulators of member countries and industry members with a goal to promote regulatory harmonization on medical device regulations in Asia and other regions in accordance with the guidance issued by International Medical Device Regulators Forums (IMDRF).

- The AHWP works in collaboration with related international organizations such as IMDRF, WHO, International Organization for Standardization (ISO), etc.

22nd Conference

- The five day conference is being conducted by Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) and National Drug Regulatory Authority (NDRA) of India in collaboration with Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- The key objective of the event is to develop and recommend approaches for the convergence and harmonization of medical device regulations in Asia and beyond and to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise amongst regulators and the industry.

What has the government done?

- The Government has effected an ecosystem to promote Make In India, R&D and innovation in medical device sector in the country. Moreover, the Health Ministry has also come out with the recent regulation i.e. Medical Devices Rules, 2017, for better harmonization with global regulatory practices and to have transparent, predictable and robust regulatory system which will further ensure safety, quality and performance of medical devices and In vitro diagnostics being manufactured in the country.
- Additionally, the Government has already allowed 100% FDI in the medical devices sector to promote Make in India.
- The Government intends that with such efforts, affordable medical devices to the best of the quality standards, is made available to the citizens across the vast and diverse geographical locations.

3. Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS)

- The Ministry of AYUSH has setup Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) for undertaking coordinating formulating, developing and promoting research on scientific lines in Ayurveda.
- The Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) is an autonomous body of the Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy), Government of India. It is an apex body in India for the formulation, coordination, development and promotion of research on scientific lines in Ayurveda and Sowa-Rigpa system of medicine.

What are the activities?

- The research activities of the council include medicinal plant research (Medico-ethno botanical survey, pharmacognosy and tissue culture), Drug Standardization Pharmacological Research, Clinical Research, Literary Research & Documentation, and other outreach activities

Vision

- "To strive for excellence and global leadership in the field of Ayurveda by comprehensive research for quality assured and cost effective products to prevent/ manage/ cure various disease".

The objectives for which the Central Council is established are:

- The formulation of aims and patterns of research on scientific lines in Ayurvedic Sciences.
- To undertake any research or other programmes in Ayurvedic Sciences.
- The prosecution of and assistance in research, the propagation of knowledge and experimental measures generally in connection with the causation, mode of spread and prevention of diseases.
- To initiate, aid, develop and co-ordinate scientific research in different aspects, fundamental and applied of Ayurvedic Sciences and to promote and assist institutions of research for the study of diseases, their prevention, causation and remedy.

4. Cochlear Implant**What is it?**

- This major CSR initiative of AAI will help the children to completely overcome their hearing disability, thereby enabling them to hear and speak coherently and making them fully independent to lead a normal and productive life.
- This effort will not only bring these underprivileged children to the mainstream of life but will also contribute to national economy.

Cochlear Implant

Cochlear Implant is an electronic device having two parts (External and Internal). Internal part is surgically implanted in the skull (Cochlear) by ENT surgeons. Post-operative rehabilitation is undertaken by Audiologist and speech language pathologist and special educator of Hearing Impaired. Children with hearing loss as young as 12 months old and within 5 years of age can be eligible for a cochlear implant under ADIP scheme as per the criteria of ADIP Scheme of Govt. of India.

The cochlear implant technology may help children who:

- Have severe to profound hearing loss in both ears
- Receive little or no benefit from hearing aids
- No Development Delay or Mental Retardation

Context

- Shri Thaawarchand Gehlot, Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment inaugurated the "CSR Summit for Pioneering Cochlear Implant Surgery under CSR initiative of Airport Authority of India (AAI) through Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO)"

5. LaQshya-Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative**Objective**

- To reduce preventable maternal and newborn mortality, morbidity and stillbirths.

Goal

- To improve quality of care provided to Pregnant Mother in Labour Room and Maternity Operation Theatres

Target Areas

- Government Medical Colleges, District Hospitals and important Sub District Hospitals and Community Health Centers

6. Measles vaccination decreases acute respiratory infection, diarrhea

- Researchers from the International Institute of Population Sciences, Mumbai have found that among children who received measles vaccination there was a decrease in acute respiratory infection and diarrhea
- The study was conducted based on data from five countries, namely, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria and Pakistan, and 12-59-month-old children were considered in the analysis.

Key Fact:

- Measles is a highly contagious disease transmitted through a virus belonging to the Morbillivirus genus.
- Children below five years are prone to the infection.
- The virus can suppress the immune system leading to infection in various organs of the body.
- Pneumonia and diarrhoea occur either as a complication or as a secondary infection.
- In 2010, diarrhoea and pneumonia were responsible for over 600,000 deaths of children in India under-5.
- India along with four other countries accounted for nearly 50% of the deaths globally from diarrhoea and pneumonia in this age group.
- Researchers also examined the effect of socioeconomic and demographic risk factors on occurrence of acute respiratory infection and diarrhoea.
- These risk factors included cooking fuel, toilet facility, source of drinking water and household wealth status.
- In India, 62% of the children were vaccinated. In all countries, the vaccination coverage was higher in urban than in rural areas.
- In India, vaccination reduced acute respiratory infection cases by 15% and diarrhoea by 12%.

7. MedTech Summit of Biodesign Programme

- The Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, has implemented Biodesign programme with the aim to develop innovative and affordable medical devices as per unmet clinical needs of India and to train the next generation of medical technology innovators in India for bringing such impactful devices to the real world.
- This Program is implemented by Department of Biotechnology jointly at AIIMS and IIT Delhi in collaboration with International partners.
- The Department has authorized Biotech Consortium India Limited for management of its Intellectual Property and other techno-legal activities.
- This event was attended by leaders of Government organisations, academia, medical device industry, start-ups, hospitals, design, business and engineering institutes from Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, India, Japan, Singapore, UK and USA.

Noxeno

- Noxeno- a nasal foreign body removal device developed by start-up InnAccel Technologies Private Limited, Bangalore, created by the Fellow trained under the Biodesign program.
- Noxeno is the first dedicated tool for anterior nasal foreign body (NFB) removal that allows doctors in any setting to quickly and safely remove objects that people (mostly children aged 2-10) put into their noses.
- Noxeno has been 100% invented, designed, engineered and manufactured in India. Noxeno has an ergonomic handle along with a built-in light source and a hinge.
- This allows the user to slip behind the NFB and remove it in a matter of seconds by simply squeezing the trigger and pulling the device. The modular nature of the system allows for sterilization of the hinge through autoclaving it.
- This reusable device has a target price of around INR 5000, making it both easy to use and cost-effective.

8. National AYUSH Mission (NAM)

The NAM is being implemented by Ministry of AYUSH with the objectives of providing cost effective AYUSH Services, with a universal access which involve, among other things

- up gradation of AYUSH Hospitals and Dispensaries,
- co-location of AYUSH facilities at Primary Health Centers (PHCs), Community Health Centers (CHCs) and District Hospitals (DHs),
- strengthening institutional capacity at the State level through upgrading AYUSH educational institutions, State Govt, ASU&H Pharmacies,
- Drug Testing Laboratories and ASU & H enforcement mechanism,

- Supporting cultivation of medicinal plants by adopting Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) to provide sustained supply of quality raw-materials and development of infrastructure for medicinal plants storage and marketing.

The NAM is addressing the gaps in health services through supporting the efforts of State/UT Governments for providing AYUSH health services/education in the country, particularly in vulnerable and far-flung areas.

The expected outcomes of the Mission are as follows:

- Better access to AYUSH healthcare services through increased number of healthcare facilities offering AYUSH services and better availability of medicines and trained manpower.
- Improvement in AYUSH education through well-equipped enhanced number of AYUSH Educational institutions.
- Improved availability of quality AYUSH drugs by increased number of quality pharmacies and Drug Testing Laboratories coupled with stringent enforcement mechanism.
- Increased awareness and acceptance of the Yoga & Naturopathy as promotive and preventive health-care systems.
- To meet the increasing domestic demand of herbal raw-materials and also to promote export.

9. National Medical Commission Bill

- The Union Cabinet cleared the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill, ending the era of Medical Council of India (MCI) as the apex medical education regulator conducting annual inspections, and paving the way for an exit exam for medical graduates.
- The move is based on recommendations of the Ranjit Roychowdhury Committee and a Parliamentary standing committee

Details

- Under the NMC, which includes a Medical Advisory Council where states will be represented, colleges need permission only once for establishment and recognition.
- Apart from removing the need for annual renewal of recognition, colleges can, on their own, increase the number of seats subject to the present cap of 250, and start PG courses.
- The Medical Assessment and Rating Board constituted by the central government can, however, conduct inspections.
- Under the NMC Bill, if a college is found to be in violation of norms, such as those governing teachers, laboratories, patients, etc., it can be fined sums ranging from half of the cumulative fees it charges from students to 10 times that amount.

- As per the Bill, the government, under the National Medical Commission (NMC), can dictate guidelines for fees up to 40% of seats in private medical colleges. This is aimed at giving students relief from the exorbitant fees charged by these colleges and is a standout feature of the bill.

25-member body

- The Bill proposes a government-nominated chairman and members, who will be selected by a committee under the Cabinet Secretary.
- The 25-member NMC will have 12 ex-officio members, including four presidents of boards from leading medical institutions such as AIIMS and the ICMR; 11 part-time members and, a chairman and member-secretary.
- The bill provides for the constitution of four autonomous boards entrusted with conducting undergraduate and postgraduate education, assessment and accreditation of medical institutions and registration of practitioners under the National Medical Commission.

Why was it done?

- Over the years, there have been numerous allegations about the functioning of MCI, with its system of annual inspections being accused of being "random" and susceptible to corruption.

10. National Nutrition Strategy

With a renewed focus on Nutrition, the National Institution for Transforming India – NITI Ayog launched National Nutrition Strategy on the 5th of September 2017. As per the strategy document, the Integrated Child Development Services Mission would be expanded to form a National Nutrition Mission along the lines of National Health Mission under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD).

- The Nutrition Strategy framework envisages a Kuposhan Mukh Bharat - linked to Swachh Bharat and Swasth Bharat. The aim is ensure that States create customized State/ District Action Plans to address local needs and challenges. This is especially relevant in view of enhanced resources available with the States, to prioritise focussed interventions with a greater role for panchayats and urban local bodies.
- The nutrition strategy envisages a framework wherein the four proximate determinants of nutrition – uptake of health services, food, drinking water & sanitation and income & livelihoods – work together to accelerate decline of under nutrition in India.
- The strategy enables states to make strategic choices, through decentralized planning and local innovation, with accountability for nutrition outcomes.

Objectives and targets:

- 3 point percentage / year reduction in underweight prevalence in children (0-3 years) by 2022 from NFHS-4 levels

- 1/3rd reduction in anaemia in children, adolescent & Women of Reproductive Age (WRA)

Key features of the Strategy include:

- The Strategy aims to reduce all forms of malnutrition by 2030, with a focus on the most vulnerable and critical age groups. The Strategy also aims to assist in achieving the targets identified as part of the Sustainable Development Goals related to nutrition and health.
- The Strategy aims to launch a National Nutrition Mission, similar to the National Health Mission. This is to enable integration of nutrition-related interventions cutting across sectors like women and child development, health, food and public distribution, sanitation, drinking water, and rural development.
- A decentralised approach will be promoted with greater flexibility and decision making at the state, district and local levels. Further, the Strategy aims to strengthen the ownership of Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies over nutrition initiatives. This is to enable decentralised planning and local innovation along with accountability for nutrition outcomes.
- The Strategy proposes to launch interventions with a focus on improving healthcare and nutrition among children. These interventions will include: (i) promotion of breastfeeding for the first six months after birth, (ii) universal access to infant and young child care (including ICDS and crèches), (iii) enhanced care, referrals and management of severely undernourished and sick children, (iv) bi-annual vitamin A supplements for children in the age group of 9 months to 5 years, and (v) micro-nutrient supplements and bi-annual de-worming for children.
- Measures to improve maternal care and nutrition include: (i) supplementary nutritional support during pregnancy and lactation, (ii) health and nutrition counselling, (iii) adequate consumption of iodised salt and screening of severe anaemia, and (iv) institutional childbirth, lactation management and improved post-natal care.
- Governance reforms envisaged in the Strategy include: (i) convergence of state and district implementation plans for ICDS, NHM and Swachh Bharat, (ii) focus on the most vulnerable communities in districts with the highest levels of child malnutrition, and (iii) service delivery models based on evidence of impact.

11. Society for Nuclear Medicine International Conference (SNMICON)

Society of Nuclear Medicine, India

- The Society of Nuclear Medicine, India (SNM-India) was founded in 1967 with the aim to promote, encourage and help the development and advancement of Nuclear Medicine as a specialty in India.

- All the way through over about 50 years, the society through Annual Conferences, periodic regional meetings through its academic wings (Indian College of Nuclear Medicine and regional chapters) have been providing a great platform to our members for exchange of ideas and sharing experiences amongst scientists, doctors, technologists with active participation of people from industry.

Details

- SNMICON 2017 – is being organized with a vision to integrate basic research and clinical perspectives on various facets of nuclear medicine radiochemistry, preclinical, translational and clinical theranostics.
- The aim of the conference is to pragmatic approach for advancement in precision nuclear medicine for the visualization and treatment of clinical pathologies, the conference will focus on specific and advanced molecular imaging probes towards biochemical imaging of diseases.
- The SNMICON meeting will provide a unique platform for high-level scientific discussions in the exciting field of MOLECULAR IMAGING and TARGETED RADIONUCLIDE THERAPY and bridge the gap between researchers and clinicians.
- This Conference will mark the beginning of production of newer radioisotopes for theranostics in India.

INMAS

- The Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS) is a mandated multidisciplinary laboratory of DRDO engaged in R&D activities in the field of Radiation, Imaging Sciences and CBRN technologies.
- INMAS is one of the very few Institutions that can boast of having an enviable contingent of highly skilled Scientists, clinical researchers and biomedical professionals working towards common goals and objectives.

12. Trachoma

- Trachoma is an infectious disease caused by bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*
- The infection causes a roughening of the inner surface of the eyelids
- This roughening can lead to pain in the eyes, breakdown of the outer surface or cornea of the eyes, and eventual blindness
- Untreated, repeated trachoma infections can result in a form of permanent blindness when the eyelids turn inward

How it spreads

- By skin-to-skin contact (handshakes or hugs).
- By saliva (kissing or shared drinks).
- By touching a contaminated surface (blanket or doorknob).

Context

- Shri J P Nadda releases National Trachoma Survey Report
- He declared that India is now free from 'infective trachoma', and termed this as a momentous achievement.
- the goal of trachoma elimination as specified by the WHO under its GET2020 program is met.

13. WHO to classify 'gaming disorder' as mental health condition

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) is all set to classify gaming disorder as a mental health condition next year.
- More and more youngsters getting hooked on video games, both online and offline
- Nearly 7% of population studied for gaming and internet addiction studied exhibited symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders -V, a diagnostic bible for mental health professionals published by the American Psychiatric Association, has already classified gaming disorder as a mental health condition.

Common affects noticed:

- Psychosocial and behavioural changes affecting daily activities
- Physical health problems (disturbance in sleep pattern and eating habits)
- Psychological problems have become a major concern for their family members.
- Internet addiction also has an effect on social performance and lifestyle
- Addictive use of Internet has an adverse effect in the form of irregular dietary habits and physical problems.
- It is also associated with insomnia, sleep apnea and nightmares.
- Among adults, it leads one to disregard crucial daily responsibilities such as work, academic, family, or social obligations

14. Karnataka HC strikes down rule on stringent tobacco pack warnings

- Karnataka High Court declared the Cigarette and other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Amendment Rules, 2014, as unconstitutional
- The rules had enhanced to 85% the area of pictorial warning on the principal area of packages of cigarette and other tobacco products.
- The court, however, upheld the similar Rules of 2008.
- Rule of 2008 had prescribed that 40% of the specified pictorial warning be printed on the principal area of the packages.

- The Parliamentary Committee, in its final report submitted on March 15, 2016 had recommended restricting the area of pictorial warning to 50%.

Petition:

- The petitions were filed by the Tobacco Institute of India, cigarette manufacturers like ITC Ltd., beedi and other tobacco products manufacturers before the High Courts of Karnataka, Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, challenging the 2014 rules.
- All these petitions were transferred to the Karnataka High Court by the apex court.

Reason given behind the ruling:

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare unilaterally framed the Rules without concurrence of the other departments concerned
- This was a violation of the Article 77 (Conduct of Business of Government of India) and the Transaction of Business (ToB) rules framed under it
- The rules were notified even before the Parliamentary Committee on sub-ordinate legislations was examining them
- Parliamentary Committee, in its final report submitted on March 15, 2016, had recommended restricting the area of pictorial warning to 50%
- The rules are contrary to Article 19(1)(g) [right to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business] as they are "unreasonable" restrictions imposed "without application of mind or any basis"

Opposition from ministries:

- Ministry of Commerce had opposed 85% area for pictorial warning on the ground that it would not result in any benefit and wanted to restrict the pictorial warnings to 40% or 50%
- The Labour Ministry had opposed pictorial warning for the reason that it would harm the beedi industry, on which several poor families are depending upon for their livelihood

Government reasoning inappropriate:

- Referring to cautions and contents of warnings like "smoking kills" or "tobacco kills", "smoking causes cancer", etc, court pointed out that no medical or scientific data or empirical research was conducted and data collected placed before the court in this regard
- Tobacco products inside the packages remain legally sellable even after changed pictorial warning

15. Legal drinking age raised to 23 in Kerala

- The Kerala government has raised the legal drinking age from 21 to 23 years
- The State Cabinet has decided to amend the Abkari Act for the purpose.

- The previous UDF government had adopted a prohibitionist policy by shutting down bars and closing state-run liquor vending outlets to reduce the availability of legal liquor.
- But in September this year, the LDF government eased the norms for four star and above bars by reducing the mandatory offset from places of worship and educational institutions from 200 metres to 50 metres, touching off a State-wide scramble to upgrade bars and hotels.
- Key Fact: Maharashtra and New Delhi had raised the age to 25 but found it had little impact on the ground.

16. Centre to give Rs.500 to TB patients every month

- New social support announced by the center: About 35 lakh identified tuberculosis patients across the country will soon get Rs.500 every month.
- This social support is intended to cover the loss of wages, travel and nutrition.

Key Fact:

- It has come in to notice that, under-nutrition is an established risk factor for progression of latent TB infection to active TB.
- Under-nutrition is a serious co-morbidity in patients with active TB in India, and increases the risk of severe disease, death, drug toxicity, drug malabsorption and relapse after cure.
- In the absence of nutritional support, undernourished patients with TB do get enmeshed in a vicious cycle of worsening disease and under-nutrition, which can be detrimental and even fatal.
- Food insecurity in household contacts of TB patients in India increases their risk of developing active TB. This has serious implications, especially for contacts of patients with multidrug-resistant TB.

Nutritional support and TB deaths:

- TB is inextricably linked to determinants of health such as malnutrition and low immunity due to social deprivation and marginalisation.
- Poor nutrition is increasing the risk by three-fold.
- Nutritional support will help reduced TB deaths, which is currently at an estimated 4.8 lakh per year

Why is nutrition important?

- Weights in TB patients are among the lowest in the world
- 50% of adult men weigh below 43 kg
- 50% of adult women weigh below 38 kg

17. 'Out of pocket spend makes up 62% of health care costs'

- Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) chairman said: Out of pocket medical expenses make up about 62% of all healthcare costs in India.

Highlights of research conducted by Chrome Data Analytics and Media (CDAM):

- Indians are more likely to have a vehicle or life insurance than health insurance
- Only 31% of Indians had medical policies independent of those provided by their employers in spite of nearly half the survey respondents admitting to having faced a "financial emergency" due to medical needs.
- The number of lives covered under health insurance policies during 2015-16 was 36 crore which is approximately 30% of India's total population, according to the Indian Brand Equity Foundation.
- Indians are also known to spend a significant fraction of their health expense out of their own pockets. 89% of health expenditure by India, in 2014, was out-of-pocket as compared to a global average of 18%. Also, government contributed no more than 30% of individual health expenditure in India according to a 2014 — the latest — assessment by the World Health Organization.

'Need to reduce'

- There is a need to bring down out of pocket expenses of patients.
- This is extremely high and leads to impoverishment of patients.
- Around the World: In comparison, out of pocket hospital expenses in developed countries such as the U.S. and the U.K. is 20% and in BRICS countries about 20-25%.
- There is an urgent need to create health insurance products that are simple and intelligible to customers, provide coverage to the aged and infirm and those suffering from chronic ailments.

18. India recorded about 3.9 million cancer cases in 2016, data shows

- According to the National Cancer Registry Programme, India recorded an estimated 3.9 million cancer cases in 2016
- It is a programme under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

State-wise data

- The worst affected states were Uttar Pradesh with 674,386 cases, followed by Maharashtra with 364,997 and Bihar with 359,228
- In South India Tamil Nadu recorded 222,748 cases, Karnataka 202,156, Andhra Pradesh 159,696, Telangana 115,333 and Kerala 115,511 cases of cancer

Programme under the National Health Mission, for Non-communicable diseases

- An initiative of prevention, control and screening for common non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (diabetes, hypertension and oral, breast and cervical cancer) has been rolled out in more than 100 districts in 2017-18 under the NHM

National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS)

- The central government is implementing a "Strengthening of Tertiary Care Cancer facilities" Scheme under NPCDCS to assist states in establishing State Cancer Institutes (SCI)
- And Tertiary Care Cancer Centres (TCCC) in different parts of the country
- NPCDCS is being implemented under NHM for interventions up to district level
- The objectives of NPCDCS include awareness generation for cancer prevention, screening, early detection and referral to an appropriate level institution for treatment
- The focus is on three types of cancer namely breast, cervical and oral cancer

Various initiatives by government:

- Oncology, and its various aspects, has been a focus at places such as new AIIMS and many upgraded institutions, under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojna (PMSSY)
- The setting up of National Cancer Institute at Jhajjar in Haryana and a second campus of the Chittranjan National Cancer Institute, Kolkata, has also been approved
- All these are aimed at enhancing the capacity for screening, prevention and treatment of cancer in the country

19. India and the future of life sciences innovation

Condition of the Indian Pharmaceutical Sector:

- The Indian pharmaceutical industry is a world leader in bringing generic drugs to the market in a cost-effective way
- Additionally, many Western pharmaceutical companies have established small-molecule development and manufacturing in India
- More recently, Indian pharma companies have demonstrated the capability to develop biosimilars for global healthcare markets
- These activities are highly valuable, providing essential and established medicines at more affordable prices to people around the world

What lies ahead?

- The future of India will go beyond generics and biosimilars
- There are many attractive features that the existing Indian ecosystem can offer the life sciences industry
- And India will eventually play a critical role in the advancement of innovative medicines

How is India a fertile ground for Medical Innovations?

- Sixty years ago, the total number of physicians in India was less than 50,000; today there has been a 16-fold increase to nearly 800,000 registered medical practitioners

- Public health centres, the foundation of rural healthcare in the country, have increased from less than 100 to more than 23,000
- This explosive growth is fertile ground for thought leaders, investors, regulators and medical centres to collaborate on developing
 - * The capabilities to nurture the type of start-up environment that will focus on innovation and
 - * Better ways of healthcare delivery, with an eye on long-run rather than short-term profitability

What should be done?

- There are a number of steps that India can take. For example, incentives for start-up biotech firms, and commitment to rigorous global compliance standards that help increase trust in the Indian life sciences industry
- These trends are under way globally, but, in some respects, have yet to be initiated by experts with roots in India

The way forward

- The medical innovations don't happen in isolation
- They emerge from collaborative networks
- Today, innovation occurs in a global village, not in a single country
- With so much to offer the life sciences, India is poised to become a dominant player
- The potential for this groundswell to materialize is happening today. It's exciting to be a part of it

EDUCATION

1. Awakened Citizen Programme

- CBSE has tied up with the Ramakrishna Mission to impart value education to its students and make them “awakened” citizens with values of peace, harmony, humility and cooperation.
- With the objective to strengthen, promote and develop cooperation in promoting values education, the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi has prepared ‘Awakened Citizen Programme’ for teachers and students
- This programme is a three-year graded value education programme for students of classes 6-8 (or classes 7-9). However, the implementation of the programme by schools is voluntary.
- The schools that opt for this programme are required to allot 16 periods per year and are to be committed for a minimum period of three years. As the programme involves initial two days’ training of teachers conducted in the school, the schools desirous of enrolling into the programmes will also have to register with the Ramakrishna Mission

2. Indian Institute of Management Bill, 2017

- IIMs are recognized as world-class management Institutions and Centers of Excellence and have brought laurels to the country. All IIMs are separate autonomous bodies registered under the Societies Act.
- Being societies, IIMs are not authorized to award degrees and, hence, they have been awarding Post Graduate Diploma and Fellow Programme in Management.
- While these awards are treated as equivalent to MBAs and Ph.D, respectively, the equivalence is not universally acceptable, especially for the Fellow Programme.

The Union Cabinet has approved the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bill, 2017, under which the IIMs would be declared as Institutions of National Importance which will enable them to grant degrees to their students.

- IIMs can grant degrees to their students.
- The Bill provides for complete autonomy to the Institutions, combined with adequate accountability.
- Management of these Institutions would be Board driven, with the Chairperson and Director of an Institution which will be selected by the Board.
- IIMs will be the first set of ‘Institutions of National Importance’ in which the President will have no direct role. In other institutions such as the IITs and NITs, the President acts as the Visitor who appoints the directors and chairpersons on the advice of the HRD Ministry.

- A greater participation of experts and alumni in the Board is amongst other important features of the Bill.
- Provision has also been made for inclusion of women and members from Scheduled Castes/Tribes in the Board.
- The Bill also provides for periodic review of the performance of Institutions by independent agencies, and placing the results of the same on public domain.
- The Annual Report of the Institutions will be placed in the Parliament and CAG will be auditing their accounts.
- There is also a provision of Coordination Forum of IIMs as an advisory body.

Issue with previous bill

- Under the two clauses [3(k) and 36(1)], the IIMs would have had to seek the government’s approval for every decision, including fee structure, admission criteria, formation of academic departments, salary of the staff and constitution of BoG.

Other B-schools are upset over the IIM Bill

- Over the last several decades, IIMs, by virtue of their reputation, had lent a certain amount of credibility to a postgraduate diploma in management (PGDM). Other big private B-schools which offer PGDM — such as XLRI-Jamshedpur, BIMTECH in Greater Noida and SP Jain Institute of Management and Research in Mumbai — now fear that with IIMs not offering PGDM, their own PG diplomas will suffer in market value and put them at a distinct disadvantage.

3. Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority (KSLMA)

- Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority (KSLMA) is all set to kick-start the second phase of Akshara Sagaram, an ambitious literacy programme for coastal areas, by rolling it out in three more districts, including Ernakulam.
- The project, being implemented by KSLMA with financial assistance from the Fisheries Department, will also be implemented in Kollam and Kozhikode districts. Initially, it was implemented in Thiruvananthapuram, Malappuram and Kasaragod districts.
- In the second phase, the project will be rolled out in 234 wards with poor levels of literacy, spread across 36 local bodies in three districts.

Details

- Selection of instructors, gathering of data about potential beneficiaries, and formation of ward-level organizing committees have been completed as a prelude to the implementation of the project.

- The primary objective of the project is to streamline the fourth, seventh and tenth standard equivalent Programmes of KSLMA in coastal areas.
- Illiterate people, newly literate, school dropouts, physically and mentally-challenged people, and all fisher folks who have not cleared fourth standard have been identified as potential beneficiaries.
- Improving the living standards of coastal people and coastal area protection measures, women empowerment, elimination of drug abuse, creating awareness about environment, sanitation, cleanliness, health, and various welfare Programmes and services provided by the State government have been identified as the other immediate benefits of the project.
- The literacy mission authority hopes that apart from improving literacy levels, the project will give impetus to continuous education Programmes in coastal areas.

4. **Pragati – Scholarship for Girls**

- To provide encouragement and support to Girl Child to pursue technical education “Pragati Scholarship” has been launched by the Government from the year 2014-15.

The salient features of the “Pragati Scholarship” are as under:

- Number of scholarship per annum: 4000
- One Girl per family whose family income is less than Rs.6 Lakhs per annum
- The candidates will be selected on merit at the qualifying examination
- The candidates should have been admitted to 1st year of the Degree or diploma programme in any of the AICTE approved institute during the academic year 2014-15 through centralized admission process of the State /Central Government.
- Amount of scholarship: Tuition Fee of Rs. 30000/- or at actual, whichever is less and Rs. 2000/- per month for 10 months as incidentals each year.

5. **World University of Design**

- India's first and only design university, World University of Design opened its campus at Sonapat, Haryana.
- Promoted by Om Parkash Bansal Educational and Social Welfare Trust of Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab, having more than two decades of presence in higher education, the university is currently located in a sprawling lush green picturesque campus with the state-of-the-art infrastructure and world class facilities
- The university has international collaborations with foreign universities like UWS, University of West Scotland, VFS, the Vancouver Film School, and IAAD, the Italian University of Design.
- Many other collaborations are in the pipeline including that with Huddersfield University, UK; Oxford Brookes University, UK; Emily Carr University, Canada.

6. **Supreme Court rejects plea for single school board**

- In 2011, a three-judge Bench led by Justice J.M. Panchal, in an appeal filed by the Tamil Nadu government, had held that a common syllabus, especially for children aged between six and 14, would achieve the “code of common culture”.
- The judgment had even viewed the idea of a common syllabus as a precursor to the Uniform Civil Code and an antidote to fanaticism and divisiveness.
- On December 8, 2017, a three-judge Bench led by the Chief Justice dismissed a petition filed by primary school teacher Neeta Upadhyay for ‘one nation, one education board’ to end disparity in knowledge dissemination during the formative years of a child.

Present Status

- At present there are more than 50 recognised educational boards in India of various types- all India boards like CBSE and ICSE, state level boards, international boards like IB and IGCSE and open schooling boards like NIOS. Each has its own schedules, pedagogy and curriculum.

Issue area

- CBSE itself does not come out in flying colours. There are more than 15,000 CBSE schools in all over India. Why is it then that in international tests like PISA and TIMSS, which benchmark school students in various countries, India languishes at the very bottom? Why does the corporate world constantly bemoan India's unemployable youth?

We should have Single board

- Firstly, since educational boards have different schedules (For e.g.: The academic year in schools of the Maharashtra state boards begins in June while that of CBSE does in April), students migrating from one part of the country to another often face problems.
- Secondly, policies followed with regards to the number of languages taught and the way they are taught differ drastically. For instance, CBSE follows the 3 language norm upto VIIIth standard and then on its 2 languages, while state boards usually follow the three language formula throughout, the 3 languages usually being English, Hindi and the state language.
 - * Moreover while boards like ICSE provide exposure to classics like the works of William Shakespeare, boards like the CBSE focus more on the communicative aspects of the language
- Thirdly, marking schemes of boards vary considerably- while some are lenient with many students scoring in the higher 90s, in some it is an achievement to cross the 90 figure itself. This creates a playing field which is not at all levelled when it comes to seeking admissions into colleges for courses which are not based on entrance exams.
- When it comes to entrance exams like NEET, students of state boards are placed at a disadvantage vis a vis the CBSE students as such entrance exams are more or less based on the NCERT syllabus.

- Separate education facilities are inherently unequal and violate the doctrine of equality
 - * The judgment for the Court, had referred to the iconic U.S. case of Brown versus Board of Education, which held that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.
 - * Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka was a landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional.

We should not have Single boards

- State Boards are cheaper when compared to CBSE & ICSE and it helps poor students.
- When there are multiple boards, it sparks competition amongst these boards. Every board's incentive is to be able to capture and get numerous schools affiliated under it.

7. Education report from HSBC

- The latest Value of Education report from HSBC, after surveying the aspirations of 8,481 parents across 15 countries, reiterates that Indian parents continue to pull out all stops when it comes to their offspring's education.
- The 2017 report found that Indian parents spent a hefty \$18,909 (about Rs. 12.3 lakh) towards their children's school and college education in tuition fees, books and transport. About 83% of them engaged private tutors and 94% were keen to fund a post-graduate degree.
- But most importantly, both for undergraduate and postgraduate courses for their wards, a majority of Indian parents — a good 55% — were eyeing varsities overseas. This is much higher than the global average of 41%.
- Quizzed about the reasons for sending their wards abroad, (globally) the parents surveyed diplomatically said that a shot at learning foreign languages, gaining international work experience and exposure to new ideas were the main motivations.
- But what remains unsaid for Indian parents is the widespread belief that the quality of foreign educational institutions, their faculty and research opportunities, are vastly superior to what is on offer at home.

Stats

- Between 2013 and 2016, there was a 24% jump in the number (stock) of Indian students studying abroad. This growth outpaced that for China (which saw a 12% expansion), South Korea (5% decline), Saudi Arabia (16% increase), Germany (2% decline) and France (6% increase). These countries have traditionally been the biggest contributors to the international tertiary student pool.
- Globally, India now accounts for the second largest population of international college students (2.5 lakh) after China (8 lakh).

One way

- With its outbound student growth rates beating China's lately, it is no wonder that many foreign varsities have been raising the pitch for their marketing blitzkrieg (though not student aid) in India.
- Growth rates apart, the other unusual facet of student migration from India is that it is largely a one-way street. Data from HSBC showed that, while China had more than 8 lakh students lodged in varsities abroad in 2016, it had also half as many international students lodged at its own campuses.
- In Malaysia, inbound students pursuing college were neck-and-neck with outbound ones. Singapore has managed to attract more than twice the number of college students it sends overseas. But in India, the number of students lodged abroad is at more than four times the inbound numbers.
- Data from Open Doors 2017 on Indian students in the USA starkly highlighted this one-way stampede. In the five years to 2016-17, the number of Indian youth pursuing the American dream at colleges there shot up from 1 lakh to 1.86 lakh, but the number of American students studying in India fell from 4,600 to about 4,100.

Problem Area

The rising global mobility of Indian students is a welcome trend in some respects. It enhances job prospects and encourages cross-pollination of ideas for the students who make the cut.

- But the trend has economic downsides too. If the hordes of bright students who head offshore for their higher studies decide to settle there permanently, the brain drain cannot be very good for India's demographic dividend story.
- A more immediate problem than the brain drain though, is the dollar drain. As more Indian parents pack off their children right from under-graduation, foreign exchange remittances towards their support are growing by leaps and bounds.
- In 2016-17, Indians spent \$3.7 billion towards 'maintenance of close relatives' and 'studies abroad', with these two items accounting for 45% of all outward remittances under the RBI's Liberalised Remittance Scheme.
- More worryingly for a country that runs a perpetual trade deficit, these outflows have grown thirteen fold since FY12, from \$279 million.

Upgrading the quality of domestic educational institutions is therefore a must-solve problem for India's policymakers. It can staunch the brain drain, attract more international students onshore and thus help keep the balance of payments in check.

ART AND CULTURE

1. Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage

- India is hosting the "Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage" from 8 to 10 December as part of celebrations of 20th anniversary of BIMSTEC.

Why This Festival?

- To emphasise and raise awareness of this rich and common heritage and mark the 20th anniversary of this unique organisation group, a BIMSTEC Buddhism Festival "Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage" has been presented by the BIMSTEC division of the Ministry of External Affairs and produced by Teamwork Arts.

Details

- 'Bodhi Parva' has entwined various threads of the Buddhist heritage into a beautiful melange including an exhibition of international and Indian Buddhist art and architecture, discourses by eminent scholars and practitioners of Buddhism, guided meditation and chanting by Buddhist monks and choir, screening of film on Buddhism, dance and music performances, quiz show and a food trail. These will help in building an awareness of BIMSTEC's rich and common heritage.

2. Golconda Fort

- Golkonda Fort was first built by the Kakatiya dynasty as part of their western defenses along the lines of the Kondapalli Fort. The city and the fortress were built on a granite hill that is 120 meters high, surrounded by massive battlements. The fort was rebuilt and strengthened by Rani Rudrama Devi and her successor Prataparudra.
- Later, the fort came under the control of the Musunuri Nayaks, who defeated the Tughlaqi army occupying Warangal.
- It was ceded by the Musunuri Kapaya Naidu to the Bahmani Sultanate as part of a treaty in 1364
- Under the Bahmani Sultanate, Golkonda slowly rose to prominence. Sultan Quli Qutb-ul-Mulk (r. 1487–1543), sent as a governor of Telangana, established it as the seat of his government around 1501. Bahmani rule gradually weakened during this period, and Sultan Quli formally became independent in 1538, establishing the Qutb Shahi dynasty based in Golkonda
- The fort finally fell into ruin in 1687, after an eight year long siege leading to its fall at the hands of the Mughal empire

Naqqar khana

- It is a term for a drum house or orchestra pit during ceremonies.
- The name literally means drum. It is supposed to be the place from where drums were beaten to announce the arrival or departure of nobility.

3. Hornbill Festival

- The Hornbill Festival is a celebration held every year in Nagaland. It is also called the 'Festival of Festivals'.
- It draws all the tribes and sub-tribes of Nagaland to the foothills below the lofty spurs of towering Mount Japfü wherein lies Naga Heritage Village, Kisama – the venue of the Festival.
- The Hornbill Festival at Kisama and the International Music Festival represent the diversity of Naga society.
- It plays host to a weeklong medley of cultural performances, indigenous games, craft bazaar, music events, fashion, cycling, motor sporting, events, a kids carnival, floral gallery, food courts, film festival and a series of competitions in various activities.
- The President said that Nagaland has so much to offer. The strength of the state lies in its organic farm produce, flowers and fruits. Nagaland has rare medicinal plants and herbs that can help create jobs and boost the economy. He mentioned Naga jolokia, called King Chilli locally, one of the hottest chilli peppers of the world, and said we need to bottle it into one of the hottest selling sauces of the world.

4. Hunar Se Rozgar Tak

- It is an initiative Ministry of Tourism, courses are offered in hospitality trades namely Food Production, Food and Beverage Service, Housekeeping Utility and Bakery and Patisserie.
- The Ministry of Tourism launched a special initiative called Hunar Se Rozgar Tak (HSRT) in the year 2009-10 for creation of employable skills amongst youth.
- The initiative is fully funded by the Ministry of Tourism.
- The features common to the training programmes under the HSRT are: the trainees should be in the age group of 18-28 years; each training programme is of short duration – 6 to 8 weeks; and no fees chargeable to the trainee.
- The HSRT initiative is being implemented through expert institutions including the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management, Institutes of Hotel Management, Food Craft Institutes and India Tourism Development Corporation.

- The State Governments / Union Territory Administrations have also been authorised to implement the initiative through Institutes selected by them for purpose.
- It is also mandatory for certain star-classified hotels to train a prescribed minimum number of persons.

Government of India has taken various steps to boost tourism in the country, which inter-alia include the following:

- E-Visa facility extended to citizens of 163 countries.
- The Incredible India 2.0 campaign launched with market specific promotional plans and content creation.
- 24x7 Toll Free Multi-Lingual Tourist Helpline 1800111363 launched in 12 International Languages including Hindi and English.
- Providing Central Financial Assistance (CFA) to State Governments/Union Territory Administrations for development and promotion of tourism.
- Identification, diversification, development and promotion of Niche products like Cruise, Adventure, Medical, Wellness, Golf, Polo, Eco, Film and Meeting Incentives Conference and Exhibition (MICE).

5. Jashn-e-Rekhta

- It is a celebration of the spirit and eloquence of Urdu. The festival is organized annually in Delhi, under the aegis of Rekhta Foundation – a non-profit organization for the promotion of Urdu language and culture.
- It aims to create the much required awareness and appreciation of a language born and evolved in the Indian sub-continent. It celebrates the multi-faceted nature of Urdu – its beauty and versatility.
- The festival explores the different elements and range of emotions as manifested through poetry, prose, drama, art, cinema and popular culture and includes performances, recitations, mushairas, panel discussions, debates, film screenings and exhibitions featuring leading writers, poets, artists, litterateurs, journalists and lyricists from India and elsewhere.
- Since its debut in 2015, the festival has grown to become one of the largest literary and cultural events

6. Kathakar: International Storytellers Festival

Context

- The Minister of State for Home Affairs Shri Kiren Rijiju will inaugurate 7th edition of three day 'Kathakar: International Storytellers Festival' at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi.
- Kathakar is the only oral storytelling festival in India and is a part of Ghummakkad Narain- the Travelling Literature Festival which was started under the aegis of UNESCO in 2010. Kathakar is an attempt to not just preserve the art form but also create new audiences for the same.

- The partners for this year's festival are the IGNCA of Union Ministry of Culture in Delhi, Heritage Transport Museum in Gurugram and the NCPA in Mumbai.

Highlights

- The highlight of the inaugural session is the launch of the book 'Curious Tales from the Himalayas' co-authored by Shaguna Gahilote and Prarthana Gahilote.
- For the first time, the festival in Delhi will also have a circus Act performed by children from the slums trained by Sweedish Circus master Andreo.
- There will also be stories of Deendayal Upadhyay and Nanaji Deshmukh, celebrated by the Government of India.
- Vishal Bharadwaj and Mohit Chauhan will be coming together for the first time to share folk stories through music.
- Adding to that will be the two puppeteers from Italy and Andhra Pradesh who are not just master of their work but also the last ones promoting and practicing the art.

7. National Culture Fund (NCF)

- The National Culture Fund (NCF) was established as a funding mechanism distinct from the existing sources and patterns of funding for the arts and culture in India.
- It will enable institutions and individuals to support arts and culture directly as partners with its government.
- 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

Why was it required?

- India has many strands to its cultural heritage, which require to survive, grow and evolve as living cultures.
- Factors such as the pace of socio-economic and environmental changes and the advent of new technologies are posing unprecedented threats to the continuity of these cultural heritages. Increasing awareness of these threats have brought about demands from communities not only to preserve and renew their languages, traditions and culture, but also to reinvigorate their cultural identity and creativity.
- In view of the increasing concern of the community to preserve and promote our heritage and to enable them to participate and contribute to its promotion, it was considered necessary to set up an organization which would facilitate and support institutions and individuals in this endeavour.

8. Udvada festival celebrates Parsi tradition, religion

- Nearly 2,000 people from around the world had gathered in Udvada, a town in Gujarat, to celebrate the three-day Iranshah Udvada Utsav.

The Udvada Atash Behram:

- The Udvada Atash Behram, also known as the Iran Shah, "King of Iran", is a temple in Udvada, Gujarat on the west coast of India.
- It is one of the eight fire temples (holy place of worship) of the Zoroastrian religion in the country.
- The Atash Bahram, meaning "Victorious Fire", is one of the oldest fire temples in India, dated to the eighth century, and represents the historical cultural and religious links with Iran.
- The current temple was built in 1742 by Dinshaw Dorabjee Mistry from Bombay. The temple structure, built spaciouly, is well decorated and contains the Dasturji Koyaji Mirza hall and a museum. The main hall of the temple is accessed through a two-stage staircase. The temple attracts Zoroastrian pilgrims from all parts of India, Pakistan and from around the world.

9. UNESCO names Kumbh Mela Intangible Cultural Heritage

- After 'yoga' and 'Nouroz', Kumbh Mela/ KumbhMela, the largest congregation of pilgrims on the planet, has been listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage under UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)
- The inscription of 'Kumbh Mela' in the list was undertaken following recommendation by an expert body which examines nominations submitted by member countries of the UNESCO
- The Kumbh Mela is held in Haridwar, Allahabad, Ujjain and Nashik

10. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

- The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.
- As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UNWTO promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide.
- UNWTO encourages the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, to maximize tourism's socio-economic contribution while minimizing its possible negative impacts, and is committed to promoting tourism as an instrument in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), geared towards reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development worldwide.
- UNWTO generates market knowledge, promotes competitive and sustainable tourism policies and instruments, fosters tourism education and training, and works to make tourism an effective tool for development through technical assistance projects in over 100 countries around the world.

Context

- Mahesh Sharma leads Indian delegation to Second UNWTO/UNESCO World Conference on Tourism and Culture at Muscot
- The Conference had also on its agenda themes such as culture and tourism as a factor of peace and prosperity; tourism development and protection of cultural heritage; culture and tourism and urban development and creativity; and exploring cultural land escapes in tourism. The conference also finalized the 2030 Agenda.

11. Padmavati Movie**Padmavati**

- The legend of Padmavati first appeared in a piece of poetry called 'Padmavat' dating back to the sixteenth century.
- Written in Avadhi language by Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi, 'Padmavati' was a tale of love, heroism and sacrifice, dotted all along with fantastical elements giving it a larger than life imagery.

Details

- The poem narrates that a princess of unparalleled beauty called Padmini lived in the kingdom of Simhaladvipa, now Sri Lanka.
- Enamoured by her beauty, King Ratansen of Chittor was engulfed with the passion to acquire her and overcame a large number of adventurous obstacles to make her his queen.
- Back in the kingdom of Chittor, Ratansen banished a sorcerer, who travelled to Delhi and told its ruler Alauddin Khalji of Padmini's beauty.
- The Khalji ruler marched to Chittor and vanquished Ratansen. But he did not manage to win Padmini as she along with other Rajput women committed Jauhar by consigning themselves to the flames.

How do the Rajput's view?

- Padmavati's story is sacrosanct among the Rajputs who consider her the ideal wife and woman and within her is vested their legacy of bravery and virtue.
- Further, this narrative of their past is something that has been learned through oral transmission from one generation to another and local folk tales that have given it a sacred legitimacy.

Ever since the protests against Bhansali's film broke out, an issue of constant debate is to what extent the legend of Padmavati historically authentic and to what extent is she a product of fiction.

SC

- The Supreme Court observed in *S. Rangarajan vs. Jagjivan Ram*, a mere threat to public order cannot be a ground to suppress freedom of expression.

What needs to be done?

- The incident has brought to light the growing sense of pride in one's culture and history. This is the moment to be proud of. But what needs to be looked into is the fact that Public emotions should not overrule Laws which are established for social harmony.
- In the name of Freedom of expression there should not be a twist in the plot as certain characters are revered by people at large and this draws to conclusion that Article 19(1) (a) is not absolute but has reasonable restrictions. We need to ensure that films do not spread ideas that sow the seeds of treason or divisiveness among people
- At the same time mob frenzy cannot become a tool to serve justice violating freedom of expression and to practice profession of will. This is a dangerous trend and cannot be permitted if we value the core principles of democracy.
 - * Not forget that there is no provision for banning a film in the certification rules.
- So this needs political will and administrative acumen to prevent such issues from reoccurring and CBFC needs to set a benchmark in addressing sentiments as well as freewill.

Alauddin Khalji

- Alauddin Khalji was the Sultan of Delhi between 1296 and 1316. Under his rule, the Khalji empire expanded rapidly to occupy regions in western, central and peninsular India.

Negatives

- Khalji's attack on Rajasthan had a particularly destructive impact upon the ruling lineages of the region resulting in the Delhi Sultan occupying a particularly hated space in Rajput memory.
- Khalji's rule was also noted for having destroyed the authority of local chiefs, most of whom belonged to the social group of Rajputs.

Positives

- He provided political stability, first in northern India by twice repelling the Mongols, then by stitching up an empire of sorts by bringing in some of the southern states into his sultanate.
- His drive against exorbitant pricing and black marketeers, probably the first such known drive in Indian history
- Fight against hoarding, and so is his attempt to bring about an equitable revenue collection system.
- Khalji is said to have regulated agricultural markets from Lahore to Allahabad and brought the land under the Khalisa.

12. Mahaparinirvan Diwas

- Ambedkar Mahaparinirvan Divas will be observed on 6th December.

- B. R. Ambedkar Mahaparinirvan Diwas is observed every year by organizing a function by the city corporation and SCs and STs State Government Employees' Association to commemorate the great contribution of the Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar towards the country.
- His great efforts help a lot to keep the country united. The constitution of India written by the Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar is still guiding the country and helps it in emerging out safely even after it had passed throughout the several crises.
- Ambedkar Foundation has been set up by the Indian Government (on 24th of March in the year 1992) so that the people all over the country can get his message of social justice.

13. Madan Mohan Malviya

- He was an Indian educationist and politician notable for his role in the Indian independence movement and Malaviya became president of the Indian National Congress as many as four times.
- He was respectfully addressed as Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and also addressed as 'Mahamana'.
- His multifaceted personality made him, at the same time, a great patriot, an educationist with a vision, a social reformer, an ardent journalist, reluctant but effective lawyer, a successful parliamentarian and an outstanding statesman.
- Among Malaviya's many achievements, the most monumental was the establishment of the Banaras Hindu University or Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalaya. In the course of his lifetime Banaras Hindu University came to be known as a Capital of Knowledge acknowledged across India and the World.
- Malaviya ji was one of the founders of Scouting in India
- He also founded a highly influential, English-newspaper, The Leader published from Allahabad in 1909
- Pandit ji was posthumously conferred with Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, on 24 December 2014, a day before his 153rd Birth Anniversary

What was his unique contribution to BHU?

- The Nizam of Hyderabad was renowned to be tight-fisted. Getting him to make a donation was perceived next to impossible. Armed with a steely determination, Malaviya managed to extract such a large donation from the Nizam that even today there is a Nizam Hyderabad Colony in Banaras Hindu University (BHU) where dozens of teachers and their families reside.

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His association with Freedom Movement

- Mahatma Gandhi considered him to be his conscience-keeper and called him his elder brother on public platforms. Still, Malaviya didn't hesitate in disagreeing with the Mahatma when it came to principles. During the Quit India Movement of 1942, when Bapu asked students to boycott schools, Malaviya publicly expressed his displeasure.
- Boycotting educational institutes was something Malaviya considered antithetical to the nation's interests. "If children don't study, how can they prepare for running the country," was Malaviya's reasoning.
- He was one of the signatories of Poona pact. Had this not been signed, the British would have sowed some more seeds of conflict in the name of Dalits. Therefore, Malaviya was a real visionary.
- Very few people are aware that 172 people were sentenced to be hung in the Chauri Chaura case. By then Malaviya had left legal practice owing to politics and social work. Still, he fought the case on their behalf and managed to get 153 people acquitted.
- Rabindranath Tagore honoured him with the encomium 'Mahamana' (a luminous mind and magnanimous heart).

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MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

1. Coca colonisation

Also known as Americanisation, this is a pejorative term used to describe the phenomenon wherein aspects of American culture spread across the rest of the world through popular consumer brands. While the term derives its origin from the name of American soft drink manufacturer Coca-Cola, the phenomenon refers to American influence through other brands as well. Critics of Coca-colonisation argue that the entry of American brands, while adding to the profits of these brands, only harms the economies of the host countries by plundering their resources. Many have also pointed to the changes to the local value system brought about by Americanisation.

2. Electronic- Human Resource Management System (e-HRMS)

What is it?

- This is a step in the direction of fully automated Human Resource Management System with a target to bring all employees of Government of India on employee portal so that all processes of personnel management from hiring to retiring will be on digital platform and manual system of handling personnel management will be dispensed with.

With launch of the website ehrms.gov.in, five bigger modules covering 25 applications have been launched. These are:

- Personnel Information System- which has functionalities of self-updating by employees.
- Leave- Leave of all kind may be claimed and sanctioned through website that will become part of service book.
- LTC- All function related to LTC application, Eligibility Check, Sanction, Advance claim, Final reimbursements, Leave encashment.
- Loan/Advances- All kind of loan and advances can be claimed, sanctioned and paid through it.
- Tour: - All tour applications to be submitted through system and TA advance may also be claimed.

Advantages

- This system has various advantages such as providing Dash board for employee and management, Updated service records, E-governance in office procedures, Reduced file movement, Faster service delivery, Assist in decision making, Common document repository of employees, Standardization of Master Data, Minimize manual entry of data, Ease of sharing information among stake holders, e-Sign for accountability/ authenticity, PFMS and e-HRMS integration for faster payments of GPF, advances, Loans, reimbursements.

- It will reduce employee's grievances.
- Availability of centralized data will enable Government for policy research and planning as such educational qualifications and other competencies and deficiencies may be easily obtained.
- It will enable Government to take transfer and posting decisions more pragmatically based on reliable first hand data.

3. Rajasthan becomes first in country to offer e-mail IDs in Hindi

- Rajasthan has become the first state in the country to offer free e-mail address in Hindi to its residents. The facility —name@rajasthan.bharat (in Devanagari script) — will lead to millions of new users who are not comfortable with English e-mail ids
- The project has been implemented by the state IT department with partnership in form of in-sourcing with private IT companies, a senior official said. A dedicated team of 10 experts from the state IT department worked for three months on the project. Apart from people who use Hindi keyboard, the email also works for those who use English keyboard. Even the Japanese who like to work in their own language don't have a linguistic email id, the official said.
- The initiative will ensure maximum participation of people towards e-governance and also that maximum facilities are available in vernacular language. This e-mail is small part of the bigger picture 'Rajasthan DigiKit' which has an enrollment of more than one crore people

4. SAICON 2017

- The First International Conference on Sports Medicine and Sports Sciences SAICON 2017 was inaugurated here by the Minister of State (I/C) Youth Affairs and Sports Col. Rajyavardhan Rathore
- SAICON 2017 will promote scientific temperament in the country and inspire students, researchers and educationists alike to take up sports science and research to the next level.
- It was organized by Sports Authority of India

Details

- SAICON 2017 Delhi will provide a platform for doctors and scientists from various parts of the country and from abroad to present their research work and field work on sports medicine & sports sciences before a large audience, interact with their Peers and also exchange information with their colleagues working in the same field.

- The conference will also foster the spirit of friendship and collaboration in the field of sports medicine and sport sciences amongst all those who aspire to contribute their mite for ushering in a refreshing scientific temperament in Indian sports, a far cry from the still prevalent medieval training methods.

5. Saudi women will be allowed to drive bikes, trucks

- Saudi Arabian women will be able to drive trucks and motorcycles
- The kingdom had earlier announced a historic decision to end a ban on women driving.
- But women involved in road accidents or who commit traffic violations will be dealt with at special centres that will be established and run by women.
- Saudi Arabia has some of the world's tightest restrictions on women: Under the country's guardianship system, a male family member — normally the father, husband or brother — must grant permission for a woman's study, travel and other activities.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following statements :

1. Hangul of Kashmir has been listed as critically endangered under IUCN Red list.
2. The brow-antlered deer or Sangai is Mizoram's State Animal.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

2. Consider the following statements :

1. Great Indian Bustard is the State bird of Rajasthan.
2. Great Indian Bustard is a critically endangered species under IUCN Red list.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

3. Consider the following statements about Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 :

1. The FTP 2015-2020 had set a target for India's exports of goods and services to touch \$100 billion by 2019-20.
2. FTP 2015-2020 had set India's share in world exports from 2% to 3.5%.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

4. Consider the following statements:

1. Bangladesh is building its first Nuclear power plant in Rooppur with the help of India and Russia.
2. India recently became a member of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

5. Bali Declaration was in news recently:

1. Bali Declaration was adopted at conclusion of World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development held in Bali ,2017.
2. India also endorsed Bali Declaration.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

6. Consider the following statements

1. Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance (FRDI) Bill of 2017 is a proposed new law for resolving financial entities' bankruptcy.
2. The Bill proposes scrapping the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) and replacing it with a Resolution Corporation under Ministry of Finance.

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 about Asia-Africa Growth Corridor:

1. Asia-Africa Growth Corridor is a joint initiative of India and South Africa
2. It is aimed at creating sea corridors linking the countries of the Indo-Pacific to Africa.

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. Pradhan Mantri Matruvandana Yojana and Mission Indradhanush work under Ministry of Women and Child Development.
2. Mission Indradhanush provides support to pregnant and lactating women.

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:

1. Changi naval base is located near the Strait of Malacca.
2. The Naval Base is owned by the Singapore Navy.

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 about Election Commission of India:

1. The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority
2. At present, Election Commission of India is a three-member body, with one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.
3. The Budget of Election Commission is charged upon Consolidated Fund of India

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. All of the above

D. 1 and 2 only

11. The first ever G20 Digital Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy was held in which country?

- A. Japan
- B. India
- C. Russia
- D. Germany

12. Which State Government is planning to launch cheap food canteens called "Annapura Bhojanalayas"?

- A. Haryana
- B. Manipur
- C. Uttar Pradesh
- D. Assam

13. Who composed the Bhakti song called "Abangas"?

- A. Kabir
- B. Sant Tukaram
- C. Sant Ravidas
- D. Guru Ramdas

14. The coast running from Karwar to Bulsar is called

- A. Malbar Coast
- B. Konkan Coast
- C. Kathiawar coast
- D. Coromandel coast

15. National Environmental Engineering Research Institute falls under

- A. Ministry of Environment and Forest
- B. Ministry of Science and Technology
- C. Ministry of Human Resource and Development
- D. None of the above

16. 'Mission Raftaar' is

- A. The Indian Railways' Mission Mode activity to increase speeds of freight train and super-fast mail/express trains
- B. A component of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' 'Avataran' or seven mission mode activities, under which all national highways will be made pothole-free by 2019
- C. A complementary programme to the Sagarmala initiative in order to provide efficient road and rail connectivity from ports to the hinterland
- D. A blueprint for making optimum use of the massive renewable energy generation capacity that will be created by 2022

17. Which one of the following countries of South-West Asia does not open out to the Mediterranean Sea?
- Syria
 - Jordan
 - Lebanon
 - Lebanon
18. Identify the correct statement with reference to the Great Indian Bustard
- It has been classified as critically Endangered species under the IUCN's Red data book
 - It has been classified as critically Endangered species under the wildlife Act of 1972.
 - Recently Great Indian Breeding center was setup in Kota, Rajasthan
 - All are correct
19. The "Preservation, protection and improvement of stock and prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice" comes under which list of Constitution of India?
- State list
 - Union List
 - Concurrent List
 - None of the above
20. The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle is mentioned in which part of the constitution?
- Fundamental duties
 - Union list
 - Concurrent list
 - Directive Principles of State Policy
21. Which of the following organizations bring out the publication known as 'World Economic Outlook'?
- The International Monetary Fund
 - The United Nations Development Programme
 - The World Economic Forum
 - The World Bank
22. Consider the following statement with reference to Shared Value Summit (SVS-2017) which was organized at New Delhi
- The theme of the summit was "Equity and Empowerment".
 - The purpose of the summit is to encourage businesses to adopt the practice of shared value by imbibing the spirit of inclusivity in their business models.
 - The summit aims to provide a platform to identify and address the barriers that exist to equality and empowerment in the Indian society.
- Choose the correct statements from the options given below
- 1 and 2
 - 2 and 3
 - 1 only
 - All are correct
23. Recently, 2017 Konark Dance Festival has been started in which particular State?
- Andhra Pradesh
 - Odisha
 - Tamil Nadu
 - Karnataka
24. Anekantavada is a core theory and philosophy of which one of the following?
- Buddhism
 - Jainism,
 - Sikhism
 - Vaishnavism
25. What is xenotranplantation?
- The process of grafting or transplanting organs or tissues between members of different species
 - The process of grafting or transplanting organs or tissues between members of same species.
 - The process of grafting or transplanting organs or tissues in plants
 - None of the above

26. Consider the following statements

1. A ridge is an elongated region of relatively high atmospheric pressure.
2. A ridge is an elongated region of relatively low atmospheric pressure.
3. In hydrologic terms, a ridge is a line or wall of broken ice forced up by pressure.

Identify the correct statements

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3
- D. 2 and 3

27. The Global Education Monitoring Report is published by

- A. UNESCO
- B. Education International
- C. World Bank
- D. Institute of International Education

28. Identify the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council

- A. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates
- B. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates
- C. Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates
- D. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates

29. The 52nd amendment to the Constitution added

- A. Tenth schedule
- B. Ninth Schedule
- C. Eighth Schedule
- D. Eleventh Schedule

30. Consider the following with reference to Gender parity Index(GPI)

1. U.N releases a report on GPI
2. GPI evaluates gender diversity and empowerment of women in the formal sector
3. GPI evaluates gender diversity and empowerment of women in the informal sector

Identify the correct statement

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1 and 2 only

31. Which of the following is a correct definition of "Isohyets"?

- A. Lines on a map showing equal height from mean sea level
- B. Lines on a map having same mean temperature
- C. Lines on a map having same barometric pressure
- D. Lines on a map showing equal rainfall

32. The essential element for batteries used in electric cars is

- A. Magnesium
- B. Lithium
- C. Sodium
- D. Bromine

33. The "Kalsubai" is the highest peak of the sahyadris in ____?

- A. Karnataka
- B. Kerala
- C. Maharashtra
- D. Goa

34. Ramman is a religious festival and ritual theatre of ____?

- A. Uttarkhand
- B. Uttar Pradesh
- C. West Bengal
- D. Madhya Pradesh

35. The executive power of the state is vested in ____?

- A. Chief Minister
- B. President
- C. Governor
- D. Council of Ministers in the state

36. Consider the statements :

1. The Codex Alimentarius or "Food Code" is a collection of standards, guidelines and codes of practice adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.
2. Codex Alimentarius Commission is established by FAO alone.

Identify the incorrect statements from the options given below

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

37. The Constitutional 91st Amendment Act, 2003 fixed the total strength of Council of ministers in Union and State Government-

- A. 15% of the total number of Members of the Lower House of the Parliament/State Legislature
- B. 10% of the total number of Members of the Lower House of the Parliament/State Legislature
- C. 20% of the total number of Members of the Lower House of the Parliament/State Legislature
- D. None of the above

38. Which of the following organisations assist a country with the adjustment process under its Extended Fund Facility?

- A. Asian Development Bank
- B. World Bank Group
- C. International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- D. New Development Bank (NDB)

39. India is the biggest producer, as well as the largest consumer and importer of which of the following crops?

- A. Wheat
- B. Cotton
- C. Sugarcane
- D. Pulses

40. The Buran wind blows across:

- A. Eastern Asia
- B. Western Europe
- C. Southern Africa
- D. Eastern Australia

41. In context of banking, what does 'BBB' stands for__?

- A. Bank Broadcast Bureau
- B. Bank Beneficial Bureau
- C. Bank Blogger Bureau
- D. Bank Board Bureau

42. The production of latex in rubber trees is closely related to which of the following?

- A. Atmospheric pressure
- B. Rainfall
- C. Atmospheric temperature
- D. Soil moisture content

43. Shaphee Lanphee, a traditional textile fabric, is a GI product from which of the following states?

- A. Assam
- B. Manipur
- C. Jammu & Kashmir
- D. Andhra Pradesh

44. Economic growth in India is measured by GDP at:

- A. Constant market prices
- B. Current market prices
- C. Factor Cost at constant prices
- D. Factor Cost at market prices

45. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Dawn is the only mission ever to orbit two extra-terrestrial targets.
- 2. The Dawn mission orbited giant asteroid Vesta and now continues to orbit Ceres.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are INCORRECT

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

46. Kanger Ghati National Park is in

- A. Chattisgarh
- B. Orissa
- C. Gujarat
- D. Tripura

47. In India, which one of the following states has the largest inland saline wetland?

- A. Gujarat
- B. Haryana
- C. Madhya Pradesh
- D. Rajasthan

48. NNP at factor cost is

- A. GNP at market price – depreciation
- B. NNP at market price – Indirect taxes
- C. NNP at market prices+ subsidies
- D. NNP at market price- indirect taxes+ subsidies.

49. Which of the following is the top level organizational structure of WTO?

- A. General Council
- B. Ministerial Conference
- C. Dispute settlement body
- D. Goods council

50. Which if these is NOT one of the major styles or schools of ancient Indian art?

- A. Amravati
- B. Mathura
- C. Gandhara
- D. Sarnath

51. Identify the correct statement with reference to K9 Vajra

- A. It is a Submarine
- B. It is an artillery gun
- C. It is a naval ship
- D. None of the above

52. Consider the following statements:

- 1. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the national Standards Body of India working under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Government of India.
- 2. BIS is a founder member of International Organisation for Standardization (ISO)

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

53. Consider the following statements:

- 1. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) is the bankruptcy law of India by creating a single law for insolvency and bankruptcy.
- 2. The code will be able to protect the interests of small investors

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

54. Consider the following statements:

- 1. World Trade Organization's 11th biennial Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires seeks to define the future contours of multilateral global trade.
- 2. The G-33 coalition includes Indonesia, China and India.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

55. Consider the following statements:

- 1. ICAN is a coalition of NGOs .
- 2. UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons would not apply to any of the states that already have nuclear arms.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

56. Consider the following statements

- 1. A bail-in is the use of public funds to inject capital into an ailing company
- 2. A bail-out involves the use of depositors' funds to revive an ailing company. .

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

57. "Ajeya Warrior- 2017" is a combined military exercise between India and which country?

- A. Japan
- B. Russia
- C. Australia
- D. United Kingdom

58. The Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary (AWS) is located in which state/UT?

- A. Tamil Nadu
- B. Andhra Pradesh
- C. Nagaland
- D. Assam

59. Which of the following crop types are affected generally positively by western disturbances in India?

- A. Rabi Crop
- B. Kharif Crop
- C. Zaid Crop
- D. None of them

60. If Panchayat is dissolved elections are to be held within:

- A. 1 month
- B. 3 months
- C. 6 months
- D. 1 year

61. Which one among the following has highest energy?

- A. Blue light
- B. Green light
- C. Red light
- D. Yellow light

62. Which one of the following is produced during the formation of photochemical smog

- A. Hydrocarbon
- B. Nitrogen oxide
- C. Ozone
- D. Methane

63. Epiphytes are plants which depends on other plants for

- A. Food
- B. Mechanical Support
- C. Shade
- D. Water

64. Ergotism is due to consumption of

- A. Contaminated grains
- B. Rotting vegetables
- C. Contaminated water
- D. Safe cooked food

65. Which of the following are plant macro-nutrient?

- 1. Iron
- 2. Copper
- 3. Chlorine
- 4. Nitrogen

Choose the correct answer

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2,3 and 4 only
- C. 1 and 4 only
- D. 4 only

66. What is the style of script in the Indus Valley Civilization?

- A. Boustrophedon
- B. Pictographic
- C. Hieroglyphic
- D. None of the above

67. In H1N1 virus ,what do H and N stands for

- A. Haemagglutinin and Neuraminidase
- B. Haemoglobin and Neuraminidase
- C. Haemagglutinin and Neuroglutin
- D. None of the above

68. The Supreme Court's power to hear Inter-State Water Disputes can be classified under its

- A. Original Jurisdiction
- B. Appellate Jurisdiction
- C. Writ Jurisdiction
- D. Advisory Jurisdiction

69. Zero defect zero effect scheme is associated with which sector

- A. Agriculture
- B. MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises)
- C. Heavy Industries
- D. Service sector

70. Consider the following statements with reference to The National Company Law Tribunal

1. NCLT is a quasi judicial body
2. NCLT is a constitutional organization
3. NCLT is a statutory organization.
4. The NCLT was established under the Companies Act 2013.

Choose the correct statement

- A. 1 only
- B. 1,3 and 4 only
- C. 1,2 and 4 only
- D. None of the above

71. Raut Nacha is folk dance performed mainly by the tribal communities of which state?

- A. Rajasthan
- B. Jammu & Kashmir
- C. Assam
- D. Chhattisgarh

72. Miyako Strait connects

- A. East China sea to Pacific Ocean
- B. South China sea to Pacific ocean
- C. Pacific ocean to Arctic sea
- D. Sea of Japan to Pacific Ocean

73. Consider the following statements:

1. The objective of the National Food Security Mission is to increase production of rice, wheat and pulses only
2. Production of horticulture crops have outpaced the production of food-grains consistently since 2012-13

Which of the statements above is/are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

74. Which of the following organizations assist a country with the adjustment process under its Extended Fund Facility?

- A. Asian Development Bank
- B. World Bank Group
- C. International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- D. New Development Bank (NDB)

75. The concept of fundamental duties of Indian constitution was borrowed from which among the following?

- A. Constitution of Australia
- B. U N Charter
- C. Constitution of Socialist Countries such as Russia
- D. Constitution of UK

76. Consider the following statement with reference to Asian Development Bank

1. Votes are distributed in proportion with members' capital subscriptions.
2. Japan holds the largest proportion of shares in ADB

Choose the incorrect statement

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

77. The Fair and Remunerative Price(FRP) of sugarcane is approved by

- A. Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs
- B. Commission for Agriculture costs & prices.
- C. Agricultural Produce Market Committee.
- D. None of the above

78. The authorization for the withdrawal of funds from the Consolidated Fund of India must come from

- A. The President of India
- B. The Parliament
- C. The Prime Minister
- D. The Union Finance Minister
- E.

79. Which one of the following brings out the publication called "Energy Statistics" from time to time?

- A. Central Power Research Institute
- B. Planning Commission
- C. Power Finance Corporation Ltd.
- D. Central Statistical Organization.

80. Consider the following statements

1. In plants, Phosphorus (P) is considered second to nitrogen as the most essential nutrient to ensure health and function
2. Phosphorus deficiency can be controlled by applying sources of phosphorus such as bone meal
3. Many parts of India had phosphorous-deficient soil.

Choose the correct answer

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 only
- D. All are correct

81. Consider the following statements

1. Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction summit is being held at Mexico.
2. Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is global forum for reviewing of progress in the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Choose the correct option

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

82. Which one of the following conditions is most relevant for the presence of life on Mars?

- A. Atmospheric circulation
- B. Thermal Conditions
- C. Occurrence of ice caps and frozen water
- D. Occurrence of Ozone.

83. If a new state of the Indian Union is to be created, which one of the following schedules of the Constitution must be amended?

- A. First
- B. Second
- C. Third
- D. Fifth

84. Ease of doing business report is published by

- A. World Bank
- B. IMF
- C. Asian Development Bank
- D. United Nations Organization

85. Often we see "Air Independent Propulsion" term in news, it is associated with

- A. Submarines
- B. Cruise missiles
- C. Helicopters
- D. Aircrafts

86. The Kala Ghoda Arts Festival is associated with which one of the following cities?

- A. Kochi
- B. Pune
- C. Mumbai
- D. Mysore

87. Consider the following statements:

1. Minimum government stake in PSBs is placed at 52%.
2. All banks with more than 50% stake of Government are called Public Sector Banks.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2.

88. Consider the following statements:

1. India is a founding member of WTO.
2. WTO is an intergovernmental organisation dealing with international trade.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

89. Consider the following statements:

1. Exo-planets are a part of our solar system.
2. Kepler-90i is the latest exo-planet to be discovered.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

90. Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

91. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Doklam is a plateau region lying completely in Tibet.
- 2. Doklam is surrounded by Tibet, Bhutan and India.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

92. With reference to the scientific progress of ancient India, which of the statements given below are correct?

- 1. Different kinds of specialized surgical instruments were in common use by 1st century AD.
- 2. Transplant of internal organs in the human body had begun by the beginning of 3rd century AD.
- 3. The concept of sine of an angle was known in 5th century AD.
- 4. The concept of cyclic quadrilaterals was known in 7th century AD.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 3 and 4 only
- C. 1, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

93. The Rowlatt Act aimed at

- A. Compulsory economic support to war efforts
- B. Imprisonment without trial and summary procedures for trial
- C. Suppression of the Khilafat Movement
- D. Imposition of restrictions on freedom of the press

94. Electrically charged particles from space travelling at speeds of several hundred km/sec can severely harm living beings if they reach the surface of the Earth. What prevents them from reaching the surface of the Earth?

- A. The Earth's magnetic field diverts them towards its poles
- B. Ozone layer around the Earth reflects them back to outer space
- C. Moisture in the upper layers of atmosphere prevents them from reaching the surface of the Earth
- D. None of the statements (a), (b) and (c) given above is correct

95. Chlorofluorocarbons, known as ozone-depleting substances, are used

- 1. In the production of plastic foams
- 2. In the production of tubeless tyres
- 3. In cleaning certain electronic components
- 4. As pressurizing agents in aerosol cans

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 4 only
- C. 1, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

96. Consider the following protected areas:

- 1. Bandipur
- 2. Bhitarkanika
- 3. Manas
- 4. Sunderbans

Which of the above are declared Tiger Reserves?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 3 and 4 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

97. The religion of early Vedic Aryans was primarily of

- A. Bhakti
- B. Image worship and Yajnas
- C. Worship of nature and Yajnas
- D. Worship of nature and Bhakti

98. Which of the following parties were established by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar?

1. The Peasants and Workers Party of India
2. All India Scheduled Castes Federation
3. The Independent Labour Party

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only

99. Lord Buddha's image is sometimes shown with the hand gesture called 'Bhumisparsha Mudra'. It symbolizes

- A. Buddha's calling of the Earth to watch over Mara and to prevent Mara from disturbing his meditation
- B. Buddha's calling of the Earth to witness his purity and chastity despite the temptations of Mara
- C. Buddha's reminder to his followers that they all arise from the Earth and finally dissolve into the Earth, and thus this life is transitory
- D. Both the statements (a) and (b) are correct in this context

100. Consider the following kinds of organisms:

1. Bat
2. Bee
3. Bird

Which of the above is/are pollinating agent/agents?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

101. The increasing amount of carbon dioxide in the air is slowly raising the temperature of the atmosphere, because it absorbs

- A. The water vapour of the air and retains its heat
- B. the ultraviolet part of the solar radiation
- C. All the solar radiations
- D. The infrared part of the solar radiation

102. Which one of the following sets of elements was primarily responsible for the origin of life on the Earth?

- A. Hydrogen, Oxygen, Sodium
- B. Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen
- C. Oxygen, Calcium, Potassium
- D. Carbon, Hydrogen, Potassium

103. Vultures which used to be very common in Indian countryside some years ago are rarely seen nowadays. This is attributed to

- A. The destruction of their nesting sites by new invasive species
- B. A drug used by cattle owners for treating their diseased cattle
- C. Scarcity of food available to them
- D. A widespread, persistent and fatal disease among them

104. In the Parliament of India, the purpose of an adjournment motion is

- A. To allow a discussion on a definite matter of urgent public importance
- B. To let opposition members collect information from the ministers
- C. To allow a reduction of specific amount in demand for grant
- D. To postpone the proceedings to check the inappropriate or violent behaviour on the part of some members

105. Which of the following are included in the original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court?

1. A dispute between the Government of India and one or more States
2. A dispute regarding elections to either House of the Parliament or that of Legislature of a State
3. A dispute between the Government of India and a Union Territory
4. A dispute between two or more States

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 2 and 3
- C. and 4
- D. 3 and 4

106. 'Project Dantak' refers to

- A. The construction of road and telecommunications network by India's Border Roads Organisation, in Bhutan
- B. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's programme to set up dental clinics through PPP mode in every district
- C. The Income Tax Department's initiative to e-verify large cash deposits made during the window provided for depositing high-denomination currency notes with banks
- D. An India Post virtual museum showcasing all philatelic items associated with India's Men in Uniform

107. Which bridge is expected to get the tag of the Longest bridge in India in future?

- A. Bhupen Hazarika Setu
- B. Dhola-Sadiya Bridge
- C. The New Ganga Bridge
- D. Bandra-Worli Sea Link

108. Where is the country's first multi-modal electric vehicle project launched?

- A. Nagpur
- B. Mumbai
- C. Pune
- D. Bangalore

109. Consider the following statements

- 1. Anopheles stephensi transmits Zika virus.
- 2. Currently there is no vaccine for Zika
- 3. Zika has been linked to microcephaly in the new born infants.

Choose the correct statements

- A. 1 and 3
- B. 1 and 2
- C. 2 and 3
- D. All are correct

110. What is/are the eligibility criteria's that needs to be fulfilled, in order to be the member of a G7 group?

- A. A very high net national wealth
- B. A very high Human Development Index
- C. Both A and B
- D. Neither A nor B

111. Comets appear like a small rounded match-head-like halo followed by a long tail, mainly due to which phenomenon? =

- A. Sublimation of icy nucleus.
- B. Evaporation of icy nucleus.
- C. Condensation of icy nucleus.
- D. None of the above.

112. Consider the following statements

- 1. Hodaigiri is the harvest dance associated with Reang tribes.
- 2. Jhum cultivation is one of the primary occupations of Reang tribes.
- 3. Majority of Reang population are literates.

Choose the correct statements

- A. 1 and 3
- B. 1 and 2
- C. 2 and 3
- D. All are correct

113. Mahatma Gandhi undertook fast unto death in 1932, mainly because

- A. Round Table Conference failed to satisfy Indian political aspirations
- B. Congress and Muslim League had differences of opinion
- C. Ramsay Macdonald announced the Communal Award
- D. None of the statements (a), (b) and (c) given above is correct in this context

114. Which of the following is the chief characteristic of 'mixed farming'?

- A. Cultivation of both cash crops and food crops
- B. Cultivation of two or more crops in the same field
- C. Rearing of animals and cultivation of crops together
- D. None of the above

115. Normally, the temperature decreases with the increase in height from the Earth's surface, because

- 1. The atmosphere can be heated upwards only from the Earth's surface
- 2. There is more moisture in the upper atmosphere
- 3. The air is less dense in the upper atmosphere

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

116. Which of the following can be said to be essentially the parts of 'Inclusive Governance'?

1. Permitting the Non-Banking Financial Companies to do banking
2. Establishing effective District Planning Committees in all the districts
3. Increasing the government spending on public health
4. Strengthening the Mid-day Meal Scheme

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 3 and 4 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

117. In India, in the overall Index of Industrial Production, the Indices of Eight Core Industries have a combined weight of 40.27%, Which of the following are among those Eight Core Industries?

1. Cement
2. Fertilizers
3. Natural gas
4. Refinery products
5. Textiles

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. 1 and 5 only
- B. 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

118. RBI's affairs are governed by the Central Board of Directors (CBD) which also responsible for its general superintendence and direction. It consists of

1. Union Minister of Finance as the Chairperson
2. Governor of RBI as the Vice-Chairperson
3. Members nominated by Union Government
4. Nominees from SEBI and IRDA

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 3 only
- D. None of the above

119. With reference to Rotavirus, consider the following statements.

1. It is the most common cause of severe typhoid among infants and young children.
2. It infects and damages the cells that line the small intestine.
3. An indigenous Rotavac has been developed in India to tackle Rotavirus.
4. It does not infect animals.

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1 and 2 only

120. What are the qualifying features of a Crypto-currency?

1. It does not have real monetary value in the market.
2. It is not owned or controlled by any institution.
3. It allows transacting parties to remain anonymous.
4. It is a virtually held asset.

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 3 and 4 only
- D. 1 and 3 only

121. The powers and the independence of the Indian judiciary allow it to act as the guardian of Indian democracy. What are these powers?

1. Anyone can approach the higher judiciary if public interest is hurt by the actions of government.
2. Higher Judiciary can issue directives to check malpractices on the part of public officials.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

122. With reference to North East Road Network Connectivity Project (NERNCP), consider the following statements:

1. The project will be based on public-private partnership model.
2. It will enhance connectivity with inter-state roads and International Borders concerning the Northeastern region.
3. Recently, India and Japan signed a document on Japanese loan and aid for the project.

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

123. Which of the following are NOT Rabi crops?

1. Cotton
2. Gram
3. Pea
4. Mustard.

Choose the correct answer using the codes below:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 3 and 4 only
- D. 2 and 4 only

124. Peer to Peer (P2P) lending is a

1. Form of crowd-funding
2. Does not carry any interest rate
3. Platform that can be used online

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

125. 'B4' – the 'Brahmaputra Biodiversity and Biology Boat' intends to save which of the following islands, that is fast eroding?

- A. Havelock
- B. Barren
- C. Majuli
- D. Katchal

126. Which of the following authorities decides whether a particular bill is a money bill?

- A. President of India
- B. Chairman, Rajya Sabha
- C. Speaker, Lok Sabha
- D. Ministry of Finance

127. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana focuses on

- A. Distribution of free LED bulbs to households
- B. Providing LPG connections to poor households
- C. Augmentation of power infrastructure in rural areas
- D. Construction of feeder smart grids in smart cities

128. Consider the following statements with reference to the Ramanujan Fellowship scheme

1. Ramanujan Fellowship are only for those candidates who are doing Post Doctoral abroad.
2. Only Mathematics related research area is covered by this Fellowship.
3. The Ramanujan Fellows could work only in few selected scientific institutions and universities in the country

Choose the correct statements from the options given below

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3
- C. 2 and 3
- D. All are correct

129. Consider the following statements with reference to UN Environment's Clean Seas campaign

1. The campaign aims to halt the tide of plastic trash polluting the oceans
2. UN Environment launched #CleanSeas in February 2017, with the aim of engaging governments, the general public, civil society and the private sector in the fight against marine plastic litter
3. The campaign contributes to the goals of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter

Choose the correct statements from the options given below

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3
- C. 2 and 3
- D. All are correct

130. Consider the following statements with reference to the Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE) Faculty Scheme

1. INSPIRE is an innovative programme sponsored and managed by the Department of Science & Technology for attraction of talent to Science
2. A striking feature of the programme is that it does not believe in conducting competitive exams for identification of talent at any level

Choose the correct statements from the options given below

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2
- C. 2 only
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

131. The Betla National Park (BNP) is located in which state?

- A. Punjab
- B. Jharkhand
- C. Haryana
- D. Himachal Pradesh

132. Edaphology is concerned with the?

- A. Influence of human development on soil
- B. Influence of soils on human development
- C. Influence of soils on living things
- D. None of the above

133. Raut Nacha is folk dance performed mainly by the tribal communities of which state?

- A. Rajasthan
- B. Jammu & Kashmir
- C. Assam
- D. Chhattisgarh

134. Ghumura is an ancient folk dance that originated in which of the following states?

- A. Odisha
- B. Madhya Pradesh
- C. Rajasthan
- D. Karnataka

135. Hemoglobin in humans has the highest affinity for which of the following gases?

- A. Methane
- B. Carbon Monoxide
- C. Nitrous oxide
- D. Carbon dioxide

136. Which of the following countries does not share its border with Black Sea?

- A. Georgia
- B. Bulgaria
- C. Belarus
- D. Turkey

137. The Nitisara of Kamandaka, also known as the Kamandakiya-Nitisara, was composed during the period of:

- A. Satavahana dynasty
- B. Gupta dynasty
- C. Kalachuri dynasty
- D. Nanda dynasty

138. Which of these regions of India is most suitable for growing rice for all three cropping seasons –kharif, rabi and zaid?

- A. North-western India
- B. Eastern India
- C. Southern India
- D. Western India

139. Which of the following is NOT an example of 'sunrise' industry?

- A. Information Technology Industry
- B. Wellness and Hospitality
- C. Renewable energy industry
- D. Automobile industry

140. Consider the following statements about National Agricultural Policy, 2000.

1. This was the first ever National Agricultural Policy announced in India.
2. The Policy aims at a growth rate in excess of four per cent per annum in the agriculture sector.
3. It explicitly prohibits the use of contract farming and land leasing in India.

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

141. Consider the following statements. Sacred groves

1. Are pristine stretches of forests that must be registered under National parks
2. Have been left untouched by the local tribals as any interference with them is banned by the local community

Which of the above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

142. What is the impact of SAUNI Yojna?

1. The project will make the longest conventional open canal system in India which would increase groundwater recharge in nearby regions.
2. The project requires a very large land area to be acquired which would result in large scale development displacement.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

ANSWER KEYS

Question No	Answer Keys
1.	A
2.	C
3.	B
4.	D
5.	A
6.	C
7.	B
8.	D
9.	C
10.	D
11.	D
12.	C
13.	B
14.	B
15.	B
16.	A
17.	B
18.	D
19.	A
20.	D
21.	A
22.	D
23.	B
24.	A
25.	A

Question No	Answer Keys
26.	C
27.	A
28.	A
29.	A
30.	B
31.	D
32.	B
33.	C
34.	A
35.	C
36.	B
37.	A
38.	C
39.	D
40.	A
41.	D
42.	C
43.	B
44.	A
45.	D
46.	A
47.	D
48.	D
49.	B
50.	D

Question No	Answer Keys
51.	B
52.	C
53.	C
54.	C
55.	C
56.	D
57.	D
58.	D
59.	A
60.	C
61.	A
62.	B
63.	B
64.	A
65.	D
66.	A
67.	A
68.	B
69.	B
70.	B
71.	D
72.	A
73.	C
74.	C
75.	C

Question No	Answer Keys
76.	D
77.	A
78.	B
79.	D
80.	D
81.	C
82.	C
83.	A
84.	A
85.	A
86.	C
87.	C
88.	C
89.	B
90.	A
91.	B
92.	C
93.	B
94.	A
95.	C
96.	B
97.	C
98.	B
99.	B
100.	D

Question No	Answer Keys
101.	D
102.	B
103.	B
104.	A
105.	C
106.	A
107.	C
108.	A
109.	C
110.	C
111.	A
112.	B
113.	C
114.	C
115.	C
116.	C
117.	C
118.	C
119.	B
120.	B
121.	C
122.	D
123.	A
124.	C
125.	C

Question No	Answer Keys
126.	C
127.	B
128.	A
129.	D
130.	B
131.	B
132.	C
133.	D
134.	A
135.	B
136.	C
137.	B
138.	C
139.	D
140.	C
141.	B
142.	D

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Paper- 1

Topic: Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

1. Distinguish between religiousness/religiosity and communalism giving one example of how the former has got transformed into the latter in independent India.
2. What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes(STs)?

Topic: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

3. "The time has come for the society to realise that a woman is equal to her husband in every respect," Comment.
4. Is India ready for a uniform civil code.Explain in the light of recent SC verdict on Triple Talaq.
5. "Textbooks that glorify war and military heroes, exclude pluralistic perspectives or undermine other peoples or ethnicities can make teaching peace, non-violence and reconciliation difficult," Discuss?
6. The spirit of tolerance and love is not only an interesting feature of Indian society from very early times, but it is also playing an important part at the present. Elaborate.
7. "Conventional wisdom suggests that economic reforms succeeding liberalization policy of government in early 1990s should have reduced gender discrimination—but that hasn't really been the case". Discuss?

Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.,geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

8. In what way can floods be converted into a sustainable source of irrigation and sustainable all-weather inland navigation in India?
9. What characteristics can be assigned to monsoon climate that succeeds in feeding more than 50 percent of the world population residing in Monsoon Asia?
10. What characteristics can be assigned to monsoon climate that succeeds in feeding more than 50 percent of the world population residing in Monsoon Asia?

Topic: The Freedom Struggle – its various stages and important contributors /contributions from different parts of the country

11. Moderate phase of Congress was an important phase of our independence movement. Elucidate.

Topic: History of the world will include events from 18th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, redrawal of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization, political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.- their forms and effect on the society.

12. Africa was chopped into states artificially created by accident of European competition. Analyse.
13. What problems are germane to the decolonization process in the Malay Peninsula?

Topic: Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries invarious parts of the world (including India)

14. Petroleum refineries are not necessarily located nearer to crude oil producing areas, particularly in many of the developing countries. Explain its implications.

Paper- 2**Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.**

1. Japan is seen as a significant substitute for China and US in the region of Asia Pacific. Discuss with special reference to cooperation between India-Japan.
2. The question of India's Energy Security constitutes the most important part of India's economic progress. Analyze India's energy policy cooperation with West Asian Countries.
3. Discuss the role of North Korea and the US in escalating nuclear crisis in the World. Suggest some solutions to resolve the crisis.

Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources, issues relating to poverty and hunger.

4. National Nutrition Mission aims to revamp the whole approach to improve the levels of Nutrition in India. How different is the new mission from the previous mechanisms to the problem of under-nutrition in India.
5. "Ultimately reduction of TB burden in India and its elimination will require improving the nutritional status of the community as a whole." Discuss.
6. What are the reasons for Brain drain phenomena in India? Explain the significance of reforms in Indian universities and higher education in this regard?
7. "To ensure the level-playing field, it is not only essential to give necessary education to the persons suffering from the disability, it is also imperative to see that such education is imparted to them in a fruitful manner," Discuss

Topic: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

8. "The confidence of the public in the legal profession is integral to the confidence of the public in the legal system," Discuss.
9. "Codifying checks and balances in respective police Acts will bring assurance against illegal orders by the political establishment to the police". Discuss.
10. 'The Supreme Court of India keeps a check on arbitrary power of the Parliament in amending the Constitution.' Discuss critically.
11. Section 497 (adultery) of the Indian Penal Code is a "flagrant instance of gender discrimination, legislative despotism and male chauvinism." Analyze.
12. To enhance the quality of democracy in India the Election Commission of India has proposed electoral reforms in 2016. What are the suggested reforms and how far are they significant to make democracy successful? (2017)

Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

13. Explain the salient features of the constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016. Do you think it is efficacious enough 'to remove cascading effect of taxes and provide for common national market for goods and services'? (2017)
14. Positive discrimination is at the heart of "Equal protection of the laws". Discuss.
15. 'Rule of Law' and 'Mob Justice' are oxymoron's. Elucidate.

Topic: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

16. "The local self government system in India has not proved to be effective instrument of governance". Critically examine the statement and give your views to improve the situation.

17. Discuss the role of Public Accounts Committee in establishing accountability of the government to the people..

Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

18. What are the main functions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)? Explain different functional commissions attached to it..

19. India has led the WTO for issues that affect the developing countries. Critically Analyse the role played by India in WTO in this regard with special reference to Doha round..

Paper- 3**Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism**

1. The Rohingya Crisis poses a challenge to India's internal security and Indian diplomacy. Elaborate the challenges ahead for India in dealing with the issue of Rohingya crisis.
2. Mob violence is emerging as a serious law and order problem in India. By giving suitable examples, analyze the causes and consequences of such violence. (2017)
3. The scourge of terrorism is a grave challenge to national security. What solutions do you suggest to curb this growing menace? What are the major sources of terrorist funding?

Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial

4. How globalization has led to the reduction of employment in the formal sector of the Indian economy? Is increased in formalization detrimental to the development of the country?
5. "Industrial growth rate has lagged behind in the overall growth of Gross-Domestic-Product (GDP) in the post-reform period" Give reasons. How far the recent changes in Industrial Policy are capable of increasing the industrial growth rate?

Topic: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

6. Give an account of the growth and development of nuclear science and technology in India. What is the advantage of fast breeder reactor programme in India?

Topic: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers

7. What are the major reasons for declining rice and wheat yield in the cropping system? How crop diversification is helpful to stabilize the yield of the crop in the system?
8. Analyse critically whether the existing cropping in different parts of India would need any change for better agriculture performance in future.

Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security;

9. In what way could replacement of price subsidy with Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) change the scenario of subsidies in India? Discuss.

Topic: Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.

10. What are the impediments in marketing and supply chain management in industry in India? Can e-commerce help in overcoming these bottlenecks?

Topic: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention

11. Data Protection is a critical part of the Government's security architecture. Examine the need for a Data Protection Law in India.)

Paper- 4**Topic: Part A: Theory related**

1. "If a country is to be corruption free and become a nation of beautiful minds, I strongly feel there are three key societal members who can make a difference. they are father, the mother and the teacher." – A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. Analyse. (2017)
2. Discuss the Ethical Issues of Climate change across the Globe with special reference to India.
3. Differentiate between Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics.
4. Conflict of interest in the public sector arises when
 - * official duties
 - * public interest, and
 - * personal interest are taking priority one above the other. How can this conflict in administration be resolved? Describe with an example . (Mains 2017)
5. What do you understand by the terms 'governance', 'good governance' and 'ethical governance'?
6. One of the tests of integrity is complete refusal to be compromised. Explain with reference to a real life example.
 - * (b) Corporate social responsibility makes companies more profitable and sustainable. Analyse.
7. "Great ambition is the passion of a great character. Those endowed with it may perform very good or very bad acts. All depends on the principles which direct them." – Napoleon Bonaparte.
8. What do you understand by the following terms in the context of public service?
 - * Integrity
 - * Perseverance
 - * Spirit of service

Part B: Case studies

You are recently posted as district development officer of a district. Shortly thereafter you found that there is considerable tension in the rural areas of your district on the issue of sending girls to schools.

The elders of the village feel that many problems have come up because girls are being educated and they are stepping out of the safe environment of the household. They are of the view that the girls should be quickly married off with minimum education. The girls are also competing for jobs after education, which have traditionally remained in boys' exclusive domain, adding to unemployment amongst male population.

The younger generation feels that in the present era, girls should have equal opportunities for education and employment, and other means of livelihood. The entire locality is divided between the elders and the younger lot and further sub-divided between sexes in both generations. You come to know that in Panchayat or in other local bodies or even in busy crossroads, the issue is being acrimoniously debated.

One day you are informed that an unpleasant incident has taken place. Some girls were molested, when they were en route to schools. The incident led to clashes between several groups and a law and order problem has arisen. The elders after heated discussion have taken a joint decision not to allow girls to go to school and to socially boycott all such families, which do not follow their dictate.

- * What steps would you take to ensure girls' safety without disrupting their education?
- * How would you manage and mould matriarchic attitude of the village elders to ensure harmony in the inter-generational relations? (250 words) (25 Marks)

One of the scientists working in the R & D laboratory of a major pharmaceutical company discovers that one of the company's bestselling veterinary drugs, B has the potential to cure a currently incurable liver disease that is prevalent in tribal areas. However, developing a variant of the drug suitable for human beings entailed a lot of research and development having a huge expenditure to the extent of 50 crores rupees. It was unlikely that the company would recover the costs as the disease was rampant only in poverty-stricken area having very little market otherwise.

If you were the CEO, then—

- (a) Identify the various actions that you could take;

(b) Evaluate the pros and cons of each of your actions.

You are the manager of a spare parts company A and you have to negotiate a deal with the manager of a large manufacturing company B. The deal is highly competitive and sealing the deal is critical for your company. The deal is being worked out over a dinner. After dinner the manager of manufacturing company B offered to drop you to the hotel in his car. On the way to hotel he happens to hit motorcycle injuring the motorcyclist badly. You know the manager was driving fast and thus lost control. The law enforcement officer comes to investigate the issue and you are the sole eyewitness to it. Knowing the strict laws pertaining to road accidents you are aware that your honest account of the incident would lead to the prosecution of the manager and as a consequence the deal is likely to be jeopardized, which is of immense importance to your company.

What are the dilemmas you face? What will be your response to the situation?

Suppose one of your close friends, who is also aspiring for civil services, comes to you for discussing some of the issues related to ethical conduct in public service. He raises the following points :

1. In the present times, when unethical environment is quite prevalent, individual attempts to stick to ethical principles may cause a lot of problems in one's career. It may also cause hardship to the family members as well as risk to one's life. Why should we not be pragmatic and follow the path of least resistance, and be happy with doing whatever good we can? 2. When so many people are adopting wrong means and are grossly harming the system, what difference would it make if only a small minority tries to be ethical? They are going to be rather ineffective and are bound to get frustrated.
2. When so many people are adopting wrong means and are grossly harming the system, what difference would it make if only a small minority tries to be ethical? They are going to be rather ineffective and are bound to get frustrated.
3. If we become fussy about ethical considerations, will it not hamper the economic progress of our country? After all, in the present age of high competition, we cannot afford to be left behind in the race of development.
4. It is understandable that we should not get involved in grossly unethical practices, but giving and accepting small gratifications and doing small favours increases everybody's motivation. It also makes the system more efficient. What is wrong in adopting such practices?

Critically analyze the above viewpoints. On the basis of this analysis, what will be your advice to your friend? 250 words.

One of the scientists working in the R&D laboratory of a major pharmaceutical company discovers that one of the company's bestselling veterinary drugs, B has the potential to cure a currently incurable liver disease that is prevalent in tribal areas. However, developing a variant of the drug suitable for human beings entailed a lot of research and development having a huge expenditure to the extent of 50 crores rupees. It was unlikely that the company would recover the costs as the disease was rampant only in poverty-stricken area having very little market otherwise.

If you were the CEO, then—

- (a) Identify the various actions that you could take;
- (b) Evaluate the pros and cons of each of your actions.

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Providing the best ever conducive atmosphere for overall growth of knowledge, skill and aptitude through classroom sessions, group study, discussion, deliberations and question sessions



Infusing the right skills in developing the analytical ability and aptitude required for giving their best.



Providing revised syllabi and latest study materials prepared after thoughtful research by distinguished analysts on the panel.



Organizing interactive sessions on previous year's question papers, modular full length test in the circumstances similar to the Civil Services Exam.



Organising Mock Interviews by panels of eminent and experienced IAS and IPS Officers.



Organizing All India Mock Tests catering to the maximum number of students Nation wide.



Interactions of enrolled aspirants with the Rankers of Civil Services Examination.

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We are the largest Education Technology (Learning) company in India that is re-inventing the learning system for students with its cutting-edge "Learning App".

BYJU'S Learning App was launched last year and has witnessed extraordinary and impressive feat in revolutionizing the way we learn and today we have over 8 million students on its platform across the world. The Learning App is one of a kind that is designed using interactive simulations, watch-and-learn videos, rich animations, and enriched with content that gives conceptual clarity making learning contextual and visual, not just theoretical.



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